

## Anthropology 382 Orientation



We will be working on the details week in and week out, but here is an overview of the project that lies ahead.

### What is an Undergraduate Thesis?

First off, realize that it is not a big term paper. It is a research project, and one which ideally should be well underway by the time one is a senior in our anthropology program.

If you don't think you have research underway, maybe you need to think again. Have you done ethnographic or archaeological fieldwork? Have you researched a term paper or conducted a project that turned up some data and produced some ideas. Have you read a lot and become well versed in some particular area of anthropology. A yes in response to any of these questions means you have very likely prepared a foundation on which to build a thesis.

Simply put, a thesis raises a question. It describes a problem, investigates it, and comes up with answers or solutions. If you think about it that way, you are very likely to have a least the first and most difficult part done, coming up with a question.

### The Advisor

Two people help you write your theses. We call one the *supervisor*. That is the person formally responsible for conducting the course. The supervisors job is to show you how to construct a professional looking piece of anthropology. He or she is concerned primarily with the form, i.e. the look and feel of your thesis. That includes its basic logic. The supervisor looks for unconvincing arguments or disorganized ideas and can usually spot them whether you're writing about paleolithic musical traditions or Antarctic archaeology.

The other person, variously referred to as the *advisor* or *mentor* is the subdisciplinary or topical expert. Your advisor consults with you about the content of the thesis, the theory, method, and data. Normally, advisors are members of the Sociology-Anthropology Department, but sometimes students recruit an advisor from another department or institution. The point is to find a professional familiar enough with the topic you are working

on to provide sound advice.

Although you are responsible for locating your own advisor, your supervisor may need to intervene. There are several reasons, and one of them is to distribute the workload. No one is paid extra to advise thesis writers, and to keep the work equitable it may be necessary to rearrange advisor relationships. A supervisor also may find it necessary to get involved should you select someone inappropriate to your work or if you overlook a faculty member most appropriate to your topic.

Once again, be aware that advisors help because they want to, not because they have to. Think about how you can make an advisor want to work with you. Can your research contribute to a potential advisor's work? Be flexible, and take nothing for granted. Don't lose your advisor. The wise thesis writer cultivates the advisor relationship with the utmost care.

## Thesis Length

The thesis needs to be as long as it takes you to answer the question you propose at its outset. You probably will write something on the order of 10,000 or 20,000 words.

You may be surprised how big your thesis becomes in a couple of months. Students often need to be urged to eliminate several pages of text. At every juncture *overwrite*. It is much, much easier to pare a thesis down to size than to add substance to an anemic one.

## Format

Thesis writers are required to follow the guidelines for publication in the *American Anthropologist*, the flag ship journal of the American Anthropological Association. A copy of the guidelines can be found at the association's website.

For the purpose of organizing your thesis, we have found the following outline to be useful. The sequence of instruction, you will notice, assumes a thesis organized into six basic sections.

1. Introduction: an overview of the thesis; the question you address, how you go about it, and what you found; gets readers interested in your work.
2. Literature Review: a narrative about how your work relates to work that already has been published; serves to develop the question you intend to answer; documents your familiarity with studies related to yours.
3. Data Section: presents the information you discovered; displays the facts pertinent to answering the question you posed in the introduction; tells reader how you acquired your data (this sometimes warrants a separate section about methods of research).
4. Analysis: applies theory to fact and interprets the data; tells the reader what the facts mean (because they never speak for themselves).
5. Conclusions: connects your analysis to the original question or problem; tells how your solution relates to other problems and areas of investigation; suggest what needs to be done to confirm or extend your findings.
6. References Cited: complete listing of all published sources of information.

## Oral Defense

The defense provides an opportunity for you to address questions about your work. Questions, of course, have come up all along during its production, but this is a final, formal event, a ritual, if you will, in which you deal with people who misunderstand or question your ideas or simply remain unconvinced. The procedure consists of a 15 or 20 minute summation followed by questions.

## Graphics

Always think about your thesis in visual terms. Studies involving spaces and objects require maps, drawings, and photographs. Actions and processes can often presented and analyzed best when charted. Counts and frequencies call for graphs and tables.

Powerpoint has become a staple in the sciences, including anthropology. ISU offers free short courses and workshops in Powerpoint. Faculty of Technology Support Services offers workshops specially directed at participants in the Undergraduate Research Symposium.

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