

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS PLANNING A SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECT IN GENDER STUDIES

It is optimal to start planning your senior project early. In your junior year, think about what you would most like to pursue for a senior project, and in second or third term of your junior year, talk to your Gender Studies advisor as well as a gender studies faculty member who might be willing to mentor your project. You are required to submit an application for your project by the fifth week of Spring term of your junior year.

The senior experience you design must be at least one term, but may be more depending on the route that you pursue. The experience may be an independent study, an internship/practicum accompanied by an independent study, an approved project in an advanced course, or a combination thereof. If you propose to do your project in the context of an advanced course, you will most likely be expected to write a longer, more in-depth paper than is typically required in the course. You should plan to meet with your faculty advisor frequently—about once a week—to provide updates on your progress and the development of your research question(s). You should also work with your advisor to compile a reading list of publications relevant to your project.

Many independent study projects involve a review of the literature or a content analysis of an issue in gender studies. Alternatively, for your independent study, you may elect to conduct an empirical study where you 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 plan your project well in advance. Pursuing an internship/practicum also requires substantial planning. Be certain to speak to your Gender Studies advisor early about places you may want to work (e.g., a rape crisis center; an LGBT support organization), and to consult the internship coordinator at the Career Center as well. Think about whether you would want to do your 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 must be approved in consultation with your gender studies advisor and the Gender Studies Advisory Board. If you are interested in pursuing an interdisciplinary capstone that integrates your interests in gender studies with another major or student teaching or a project with an artistic/performance component, you are strongly encouraged to consult with your advisor(s) and relevant department chairs to plan and negotiate your overall senior experience as early as possible. Once you have decided on a topic and found a faculty mentor, you should fill out the senior capstone proposal form (available on the Gender Studies home page) and submit it to the chair of gender studies for approval by the Gender Studies Advisory Board.

The senior experience will culminate in a senior thesis about the project (usually a 20-25 page paper, though length is sometimes considerably longer depending on the type of project and your mentor's expectations), and an oral presentation of your work. Oral

presentations are held at the end of third term; all graduating seniors give a 20-minute presentation followed by 10 minutes of discussion.

Two Phase Proposal Process

Students are asked to complete an initial application by the 5th week of third term in their junior year and submit it to the Gender Studies Advisory Board. During their senior year, you must also submit a more comprehensive proposal (deadlines for the full proposal: 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, and an overview of each is provided here.

1. **Phase One - Application Form:** The student is asked to describe the type of project, the topic, and the context (class, honors project, etc.) and that identify the faculty member(s) with whom you will work.
2. **Phase Two - Proposal Form:** The student is asked to provide a longer description of the project, a timeline for the project, reading list or annotated bibliography (choice 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 the advisory board.

Project and Paper Guidelines

Your work on gender for your 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 your analysis of those issues reflects a feminist perspective. Your project should clearly reflect the fact that you've majored in Gender Studies, though it may also reflect a divisional approach. That is, 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).

In addition, be sure to explore important intersections or dimensions of diversity related to your 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, sometimes ignoring sexual

orientation entirely. Although you may elect to pursue a topic that is not focused on these issues, you should consider at least acknowledging the critical diversity issues related to your 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. You will need to (eventually) develop a theme or set of themes that serve to organize your paper and, hopefully, put your own intellectual stamp on it. This can be done in a number of ways, such as:

- 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 you see running through most of the theory and papers you'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);
- e) taking a stand on a controversy within the area that stems from competing theories or inconsistent research findings (you may not be able to resolve the controversy, but you can evaluate it).

Do not expect to know the final overarching critical themes of your paper after you have only dipped your toe into the pool of existing theory and research. It is only after you have done much of the hard work of understanding the area that you will be able to develop your own take on things. Your mentor may require article summaries or other written work (e.g. reflection papers) to help you build your knowledge of an area.

To begin searching for sources in *gender studies* (on the library's research page of electronic resources: <http://lawrence.edu/library/research/elecres.shtml>), try the *Contemporary Women's Issues* or a general database like *Academic Search Elite* or *WorldCat*. The best databases for getting you started finding *social science* research and theory are: *Psycinfo*, *Anthropological Index Online* and *Anthrosource*. For *humanities* research get started with *MLA Bibliography*, *Historical Abstracts*, and *Arts and Humanities Search*.

Things to Discuss with Your Mentor

1. Arrange to meet with your mentor, 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 drafts are due and what type of feedback you would like on drafts.
5. Discuss grading—what aspects of the process will be graded?
6. Discuss your final presentation—you will be presenting with other seniors at our year-end celebration and senior presentations. During your final presentation, be sure to include a statement about how your project contributes to the field of Gender Studies.