

## **ISF Senior Thesis Guidelines**

The ISF Senior Thesis requirement is the capstone experience and final product of the ISF Major. The thesis is a sustained, original, and critical examination of a central interdisciplinary research question, developed under the guidance of the ISF 190 instructor. The thesis represents a mature synthesis of research skills, critical thinking, and competent writing. As the final product of a student's work in the major, the thesis is not the place to explore a new set of disciplines or research problems for the first time, but should develop methods of inquiry and bridge the several disciplines that students have developed in their Course of Study.

### **Form:**

The ISF Senior Thesis should be 30-40 pages of text in length (7500-10,000 words maximum), not including documentation. It must include a title page, a table of contents, a list of sources consulted, and a complete bibliography. It must be annotated either by footnotes, endnotes, or Social Sciences Citation style in-text references. In all cases, students must follow the rules of the Chicago Manual of Style. The thesis must be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, and carefully proofread for spelling and grammar. Two copies of the thesis must be submitted to the ISF 190 instructor.

### **Sources:**

As the product of the ISF "research-driven liberal education," the Senior Thesis should strive to be more than an analytical and critical summary of secondary literature, comparing and contrasting contemporary academic scholarship on a question. Rather, Senior Theses should make every effort to engage critically with primary sources. What constitutes a primary source remains open to interrogation and discussion with the ISF 190 instructor. The nature of primary sources will depend on the topic and the research questions posed by each student. Primary sources can be quantitative or qualitative, published or unpublished, written or oral, historical or contemporary. (Any student using research with human subjects must receive approval:

see <http://rac.berkeley.edu/compliancebook/introduction.html> for more information about research protocols).

They can include literary works, letters, and memoirs; official statistics or censuses; reports of NGOs garnered from websites; objects or visual media; juridical decisions or legislative interventions, opinion polls, or even blogs; or student-generated instruments (questionnaires, surveys, interviews). Sources are primary in that they are produced by or refract specifically the historical actors and institutions and the social processes that are the object of study. As such, these primary sources become the "raw data" from which specific interpretative frameworks are elaborated in the academic journals and books of the disciplines, written by trained academics

(secondary sources), and which then might be synthesized in textbooks and websites (tertiary sources).[1]

The identification of a primary source is not always obvious: a longitudinal study of obesity in South Africa written for a scholarly journal would be considered a secondary source, but the tabulated data generated by the researcher and interpreted in the article could be considered a primary source. A nineteenth-century history of Machiavelli and the Medici would be considered a secondary source, unless the thesis was about nineteenth-century histories of Italy, at which point it becomes a primary source. Students need to work closely with their ISF 190 instructors and research librarians to identify the primary sources for their theses. Although practices will vary widely according to topic, students are urged to consult at least five different primary sources in their research, and their theses should include a bibliography of eight to ten secondary sources (academic journals or books) relevant to the research question.

### **Methodology and Bibliography:**

Following the student's Research Program and Course of Study, the methodology and bibliography of secondary sources (academic books and articles) should be interdisciplinary in character, and should critically evaluate the scholarly contributions to the research question from the perspective of the different disciplines. It is generally recommended that students devote an early section of their thesis to such a methodological reflection, although some Senior Theses will address the methodological dimensions of their inquiry in a more continuous fashion within the text. In any case, a Senior Thesis should demonstrate a familiarity and knowledge of specific disciplinary approaches and the distinctiveness and originality of an interdisciplinary one.

### **Originality:**

The elusive goal of originality plagues scholars of all levels. No academic work is ever entirely original, since we build upon mountains of information, resources, and scholarship that come before us; thus the importance of acknowledging debts fully and clearly to other scholars. Rather than striving for complete originality, students should select a subject in such a way as to contribute to the conversation, drawing on the research and ideas of many other scholars and thinkers, their work cited as used. A Senior Thesis might result in a re-evaluation of existing interpretation or a fresh perspective, although it is unlikely that a student's insights will likely not be present at the beginning of the project. Rather, through the critical and creative exercise of research and writing, under the guidance of the 190-seminar instructor, that original contribution will emerge. Remember: no two theses are alike, even if they use the same primary sources and address the same topic.

## Resources:

In addition to the analytical, research, and writing skills acquired in ISF 189 and other coursework, students are encouraged to begin discussion before the semester of their Senior Thesis about sources and bibliography with the ISF faculty, and to reach out to faculty in relevant departments and programs on the UC campus. The student's thesis advisor in ISF 190 will be an important resource in directing them towards resident experts on campus. Lynn Jones, Research Librarian at Doe, is an invaluable resource in helping orient students towards primary and secondary sources: students should consult her "ISF 190 Thesis Seminar" website long before they begin the 190 (<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/alacarte/course-guide/195-ISF190?tab=998>). Indeed, it is expected that students will have devoted a serious effort towards identifying a research topic, if not a set of research questions, before the semester of their Senior Thesis, and should come prepared to the first meeting of their ISF 190 with a paragraph statement, list of possible sources, and foundational bibliography for their Senior Thesis.

## Reviewers and Second Readers

All students must consult with outside faculty who have **research specialities relevant to the thesis topic**. Students are expected to attend the office hours of a faculty researcher to discuss both their research questions and bibliographies. Students should locate the member of the Advisory Board whose research profile most closely matches the thesis topic; students may consult faculty researchers who are not on Advisory Board if their research profile is more relevant to the thesis work. If the faculty member is willing, students should ask the outside faculty member to comment on a written version of the research question and bibliography made up of primary and secondary sources. **Honors students must have second readers, usually drawn from the Advisory Board. A second reader who is not on the Advisory Board must be confirmed by the ISF thesis adviser to have a relevant research record to evaluate the thesis.** Honors students are encouraged to submit a substantial draft of the thesis to and ask for comments from the second reader before the final thesis is turned in.

## Abstracts

All theses must have abstracts, which are a purely descriptive summary of thesis. The abstract should contain between 150 and 250 words, a summary of the research question, methods, results, and the significance of the findings.

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For further elaboration of these categories, see Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3rd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008): 69-70 et. seq.