

Honors in American Studies FAQs

Updated 2022

Q. How do I prepare for an honors project before my final semester(s)?

1. Come up with a topic. Often thesis topics emerge from readings or research projects in previous courses, but they can also be something altogether new. What would you like to know more about, and what question(s) are you asking?
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 refine it and develop a research plan.
3. Put together your honors proposal. The application and other information can be found at the [Class Deans' Honors website](#). Take especial note of the "Timeline and Dates" section.

Q. What should I discuss in my honors proposal?

1. Explain your proposed topic as clearly and concisely as you can. The more specific you are, the better. Sometimes it is easiest to phrase your topic as a question (How has A changed over time?) and then rephrase it as a proposal (My project plans to examine how A has changed over time). Sometimes it helps to write a statement using the following formula: Usually scholars/people think X, but after considering Y, my project will show Z.
2. Explain the significance of your topic. Consider: Why does your topic matter? Why should other people be interested in it? What questions will your thesis seek to address that others have not already answered? How will your thesis add to the conversation that already exists on your chosen topic?
3. Explain how you plan to conduct research.
 - 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?
 - c. What kinds of methodologies/disciplines will you use?
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. Include 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.

The complete proposal is submitted, with your advisor's signature(s), 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). SHIP approval typically occurs during the first 4 weeks of classes.

Q. What is a second reader?

During the year/semester, your project 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 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 by AMS/SHIP. However, in AMS second readers are not assigned: **it is ultimately up to the student and adviser to choose a second reader.** With this in mind, you should begin considering possible second readers early on.

Q. What is the general timeline?

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

To apply for honors in 2022-23, you will need to submit a completed application to the Director of Honors, Christen Mucher, by **Thursday, September 1**. You are free (and encouraged) to work with your advisor and the director on drafts of this proposal before the deadline.

Students who register for a fall honors thesis project will not see the course on their schedule until after SHIP has approved it. The deadline for submitting the final director- and program-approved proposal to SHIP is **Thursday, September 15**.

Deadlines for 2023-24 have not yet been announced, but the spring deadline is typically during the last week of classes, i.e. in early-May and the fall deadline during the first week of classes.

Students contemplating honors projects (and applying for either fall or spring) should be in communication with their advisors well in advance of all deadlines.