

Guide for Faculty Supervising an Individualized Major Thesis Student

Thank you for considering supervising an individualized major senior thesis. Your guidance and the practices in your discipline are most important for framing the individualized major thesis project and setting the standards for its evaluation. The guidelines below outline some of the particular considerations relevant to individualized major students. The guidelines are most appropriate for theses in the social sciences, humanities, and sciences that result in a written study. Aspects of these guidelines may also be relevant to students whose theses result in a less traditional final product.

All individualized majors are expected to fulfill a capstone requirement. The capstone requirement provides the individualized major with the opportunity to integrate the knowledge s/he has acquired in her/his major courses. This requirement can be fulfilled by taking the program's capstone course or by completing a thesis project. Students in the Honors Program who plan to fulfill their Honors Scholar requirements in their individualized major must complete a thesis. Other students outside of Honors who are motivated to complete a substantial, independent capstone project are also encouraged to complete a thesis.

Thesis projects may take a variety of forms. Typical is the lengthy written study, the traditional thesis. Other forms are also possible: for example, photo essay, piece of fiction or collection of poetry. Substantial projects, such as a website or a film, would produce a permanent record, but a thesis project report would also capture a summary of the research, planning, and creative work undertaken. The unifying thread for all thesis projects is that they contribute to the development of knowledge or practice in new ways, involve significant background research, require sustained attention in the implementation of the project, and result in a piece of written work that documents the student's learning process and outcomes.

THESIS COURSEWORK:

We expect most theses to consist of a six-credit sequence completed over the course of two-three semesters. *(NB: Students intending to complete Honors Scholar requirements in their individualized major must complete a six-credit thesis sequence.)*

In the social sciences and humanities, students will typically enroll in a research seminar, graduate course or independent study with their thesis supervisor during the fall semester. This fall semester course should provide the student with an opportunity to explore the existing scholarship on the theme of his/her thesis. Often the student will use the fall semester to write a research paper that reviews and evaluates that scholarship and begins to explore the specific topic of his/her thesis.

During the spring semester, the student will typically enroll in INTD 4697W Thesis. This course operates as a one-on-one research and writing course for which the thesis supervisor is the instructor. During this semester the student is typically engaged in a close investigation of his/her research question and the writing of the thesis. The student meets regularly with the thesis supervisor who provides feedback and advice on data collection and evidence gathering, analysis, and writing.

In the sciences, students may follow a somewhat different sequence with two or more semesters of data collection and laboratory work (when the student registers for a research course or independent study in his/her thesis supervisor's department) followed by the writing up of results (when the student registers for INTD 4697W Thesis).

EXPECTATIONS:

Disciplines and individual faculty will differ in their expectations regarding methodology, theoretical approaches, and presentation of findings. Nonetheless, the Individualized Major Program has set out some broad expectations of learning outcomes for individualized major thesis writers.

First, the student's research, analysis, and writing on the thesis project should be relevant to the student's individualized major and represent an opportunity for the student to integrate and deepen at least several aspects of study in the major.

Second, a thesis should do more than summarize the existing literature on a particular topic. It must make an original contribution to the field of study. It must present new findings in the form of new data, or new, critical interpretations of existing material. It must reflect a good command of the research methodologies in the relevant discipline(s).

The following learning outcomes are expected:

- The student is able to define a research question and design a substantial research project.
- The student is able to identify appropriate primary and secondary sources relevant to his/her research project. The student is able to collect relevant and reliable data that addresses his/her research question.
- The student is able to analyze the strengths and limitations of different approaches scholars have taken to the research question. The student is able to recognize interpretative conflicts resulting from these different approaches.
- The student is able to select an approach or several approaches appropriate to addressing his/her research question.
- The student is able to develop an argument that is sustained by the available evidence and present that argument in a clear, well-organized manner consistent with disciplinary or interdisciplinary practices.

The question of length is perhaps an inevitable one. While we recognize disciplinary differences, we have noted that the best individualized major theses in the social sciences and humanities have been at least 45 pages and often 60-80 pages. Science theses have typically been somewhat shorter. (If the thesis has been written with publication in a scholarly journal as the objective, then the thesis may be more concise than the typical unpublished thesis. Once again, though, page length will depend on the discipline and the target journal.)

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The Individualized Major Program has a student guide to thesis writing which is distributed to students considering the thesis option at the beginning of their junior year or when they are accepted into the program. It is available at our website at: www.imjr.uconn.edu under "Capstone" on the left-hand navigation bar. We expect individualized majors to submit to our office a thesis proposal (form, description of project, preliminary bibliography) which they have discussed with their thesis supervisor. This proposal is due no later than the last day of classes of the semester before they begin their thesis.

We appreciate faculty willingness to supervise the theses of individualized majors. It allows individualized majors to explore in depth a topic about which they are passionate and it provides them with excellent experience that will serve them well in their graduate studies and/or careers. If you have any questions about the Individualized Major Program or about supervising an individualized major thesis, please contact Margaret Lamb, Director, 486-5829 or Monica van Beusekom, Academic Advisor, 486-0324.