

GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY MENTORING A SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECT IN GENDER STUDIES

Students are encouraged to speak to potential mentors as well as their Gender Studies advisor in second or third term of their junior year about their senior projects. Mentors must be members of the Gender Studies Advisory Board or active in Gender Studies. If you have not been actively involved with Gender Studies recently, please discuss your interest in mentoring such a project with the chair of Gender Studies.

The senior experience students design must be at least one term, but may be more depending on the route that they pursue. The experience may be an independent study, an internship/practicum accompanied by an independent study, or an approved project in an advanced course. If you are allowing a student to do a senior project in the context of your advanced course, we recommend that require the student to write a substantial, more in-depth paper (i.e., 20-25 pages). You should meet with the student frequently to discuss their progress and the development of their research question(s). In addition, advisors should suggest sources so that the student can compile a reading list of publications relevant to their project.

Many independent study projects involve a review of the literature or a content analysis of an issue in gender or women's studies. Alternatively, for an independent study, students may conduct an empirical study where they collect qualitative (e.g., interviews) and/or quantitative (e.g., surveys and questionnaires, laboratory results) data. Empirical studies generally require at least a two-term commitment, so be sure to let students know how much time you anticipate that they will need to commit to the project. Pursuing an internship/practicum also requires substantial planning on the student's part, and if they want academic credit for the internship/practicum portion of their senior project, they must have a faculty sponsor. Faculty sponsors help to design a learning contract (i.e., a document that specifies goals for the projects and what the student will produce) for the placement and typically call and check on the student's progress once they are placed. We recommend that students speak to their gender studies advisor early about places they may want to work (e.g., a domestic abuse shelter; a rape crisis center; an LGBT support organization), and to consult the internship coordinator at the Career Center as well. The Career Center has learning contract forms and can support the internship/practicum experience in a variety of ways. Students may do an internship/practicum while on campus, or during the summer, allowing greater geographic flexibility.

In general, a variety of artistic or research projects, interdisciplinary projects, and projects based on social service or activist initiatives may be appropriate senior experiences, but all must be approved in consultation with the student's gender studies advisor and the Gender Studies Advisory Board. Students interested in pursuing an interdisciplinary capstone that integrates their interests in gender studies with another major or student teaching or a project with an artistic/performance component, are strongly encouraged to consult with their advisors and relevant department chairs to plan and negotiate their overall senior experience as early as possible. Once a student has decided on a topic, they should fill out the senior capstone proposal form, obtain your signature, and submit it to the chair of Gender Studies for approval by the Gender Studies Advisory Board.

The senior capstone experience should culminate in a senior thesis (generally, a 20-25 page paper, though length is sometimes considerably longer depending on the type of project and your expectations), and an oral presentation of the work. Oral presentations are held at the Gender Studies celebration at the end of third term; all graduating seniors give a 20-minute presentation followed by 10 minutes of discussion.

Proposal Process

Students are asked to complete an initial application by the middle of Spring term in their junior year and submit it to the Gender Studies Advisory Board. During their senior year, they must also submit a more comprehensive proposal (full proposal is due: 2nd to 5th week of the term in which the project is being done for a one-term project; end of the 9th week of the first term of a multiple-term project). Forms for each phase of the project are available on the Gender Studies website.

1. **Phase One - Application:** The student is asked to describe the type of project, the topic, and the context (class, honors project, etc.) and that identify the faculty with whom the student will work.
2. **Phase Two - Proposal:** The student is asked to provide a longer description of the project, a timeline for the project, reading list or annotated bibliography (at advisor's discretion), working thesis, outline of major sections, clarification of what will be produced, and IRB approval in the case of project working with human participants. Project advisors are asked to pre-approve these documents and set a due date within the parameters defined by GEST.

Project and Paper Guidelines

Students' work on gender for their capstone project must do one or more of the following:

- Address issues of gender and/or sexuality theoretically or conceptually, as opposed to simply presenting gender similarities or differences or "adding women" or other underrepresented groups;
- Explicitly include and analyze feminist/queer/intersectional gender perspectives, theories, and/or concepts;
- Use, expand, or critique feminist or queer methodologies.

That is, we expect students to take an *explicitly* feminist approach by either drawing explicitly on feminist theory, using a feminist methodology (and being explicit in how it is feminist), or by addressing gender or women's issues conceptually or theoretically and explaining how their analysis of those issues reflects a feminist perspective. The project should clearly reflect the fact that they've majored in Gender Studies, though it may also reflect a divisional approach. Thus some projects may reflect standards in the humanities (e.g., techniques of literary analysis, historical case studies, engagement with theory) while others may reflect standards in the social sciences (e.g., reviews of empirical studies, theoretical work, conducting a research study). Given the variety of feminist theories and disciplinary differences in how projects are approached, encourage your student to be explicit about how his/her project addresses one of the criteria above.

In addition, encourage your student to explore important intersections or dimensions of diversity related to their topic. For example, if doing a project on sexuality education, it is important to consider

how socioeconomic status influences the quality and type of education available as well as the tendency of many sex education curricula to be heteronormative or even ignoring sexual orientation entirely. Although your student may elect to pursue a topic that is not focused on these issues, strong work will at least acknowledge the critical diversity issues related to their topic.

Although many papers will involve summarizing and critically reviewing existing theory and research, a good literature review paper is more than a summary of theories or a set of research critiques. Students are expected to (eventually) develop a theme or set of themes that serve to organize their paper and, hopefully, put their own intellectual stamp on it. This can be done in a number of ways:

- a) synthesizing research and theory in a new way (e.g., pointing out relationships between theories that have not been suggested or fully developed by others);
- b) developing a coordinated set of criticisms that they see running through most of the theory and papers they've read;
- c) suggesting new directions in which research, theory, and/or practice ought to proceed (e.g., construct new hypotheses, alternative theories, new methodologies);
- d) applying the theory and research in a novel way (e.g., to address an important social issue or text);
- e) taking a stand on a controversy within the area that stems from competing theories or inconsistent research findings (they may not be able to resolve the controversy, but they can analyze and evaluate it).

Mentors may require article summaries or other written work (e.g., reaction and reflection papers) to help students build their knowledge of an area. Faculty mentors are encouraged to explicitly discuss expectations and grading policies with students, provide regular feedback, and perhaps, put expectations in writing (e.g., create a syllabus or something comparable).

Students may need guidance on how to find appropriate resources and on how to define a manageable project. If the student is considering submitting their project for honors, they may need additional guidance on that process.

Things to Discuss with Your Student

1. Arrange to meet with your student regularly, typically at least weekly.
2. Discuss whether there will be weekly writing assignments (e.g., article summaries, or short reaction papers).
3. If human (or animal) participants are involved, discuss how to prepare a Human Participants proposal and make sure it is submitted to the Institutional Review Board in a timely fashion.
4. Discuss when assignments and drafts are due and what type of feedback you will provide on drafts or other assignments.
5. Discuss grading—what aspects of the process will be graded?
6. Discuss the final presentation—students will be presenting at the Gender Studies year-end celebration and senior presentations toward the end of third term. If they complete the project in an earlier term, they will still present in third term. You may want to give them some advice on preparing and rehearsing a 20-minute presentation. Most students use PowerPoint in their presentations.