

Thinking about your senior thesis

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Writing your senior thesis is a great and wonderful opportunity to use the knowledge you have gained in your American Studies concentration and to shine as an expert in that field. Because it will emerge from a field of study you defined, it will build on your best strengths as a scholar.

This form is designed to remind you of those strengths and to help choose a focus for your thesis. By identifying the courses you have taken in your concentration, the major texts that have engaged, compelled, excited and inspired you and ideas about primary sources you will be taking a huge step toward arriving at a project that will be grounded, sustainable and fun.

Step 1

What is the topic and historical period of your concentration?

Step 2

List the four courses that comprise your concentration:

Step 3

List at least four texts (books or articles) that have made a particularly strong impact on you. These should mainly come from your concentration- courses but could also include material from junior colloquium.

Step 4

your thesis topic. Tell us how your topic emerges from your concentration. Give us as much detail as you can, including periodization, whether you have written to date on this or a related topic, and what, if any, specific questions you hope to answer through your research. Try to be as specific as possible: if you are interested in the New Deal, for example, describe the *particular* ideas/programs/elements of the New Deal that are fueling your research. This is a forcing exercise: if you do not have a precise answer to this question, research some possibilities and describe them in detail.

Step 5

Primary sources are the most important key to turning a thesis idea into an actual thesis. You will need to define your primary sources before your topic will be accepted. List here any and all primary sources (including specific archives, documents, aspects of material culture etc.) that you imagine you will use in writing your thesis. Again, this is a brain-storming exercise: if you do not have a precise answer to this question, go out and do some preliminary research so that you can formulate a response.

