

Syllabus

HNR 325: Honors Thesis Orientation

Tuesdays, 11:00 & 1:00 (both in APSC 212)

Wednesdays, 1:00 (MNB 130) & 4:00 (APSC 212)

Dr. Gavin Keulks (he/him/his), keulksg@wou.edu

Honors Thesis webpage: <http://www.wou.edu/honors/thesis.php>

Course Description & Objectives

By all accounts, HNR 325 is a difficult class to describe, teach, and take. Some of you have no thesis topics; others already have topics and advisors. Your topics are also so diverse that what works for one student (say, in the liberal arts) won't work for another student (in the sciences). SO ... what learning outcomes/goals will we strive to accomplish this term?

1. Make sure each of you has an **interesting, workable topic** that identifies a) your scholarly methods; b) your argument or main focus; and c) your "so what" answers.
2. Make sure each of you refines/focuses your ideas into manageable shape.
3. Make sure each of you has approached a professor who could be your **project advisor**.
4. Make sure each of you has **begun researching** your subject. If your subject involves field research or data harvesting, then you should develop an action – and possibly IRB – plan for that as well.
5. Make sure each of you has started to conceptualize the **organization** of a) your thesis proposal and b) your actual thesis.

Required Texts

None! Expect handouts featuring past student work, but your ideas are the only "text" for this class, as is appropriate for a thesis prep class.

Required Work & Attendance

You will be drafting and revising your thesis proposal. When complete, it will be 5-6 pages, single-spaced, and formatted into specific sections. It's much harder than it seems. To prevent absences, any student can attend any section of this course. More than two unexcused absences will result in a lowered final grade (B to B-, eg.)

Grade Calculation

All grades in HNR 325 are tentative until your work is reviewed by me and also the Honors Committee. The final grade will be based on a) the quality of your work and revisions this term; b) the timely progression of your work (prioritize this class equally with other classes); c) attendance; and d) the Honors Committee's reception of your work.

Tentative Weekly Calendar

Expect this tentative schedule to be revised depending on student progress and my discretion. A lot depends on how quickly you all determine your topics, although we can't dwell on that for more than a few weeks.

9/26-27: **Week 1:** Course introduction and overview. Begin Discussing topic refinement/ selection. In-class work on Topic Generation Prompts handout. **Homework for Week 2:** start narrowing down possible topics to three, using the Topic Generation Prompts handout. Consider:

- Have you written a paper for a class that you could expand?
- Have you wished that a class would be taught in one of your favorite subjects? If you could teach it, what would you emphasize?
- Have any current events or news stories captivated you?
- What study abroad or volunteer/service learning projects have you participated in? This is a remarkably fertile topic field ...
- What aspect(s) of yourself or your culture are you most interested in?

10/3-4: **Week 2:** Continue Topic Refinement: Types of Thesis Projects Presentation **Homework for Week 3:** Complete and email to me your Topic Brainstorming Worksheet.

10/10-11: **Week 3:** Conclude Topic Refinement: Topic Refinement and Research Design Presentation. **Homework for Week 4:** If you haven't already done so, begin **seriously** researching your topic and compiling a bibliography. This will include both primary and secondary sources. You're seeking 10 good sources, not just 10 sources. Do your database searches and order appropriate works THIS WEEK. Also, if you haven't yet done so, feel free to discuss your topic with 1-2 faculty members who could become a thesis advisor. When thinking about possible advisors, consider:

- Faculty members who have expertise in your area
- Faculty whom you respect, get along with, and whose classes you enjoyed. Often the people who motivate us to do well in their classes can also motivate us to finish our theses.
- Faculty members from whom you have taken 2-3 classes. It is allowable to expand a paper from an earlier class into a thesis ...
- If you're truly at a loss, consider speaking with the head of the appropriate department (or division), who might be able to recommend different faculty.
- If you already have a thesis advisor, please meet with him/her to ensure you're both on the same page.

- 10/17-18: **Week 4:** Discuss Honors Committee Evaluation Criteria, IRB, Annotated Bibliographies, and Personal Interest Sections. If needed, Discuss past theses, specifically research design, methodology, scope, and IRB. If time permits, workshop Personal Interest Section. **Homework for Week 5:**
- 1) Finish your personal interest section
 - 2) Finish your annotated bibliography
- 10/24-25: **Week 5:** Discuss the Methods/Process section. **Homework for Weeks 6 & 7:**
- 1) Draft your Methods/Process section (250 words)
 - 2) Continue drafting/revising your other sections.
 - 3) If you haven't approached an advisor, please do so this week.
- 10/31-11/1: **Week 6:** Discuss Larger Context section. **Homework for Week 7 & 8:** Draft your Larger Context section. Also catch up on any lagging assignments.
- 11/7-8: **Week 7: No Class (Conference Travel)**
- 11/14-15: **Week 8:** Discuss Abstracts and Titles. Revisit Larger Context, if needed. **Homework for Weeks 9 & 10:** Write your Abstract. Also catch up on any lagging assignments.
- 11/21-22: **Week 9: No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday).**
- 11/28-29: **Week 10:** Course conclusion and leftovers. **Homework for finals week:**
- 1) Finish all sections of your thesis proposal and email to keulksg@wou.edu in Word or Pages by the due date we'll determine. I'll then read over this draft and request further changes.
 - 2) VERY IMPORTANT: also email your proposal to your thesis advisor for their approval.
- Finals week: Submit thesis proposal. Please note that this won't be a true "final" draft because all of you will have to make revisions over holiday break. HNR 325 does not end with the end of the term: it only ends when your proposal has been approved by both me and your advisor. Expect to work over the holiday break.

Honors Committee Requirements & Evaluation

Below are the required components of the Honors Thesis Proposal. Depending on your subject and discipline, it is likely that your Methods/Process section (esp. in the sciences) or your Larger Context section (for social sciences and humanities, among others) will be the longest and most important section.

- Working Title
- Advisor Name & Department
- Student Pronouns (optional)
- Abstract
- Personal Interest
- Larger Context
- Methods/Process
- Working Bibliography, with Select Annotations (8 sources, 4 annotated)

Evaluation Process

1. All proposals come before the committee anonymously but with advisor names identified. Nearly all theses are evaluated in January and February.
2. The proposal sections are scrutinized by the committee, which determines whether a proposal is rated *acceptable*, *pass with concerns*, or *unacceptable*.
3. The committee's evaluation of the proposal will be paraphrased for you and your advisor.
4. If the committee has significant reservations about your proposal, additional revisions could be required, so please put significant effort into the document.

Explanation & Definition of Sections:

The purpose of a thesis is to articulate and investigate a question that is both personally stimulating, useful to others, and presented in discipline-specific ways. It is a culmination of the student's unbiased research and balanced analysis, sensitive to the arguments on both sides of the rhetorical equation. Students should start not with a presumption but with an observation, then devise a way to seek explanations for that observation. These are the components of a thesis proposal:

Abstract: a thumbnail sketch of the proposal: What questions will you explore? A summary of the main point(s) of each major section of the proposal; not an introduction but rather a synopsis of the project.

Personal Interest: discuss any relevant connections between your project and such things as courses taken, personal or work experiences, hobbies, volunteerism, study abroad, etc.

Larger Context: the "so what" & "who cares" section. When completing this section, it will help to address some of the following questions: Who is the audience? Why is this work important to them? How could your results/project contribute to the discipline? References to two scholarly sources are required in this section.

Methods/Process: What are you doing? How – specifically! – will you do it? Do you have sufficient resources? What will be the end-result? Make sure to define any discipline-specific terminology.

Disability Accommodations

WOU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering full participation for all students. Please notify your instructor if there are aspects of the instruction or design resulting in barriers to your participation.

Disability related accommodations are determined through the Office of Disability Services (ODS). If you, as a student, believe you may be eligible for disability related accommodations please contact ODS, they would be happy to work with you. ODS notifies students and faculty members of approved academic accommodations and coordinates implementation of accommodations.

APSC 405 (office) / 503-838-8250 / <https://wou.edu/disabilityservices> / ods@wou.edu

Student Health and Counseling Center

WOU students taking all online classes must opt into the \$150 health service fee to access medical and counseling services at WOU's Student Health and Counseling Center (SHCC). Students taking in-person or hybrid classes will be automatically assessed the above fee and will gain access to SHCC services. For more information, please go to <https://wou.edu/health/> or call the SHCC at (503) 838-8313.

Mental Health Statement

If you experience overwhelming academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings of anxiety or depression, I strongly encourage you to seek support. Remember that getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do – for yourself, for those you care about, and for those who care about you.

- Student Health and Counseling Center (wou.edu/health). Counseling services are free for all WOU students taking at least 1 on-campus credit.
- WOU's Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Promotion program (wou.edu/mental-health).
- For life threatening situations, call 911 or Campus Public Safety (wou.edu/safety) at (503) 838-9000.

Additionally, if a faculty or staff member has concerns about your mental health, they may contact the WOU CARE Team (<https://wou.edu/student/care-team/care-team-information/>) and ask them to reach out to you. The CARE team specializes in helping students who are dealing with issues of bias, trauma, situations involving medical or psychological concerns, and campus emergency situations that directly affect the well-being of students and the campus community at large.