

Introduction to the Thesis

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W 9:50-11:10

MU-115

Course description: A series of weekly meetings designed to provide prospective thesis writers with the background, resources, and understanding necessary to produce quality independent work. This course will engage students in investigating previous theses written in their fields, discussions with students currently writing theses and faculty advising theses, identifying a thesis advisor, developing an individual thesis topic, increasing information literacy and research skills, and producing an annotated bibliography.

Required Text: Charles Lipson, *How to Write a BA Thesis: A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper* (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 2005)

Useful Resources:

- (1) Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How To Read A Book* (Touchstone, 1972). Think you know how to read? Turns out you don't. Adler is the authority on the subject.
- (2) Paul Silvia, *How To Write A Lot* (American Psychological Association, 2007) This book will be most useful when you're headed into the thesis writing, and if you plan to go on to graduate school.

Grading: This course is graded on a pass/no credit basis. Grades reflect completion of assignments and active class participation. Assignments must be submitted on time and must demonstrate thought; failure to do so will result in a failing course grade (not to mention poor preparation for the thesis). If you miss three or more classes, you will not receive course credit.

Required work: Each student is required to complete a short annotated bibliography, will be responsible for oral presentations in class, and will submit occasional short written pieces. This is *your* course; you will get out of it what you put into it.

Communication: There will be a sakai site for our course. At that site you can find information about the course, discuss the course, and submit assignments.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism, cheating, and fabrication are serious breaches of academic integrity. The Student Code of Conduct addresses these issues, and it is important that you follow it. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or fabrication, please ask the instructor.

Classroom Environment: The classroom is a learning environment. That does not mean political perspectives, value debates, or conflicts over cultural differences are not allowed. On the contrary, you are encouraged to raise such issues in class. However, real engagement requires respect. Everyone has a right to learn here, which means that we respect each others' differences. Deprecating fellow classmates or others will not be tolerated. Prejudicial or hateful speech will be confronted. Moreover, language is a powerful tool; it conveys ideas and influences behavior. This power allows language to communicate bias and exclude individuals, even though that may not be the intention of the author. Thus while there are no rules for student expression in this course or at Rutgers University, we strongly encourage you to be sensitive and careful about the language you use in both writing and speaking.

Accommodations: It is the policy of Rutgers University to provide reasonable accommodations for all qualified individuals with disabilities. If you need an accommodation to fully participate in this class, please consult with us at the beginning of the semester or at any point necessary during the semester.

Weekly Syllabus (subject to change)

- 9/2 Introduction (ours) and introductions (yours)
- 9/9 What's an undergraduate thesis?
Due today: Find a thesis in your proposed subject area and/or interests in our collection at the Aresty Research Center, read it, and prepare a short (3 minute) oral presentation evaluating its content, structure, and methodology.
- 9/16 Finding your passion, making connections
Due today: Construct a "mini annotated reading list" composed of five "texts" (songs, articles, books, etc.) that were influential in your thinking (primarily undergraduate years). Be prepared to present it.
- 9/23 Reading, Writing, and Note Taking: What You Knew and Forgot, or Didn't Know At All
Read for class: Lipson, , p. 41-65 (Qnotes) p81-86 (on reading lists),
Due today: Read the sample annotated bibliographies and bring questions.
- 9/30 Choosing a topic and finding (better) sources
Read for class: Lipson p66-80, 110-119
Due today: Bring a list of three potential thesis topics that you'd like to explore. Also, report on your meeting with your subject area librarian to discuss possible research ideas and strategies, be prepared to discuss your experience, problems, successes
- 10/7 Prewriting and revision
Read for class: Lipson p123-142 (prewriting)
Due today: 3 sources for annotated bibliography and 3 potential advisors.
- 10/14 Funding the thesis and Writing a literature review
Due today: meet with at least one potential advisor.
- 10/21 Discussion with current thesis students
Read for class: Lipson 244-263 (overcoming problems). Anything address your own fears? Due today: annotated bibliography. And prepare at least three questions to ask our guests.
- 10/28 Discussion with thesis advisors and going from bibliography to literature review
Read for class: Lipson 233-243
Due today: Prepare at least three questions to ask our guest.
- 11/4 Wrap-up
Read for class: Lipson 267-274 (on timelines)
Due today: 3-5 page Literature review concentrating on the major areas of agreement and disagreement among the authors. Include, if possible, some thoughts about where you stand, and what you plan to do next.

Optional: Meet afterwards to work on proposal