

**Honors Program, Thesis Course 399
Spring Semester, 2021**

Instructor: Heather Altfeld, M.F.A.

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Office Hours: Mondays 1-3pm, Wednesdays 12-2pm, and by appointment. (if you need an appointment; please email me with 4-5 reasonable times...Please give me at least 48 hours notice when possible if you need an appointment outside of office hours.

<https://calendly.com/heatheraltfeld/office-hours-spring-2021>

FINAL PRESENTATIONS (TENTATIVE DATE): Monday, May 10th, 4:00-7:00pm

REQUIRED TEXT: *How to Write a Thesis* by Umberto Eco (from last semester) and a number of articles I will post from various long-form journalistic/scientific sources

HOW SPRING SEMESTER WILL WORK

Greetings, and welcome to Second Semester of our Final Thesis course! You have all worked REALLY 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, as you now know, 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 potentially first-hand fieldwork (required if you are working on a year-long thesis). While length is somewhat subjective and will radically depend on whether you are doing a project-based thesis or a paper-based thesis, the general requirement will be **10-12 pages for PROJECTS and 28-32 pages MAXIMUM for paper-based theses (not counting the Works Cited page, etc).**

The thesis should clearly demonstrate your academic and intellectual curiosity with equal measures of rigor and creativity. It 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 a project 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 draft in Spring, you will feel like a genuine expert, one who has an well-rounded, interdisciplinary approach to a question of intrigue. Each sentence of the final product 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:

2.5 hours “class” time per week (independently conducted for the most part)
5 hours of homework time (again, independently conducted)
= 7.5 hours per week, more or less

This means that in total, your **year-long project** will involve approximately 240 hours of research and writing! Wow! Think of the amazing potential results!

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 keeping up with the 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 an 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 normally accept late work, except in serious, compelling, documentable situations.

Projected Trajectory for the Spring Semester Course:

Fill in holes in your knowledge. Develop and complete your primary research. Read Eco's book for helpful advice on writing a thesis. Print your annotations, and use them to draft your paper. 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. Turn in drafts. Read John Mc Phee's Draft #4:

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/04/29/draft-no-4>

Bring home a kitten to keep you company while you write. Build your Final Presentation (15 minutes). Practice your presentation at least 20 times. 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.

Advising:

You will continue to work with your advisor for your thesis or project who is an expert in the area (s) you wish to conduct research. This advisor should be working with you during the Spring semester 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. Advisors will be asked to grade your final paper in Spring, which is approximately 35- 40% of your Spring Grade.

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? **MAKE SURE TO CHECK WITH YOUR PATHWAY COORDINATOR IF YOU ARE USING THIS COURSE TO COMPLETE A PATHWAY REQUIREMENT!!!!!!!**

Work with your advisor! 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.

Attend Class Meetings. These are designed as A) Writing instructionals, B) check-ins about your progress, C) to provide moral and peer support for your work, D) to clarify questions and issues before they become problematic, and E) 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:**

- ❖ **A meaningful and 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.

Spring 2021 Deadlines

By February 15th: Literature Review (see sample online) DUE to me by 3pm

Also by February 15th: SCHEDULE your short meeting with Heather. Please do not wait until the last minute to schedule this!

By March 8th: Interview Annotation #2 DUE by 3pm Recall that this interview must be someone “up the chain of expertise” and NOT a local connection. See “Interview Techniques and Write-Up” on Blackboard for further tips on this process!

By March 22nd: Primary Research Component DUE by 3pm. This will consist of your exhaustive efforts with your qualitative research, written up with attention to detail and professionalism. Further assignment criteria will be on BBL. It will describe how, where, when, etc your research was conducted, and what your findings were.

By April 5th: 15 pages of thesis due to Blackboard BY 3pm (it needn’t be beginning to end; we’ll go over in class some, also see Eco’s book). This is mostly a “get the words on the page” assignment. That being said, it will need to be a solid draft that is substantive and decent enough to read and will include a revision of your Lit Review!

By April 19th: **Completed** VERY GOOD WORKING draft of thesis DUE to your advisor and to Heather and to Blackboard for Peer Review by 3pm!

By April 26th: Submit your peer review to your peer and to me (via Blackboard). Instructions will be given as the date approaches.

By May 3rd: 50-word Abstract, 50-word third-person bio, and inventive title of project DUE to Blackboard by 3pm. **NO LATENESS PLEASE. PLEASE ADHERE TO THE 50 WORD LIMITS. This is essential so I can plan the program. Please proofread carefully.** If I have to put substantive time into editing your abstract or bio, I will subsequently subtract points.

MAY 10th, 3pm: (ALL STUDENTS) D Day! Presentations in front of Honors Program, Undergraduate Dean, Director, etc. Dress sharp, practice, and STAY THE WHOLE TIME.

By May 14th: (ALL STUDENTS) FINAL DRAFT OF THESIS DUE to me and to your advisor. NO LATENESS ON THIS DEADLINE!!

By May 20th: Grade from your advisor due to my email by NOON. If your advisor will need additional time, they will need to contact me so that I know. IF I do not receive a grade from your advisor by the time grades are due on May 20th, I reserve the right to assign my grade to the entirety of your project.

GRADING POLICIES

Assignments are considered late if they do not appear on Blackboard at scheduled times.

Here are some associations for you 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, Thesis, Spring Semester:

100 points Attendance and Participation on Zoom

120 points for completed Literature Review

100 points for Interview #2

200 points for Primary Research Component

100 points for submission of a primary draft

50 points for submission of an on-time peer review

200 points for my evaluation of the Final Paper

200 points for Advisor's evaluation of Final Paper

200 points for abstract, title, and successful, graceful public presentation of your project per guidelines

Americans with Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Please also contact Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) as they are the designated department responsible for approving and coordinating reasonable accommodations and services for students with disabilities. ARC will help you understand your rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and provide you further assistance with requesting and arranging accommodations.

Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as a XX (specify if desired). I am required to share information regarding sexual misconduct with the University. Students may speak to someone confidentially by contacting the Counseling and Wellness

Center (898-6345) or Safe Place (898-3030). Information on campus reporting obligations and other Title IX related resources are available here: www.csuchico.edu/title-ix

ESL Resource Center

The ESL Resource Center provides free tutoring for all non-native English speakers and heritage learners. Tutors can provide assistance with any

aspect of the writing process from brainstorming topics, outlining papers, editing drafts, answering grammar questions, and working with sources and citations. Tutors also provide help with oral presentations, digital documents, and reading and listening skills. The Center isn't exclusively for international students. Instead, anyone who identifies as a non-native English speaker is welcome to utilize this free campus resource. The Center is located in ARTS 206A and is open Mondays – Fridays from 10:00 – 4:00. No appointments are necessary. More information can be found at: <http://www.csuchico.edu/eng1/student-resources/eslcenter.shtml>

Mechoopda Acknowledgement

Let us all please be aware and thoughtful of the fact that CSU, Chico stands on traditional Mechoopda Indian tribal lands. Without them and other indigenous people, we would not have access to this campus or our education.