

Guidelines for the Sociology Honors Thesis Prospectus

A prospectus for honors work in sociology should define a topic for investigation, briefly discuss the sociological relevance and research viability of the topic, demonstrate the availability of primary or secondary source material to be used, and discuss the student's intellectual preparation for the thesis work. A prospectus need not be long—roughly three pages will suffice.

The thesis prospectus has three primary purposes:

1. it notifies us, the Sociology Department, of your intention to write a thesis;
2. it gets you to organize and clarify your ideas for a thesis;
3. it identifies a set of goals and target dates for reaching those goals.

After submitting the prospectus to your advisor in early May, schedule a time to meet with your advisor in order to discuss the viability of your proposed research topic and to devise a course of action for the summer. Schedule this meeting so that it occurs before you leave campus for the summer. Your advisor, in consultation with the department, will make the final decision about going forward with a Sociology 360/370. Please note that to be admitted to the thesis program, you should have a grade point average of at least 3.50 in all work in the major field above the 100-level. Please provide this GPA information to your advisor when you submit your prospectus.

Your thesis prospectus should consist of the following sections:

- I. **Research topic:** This section of your prospectus should state your proposed research topic and your primary research question. You will likely want to identify additional secondary research questions, but do so sparingly because too many research questions can undermine clarity and focus. Guard against research topics that are overly general or overly narrow.
- II. **Sociological relevance:** This section needs to make a case for the sociological significance of your proposed research. What will we learn that we have not already? What misconceptions might your research correct? To help make a case for the sociological relevance of your topic and how it is related to previous research on the subject, your prospectus should show at least some knowledge of relevant theoretical and/or empirical literature. You do not need a long literature review at this point—but your prospectus should give us some idea that you are familiar with a relevant body of literature.
- III. **Methodology and data:** The prospectus needs to identify the primary data sources that will be used in the conduct of your research, how you will collect the data, and how you plan to analyze the data. The prospectus should also address the availability of these data sources, specifying how the student will gain access to them if they are not available at Wellesley College.
- IV. **Student preparation:** The prospectus should indicate the student's previous experience (e.g., course work, private readings, etc.) that have provided adequate background for the research to be done. It should also address the issue of the student's facility in foreign languages, quantitative methods (e.g., survey research), qualitative methods (e.g., content analysis, in-depth interviewing, participant observation), and/or other methodologies when relevant for the proposed research.
- V. **Timeline of project:** The prospectus should provide a tentative timeline with deadlines for data collection and analysis. Of particular interest to the Sociology Department and your faculty advisor will be your timeline and research goals for the summer preceding your senior year.
- VI. **Bibliography:** The prospectus should include a *short* bibliography. The bibliography should differentiate between primary and secondary sources. Secondary source listings should be limited to the most central and relevant materials. The prospectus should observe proper ASA citation procedures (see any recent issue of the *American Sociological Review* or the *American Journal of Sociology* for guidance on correct citation format).