Course Description

This seminar is designed to help Honors College students prepare for their Senior Thesis or Senior Creative Project. The senior projects are completed in a student’s home college or school, but there are common elements to these projects across majors and colleges. Together we will think through issues concerning topic and advisor selection and how to approach the thesis project. We will learn about important resources here at UVM (people, library resources, aids and other materials, and funding) to help you pursue your project. You will each write a “pre-proposal” that will provide a foundation for you when you turn to completing your thesis proposal in your home school/college in the spring. Honors College students who have been through this process will offer advice and answer questions, and we will have an informal “troubleshooting” session to assist each other with problems and issues that may arise. Finally, students will receive constructive feedback on rough drafts from the instructor and a small group of peers. Our few meetings and assignments should give students a good foundation from which to then successfully pursue their thesis proposals.

This is a one-credit seminar, although students may also take the class for zero credits if they prefer. Grading will be on a “S/U” (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory) basis.

Who should be here?

- **Honors College students from CAS and CESS are required** to take this class; it is recommended for students from other colleges.
- **Students who are studying abroad Spring 2013**, If you will be at UVM during the spring term, then it is likely you should not be here now.
- Some of you may feel that you are advanced enough in your thesis preparatory work so that you don’t need to take this course, even if it is required (CAS/CESS). In that case, you may appeal not to take the course via a waiver form. Let me know if you would like to pursue this option.

It is important to note that the seminar is not a primary source of disciplinary-based content. It is not intended to replace or substitute for the counsel and substantive input from faculty members in students’ fields of study.

A Blackboard site is available where all course materials will be posted.

Goals of the Course:

Every student has all her/his questions answered, has an understanding of the available resources, and develops a personal “roadmap” to completion of the thesis. (And you’ll have a pre-proposal!)

I cannot stress enough how important the working relationship with your faculty mentor is going to be from now until you defend your thesis. For this course you should talk with her/him, bounce ideas of her/him, and show her/him multiple drafts of your pre-proposal. This is the person who supports you in this process, so you must BRING HER/HIM INTO THE PROCESS!
Honors Thesis Support Network (use back of last page to take notes on each of these)

Beyond the course instructor (me) and each student’s thesis advisor, a network of individuals is available for students who need or desire consultation, assistance, and support as they prepare proposals, conduct research, and write a thesis. This network includes:

- Faculty and staff associated with honors committees in each college and school who can assist with issues related to the proposal review guidelines, deadlines, and process
- Library staff who can assist with identifying and locating library resources
- Faculty departmental representatives who are well-versed in thesis matters
- Senior honors students who can provide peer mentoring
- Peer review groups from Honors 101 who are familiar with each other’s thesis projects

Consult the course Blackboard site once the semester is underway for names and contact information for support network members.

Course Requirements and Grading

There will be five required meetings of this class. The classes will be held:

Class 1. January 15/16: Introduce: the course, senior thesis project, some elements of the pre-proposal. Discuss: Selection of faculty mentor, relationship with faculty mentor, difficulties with faculty mentor...

Class 2. January 22/23: What is a Literature Review? Specific requirements and resources for each school and college.

Class 3. January 29/30: How the library is critical to the success of your thesis (general research methods and strategies, services, selected library sources).
   - **DUE:** One (or two, no more!) sentence thesis topic statement is due at beginning of this session. In addition, include your College/School and the department in which you have a major.


   **NOTE:** **Check-in on Blackboard: submit 1-pg progress report (signed!!) by 11:59pm February 26/27.**
   **Electronic copies of pre-proposal drafts due on Blackboard by 11:59pm March 5/6. These will be distributed to peers for review the following week (you each review 4 or 5, 8-page pre-proposals).**


   **NOTE:** Final pre-Proposal due on Blackboard on Tuesday/Wednesday, March 19/20 by 11:59 pm.

Students are required to:

1. Attend each of the five classes.
2. Bring a simple one or two sentence topic statement to the third class meeting (January 29/30). (Note: this is only a topic statement, not a thesis statement.)
4. Submit a thesis pre-proposal on Blackboard by March 5/6 (11:59pm).
5. Provide written peer review of the pre-proposal submitted by 4-5 of your colleagues - submit on Blackboard.
6. Meet with the small group of colleagues on March 12/13 to provide your peer reviews orally to one another – by this date written reviews are uploaded.
7. Submit the final copy of the pre-proposal to me on Blackboard by March 19/20 (11:59pm).

Have I met with my advisor lately?
NOTE: Failure to fulfill any one of these requirements will result in a grade of “U” (Unsatisfactory).

Thesis Pre-Proposals

The pre-proposal each student will prepare in this course will not necessarily conform to the exact proposal requirements for their home school or college—your thesis advisor will help you meet those requirements. It will, however, include key components of any successful thesis proposal. What students will take away from this class will be the basic elements they will need to then craft thesis proposals in their specific academic units.

Each Thesis Pre-Proposal will include the following elements:

1. Title and Advisor/Mentor.
2. Abstract: a short summary of project and its significance. (No more than 100 words.)
3. Descriptive narrative of project: Explain the question or problem being addressed, and what you hope to demonstrate with your research. (No more than 2 pages.)
4. Significance: Explain why this project is important, including how you hope to offer an original contribution to addressing the problem being studied. (No more than 1 page.)
5. Literature Review: Provide a short literature review of at least 10 published scholarly works addressing this topic. Explain what each of these scholars have accomplished in addressing this topic to date, and how their work relates to your own proposed thesis. (No more than 3 pages.)
6. Methodology: Explain how you will approach your study. (No more than 2 pages.)

Each pre-proposal will be no longer than 8 pages, excluding Title/Advisor and Abstract. Brevity, clarity, and focus are essential. It is also important that pre-proposals are written in non-technical language, so that intelligent readers who are not familiar with the particular discipline or topic will nonetheless understand what is being proposed and why it is being proposed.

Peer Reviews

Each student will be assigned to a group of 4-5 other students proposing thesis topics in (roughly) related fields. Students will read all the pre-proposals in their group and provide, on the last day of class, peer reviews to the other members of their group. The peer review process is designed to give each student feedback on their pre-proposal, and to also allow each student to get a good feel for the work being pursued by some of their colleagues.

Peer reviews should address the following issues (use these six points as your direct guide):

1. Title/Advisor and Abstract: Is the title appropriate and descriptively accurate? Is the abstract clear, concise, and complete? Can anything be deleted? Does anything need to be added?
2. Descriptive Narrative: Are the goals and objectives of the project clearly stated? Are there any suggestions that you have for clarifying this description? Is the project sufficiently focused for a thesis or does it seem too broad and unwieldy?
3. Significance: Is the potential importance of this study clearly stated? Is it clear how it fits within a broader scholarly context?
4. Literature Review: Does the Review demonstrate significant knowledge of the topic field? Does it clearly place the thesis proposal within the context of this field? Does it clarify the reasons for pursuing the project?
5. Methodology: It is obvious why the student is approaching this topic in this way? Will the methodology be able to generate a reasonable answer to the research question? Is the methodology clear, or does it need to be further developed and elaborated?
6. General: Can a non-specialist understand this proposal? Is the logic clear throughout?

These peer reviews are to be delivered orally in the small groups in the November 13th class. It is very helpful to the students receiving the review to have the written feedback from each evaluator. A form will be provided on Blackboard that you can fill out for each pre-proposal you review. Submit reviews via Blackboard to the students in your small group review.

Has my advisor read my draft lately?
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<th><strong>Honors Thesis Support Network</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Faculty Mentor:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Honors College Super Squad!</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Library staff within my specialty:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Senior HCOL students who are in the trenches:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Peers from HCOL101 who are familiar w/ my field, project, etc.</strong></td>
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