

WRITING AN HONORS THESIS IN ASIAN STUDIES

WHAT is an Honors Thesis?

The Schreyer Honors College has a description of the honors thesis and offers advice about how to choose a topic, find a thesis director, and budget one's time: <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/>.

The Honors College describes the thesis as “a scholarly piece of writing in which the writer is expected to show a command of the relevant scholarship in his (or her) field and contribute to the scholarship. It should confront a question that is unresolved and push towards a resolution.”

The thesis is likely to be one of the most challenging and rewarding assignments of your undergraduate career. It is an opportunity to actually engage in scholarly analysis at an advanced level. In the process of pursuing a topic, conducting independent research, and formulating, articulating and crafting a sustained argument, you will build on what you have learned in coursework, gain insights into disciplinary scholarship and methodology, and develop your talents as a writer and thinker. Having completed your thesis, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have produced a work of scholarship that will be permanently archived in the Schreyer's (electronic) thesis archive and the Penn State Library system.

The Asian Studies Department expects honors theses to be based on thorough research and to offer an original interpretation. You are required to undertake a meaningful degree of primary source research in crafting the thesis.

The nature and extent of the primary research may vary according to the question pursued and the field of study. You are also expected to situate your research and analysis within the scholarship of the field and to clearly articulate and support the significance of your project and its contribution. Be careful not simply to present a narrative or an inventory of your sources, but rather center the thesis on the analysis and interpretation of your research in such a way that you make an argument. Thesis directors should help determine the appropriate balance between primary research and scholarly contextualization, between presentation of the evidence and interpretation.

WHO may write an honors thesis in Asian Studies?

- You should be an Asian Studies major or minor.
- If not a major or minor, you must have completed several Asian Studies courses.

WHAT is the process for arranging an honors thesis in Asian Studies?

- First, you should think about a topic that interests you. For example, you may have written a paper for a class that could become the basis for an honors thesis.
- Next, you will need to identify a faculty member in Asian Studies to direct your thesis. It is best if you choose someone who works in the area you have identified as your topic. You may want to keep in mind some of the faculty members you have worked with in classes. Ask the individual faculty member if he or she is willing to serve as your thesis director. If you are unsure whom to ask, you may want to discuss this with the Asian Studies honors adviser.
- You will also need the approval of the Asian Studies honors adviser, who will be a second reader for your thesis.
- Be sure to read over the section on thesis writing on the Schreyer Honors College website: <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/>.

- The Honors College will ask you complete a thesis proposal to identify your thesis director and give a basic outline of the topic you intend to address in your thesis. Honors College deadlines apply for the submission of the thesis proposal, which is typically one year before you intend to graduate.
- If you are writing an interdisciplinary thesis (in two departments), you will need a thesis director, an honors adviser reader, and a second reader from the second major to approve your thesis.

WHAT is ASIA 494H and how do I register for it?

- ASIA 494H is the Asian Studies honors thesis writing for three credits.
- You may register for ASIA 494H in either or both the fall and/or spring semesters of the academic year in which you intend to graduate, for a total of six credits.
- You cannot register for ASIA 494H on eLion. To register, pick up a registration form from the Asian Studies honors adviser. The form requires the signature of your thesis director. Return the signed form to the Director of Undergraduate Studies for the Asian Studies Department, who will facilitate your registration.

WHAT is the procedure and timeline for developing the thesis?

- A Thesis Proposal is due to Schreyer Honors College in the spring of your Junior year. The Proposal outlines the scope of the proposed research and should include a preliminary bibliography. The Proposal will have to be approved by the honors adviser, your thesis director, and the Schreyer Honors College.
- You and your thesis director will then create a calendar of meetings during the two-semester writing process. It is recommended that you register for ASIA 494H.
- “Check-point” 1: By mid-September of your Senior year, you must submit an expanded thesis proposal (which includes in-progress bibliography identifying substantial primary and secondary sources and an outline of the structure of your thesis, as well as a schedule for chapter completion dates) to the honors adviser. Your thesis director must have signed off and agreed to your expanded thesis proposal.
- “Check-point” 2: In the week prior to the last week of the semester, you must submit to your thesis director a polished, credible draft version of one chapter (ca. 15-20 pages) and a detailed outline of the following chapters. This is a firm requirement; permission to repeat ASIA 494H is contingent upon completion of this benchmark. Your grade for ASIA 494H will be based on the quality of these materials.
- You must submit a full draft of the complete thesis to your thesis director and the honors adviser, as well as to the Schreyer Honors College, by mid-March. This is a hard deadline; failure to do so may result in not having your thesis approved.
- The last weeks before final submission to Schreyer Honors College should be used to revise the thesis according to the thesis director’s comments.
- The final approval signatures are not automatic and are subject to the discretion of the thesis director evaluating your work. You should allow at least a week for the thesis director and the readers to sign your final approval page.
- File the final version of your thesis, as well as signatory page with the signatures of the thesis director and the honors adviser, with the Schreyer Honors College by their formal deadline in early April. If you are not able to submit your honors thesis by the April deadline for graduation in May, it is possible to delay your graduation until August and use time over the summer to complete your thesis. HOWEVER, thesis directors are not always available over the summer, so be sure to consult your thesis director before you make this decision.

WHAT are the parameters for the Asian Studies honors thesis?

- An honors thesis in Asian Studies is typically 50-80 pages in length.
- Your topic should focus on some aspect of one or more countries or peoples of the Asian region, as covered by the teaching and research program of the Asian Studies Department.
- You are encouraged to make use of at least some primary and secondary material in Asian languages, in addition to material in English.
- Remember that simple and generic overviews are not analysis and will be considered insufficient for an honors thesis. You are expected to engage in an analytical and theoretically/conceptually informed approach to your topic and your sources.

WHEN you have read the above document and identified an honors thesis director, please sign the form below to indicate that you understand the requirements. Give this signed form to your honors thesis director.

YOUR NAME: _____

YOUR PSU ID #: _____

NAME of your THESIS DIRECTOR: _____

INTENDED SEMESTER of GRADUATION: _____

Your signature

Date

If you have any questions about the thesis-writing process in Asian Studies, please contact the Asian Studies Honors Adviser.