

Guidelines for the Philosophy Senior Thesis

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Background. In all majors at Hanover students are required, in their senior year, to complete a “culminating experience.” This may be an internship or other extended experience, but in disciplines like philosophy it is normally a serious research project culminating in a long paper. In philosophy, this Senior Thesis is designed to promote and assess several primary skills in the major:

- to develop a serious question or task in philosophy which requires somewhat original work to answer or accomplish
- to design a method of satisfactorily resolving the question/task
- to effectively write up the analysis and argument which supports one’s results
- to adequately communicate one’s results in a public forum and respond well to challenges and inquiries about one’s work

The Senior Thesis is designed to give students an opportunity to discover and show what they are able to do in the way of substantially independent serious philosophical work near the end of their undergraduate education. It isn’t meant to be a difficult hurdle to somehow get over, but a real chance to draw on much of what has been learned and developed in their major studies. Broadly, the Senior Thesis project can be set out in four stages.

Stage 1 – Selecting a Question or Task

1. As you move through your philosophy curriculum and other experiences, keep your mind open for issues, ideas, authors, and such that really engage your thought. Keep tabs on these as potential Senior Thesis topics.
2. Check some of these out further. Write a paper on some, discuss them with philosophy faculty, do some related reading.
3. Often the best Senior Thesis work builds on a course that provides a foundation for deeper, more focused work on the topic. If you haven’t already got that background, take a relevant course.
4. Look at some of the Senior Theses produced by recent alumni to get a better sense of what these entail.

Stage 2 – Selecting a Senior Thesis Advisor & Writing a Proposal

1. As soon as you can, start discussing possible Senior Thesis projects with philosophy faculty who might work well with you on them. They may refer you to a colleague because of special expertise, other obligations, etc., but will always be helpful at least in your initial thinking about topics and methods.
2. You will need to write a Senior Thesis proposal and present it during the Philosophy Seminar. (The Philosophy Seminar is offered only during the Fall term. Fall projects will be presented at the beginning of the term, and Winter projects will be presented at the end of the term.) Work closely with your Senior Thesis advisor on this.
3. A good Senior Thesis proposal should do at least the following:
 - a) Clearly identify the philosophical question or task you will focus on.
 - b) Explain why you are especially interested in this project.

- c) Put the question/task within a wider philosophical context to show how answering the question is logically related to other issues and ideas.
 - d) Indicate what you have already done that provides a foundation for your project—such as related courses, papers, reading, experiences.
 - e) Sketch the main methods and materials you plan to use in your project (e.g., a preliminary bibliography, a list of people to talk with, a way of breaking the larger task into manageable units).
 - f) Lay out a tentative timetable for doing your project (in consultation with your advisor), leaving adequate time for completing a final draft before the end of the term.
4. For your Senior Thesis proposal presentation, you will submit copies of your written proposal to the philosophy faculty, with a synopsis for all the students. You will have 20-30 minutes to talk about your proposed project and respond to comments. Students and faculty will offer both spoken and written suggestions that may be helpful as you refine your proposal and undertake your project.

Stage 3 - Doing the Senior Thesis

1. By the start of the term for your Senior Thesis you should be fully prepared to jump in. Think of it as a whole course that you have designed—your proposal is the syllabus and you are ready to get into the project in a methodical way.
2. Don't let other classes and involvements shove the Senior Thesis to the back burner, though doing so may be easy since there are no externally imposed course requirements keeping you on track.
3. Be sure to confer with your advisor at least weekly and deviate from your agreed timetable only in consultation with your advisor.
4. Plan to complete the Senior Thesis by the end of classes in the term.
5. See guidelines on the format for Senior Theses, including submission of a copy to Duggan Library.

Stage 4 – Presenting the Senior Thesis

1. During an exam period early in Finals Week you will have about 45 minutes to present the results of your Senior Thesis project to philosophy faculty, majors and other guests. The atmosphere will be informal but also serious, rather like the Philosophy Seminar.
2. You will provide all in attendance with a short outline of your Senior Thesis, along with brief supportive materials (e.g., quotations, charts).
3. All members of the philosophy staff will confer on an evaluation of your presentation, which your advisor will use in deciding a Senior Thesis grade.