

SOAN 400: Senior Seminar and Thesis

The SOAN senior thesis project provides students the opportunity to conduct an extended research project under the mentorship of department faculty. Thesis projects draw on the theoretical perspectives, methodological repertoires, and knowledge areas developed in core and elective SOAN courses. At the same time, the thesis experience invites students to extend their theoretical range and apply their methodological skills in a creative research project.

Given the diversity of concerns, topics and outcomes of research in sociology and anthropology, thesis projects do not conform to any single template. Projects that require quantitative and/or qualitative research methods are equally welcome. SOAN theses may rely on survey collection, statistical analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, formal interview, historical inquiry, textual analysis, etc. Alternatively, thesis projects may be primarily bibliographic in nature, offering a critical synthesis of existing and emerging areas of theory and research.

While all thesis projects result in an extended written document and are presented in a public forum, students in consultation with their mentors determine the precise nature and format of the final project. For example, some thesis projects result in ethnographic essays while others take the form of critical reviews; some theses include policy recommendations while others suggest areas for further research; some theses are presented orally in the form of a conference paper, others as summarized in a research poster.

Laying the Groundwork

Coursework

Core and elective courses that fulfill SOAN major requirements provide the background for the thesis project. These courses provide students with the theoretical perspectives, methodological tools, and knowledge that help to formulate preliminary ideas and the thesis.

The SOAN methods courses (200-205) are especially important insofar as they are focused on the conceptualization, practice, and presentation of research projects using recognized approaches in sociology and anthropology. For some students, the projects completed in the methods courses provide direct impetus for senior thesis projects.

Students are encouraged to take research methods courses in the following order:

- 1) SOAN 200 - 204 (Sophomore year)
- 2) SOAN 205: Research Theory and Design (Junior year)

SOAN 205 provides a foundation for designing independent research and can be used to develop your pre-thesis letter of intent (see below).

Internships, independent studies, and 300 level seminars provide another set of courses from which students may begin preparation for their senior theses projects.

Students are encouraged to speak with their course instructors and advisors about thesis ideas inspired by their coursework.

Off campus and overseas programs

SOAN students often begin thesis-directed independent research while participating in off campus and overseas programs. This research can be conducted without having determined the exact nature of the thesis project. Indeed, open-ended ethnographic research can be instrumental in helping to define a thesis project and collect relevant data and sources. Students planning to enroll in off campus-programs are encouraged to share their interest in conducting thesis-directed research with their advisors prior to leaving campus.

SAAB funded research

SOAN students have great success in receiving SAAB grants to fund domestic and international research relating to their senior thesis. Such research is typically conducted during the winter or summer break. Information about the application process can be found on the SAAB website. Interested students should contact their advisors and the SAAB representative in the SOAN department.

Independent Studies

Students interested in beginning research for their thesis projects prior to enrolling in SOAN 400 may arrange for an independent study with a department faculty member.

Pre-Thesis Advising

SOAN majors should arrange a pre-thesis meeting with their advisors during the first semester of their junior year. At that meeting, advisors will review the pre thesis registration processes for SOAN 400.

Students are encouraged to prepare for this advising meeting by writing a narrative that addresses the following questions:

1. How might current and completed SOAN courses inspire a thesis project? How might the projects you conducted in your methods courses (SOAN 200-205) inspire a thesis project?
2. How might your participation in off campus or overseas program(s) provide a foundation for your thesis project?
3. How might an internship and/or independent study provide foundations(s) for your thesis project?

4. How might a SAAB grant support thesis related research?

Registering for SOAN 400

Registration for SOAN 400 takes place during the spring semester prior to a student's senior year. In order to be granted permission to register for SOAN 400, students must:

- Complete the online SOAN 400 pre-registration form on the department website (and sent to majors via email) early in the term.

Students are notified of their SOAN 400 section assignment by the beginning of spring term registration. Permission to register for the course is granted by the section instructor, and students are expected to register for the course themselves once permission is granted (the department will not enroll you).

Thesis Preparation

During the semester prior to enrollment in the class, students will meet with their thesis instructors as a group. Students enrolling in a FA thesis class will meet the April prior to the start of their section, and students enrolling in a SP thesis class will meet the November prior to the start of their section. As part of these meetings, faculty instructors will explain the thesis writing process as well as assign students to write a **Pre-Thesis Letter of Intent**.

The Pre-Thesis Letter will be an informal letter that expresses the ideas of what students might want their thesis to focus on. Students will be free to attach other things that they'd like to share with their instructor that relate to their area of interest, such as a proposal from a methods course, a paper from a seminar class that they want to build on, a list of favorite books from other classes, etc. This letter will be due to the instructor during the semester prior to their enrollment in thesis, on the Monday of the last week of classes.

If you are overseas during the time that you would typically meet with your professor, please contact your assigned instructor for information.

Honors and Awards

Honors

Students with a 3.50 GPA in the department are eligible for departmental honors. Eligible students wishing to be considered for honors must submit their thesis one week prior to the last day of class. Theses submitted for honors are reviewed by at least two faculty members in the department.

The department grants honors to theses recommended by both reviewing faculty. Students are notified of the award by the end of the exam period.

Electronic Posting

The SOAN department keeps an archive of all student theses. Theses are collected in digital form and managed by Watzek Library. Submission instructions can be found on the library's website and in the Student Resources section of the department website.

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