

Honors in American Studies FAQs  
2017

Q. What do I need to do to prepare for honors?

1. Come up with a topic. Often thesis topics emerge from readings or research projects in previous courses, but they can also be something that is altogether new. What would you like to know more about, and what question(s) are you asking about it?
2. Find an adviser. The AMS director of honors can help, but ideally your thesis adviser will be a professor you already have taken classes with and know in some capacity. You should discuss your topic with your adviser, who can help you to refine it and develop a plan for doing research.
3. Put together your honors proposal. The application form and other key points of information can be found at the Class Deans' website:  
<http://www.smith.edu/classdeans/honors.php>

Q. What should I discuss in my honors thesis proposal?

1. Explain your topic as clearly and concisely as you can. What do you want to write about? The more specific you can be in defining your topic, the better.
2. Explain the significance of your topic. Why does it matter? What questions will your thesis seek to address that others have not already answered or how will your thesis add to the conversation that already exists on your chosen topic?
3. Explain how you plan to conduct research on the topic. What sources will you consult?
  - a. What kinds of primary sources will you consult? Will you need to use archival collections? There is money available to support research on departmental honors thesis through the Tomlinson Fund, so keep this in mind if you think you might need to travel to do research.
  - b. What kinds of secondary sources (scholarship) will you consult? What kinds of methodologies/disciplines will you include?
4. Explain how your studies at Smith have prepared you for researching this topic. What courses have been especially relevant? What readings have you done beyond your coursework that might be relevant? What other experience(s) do you have in or outside of school that you think will contribute to successful thesis?
5. Create a short, preliminary bibliography of books, articles and other relevant sources that you have already consulted or plan to consult for your thesis research. This does not need to be more than 1 page.

Completed proposals should be approximately 3-4 single-spaced pages (not counting the application form and other supporting materials). This proposal is submitted (with your advisor's signature) to the director of honors for an initial evaluation, and then submitted to the AMS Executive Committee for evaluation and approval. Final approval rests with the Class Deans' Subcommittee on Honors and Independent Programs (SHIP).

Q. What is a second reader?

Once your thesis proposal has been approved, your thesis will primarily be evaluated by two people: your adviser and your second reader. The second reader is required by the College so that the evaluation of your work is not solely in the hands of one person.

The second reader should be someone who knows your topic in a general sense if not specifically, and who can provide a different perspective than your primary advisor's. Ideally, the second reader should be someone with whom, like your adviser, you have taken classes and have established some sort of working relationship.

You do not need to have chosen a second reader before your thesis has been approved. However, **it is ultimately up to the student and adviser to choose a second reader.** In American Studies, second readers are elected, not selected for you. With this in mind, you should begin to discussing possible second readers with your adviser early on.

Q. When do things need to be done?

There are two opportunities to apply to apply departmental honors: once in the late spring before your senior/final year and once in the fall of your senior/final year (reversed for J-grads).

To apply for honors in 2017-18 this spring, you will need to submit a completed proposal application to the director of honors, Christen Mucher, by **Monday, May 1**. You are free (and encouraged) to work with your advisor and director on drafts of this proposal.

Students who register for a fall honors thesis course will not see the course on their schedule until after SHIP has approved it. The deadline for submitting the director- and program-approved proposal to SHIP is **Monday, May 22**.

Deadlines for the fall have not yet been announced, but the fall deadline is typically at the end of the second week of classes, i.e. in early-September. If apply in the fall, you will need to have your proposal submitted to the director of honors in American Studies during the first week of classes.

If you are considering applying for honors in the fall, try to begin communicating with your potential advisor before you leave campus in the spring and please be in touch with the director before the 2017-18 school year begins.