

Honors Program, Thesis Course 399 Fall Semester, 2019

Instructor: Heather Altfeld, M.F.A.

Office: ARTS 375

Email: hfisher@csuchico.edu

Office Hours: Beginning this semester, due to high volume of students enrolled in Thesis, I will require you to sign up AHEAD OF TIME in Google Calendar for TWO 15 min appointments per semester. Since class will occur weekly rather than monthly, this should help you to keep on schedule and we will have ample time to field individual questions in class.

Here is the sign-up sheet for you (it will be active by Friday, Aug 31; please do not use before then!)

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1MI2jTPDjGOQR7OjH_2ClzUzLojsjSxilBstjON6STM/edit?usp=sharing

Office Hours in ARTS 375 (please be aware that visits may be limited to ten minutes maximum)

- Wednesdays 2-4pm
- Fridays 2-4pm

Greetings, and welcome to your Final Thesis course! You've worked hard to get here, and it is exciting to be able to share the ideas, experiences, research, and imaginative work that will carry you up and out of the University in the next year or so.

Your THESIS will be an exciting, imaginative, in-depth, interdisciplinary investigation into a subject or subjects that fascinate and sustain you. It will be an integrated compendium of research; readings, ideas, and first-hand fieldwork.

You have two options for the Thesis. Former student advice: "Think BIG, think interesting, and think early!"

Option A: You may choose to do a PROJECT, which will be interdisciplinary in nature, will demonstrate subject area expertise, creativity, imagination, and will include a written component of approximately 12-15 pages as well as a performance/demonstration/etc. The projects will be considered on an individual basis and will need to include a narrative of sorts and a literary review (see below).

Option B: You may choose to do a research-oriented paper option. While length is somewhat subjective, the general requirement will be approximately 28-30 pages in length for the year.

In either case, the thesis will clearly demonstrate your academic and intellectual curiosity with equal measures of rigor and creativity. Both of these will include some sort of **primary research component**. The thesis will provide clear and fascinating insight, as well as elaborating on, the work you have done while at Chico State *that has been most memorable and interesting to you*. You will want to choose something that

moves you, and moves us, your readers, that is divergent in approach, engaging in delivery. Make us think. Let us see your expertise and extraordinary mind. By the time you reach the final stages in Spring, you will feel like a genuine expert, one who has a well-rounded, interdisciplinary approach to a question of intrigue. Each sentence of your final submission will be the most beautiful one you possibly could write. Think of the thesis as a part of making the transition being a lone college student to conceptualizing yourself as a member of a community of writers, artists, scientists, philosophers, activists.

The Thesis Course is 3 units per semester. As the CSU catalog stipulates, "For all CSU degree programs and courses bearing academic credit, the "credit hour" is defined as ... [o]ne hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week..." This means that the expectation, in terms of hours, would be broken down approximately as follows:

0.75 hours of class time per week (will vary somewhat)
6.5 hours of homework time (this will be independently conducted)
= 7.5 hours per week, more or less

Since the semester here is long (17 weeks), we are looking at approximately 120 hours of work per semester on the thesis. This means your year-long project will involve approximately 240 hours of research and writing! Wow! Think of the amazing potential results!

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAD PLANNED ON MEETING ONCE PER MONTH: This has worked in previous years; unfortunately our format is required to change this year (I'm just the messenger!) Please note that you will be asked to choose between **GROUP A or GROUP B** and you will meet as per the meeting schedule in the back of the syllabus accordingly (so that you will be meeting on average 2.5 times per month).

Q: may I change groups?

A: yes, in Spring. Not in Fall. Thanks for asking!

Course Description from the Catalogue:

Independent study of an interdisciplinary topic that satisfies three units of upper-division GE theme requirements. This capstone course is designed to hone your skills in research and writing by working on a topic that grows out of the material you found most intriguing in your other upper-division theme classes.

Purpose of Our 399 Thesis Course:

By way of my oversight, your advisor's advice and influence, mandatory meetings, and collaborative peer editing, our course aims to provide you support and guidance as you work on your thesis. This includes helping you succeed in creating an interdisciplinary focus for your research, providing guidelines to stay on track and be accountable for your time and labors, and the provision of mandatory meetings to help you assess your progress, get advice, conduct peer review, and deepen your research methods.

My Role as Instructor:

My role is to help you determine the scope of an interesting and interdisciplinary project, to offer suggestions and advice for expansion (and sometimes contraction) of project to make it manageable, to keep you in check with respect to managing course deadlines for work on a reasonable time line, to give you feedback on your annotations, proposal, and draft, and to be here for questions, support, and guidance. I consider myself to be a facilitator and mentor, here to think through ideas with you, brainstorm, offer suggestions for readings and research directions, and assist when necessary in finding campus connections to faculty who will facilitate and chair your work. *I am not your editor, your project director (that's you!) and I wish not to be a nag!* I believe you can handle the responsibility of the work. If you have an assignment due, or a meeting with me due, ***it is your responsibility to check in. I do not provide copyediting or proofreading.*** While I may suggest editorial changes, the grammatical and mechanical editing of your thesis is ultimately your responsibility. The quality of the writing, as well as the quality of the research, is critical to your grade.

I do not accept late work, except in serious, compelling, documentable situations.

Projected Course Direction:

Fall: Gather information, some of which will be actual physical books from Meriam Library! Read Umberto Eco's "How to Write a Thesis." Read, take notes, read more, take more notes. Interview at least one person in your area. Consider ways of familiarizing yourself with the "whole," with trying to understand. Do annotations, albeit tedious, to help you organize your research. Meet your advisor as much as you can. Most importantly, ask big questions. Buckle your seatbelt for the long ride. Take some risks. Be willing to sometimes look a little dumb sometimes. Eat buttery popcorn. Love your library. This all helps.

Spring: Fill in holes in your knowledge. Develop a deeper primary research. Read our textbook for helpful advice on writing a thesis. Find your notes and use them. Write. Read a bit more where your knowledge is weakest. Write more. Talk to your advisor as much as they will permit you to. Use your peers for review. Complete interviews. Turn in drafts. Read John Mc Phee's Draft #4:
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/04/29/draft-no-4>

Bring home a kitty to keep you company while you write. Build your Final Presentation (15 minutes). Invite your friends and family to come cheer you on. Cheer yourself on. Eat chocolate. Remember that it will be over soon and that you will have this amazing thing to take with you into the world.

Spring Thesis Presentation Date: May 9th, 4-7:30pm. MAKE SURE YOUR PERTINENT FAMILY AND FRIENDS KNOW ABOUT THIS!

Advising:

You will be required to find a suitable advisor for your thesis or project who is an expert in the area (s) you wish to conduct research. This advisor should be carefully selected from your intended field (s) of study, and the advisor must consent to working with you during the year to evaluate your ideas and writing. Advisors will vary considerably in the amount of time and effort available to you as a student; some will prefer a hands-on approach, others may simply be willing to read your draft and final work. Please begin

thinking NOW about who might be willing to work with you in such capacities. Advisors will be asked to grade your final paper in Spring, which is approximately 40% of your Spring Grade. Choose wisely!

Expectations for Thesis Students:

By September 14th: By this date, you need to have met with me, introduced yourself, and described your potential project in detail. Come prepared to brainstorm and take notes with a pad of paper. Please make an appointment on the Google calendar. If none of these hours work for you, you **MUST** take responsibility by emailing me a list of available times and days by the end of the first week of school, and I will do my best to accommodate you within reason.

By September 21st: Submit to Blackboard by NOON your potential reading list. This might include, but is not limited to, peer-reviewed research, qualitative/quantitative studies, essays or nonfictional works that may pertain to your research, fieldwork conducted in your area, fictional works, artwork, music, performance, etc. that may add to your understanding of your subject area. Leave no stone unturned! Plan to have approximately 20 sources on the list.

ALSO by September 21st: I will need you to submit to Blackboard by NOON your advisor's name, contact information, department, etc. If this changes over the course of the year, please notify me immediately.

By October 12: FIVE annotations for your Thesis sources due to Blackboard by NOON. The annotation assignment and pertinent examples will be posted online. Cite your work as per your discipline, in MLA or APA format. Sources will be subject to scrutiny and review! Sources that are not credible or in-depth will require revision.

By November 2: A 1.5 page single spaced updated Proposal due to Blackboard by NOON. Proposal Assignment specifics will be posted on Blackboard.

By November 9th: Submit to Blackboard by NOON another FIVE annotations as per the annotation assignment.

By November 30th: Interview #1 DUE to Blackboard by NOON.

Also by November 30th: You need to have completed your second formal office meeting with Heather before or by this date. For solo meeting, come prepared to brainstorm and take notes with a pad of paper. Again, if none of the appointment slots work for you, you **MUST** take responsibility by emailing me a list of available times and days by the end of the first week of school, and I will do my best to accommodate you.

By December 14th: YOUR LAST EIGHT ANNOTATIONS due to Blackboard by NOON.

By December 20th: (note that this is a Thursday!) **Self-Evaluation Due.** This will include at least several areas of research you still know you need to complete in Spring, as well as a proposal for primary research.

Some Advice to You From Me!!

The main criteria will be critical in the evaluation of your final thesis:

Risk—is the project interesting, different, not a report or reiteration of knowledge? Does it attempt something interesting, different, slightly, as they say, out of the box?

Effort—does the project seem like the concerted effort of a high-level Honors Student, an almost-graduate level student? Is it clear that you are knowledgeable and somewhat expert in the area you chose to investigate and understand?

Depth—is the project sufficiently deep in scope? This relates too to the above criteria regarding effort. Did you ask the important questions? Think through many angles? Uncover the stones?

Originality/Imagination—is the project at least attempting to make a contribution to a conversation in your area (s) of interest? Is it engaging, scintillating, and sufficiently new to convince us of original thought?

Interdisciplinary-ness—this is a requirement of the Honors program and GE pathways. Do you connect the primary area of study to other disciplines? Is there an attempt to look at the convergence of sometimes disparate things?

Hey, okay, so I have an idea, and I am ready to work. What next?

Get yourself an Advisor! Stat! The advisor's job is to mentor you through the intellectual process, provide support, suggest readings, read a draft or two, and at the end, to either issue a grade, or to ask me to. When considering how to select an advisor, bear in mind that until policies change at the University level, advisors are not generally paid for their time. So, to that end—select someone who will be willing to give you a minimum (very minimum) of four hours of time during the semester. Also, someone who will be able to support and appreciate the level of time and dedication it will take, as well as commitment to the interdisciplinary aspect of the thesis requirements. Finding someone who knows your work ethic will make things easier.

Gratitude is Invaluable. Because your advisor may be putting in extra hours on your behalf, consider small, but meaningful gifts, cards, etc as a thank-you for their dedication to you. Small things count. Simply mailing a handwritten note (Thanks, Gail, for the time you spent with me last Friday talking through these readings) is thoughtful. As a professor, I know that gift cards, even for \$5.00, to Naked Lounge, Peets, etc are treats, and well appreciated.

**ADDITIONALLY, please consider an acknowledgement to your advisor (s) in your written thesis.

Read. Then read. Then do some reading! Often students are intimidated by the writing component (particularly the length) of the thesis. This is, in part, because if you haven't yet read much about your area of interest, you don't yet know how much there will be to say. You should know about 500% more than

the next smartest person in our class in your area of research, so take the reading seriously—it is a key element to success in the course.

Annotate what you read. Create a set of notes for yourself. This will save you a huge amount of time later on. You will be able to use some of what you write in your annotations directly in your paper. AND make sure to ask your advisor what they think you should read! If you are crossing disciplines, consider asking a second advisor from your connecting discipline to recommend some good reading as well.

I want to do a project rather than a lengthy written thesis. What do I do? Come see me asap in office hours. Projects are a little harder to define in scope, and must be done on a case-by-case basis. Please see me by Week Two!!! If we do not meet by the end of Week Three, it may be too late to set up proper perimeters.

Attend Mandatory Meetings. These are designed as A) check-ins about your progress, B) to provide moral and peer support for your work, C) to clarify questions and issues before they become problematic, and D) to talk through handouts, expectations, procedures, and provide some new material for your projects, ie, ethnographies to read, etc. These meetings are so important that you will receive *points* for attendance!

What Should My Thesis Do?

For the purposes of this particular section, the words “thesis” and “project” are interchangeable, not meaning to distinguish between written work and artistic sorts of thesis ambitions.

When asked, “What do you hope for in a good thesis, as a teacher?” I thought of a few ways of answering this. For one, I don’t have a “vision” of each project, or a pat answer. But I do think the following are important aims of a good thesis:

- 1) The project demonstrates considerable expertise. You should know, like, *a thousand percent* more than the next smartest person in the room. Or more. I should be able to call you up if I need a guest lecturer to talk about your area, and be able to treat you like an expert in the field. Which you will be!
- 2) Your work should be original. That is, the thesis distinguishes itself from a “report” by including at least some layer of primary research. This can be in the form of an interview, a survey, a map, anything that generates even a small but NEW contribution to what you are studying. If you can’t do all the research you want to do, due to lack of funding, time, or necessary sophisticated assistance, at least make some interesting assertions about your subject that could be used by future researchers.
- 3) Connections. You should be making connections between disciplines, between ideas, between researchers in a historical context, between dissimilar ideas that might, in fact, be related. Your ability to think uniquely and originally about your issue and come up with new and important thoughts is critical.
- 4) Remember that you will hit some lumps in the road, and even some failures. Failure is a GOOD SIGN of GOOD RESEARCH. It says you are trying new things. It becomes part of what you write about.

Thesis Specifics:

While the thesis specifics will vary a good deal as per your fields of research, ALL theses will include the following. The length will vary depending on whether you are doing a project or a research-oriented paper.

- ❖ **A Weighty, Engaging Introduction:** What made you choose to do your research in this area? What questions and curiosities drove your work? What was it that bore scrutiny by you?
- ❖ **A Literary Review and Conversation of Contexts:** What have others thought about this subject, or these ideas? Whose voices have been in the conversation in the past, and whose voices are most prevalent now?
- ❖ **A Synthesis:** of your ideas into the conversation. What can you add to this discussion? What do you have to say that is new, interesting, real? What were some things you found, considered, etc. that might carry the curiosity of others in the future?
- ❖ **A Primary Research Component** that will include, but is not limited to, fieldwork, interviews, ethnography, mapping, laboratory work, etc as is relevant to your project.
- ❖ **A Conclusion** that is insightful, *not reiterative*, offering future directions for research, ideas for collaboration, etc.

The Final Thesis must be clean and error-free, and include proper in-text citations for scholarly sources consulted and a comprehensive Works Cited page. Aim to stun and compel the audience with interesting, provocative, beautiful writing. Because this project has been driven by your curiosity, your reading experiences, your field work, interviews, etc., you will want to be writing in *first person narrative*. I am respectfully asking that you stay away from “formulaic” approaches to writing; please take creative liberties and risks as you write.

GRADING POLICIES

Assignments are considered late if they do not appear on Blackboard (or hard copy, if specified) at scheduled times. Printer trouble IS NOT a valid reason for late work, nor is computer difficulty. After many semesters of being flexible with deadlines, I have come to the conclusion that unless dire circumstances arise (medical/familial emergencies) *I cannot accept late work*.

Please familiarize yourself with the following “adjectival associations” with each strata of grade:

A work: “A” work is generally associated with *exemplary, stellar, original, extraordinary, thought-provoking, engaged, of artisanal quality*. An “A” is *truly remarkable, shiny, graceful, boastworthy, and amazing*. In other words, you totally rock.

B work: “B” work is generally associated with “*above and beyond,*” with some, but not all, of the above qualities, above average, to stand out on occasion, to be worthy of recognition. You are, on occasion, outstanding, at other times, perhaps, doing perfectly great. **Newsflash! A “B” is a good grade.**

C work: “C” work is average. That means, that you have done *competent work*. *You have done what has been asked of you, but rarely stretched toward something more.* Your work (not you, of course!) is regular, ordinary, and meets minimum assignment criteria. You are just fine! Remembering that a “C” is average is helpful. It means *everything is okay.*

D work: “D” work fails to meet the minimum criteria for the course. Perhaps you did a fantastic job on the Annotations but did not turn in other work. When you receive a “D,” it means that I cannot, in good conscience, allow your project to be presented—it simply isn’t yet ready. A “D” can also indicate a lack of commitment to the deadlines.

“F” work: This would be a rather sad state of affairs. Perhaps it was a very rough time in your life. Trying not to get an F is always a good idea. Remember, though, that it is your *work* that is being assessed—not you, not your potential, and not your past performance in other academic endeavors.

If you have concerns or questions about your grade, come to my office hours. Come *before* things are dire, before the end of the semester, when it is often too late to make substantive improvement!

POINTS POSSIBLE

The thesis project for **Fall Semester** will be graded as follows:

Preliminary Proposal (due first day of class meeting) 40 points

Reading List + Advisor Contact Info: 60 points

Annotations: 25 points per annotation, 18 annotations, 450 points

Attendance and Participation, including attendance at both class and office meetings: 140 points

Second Proposal: 100 points

Interview: 100 points

Self-Evaluation: 60 points

Total Possible Points (subject to change): +/- 950 points

Course Schedule for Thesis 399

**Dates subject to minor changes!*

***Calendar does not reflect small in-class assignments*

WEEK	DATES	MEETING SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS
1	Week of Aug 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First meeting, Introductions, Discussion of course and of ideas • Read Eco, Ch 1-2 • BRING your 3 ideas (see email from Summer!) • ALL GROUP MEETING
2	Week of Sept 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP A ONLY: Read Ch 3 in Eco, Clarification of Proposals Discussion, Eco and Research
3	Week of Sept 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL STUDENTS: Make sure you have signed up or completed meeting with Heather! • GROUP B ONLY: Clarification of Proposals Discussion, Eco and Research (Ch 3)
4	Week of Sept 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL STUDENTS: Reading List and Advisor Contact DUE SEPT 21 • GROUP A ONLY
5	Week of Sept 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP B ONLY
6	Week of Oct 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL STUDENT MEETING: You and Your Annotations: Chums or Enemies? • Read Ch 4, Eco
7	Week of Oct 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP A ONLY • ALL STUDENTS: Annotations 1-5 DUE TO BLACKBOARD by noon Oct 12
8	Week of Oct 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP B ONLY
9	Week of Oct 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP A ONLY
10	Week of Oct 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP B ONLY • ALL STUDENTS: Updated Proposal DUE to Blackboard by Noon Nov 2!
11	Week of Nov 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL STUDENT MEETING • ANNOTATIONS 5-10 due Friday Nov 9th

WEEK	DATES	MEETING SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> REMEMBER: Schedule 2nd formal meeting with Heather by now!
12	Week of Nov 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GROUP A ONLY
13	Week of Nov 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NO CLASS! Thanksgiving Break! Make sure you have scheduled or completed any interviews!
14	Week of Nov 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GROUP B ONLY
15	Week of Dec 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No class/Heather at Conference
16	Week of Dec 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ALL STUDENT WINTER SHINDIG All Students: Final 8 Annotations DUE to Blackboard Dec 14th noon
17	Week of Dec 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no meeting! Good luck on Finals! ALL STUDENTS: Self-Evaluation due by Thursday, Dec 20th NOON