Normally, Anthropology theses are completed in the final semester of the senior year. Exceptions are exceedingly rare. Theses always dominate the entire final year of Bates College Anthropology students, so be prepared to bear a significant extra workload all year. The required senior seminar now includes a thesis-writing component. Honors rules/deadlines are set by a college-wide committee. Thesis support grants are reviewed by Lane Hall—either Dean of Faculty or Off Campus Study, depending on the fund.

**Junior Year**

Choose a tentative topic and consult with faculty advisor/s. Communication should continue while abroad and over the summer months.

A small number of rising seniors—those with the strongest academic records—will receive an invitation to pursue honors. Those students may opt to do either a full year honors or a regular (second semester) thesis. Those interested in honors but not invited based upon their academic record may still petition the department for permission, but such permission is contingent upon the approval of the entire department.

**September**

Department faculty will hold a meeting for all senior majors, discussing the components of a good thesis, etc.

**October 1**

Year long (including honors) thesis prospectus due. Circulated to all anthropology faculty for comments and approval. Often this first version is not approved as is, so you may be asked to revise and resubmit by November 1st.

**November 1**

Prospectus due for regular (winter semester) theses. Circulated to all anthropology faculty for comments and approval. Often this first version is not approved as is, so you may be asked to revise and resubmit by Dec. 1st. Revised year long/honors prospectus due (if revision required).

**December 1**

Revised prospectus for regular (winter semester) theses due. Final assignment of advisors. Every effort is made to assign students the advisor of their choice, but consideration will also be given to distributing advising responsibilities evenly. Advisors set parameters for process and progress, including deadlines, with the following exceptions:

**January**

Official honors nominations go to College Honors Committee

**February**

Honors thesis abstract due to College Honors Committee

**March/April**

Honors due dates and panels set by College Honors Committee

**ALL THESES DUE BY LAST DAY OF CLASSES WINTER TERM**
ANTHROPOLOGY SENIOR THESES—PROPOSAL/PROSPECTUS

A thesis proposal serves several purposes simultaneously:

- For you, the prospectus serves to make the thesis real. It firms up your commitment to a particular anthropological problem, gets you into the library and/or into the field, and forces you to demarcate a sufficiently specific topic. This intellectual work PRECEDES the writing of the proposal.
- You will have to come up with a clear idea of how you will proceed (likely books to use, theoretical discourses in which to situate yourself, proposed methods, a timeline) and this forces you to plan ahead.
- It will assist us, your professors, in delegating advising responsibilities.
- It will put all of us on notice of your interests so that we can send relevant material your way as it comes to our attention. This can be a very useful by product of the proposal writing process.

Your proposal is your chance to choose a topic which you care about personally and/or fascinates you intellectually. You will live and breathe whatever topic you choose for many months, so be sure you are passionate about it and that it is also feasible. This fervor will then help propel you through the coming months of work. Try to demonstrate your enthusiasm in your proposal, which should be lively rather than overly mechanical.

We have placed in the lounge a notebook with sample thesis proposals and theses of varying quality for you to peruse for inspiration. Each faculty member has particular theses set aside to serve as inspiration as well. While the content and contours of the proposal are largely in your hands, you MUST include the following:

- A descriptive working TITLE (you may wish to hold flashy titles for later).
- Your DISCUSSION of the topic or problem or issue itself should take several pages, including a brief review of the issue or problem (e.g., institution to investigate; philosophical debate to explicate, critique to formulate) and what others may have already thought or written about it (e.g., brief literature review; presentation of a specific theoretical paradigm; explication of a cultural belief structure).
- Your WORK PLAN should address both methodology (how you will generate your data), and a timeline (your procedure over the coming months).
- A WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY for the entire project should be appended. You don’t [yet] have to have read everything in detail, but you do have to indicate to us that you have been digging for sources. The body of your proposal should demonstrate familiarity with the outline or contours of the relevant literatures.

The project proposal is due October 1st for full year and November 1st for winter term theses. We may ask you to revise before allowing you to move on. Remember, the quality of your prospectus will figure in both ANTH441 grading and the final evaluation of the thesis itself. One of the benefits of being at a small school is the availability of faculty and reference librarians for consultation—take advantage of this opportunity!
By their nature, theses are exercises in creating new knowledge. In a natural science, a thesis project might entail a laboratory experiment; in philosophy, it might require a close analysis of a particular philosophical position. In Social Anthropology, theses usually take one of two directions—students either carry out fieldwork, which is the discipline’s primary way of generating new knowledge, or they conduct library research. Most theses for this department depend upon both fieldwork and library research.

Theses do more than gather information on a particular topic; theses are not reports; theses for us cannot be entirely descriptive. They will be genuine research only to the extent that they look at a topic generated out of a particular location—e.g., gendered power in a particular human institution (such as the army or a hospital), oral narratives within a particular community (perhaps urban migrants), the rise of ethnic nationalism (so very many settings could work for this one), the lives of the aged (in Lewiston for example)—from a theoretical perspective. Without a perspective on the topic, a student has no criterion by which to include or exclude material except one’s own energy, library resources, and time. With a perspective, carrying out fieldwork or doing library research acquires a point, a premise, a reason: “I want to show that Sahlin’s understanding of ‘stereotypic reproduction’ is wrong in the case of the colonial encounter between Greeks and Macedonians.” Or: “In this thesis I want to take a cognitive anthropological approach and investigate the Bates Student.” Or: “Anthropological thought has been dominated in recent years by two approaches to the peasantry and agricultural development, one associated with Geertz, the other, with Bloch. This thesis is an attempt to evaluate the strengths and shortcomings of both approaches.”

A good thesis can begin with a student’s interest in either a topic or a theory. Sometimes they begin with a student rummaging through anthropology journals. Sometimes they grow out of the ideas or experiences first encountered on a junior year abroad program or during a summer job or internship. Topics are motivated sometimes by a moral interest, sometimes by more obviously academic concerns. There is no reason in principle why a student could not take an anthropological theory and apply it to a non-anthropological case, let’s say, something that struck a student’s interest while taking a course on Roman Britain, or on the Old Testament, or on the Contemporary Media, etc.

An anthropology thesis can come from virtually anywhere and investigate virtually anything. For instance, in 1989, Peter Muise’s honors thesis concentrated on accounts of abduction by aliens and drew on material from the National Enquirer. Good theses, however, have a common structure. They begin with a review of the literature, usually retracing the evolution of recent arguments relative to an issue of theoretical importance. In Muise’s case, he reviewed the anthropology of spirit possession because it had struck him that abduction accounts followed the same logic as people’s stories about being possessed. This literature review sets the scene for the presentation of the new material that follows. That material can be ethnographic material collected by the writer, it could be library material uncovered and re-analyzed by the writer, or an examination from
another perspective of the theoretical literature presented previously. The number of chapters is arbitrary, but most theses have three or four chapters and run from fifty to eighty pages. Length for its own sake does not make a thesis; the productive tension between theory and case material does.

This handout can only provide a summary view of conceptualizing and organizing a thesis—each thesis is a project that takes its particular shape from the interaction of two human beings with the theoretical and descriptive material. Students need to see their advisor, regularly, to brainstorm, get feedback, and come to an understanding of what will work and what will not. Guidance on the mechanical details necessary for writing a long research paper can be found in Kate Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Further information is available on The Writing Workshop (use the link on Bates “hot list”) and The C.B.B. (http://leeds.bates.edu/cbb/) webpages. The Department suggests that students follow the American Anthropologist’s style of “embedded citations” and endnotes (see www.aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.pdf, esp. pp.5,7-8,10-14).

WRITING A THESIS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology theses may differ somewhat from those on other anthropological topics because they tend to be interdisciplinary, often relating to one or more of the natural sciences, and because archaeological data tend to be concrete, often requiring quantitative descriptive analysis. The facilities, collections, and research activities of the Maine State Museum provide many interesting opportunities for such thesis projects. However, an added bit of planning and coordination may be required to assure their success.

If you are interested in writing an archaeology thesis based upon original archaeological research, be sure to contact Professor Bourque early so that you can develop a workable project design. You may have to arrange for substantial advice from a faculty member in another department, schedule travel to visit Museum collections, or conduct fieldwork or other activities which complicate matters slightly.

STUDENT RESEARCH FUNDS

Seniors undertaking anthropological research projects may apply to several internal Bates programs for funds to support travel expenses, cassette or film purchase, software, phone interviews, transcription, and interlibrary loan costs. Some programs are administered by the Dean of the Faculty’s Office, others by the Dean of Students’ Office. See Doris Vincent in the Off-Campus Study Office or Kerry O’Brien in Jill Reich’s office for more information on these opportunities. Consult the Student Research and Service-Learning Support website www.bates.edu/Research-grants.xml. The department itself has a limited budget for student research funding.

[Revised 6-05]