

COMPS 2003-04

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY CARLETON COLLEGE

Senior Sociology/Anthropology students may fulfill the integrative exercise either by taking a comprehensive examination based on departmental required courses and a reading list, or by writing a senior thesis on a topic approved by the department. In either case, students must enroll in six credits (Sociology/Anthropology 400) to prepare for the exam or write the thesis, spread as the individual desires over Fall, Winter, and Spring terms of the senior year.

EXAM OPTION

Students can fulfill the Sociology/Anthropology integrative exercise through a comprehensive, six-hour examination consisting of several essay questions. The students will write required exam essays covering material from the core courses for the major. In addition, students will choose from several substantive subfields of anthropology and sociology (for example, race/ethnicity, social inequality, gender, religion, etc.), on which they will write additional exam essays.

The best preparation for the exam is the upper level required theory and methods courses, and other substantive courses in the major. In addition, the department prepares a reading list, including books and articles drawn from the core courses and covering the designated substantive subfields. These readings are chosen according to criteria such as the work's status as a "classic," or its contemporary relevance. Each exam question relates to readings on a particular core or field reading list and courses in that field. Material on the reading list will be placed on reserve in the Library.

Early in Fall Term 2003, a reading list and sample exam questions will be distributed to seniors. Students should form study groups to prepare for the exam. Students who initially plan to write a thesis in completion of the integrative exercise will be permitted to switch to the exam option, but must indicate their intention to do so to the Chair of the Department, Professor Bev Nagel, no later than Friday, January 9, 2004.

The exam will be held on Saturday, April 3, 2004, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (with half-hour breaks in the morning and afternoon, and a two-hour lunch break). Students who do not pass the exam will be given an opportunity to retake it on Saturday, April 24, 2004.

Schedule

Early Fall Term 2003 – Comps reading list and sample exam questions distributed

Friday, January 9, 2004 – Deadline for switching from the thesis option to exam option

Fall and/or Winter Term 2004 – Study groups meet to prepare for exam

Saturday, April 3, 2004, 8:30 a.m. -5:30 p.m – Comps exam (place to be announced)

Saturday, April 24, 2004, 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m – Date of second exam for those failing the first exam

Thesis Option

The thesis option for Sociology/Anthropology involves the execution of a major, individual project of sociological or anthropological research and analysis, culminating in a paper of approximately 50 pages. Such a project may be a study of a particular group or social situation; it can be comparative or not; it can be done through library research, analysis of existing data, or original field work and/or survey; it can be a deliberate test of one or more theories or hypotheses; or it can be an analysis of theories themselves in a socio-anthropological framework.

While the range of appropriate topics is broad, not all topics are feasible for a senior thesis. During the fall term, students wishing to write the thesis must develop a convincing proposal. Students must submit an initial proposal to the department no later than the end of the third week of fall term. A fully-developed research proposal must be submitted by the end of the eighth week of fall term. This proposal must be accepted by the department before students can proceed to write the thesis.

The bulk of the writing of the thesis should be completed by the middle of winter term, and a final version of the thesis must be submitted by the due date early in spring term. Students completing the thesis option will also be required to present their work in a talk open to the public, to be scheduled during spring term.

Students are expected to turn in all proposals, drafts, and the final thesis by the deadlines given below. Unless prior approval is obtained, failure to meet these deadlines will mean that your thesis will not be considered for distinction.

Schedule

Wednesday, June 4, 2003 – Initial Proposal Due for students planning summer research

Friday, October 3, 2003 - Initial Proposal Due for students not planning summer research

The initial thesis proposal of at least 3 pages must be submitted to the department chair, Professor Bev Nagel, no later than **NOON ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3rd**. *Students who are off campus Fall Term must mail in their proposals soon enough to arrive by October 3rd.*

*If you are planning to do research over the summer before your senior year, this initial thesis proposal must be submitted by noon of the last day of classes in Spring Term 2003, **Wednesday, June 4th**.* Students planning summer research involving human subjects (such as interviews, surveys, or participant observation) must obtain approval for their research from the Institutional Review Board **BEFORE UNDERTAKING ANY RESEARCH**. For more information and application guidelines, see the link labeled “Human Subjects Research Application” on the Dean of the College web page.

Before submitting the initial proposal, you must discuss your intended project with at least one faculty member of the department. Guidelines for the initial proposal are provided below. You will be required to submit another proposal if the original one lacks sufficient promise or appears unfeasible. After your initial proposal has been accepted, you will be assigned to a faculty thesis advisor.

Friday, November 7, 2003 – Final Thesis Research Proposal Due

One copy of your final research proposal, with annotated bibliography, is due Friday, **NOVEMBER 7th**, at 4:30 p.m. in your comps advisor’s office. The final research proposal

should be 12 to 15 pages in length, and should follow the guidelines provided below, under “Description of a Research Proposal.”

In the case of any project involving original research on human subjects (e.g., surveys, participant observation, interviews), the proposal must also be approved by the Institutional Review Board. For more information and application guidelines, see the link labeled “Human Subjects Research Application” on the Dean of the College web page.

If your proposal is not deemed sufficiently feasible by the department, you will have an opportunity to revise it for resubmission. The revised proposal must be turned in to your advisor by the first day of Winter Term, Monday, January 5, 4:30 p.m. To proceed with the thesis option, your proposal must be accepted by the department no later than Friday, January 9th, 2004. That is also the deadline by which students who had initially elected to do the thesis option may switch to the exam option.

Friday, January 23, 2004 – First draft of thesis due

A first draft of the comps will be due in your comps advisor’s office in the third week of winter term, Friday, **JANUARY 23rd**, at 4:30 p.m. This draft should also include an assessment of what needs to be done to complete the study. A bibliography of works read so far and of others that you intend to read should be appended.

Friday, February 27, 2004 – Abstract and second draft of thesis due

A **complete** second draft of the thesis is due in your comps advisor’s office by Friday, **FEBRUARY 27th**, at 4:30 p.m. This draft should include all elements of your final paper, including the abstract, full text of the body of your paper, any tables, charts, or figures, and the bibliography.

You should also turn in a copy of the abstract to Professor Nagel, no later than 4:30 p.m., February 27th. The American Anthropological Association describes an abstract as “an informative summary of a longer work and states the central topic at the beginning. It indicates the nature and extent of the data on which it is based; outlines the nature of the problem or issue and delineates the relevant scientific argument. Finally, it shows how the content relates to the existing literature. Where helpful, citations can be used. Your abstract should be typed and between 75 and 100 words.

Monday, April 5, 2004 – Final thesis due

Three copies of the final, finished version of your comps paper are due Monday, **APRIL 5th**, 4:30 p.m., in Professor Nagel’s office. Any submissions after 4:30 p.m. must be accompanied by a formal letter to the Department Faculty explaining in detail why the comps are late. If the explanation is unacceptable the paper will be evaluated the following Fall. No late comps will be considered for Distinction.

End of April to early May – Oral presentations of thesis papers

Each student will orally present his or her thesis in a public forum open to any interested parties - other majors, faculty, friends. These oral presentations contribute to the final evaluation of the paper. Each senior will be paired with a junior, who will introduce the presenter and initiate discussion following the presentation.

GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING A THESIS

What is a thesis?

The main goal of the thesis is to give the student an educational experience of a different sort from any he or she is likely to have had before. Unlike most other projects you have undertaken, writing a thesis is not bounded by having to conform to the goals of a course nor must it be completed in a few weeks' time. Rather, it is meant above all to give each of you the opportunity to think up and work out the investigation of a topic that deeply interests or concerns you. In addition, with the length of time and the care you will be taking on the study, many of you will be able to produce an essay that can be fairly evaluated by the standards that practicing scholars in Sociology and Anthropology use to judge each other's work.

Thus a thesis should **not** be thought of as just another paper, or a lengthy independent study. It places a greater responsibility on the students than that. While you will be working closely with your advisor, nonetheless you are the primary person responsible for conceiving the project, exploring its ramifications, and completing it in a way that both fulfills your goals and measures up to sociological and/or anthropological criteria applicable to the issues and data you are working with. Accomplishing such a task can benefit you in a number of ways. Perhaps the most important of these are that (1) you get a feel for what it takes to carry out a piece of research from start to finish; (2) you get the confidence of knowing you **can** do it; (3) you become an expert on something.

The thesis achieves these goals by two principal means: first, the freedom you have to choose your topic helps ensure that you will have the interest and excitement necessary to carry you through the inevitable hard times; second, it gives you enough time to make mistakes and false starts. Odd as it might seem at first, this is crucial.

Unfortunately, Carleton's not-quite ten-week terms almost never give students a chance to learn from their mistakes, yet such learning is probably more meaningful and useful than any other kind. In doing papers you undoubtedly have had the experience of making mistakes -- if only that of reading material that turned out not to be relevant -- but you have rarely if ever had time to do more than patch it up somehow at the end. With comps, enough time is built into the process so that after discovering an inadequacy in your approach you have the opportunity to develop and use a more satisfactory one. Thus you learn by doing and also do objectively better work. A copy of recent distinction theses are on reserve in the library. Also, all the theses of the last three years plus distinction theses of recent years are available in Susan Quay's office.

The point of professors (and fellow students)

Professors have been there before and can warn of dangers ahead, can make suggestions, can help you find out how what you are attempting to do or study fits into the ongoing currents of research in sociology and anthropology. Both they and fellow students can, above all, question you -- not to confuse you, but to strengthen your understanding of what you are doing and why you are doing it. Finally, they can offer moral support in the difficult times when you feel you are floundering around or nothing is going right.

Feel free to draw on any of the faculty -- Soc/Anthro and others as well -- for advice about your study. Remember, however, that what we professors generally do when asked for help is say what we would do in your place. Since your advisor is the one who will be most familiar with what you are trying to do, you should also consult with him or her as to how best to utilize such ideas and suggestions from other sources.

Students have often found it helpful to form writing groups. Students in a thesis writing group read and comment on each other's drafts, provide encouragement and moral support, and help you through those final revisions and proofreading. Your writing group members need not be working on topics similar to yours; in fact, it may be more interesting and fun if they aren't!

Theoretical orientations

The conceptualization and theoretical orientation of your thesis is crucial to its success. Theoretical orientations will help you interpret, describe, explain, measure, or otherwise approach your topic. For example, to study social movements you can use theories of resource mobilization, collective behavior, or frame alignment, among others. Or, to look at questions of ethnic identity you can follow primordial, constructed, or strategic models (each with several subtypes). These are only illustrations. Your thesis may be conceived as an application or test of a particular theory (e.g., strategic model of ethnic identity), or may draw upon several. You may focus on "mid-range" theories, or draw upon broader, foundational theoretical orientations (such as functionalism, conflict theory, etc.; for more specific examples refer to the list on the Department's web page).

Developing and defining the theoretical orientation constitutes the hard part of your thesis work. Indeed, it is the hardest part of doing any sociological or anthropological work, and the ability to do it well is what distinguishes prominent, creative scholars from others. Get a sense of it by thinking about how scholars have analyzed things in the courses you have taken, by further reading in the area of your thesis project (making full use of library sources, such as Annual Reviews, Sociological Abstracts, and other specialized bibliographic tools), and by talking with faculty and other students. Or, take your favorite, most inspiring article on your thesis topic and look at how explanation and interpretation, or some other kind of analysis emerges from and/or is supported by the data. These are invaluable aids and strategies, but there is no simple, cookbook guide for this sort of thing, nor can anyone else do it for you. In the final analysis you yourself must do the very hard work of thinking through and struggling with the analytical and theoretical issues your topic raises.

Manuscript style and style of citation and references

You should use one of the standard forms of citation used by anthropologists or sociologists in preparing your final project. The Department's web page provides an overview of citation styles and links to more detailed guidelines. The AAA (American Anthropological Association) guidelines include detailed information on use of block quotes, section headings, and other manuscript preparation issues, as well as citation guidelines. Copies of these guidelines are available in the Department lounge; they can also be accessed on the AAA web page, for which a link is given on the Department's citation web page.

Evaluation of comps

Each thesis will be read by at least two professors. The evaluation process typically takes three weeks. Possible grades are Pass, Pass with Distinction, and Fail. The early deadline for final drafts allows enough leeway for a paper judged inadequate to be rewritten in time for another evaluation. Alternatively, if the faculty readers judge the comps paper inadequate, they may request that the student write an additional, shorter essay addressing in greater detail specific issues related to the paper, or may schedule an oral examination with the student to cover issues raised by the thesis. In this case, the student would not be required to rewrite the entire comps paper.

Theses that are turned in late without an acceptable explanation will not be considered for distinction. Thesis papers that are sloppily prepared—e.g., that are full of typos,

grammatical errors, and so forth—indicate that the writer does not consider this a finished copy and/or does not take his/her work seriously. Such papers will not be considered for distinction. So, allow yourself enough time for final revisions and proofreading!

Oral presentations also enter into the final grade.

DESCRIPTION OF A THESIS PROPOSAL AND ITS PARTS

A thesis proposal is a paper in which you define a topic for research, and describe how you would collect and analyze data to study that topic. What actually goes into a proposal depends in part on the topic you are interested in, and whether you want to test a hypothesis or model that is already well-defined, or explore a topic to develop such a model. It also depends on the kind of research that you plan. You need to provide the following information in any proposal:

1. What is the topic that you want to study?
2. What do social scientists already know about this topic?
3. Why do we need to know more? How would your research build on, modify, or correct errors in previous work on this topic?
4. What exactly would you do? (Collect a survey? Conduct in-depth personal interviews? Participant observations? Analyze secondary sources? What approximate timetable would you use? In the case of empirical research, who would be your subjects? How would you analyze and/or interpret the data you collect?)
5. How would what you propose to do in #4 above address the shortcomings or needs identified in #3?

This means that your proposal should contain several parts:

1. An introduction

The introduction should set the topic you propose to study within a broader social scientific context. Generally, it should be ½ to 1 page in length.

2. A review of the pertinent scholarly literature

The purpose of the literature review is to develop the rationale for why you focus on the specific topic you have selected. The literature review should summarize and (briefly) critique what social scientists already know about your topic, and should indicate the major theoretical assumptions, concepts, and issues (both theoretical and empirical) that social scientists have been concerned with in studying this topic. Your task is to analyze and organize previous thinking and research, and identify its major strengths and weaknesses as they pertain to your topic.

The scope of your literature review will vary depending on the topic, and whether your proposed research is exploratory or aimed at testing a hypothesis/model. For example, suppose you are interested in the relationship between sex and income. There is a voluminous literature available on the determinants of income and social mobility. Rather than writing a book, review the current work that specifically address your topic. You do not, for example, need to discuss literature on race and income *unless you draw important ideas or concepts for your own hypotheses or research questions from that literature*. In fact, in

determining the lacunae in one body of literature, we often make reference to concepts applied in another, related body that could shed light on our specific topic.

On the other hand, you may select a topic on which very little has been written. In that case, you might have to search much further afield. Can you draw on ideas from research on related topics? Or, must you develop your own hypotheses/research questions by drawing on general theoretical perspectives? In this case, you would refer only to those sources you actually used directly in developing your research topic.

Depending on the volume of literature available on your topic and the complexity of your topic, your literature review is likely to be from four to seven pages in length. This means it needs to be very concise. Sentences with long lists of citations, bad taste in essays, are common in literature reviews. (Nonetheless, such “citation banks” need to have enough specificity to make sense!)

3. Definition of the research problem

In this section, you state the hypothesis or model you intend to test or discuss the research questions you intend to explore. If you are testing hypotheses, be sure to define any ambiguous concepts and state your scope conditions. The hypotheses should be stated clearly and in such a way as to be true or false. If you are formulating a set of research questions to explore, you should still be sure to define any ambiguous concepts, but wouldn't have to worry about true/false testability. This section of a proposal will vary in length depending on how many hypotheses/questions you deal with and how directly they follow from the literature you have reviewed. So, this section might be anywhere from one [unusually brief] to five pages in length.

4. A description of your proposed research methods

This section of the paper should identify the unit of analysis for your study, the population and sample on which you focus, observation and measurement techniques, and (if appropriate) how you will analyze the data. For example, if you are collecting original data, you must indicate how you will collect it (participant observation, survey, interviews...). What are the topics you will focus on? What topics will be covered in your interview schedule or questionnaire? What kind of field observations would you focus on? Most importantly, what are the strengths and limitations of the research methods you have outlined, especially with regard to your research problem (in other words, what is your rationale for choosing these methods)? This section of the proposal usually requires about three to five pages, although often less for a project based solely on participant observation.

The page guidelines given above are approximate. By these guidelines, your proposal could be anywhere from eight to eighteen pages in length; for most thesis topics, we expect that your proposal would be at least 12 pages in length. As for the number of articles and/or books that make a reasonable literature review, there are no firm guidelines. It depends on the scope of the pertinent literature.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND HINTS

- Organizing a literature review: The library staff will have suggestions to simplify your journey through the numerous reference sources available at Carleton's library. Your life will be much more pleasant if you use these suggestions and the reference staff (after all, they are

paid to help you). Also, make as much use as possible of the abstracting sources; reading abstracts and reviews first will save you the frustration of reading irrelevant or crummy articles and books. Recent articles in the top journals (e.g. *American Anthropologist*, *American Ethnologist*, *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*) will provide models of a finished literature review and help you in organizing your own. Without such a model, it can be frustrating to organize the literature you read, especially if there is a lot of it. Logical grouping of works along the dimensions of your research problem is key.

- Evaluation of a thesis proposal: Several factors will figure into the department's assessment of your proposal and its feasibility as a thesis topic. The intrinsic merit of proposed research is one of these factors. Is your proposed research adequately framed as a sociological or anthropological inquiry? In addition, in reviewing your thesis proposal we will consider the soundness of your proposed research approach (both conceptual and methodological), the adequacy of the resources available for carrying out your proposed study, and your preparation for carrying out the proposed work.
- Annotated bibliography: You should append an annotated bibliography of scholarly works that you have consulted and that you plan to consult for your comps. The annotated bibliography should be formatted according to an acceptable citation style (see above), and should include 2-4 lines of annotation per item. Annotations should indicate what the article or book is about and its relevance for your comps project.

THE INITIAL THESIS PROPOSAL

Your initial thesis proposal (due October 3rd) should cover much the same issues as the final proposal, but in a more preliminary and briefer form. That is, it should summarize the following:

- The topic you wish to investigate
- The principal question(s) you want to pose about the topic and their sociological/anthropological relevance.
- The theoretical framework upon which your project will draw
- The methods you intend to use to answer your research question(s). What sort of data you will need to answer your question(s)? How and where (e.g., bibliographic sources, field work, surveys, interviews, etc.) will you actually find those data?
- The feasibility of the study, i.e., the adequacy of available resources to carry it out, the probable length of time various aspects of the research will take.
- Your preparedness for the study: i.e., courses you have taken that have provided you with background in relevant theoretical or substantive literature, methodological training (statistics, qualitative interviewing, etc.), foreign language preparation, and so forth.
- The name of the faculty member(s) with whom you have discussed your project.