



SENIOR THESIS SURVEY  
HISTORY AND LITERATURE  
CLASS OF 2006

To the Senior Class of 2007:

Enclosed are the results of a senior thesis survey conducted by members of the History and Literature senior class of 2006. A student committee drafted the survey as a means of providing rising seniors with practical advice for research, writing, and time-management. Over 50% of the senior class responded anonymously to the survey through an on-line polling tool. Their collective wisdom should help to demystify the thesis experience for those of you who are just embarking on the project. The last page of the document contains contact information for 2006 graduates who volunteered to serve as “peer advisors” to current seniors with questions about any aspect of the thesis process.

Many thanks are due to Iliana Montauk ('06), Olivia Ma ('06), Katie Monticchio ('06), and Matthew Growdon ('07) for writing and administering the survey. Madeleine Baverstam ('07) also helped to collect information.

If you would like to participate in the process of turning this survey into an annual event and expanding the results into a senior thesis handbook, please contact Kim Davis (kcdavis@fas) or Stephanie Lin (smlin@fas), Co-Chairs of the Committee on Instruction. In the early months of the Fall, we will be convening a meeting of the Student-Faculty Committee to gather student volunteers for the handbook project.

Enjoy the informative (and often funny) advice in the pages that follow!

Best,

Kim Davis

## Post-Thesis Reflections of History and Literature Seniors (2006)

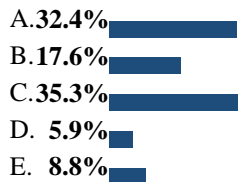
Number of responses: 34 (53% of seniors)

### QUESTION 1:

**When did you choose your thesis topic?**

- A. The spring of my junior year
- B. The summer between my junior and senior years
- C. September of my senior year
- D. October of my senior year
- E. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34



Number of text responses to final choice: 3

Other: “more like January;” “freshman year;” and “Fall junior year, but I was out of phase.”

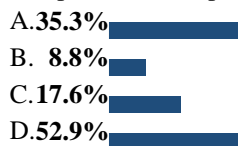
### QUESTION 2:

**How did you choose your topic? (Check all that apply).**

- A. It came from my junior essay topic
- B. It was suggested to me by a professor, tutor, or TF
- C. It was something I became interested in during a class I took at Harvard
- D. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

(Multiple selections per response are allowed.)



Number of text responses to final choice: 18

#### Selected answers for “Other”:

“I came across a website with an intriguing title while doing a Google search for something else. It turned out to be a site with information on the religion I ended up focusing my thesis on.”

“Through books I read over the summer.”

“It developed out of my sophomore essay.”

“I wanted to do something on film, and I stumbled upon the topic as I researched.”

“It partially grew out of older personal interest and partially out of a trend that I noticed just in my everyday life. It kind of just came to me over the summer.”

“Piecing together interests from sophomore and junior essays and googling.”

“It was something I'd been interested in my whole life--my summer house.”

“It was something I became interested in during a class I took abroad.”

“I had an interest in the subject, and my tutor helped me find other primary sources to help flesh it out.”

### QUESTION 3:

**Was your topic a totally new field of research for you?**

- A. Yes
- B. No (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

A. 44.1% 

B. 55.9% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 19

Selected answers for “No, (please explain)”:

“I was taking a class concurrently related to topic and had read in the time period.”

“I had been dealing with the authors I chose and studying poetry throughout my academic career.”

“I had begun the research with the junior essay, though the thesis took it much much further and in several new directions.”

“I had written both previous tutorial papers on the same genre of theater.”

“I learned about a new part of the country, but brought a lot of the thinking I'd done about American landscape to that.”

“I picked a topic in Modernism, which I'd been dabbling in since freshman year.”

### QUESTION 4:

**Did you ever change your topic? If yes, when and why did you change it?**

- A. No
- B. Yes (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

A. 55.9% 

B. 44.1% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 15

Selected answers for “Yes (please explain)”:

“Twice. I didn't like the one I was doing.”

“It evolved greatly over the summer as I found that my original topic wasn't so possible.”

“I did not get a handle on my topic until November, even though I was researching other, related topics beforehand.”

“I changed it over the summer because I became interested in a different subject after reading a book.”

“It evolved over time and wasn't really fleshed out till about October.”

“I did research over the summer on a different topic than the one I ended up using. The research was boring for me--I was trying to dig up primary historical sources, and I just didn't like being in archives or doing that kind of work. I tried to force it all summer, but finally picked a topic I was excited about. Listen to yourself when choosing a topic--it should be something you're excited about!”

“I had wanted it to be larger, and then smaller, and eventually by the end of the summer settled on a middle ground.”

“I changed subject of last chapter while writing in the spring.”

“I changed my topic a number of times during the fall. It was agonizing. I was stubborn, and wanted to write on film. I kept searching for topics within film, and eventually found one.”

“Not totally, but I added a substantial component to it a few months into the fall that drastically affected the direction.”

“I had to change my texts partway through senior year because the first set of texts was unfruitful.”

“It slowly morphed through conversations, but I would have preferred the original.”

#### **QUESTION 5:**


**When did you start researching?**


- A. The spring of my junior year
- B. The summer between my junior and senior years
- C. September of my senior year
- D. October of my senior year
- E. Other (please explain):


Number of responses: 34

A. 23.5% 

B. 41.2% 

C. 14.7% 

D. 11.8% 

E. 8.8% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 3


#### **QUESTION 6:**

**Did you have a concrete research plan before you began? (If so, what was it?)**

- A. No
- B. Yes (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

A. 82.4% 

B. 17.6% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 6

Selected answers to “Yes (Please explain)”:

“I was fortunate enough to have at my disposal a very well organized archive of the personal papers of Frank B. Robinson, the man I was researching. So when I went out to the University of Idaho (where these archives are kept) to do my research, I had a very clear understanding of the materials I was going to be working with and had two weeks to work my way through the nice-sized (but not overwhelming) archives. I had a lot of help from my advisor about how to tackle the information.”

“Lots of online research, gov. docs, piles of books.”

“I looked into Harvard's resources a bit in the spring, and hit outside archives during the summer, then returned to Harvard sources in the fall.”

“Expand on my junior paper by getting more historical info in a university library.”

“I made one up for grant proposals--when I'd begin doing what, what time would be allocated doing each thing.”

### QUESTION 7:

**If you answered yes to the previous question, did your research plan change at all? If so, how and why?**

Number of responses: 5

#### Selected Answers:

"I ended up bringing back as many xeroxes as I could of what was in the archives that I thought might be useful. Because I was dealing primarily with primary texts, these photo copies ended up making up the core of my research materials. So, my "plan" didn't change, to the extent that my plan was the types of texts I was working with. I went out there, got what I needed, and ended up using almost all of it. I was very lucky."

"I ended up expanding a lot on the framework that I started with and taking it in new directions, but it was a solid start. Mostly I had just planned where to start looking."

"Yes. Even though I did lot of historical research over the summer, I ended up doing a bunch of literary theory stuff during the fall that was really helpful."

"I realized that some things would take longer than others--one phase in particular, so I focused my summer on doing that. By the end of the summer, my topic had slowly changed, and so my research plan was no longer very applicable to the project."

### QUESTION 8:

**Did you travel out of town to visit archives or other sources for your research? (If so, how was that experience, and what do you wish you had known before traveling or visiting archives or other sources?)**

A. No

B. Yes (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

A. 67.6% 

B. 32.4% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 11

#### Selected answers to "Yes (Please explain)":

"It was very helpful to do archival research. I realized I had to change my topic, and come September I did."

"This was a very enjoyable learning experience, but not profitable or efficient insofar as thesis concerned unless have a secure handle on a very narrow topic and have done extensive secondary research beforehand."

"Great experience and I got everything that I needed out of it. I recommend being familiar with the collection and contacting the librarians/archivists before going out there -- tell them about your project, what you're hoping to find, and ask if they have any advice for you. Definitely make friends with them once you get there. They like being asked for help. Be organized in your note taking and make sure you write down exactly what texts your working with and where in the archive their from."

"I was working in Alaska, so I did research while I was up there."

"It was a wonderful experience, which I highly recommend, although I wish I had had a stronger research plan."

"I traveled in January, and without this trip I wouldn't have had a thesis. I wish I had started in the summer, so I could've perhaps taken this trip in October."

"To Milwaukee; very valuable and a very neat experience, totally worthwhile just as a chance to deal more closely with primary documents."

"It was very easy and very fulfilling. I would just tell people to look at everything even tangentially related to the topic, and type/write down EVERYTHING. You never know what will end up being "relevant." For example, I was writing about the conflict between two

communities, but my chapters ended up being about descriptions of health/environment, and romantic relationships.”

“I chose my topic too late to apply for HCRP so I had to pay out of pocket. The experience was really invaluable, it was so important to GO to the place I was writing about, even if I didn't actually use the primary sources there I found. People are also very good sources, and I felt like I was being responsible/responsive to the community whose history I was partially writing about.”

“I went to Paris to look at archives and they were, indeed helpful, although I ended up sightseeing more than I should have. I had a very small grant, and I think if I had stayed in Paris longer I would have been able to settle in to the research experience a lot better.”

### **QUESTION 9:**

**Did you receive any funding for your research? (If so, when and from where did you get it? What was it for?)**

- A. No
- B. Yes (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

A. **64.7%** 

B. **35.3%** 

Harvard College Research Program (HCRP) grant: 11

Dean's Summer Research Grant: 2

Center for Eastern European Studies grant for summer research: 1

Number of text responses to final choice: 12

#### Selected Answers to “Yes (please explain)”:

“Harvard College Research Program gave me funding (\$1400) to travel to Moscow, Idaho for two weeks during August before my senior year. I was working in the archives and special collections at the University of Idaho. This paid for my plane ticket, motel room, and photo copying expenses.”

“HCRP and Dean's Summer Research Grant. Received in the spring of my junior year and again (HCRP) in the fall of my senior year. The funding was mainly for travel and living expenses in Boston, Northampton, London, and New York, where I was visiting archives.”

“I got funding from HCRP. They are really generous with funds for theses, and they pay you for your time, so it is a fantastic source. I got it for basic travel in Boston, copies, and wages. You have to apply early, but it is totally worth it, and they're very understanding if your topic changes.”

“HCRP to go to the Bibliotheque Historique de la Ville de Paris.”

“HCRP funding to research in DC and New York collections, it was great!

“HCRP, I actually applied late but was able to work something out with the program.”

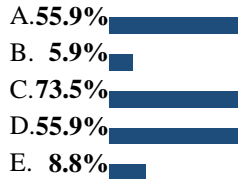
**QUESTION 10:**

**How did you document your research? (Check all that apply).**

- A. I made photocopies and took notes on those pages
- B. I used note cards
- C. I typed notes on a laptop while reading
- D. I took notes by hand in a notebook while reading
- E. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

(Multiple selections per response are allowed.)



Number of text responses to final choice: 3

Other (please explain):

“Constant notetaking in an annotated bibliography on my computer, including a lot of quotations.”

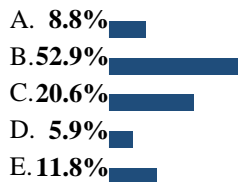
“I kept all notes, whether originally written or typed, on my laptop. Everyone should do this!! It makes it so easy to search your notes and really utilize your texts.”

**QUESTION 11:**

**When did you begin to write?**

- A. September
- B. October
- C. November
- D. December
- E. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34



Number of text responses to final choice: 4

Other (Please explain):

“I turned in my first chapter in December, but I used almost nothing from that initial submission in my final thesis. I really began to write in mid-January after I had taken my research trip.”

“With the topic change, I didn't start writing what would become my thesis until February.”

“I wrote responses every week beginning in October, and some of them eventually became my first chapter.”

**QUESTION 12:**



### How did you begin to write?


- A. I free-wrote for a fixed period of time.
- B. I composed an outline.
- C. I merged earlier free-writes/notes together.
- D. I wrote by hand, then transferred it to a computer.
- E. Other (please explain):


Number of responses: 34

A. 20.6% 

B. 35.3% 

C. 23.5% 

D. 2.9% 

E. 17.6% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 6

#### “Other”:

“I was given various 5 page assignments that were relevant to my topic;” “I plunged into writing my first chapter;” and “a combination of merging earlier notes and outline.”

### QUESTION 13:

**What were some of the most helpful tips/strategies you used, developed, or wished you had used during the writing process?**

Number of responses: 29

#### Answers:

“An '05 h/1 concentrator told me to take notes on every source I encountered--that I would use and that I didn't, and why I didn't. I started that way and wish I had kept it up (it's really not that hard, and it's very helpful to have those records and to think about your sources).”

“I think it is important to know when to stop reading and start writing... I over-researched and it is only through writing that you realize the scope of your project and how your energy is most efficiently spent.”

“Planning for lots and lots of drafts. Revising was vital and time consuming, which is easy to forget. Also, beginning to write SOMETHING as soon as possible. And I wrote 2 of my final papers junior year on topics that were somewhat related to my thesis. I ended up using only some of that research, but it was important and saved me a lot of time in the Fall.”

“After reading secondary materials, I would write reflections on what I had read and related the arguments of those scholars to the primary texts I was working with. Every week I tried to write a few pages on specific topics, and as I gathered more information and knew what I was going to try to argue and write about, I started putting together rough outlines. When I finally started writing, I found myself using bits and pieces from the earlier “free” or “pre writing” sessions. The outlines were definitely a key part of organizing and structuring my writing process. I also took all my notes on my laptop, which helped immensely. I had a separate document for each source I was using, and then when I created outlines, I would cut and paste quotes from my notes into the outline to flesh it out. Then when I sat down to write, I had my notes organized in outline format. It made things MUCH easier.”

“Having a concrete idea of the thesis argument before starting.”

“I wrote a lot of response papers (5-10pp per week), so when I started writing I had a lot of ideas to work with.”

“I wish I had started earlier perhaps. I think writing outlines before hand really helped me and I always did several drafts of my chapters. My tutor also had me write close readings of

my primary sources before I knew if they were going to be in my thesis or not and that was extremely helpful.”

“Compile lists of important quotes from all the sources you will be using as well as other interesting quotes that you encounter outside of your research. Free write and write response papers on important themes and topics you may wish to address in your thesis in the early fall of your senior year.”

“I learned to set aside time (usually three hours at a time) without any internet access to just take notes, free-write, and read. The internet was a huge distraction, and getting rid of it helped me clear my head. I also left plenty of time for editing.”

“Write a LOT. It doesn't matter what, it's just good to be thinking and working through your ideas.”

“Just start writing. It is intimidating, and you aren't sure what you're going to say at first, and nothing sounds good. But the earlier you get writing the better, because it really helps you get a sense of how much research you still need to do, etc. I started by writing about the historical context of my period--just a basic synthesis of secondary sources. This eventually built into my intro, but it was just a low-pressure way to get into the material. And once you start putting it into your own words, you get a much better sense of what you're working with.”

“Write more early on and edit heavily.”

“Constant brainstorming and outlining were key for me. Also, typing in quotes helps a lot early on, and using full citations from stage 1 is extremely helpful.”

“Write early even if it's not good. Write in your free time, even if you don't feel like you have any progress.”

“I gave as much as I could as frequently as I could to my advisor. Although a lot of it was very bad, the conversation that came out of it kept me on the right track and provided both content and structure at early dates.”

“Bare-bones outlining by paragraph topic (sentence/phrase) to see the general flow of the section or chapter, then filling in paragraphs while leaving the topic boldfaced above each paragraph. That helped with longer documents to keep track of where I was and to rearrange sections if need be.”

“If you get bogged-down, just make a note in bold and come back to that spot later.”

“I began writing really early on, which I think turned out to be a really good thing. After the first few weeks of school, I made myself write out little 4-5 page mini-papers every week so that I would get in the habit of writing a lot and also so that my research would never get too out of control. It helped me keep a handle on what I was reading and thinking about and in many cases, the exercises were actually integrated into my final product.”

“Note-taking with direct quotes from my sources (properly annotated) was really valuable---drawing connections between my sources as I went along, even if I wasn't positive how they would be applicable to the overall argument at that point.”

“My tutor and I had set a very definitive schedule that allowed me extra time in case of last minute emergencies. I had a deadline every week, which was so helpful. Also, I kept a running list of sources from the very beginning, and formatted footnotes from the very beginning, which made the last few nights much easier. Towards the end, because I was so tired, it was great to have peer edits from friends who could find writing issues as well as typos, which I may have missed.”

“I definitely think everyone should start writing right away. It's hard to wait so long for the overall argument to come together, but it's less scary if you already have lots of mini-arguments.”

“Free-writing to get your ideas out at the beginning is really important. Also, when I read a good source, I would work from that. One of the most rewarding parts is revising - so you will be missing out if you don't leave time to do that. I revised for all of February.”

“I wish I had revised my chapters more immediately after I wrote them rather than wait till February. I also wish I had a sense of the thesis as a whole before I began writing my chapter.”

“Rethink and revise. A Lot. Don't obsess too much over first drafts. Get your advisors'

comments on your ideas, then polish the prose.”

“I found that starting with five pages of stuff and then revising it was great. I could insert things I hadn't thought of before, I wasn't scared by the blank page, and I ended up with ten pages when I was done. Using this process to develop a chapter lets you see how your ideas interrelate in a useful way.”

“I wished I'd just forged ahead instead of trying to create a finished product from the very beginning!”

“Create an outline with evidence within it.”

**QUESTION 14:**

**If you worked on your thesis over the summer, approximately how many hours per week (on average) did you work?**

Number of responses: 21

**Mean = 3.7**

**Min. = 0.0**

**Max. = 16.0**

**QUESTION 15:**

**How many hours per week, on average, did you work on your thesis during the months of September and October?**

Number of responses: 33

**Mean = 7.5**

**Min. = 0.0**

**Max. = 18.0**

**QUESTION 16:**

**How many hours per week, on average, did you work on your thesis from November 1 through December 9 (the day that a section of the thesis was due to the department)?**

Number of responses: 33

**Mean = 11.5**

**Min. = 0.0**

**Max. = 30.0**

**QUESTION 17:**

**How many hours per week, on average, did you work on your thesis from December 10 until February 1 (the start of the spring semester)?**

Number of responses: 33

**Mean = 14.1**

**Min. = 2.0**

**Max. = 35.0**

**QUESTION 18:**

**How many hours per week, on average, did you work on your thesis from February 1 to March 1 (when the thesis was due)?**

Number of responses: 33


**Mean = 28.7**  
**Min. = 5.0**  
**Max. = 112.0**

**QUESTION 19:**

**Did you work on your thesis during Thanksgiving break, winter break, or intersession? (If so, how much?)**

- A. No
- B. Yes (please explain):

Number of responses: 33

A. 18.2% 

B. 81.8% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 27

**Thanksgiving: 6**  
**Winter Break: 14**  
**Intercession: 20**

Selected answers for "Yes (Please explain)":

"These were actually my most productive times--winter break and intersession."

"I didn't do much over Thanksgiving, but I finished all my research over winter break, with the goal of not taking out any more books. I wrote my second chapter over intersession while in FLORIDA with friends, on the beach! I highly recommend going away for intersession, actually, but setting aside three hours a day to write, preferably with margarita in hand."

"Only over winter break and intersession. I wrote a chapter over winter break, and a chapter over intersession. I wasn't ready to write anything substantial by Thanksgiving."

"Intercession I was working on it from 9AM-Midnight."

"Winter break, spent 2-3 days on it, around 5 hours a day."

"I did a lot of reading over winter break to flesh out my research. Over intersession, I actually stayed on campus specifically to work on my thesis without any distractions. That week was a really critical one in terms of writing for me, and I ended up getting A LOT of work done without the distraction of other classes."

"I worked on it during every break. I'd normally read, but during intersession I did a lot of writing, even though a lot of it was junk."

**QUESTION 20:**

**Did you feel pressured for time as March 1 approached?**

- A. No
- B. Yes (please explain):

Number of responses: 33

A. 36.4% 

B. 63.6% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 21

Selected answers:

"Even though I was ahead of schedule, I still wished I had more time to edit."

"My roommates were placing bets that I wouldn't get it done."

“The time pressure was actually really great, I was running on sheer adrenaline.”

“Only in the sense that I was done with the full thing and first revisions with a week to go, but by that time I was so burnt out, there wasn't enough time for me to get my feet underneath me for a next go-round. I would recommend getting it done with two weeks to go, rather than just one, so that you have time to recover a bit and get some distance. Then you can come back at it with fresh eyes. And don't leave your conclusion to the end!”

“I basically ended up writing my whole thesis from Jan. 13-March 1.”

“I felt pressured, but not too much so. I think there is a certain normal amount of pressure that everyone feels as they approach the end of a really huge project. I think that I could have continued to work on it and improved it almost indefinitely, so the pressure was more to get it to a good enough stopping place. I never really felt like I wasn't going to be able to finish or anything that dramatic.”

“Writing a bibliography takes more time than you think. Also, part of the process is realizing that your work is imperfect and it will never be finished and then you have to cut your losses a lot in February.”

“I was involved in a student organization that held a conference over intersession and a conference in February, both of which detracted from time spent on my thesis. Poor planning on my part (i.e., waiting to do a lot of my thesis at the last minute) did not help!”

### QUESTION 21:


**On which of the following thesis-related activities did you spend the most time?**

- A. Researching
- B. Writing
- C. Thinking/brainstorming
- D. Meeting with (an) adviser(s)
- E. Worrying, stressing out, or feeling guilty for not working
- F. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 33


A. 24.2% 

B. 39.4% 

C. 12.1% 

D. 0.0%

E. 21.2% 

F. 3.0% 

### QUESTION 22:

**Looking back, on which of the above activities do you think you should have spent the most time?**

Number of responses: 28

**Researching: 9**

**Writing: 15**

**Thinking/brainstorming: 4**

**Meeting with advisor: 1**

Selected answers:

“I think I could have researched more systematically and thus taken more time. My research basically happened as I wrote. I would read a source and then write a section on it. That was more efficient time-wise than one might expect, but it was not very systematic, and it made my research sort of sloppy.”

“Writing, which was probably second on the list, should have been first. Brainstorming wouldn't have hurt, either--often when I started to write it was raw ideas that were terrible. I also should have spent more time talking to professors other than my advisor.”

“I was a bit nervous to actually begin the writing process, because it seemed so overwhelming. Researching was an easy and deceptively productive way to procrastinate. While I value my research immensely, I think I should have trusted my ability to write seriously earlier in the process.”

“It's important to give yourself time to just think and make notes - it feels unproductive but it's actually productive. I spent so much time writing but I wish I had more time to refine my writing.”

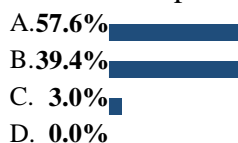
“Thinking! It would have my researching and writing much more effective! After thinking, I wish I had spent more time researching (even though not even 1/4 of my research made its way into my thesis) because it would have at least stimulated by thinking. After researching, I would have spent the most time on editing and revising; writing should have been the least activity to spend time on!”

### QUESTION 23:

**By December 9 (the deadline for turning in a section of your thesis), about what percentage (measured in numbers of pages) of your thesis did you have finished? Please only count pages that actually contributed to the thesis you turned in on March 1.**

- A. Less than 25%
- B. Between 25% and 50%
- C. Between 50% and 75%
- D. Between 75% and 100%

Number of responses: 33



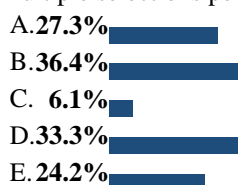
### QUESTION 24:

**How did you balance working on your thesis and other commitments (such as other classes, extra-curricular activities, etc.) during the fall and spring? (Check all that apply).**

- A. I dropped some or all of my other commitments to work on my thesis
- B. I decided to participate in my other commitments mainly in the fall, then drop them to work on my thesis in the spring
- C. I decided to drop some or all of my other commitments in the fall to work on my thesis, but I participated in those activities in the spring
- D. I maintained my other involvements throughout senior year, while working on my thesis
- E. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 33

(Multiple selections per response are allowed.)



Number of text responses to final choice: 8

Selected answers to "Other":

"I dropped some of my commitments, but I wouldn't attribute that decision wholly to my thesis. I spent less time on my other classes for sure, that was a big factor."

"Most of my commitments ended in the Fall anyway. I also took fewer classes in the Spring."

"I was associate managing editor of the Crimson until mid-January, but actually, this kept me close to Lamont so I could work. Staying involved in other activities actually kept me excited about my thesis."

"I took four classes in the fall, but one was tutorial and the other was pass/fail. This was amazing: it gave me more time in January to work and made my life much less stressful in the initial stages, where you're spending a lot of time but not making much progress."

"I spent a lot of time begging TFs for extensions. For the most part, they are understanding, but I felt sort of overwhelmed with make-up work after I handed in my thesis."

"I maintained my other commitments, but just spent less time on them."

"I took only 2 other classes besides tutorial."

**QUESTION 25:**

**What were your other major commitments senior year? How many hours/week were you involved in them? How do you think these affected your thesis-writing experience, if at all?**

Number of responses: 32

Selected answers:

"I probably had about 12 hours of other classes, and about 10-15 hours devoted to extracurriculars and part time jobs. I skipped classes when I felt a thesis crunch (or just felt tired) and skimmed on classwork probably more than extracurriculars. And it sometimes affected my social life, but not as much as my other schoolwork."

"I ended up dropping pretty much all extracurricular activities, but I kept up with my classes more than anyone else I knew writing a thesis. For instance, I never skipped classes, not even during the week the thesis was due. At times I think it would have been nice to have some extracurricular activities left, but the one I enjoyed most at college would have been too big a time commitment for me during thesis-writing time."

"The Harvard Crimson was quite time consuming. Maybe 30 hours a week. It was difficult at times, but that ended just when thesis writing became the most intense (second semester), so it worked out well."

"Playing rugby -- I turned my thesis in the fall, right after our playoffs. I would have had more time if I hadn't played, but I probably wouldn't have structured my time as well, so I think it evened out."

"I work normally 7 to 10 hours a week and also do dance for normally 2 hours a week and then much more when we have a show/rehearsals. I had to completely drop these activities starting my spring semester."

"I direct a PBHA program, but luckily I had a co-director who could help me out when things got crazy. I think it is totally possible to keep up all your other commitments, but just be clear that there will be times when you'll need people to pick up the slack for you. I'd also recommend taking it easy on the other classes you take--no reason to kill yourself, and it will make the process much more enjoyable."

"Citystep-- 10 hours a week. Opportunes-- 12 hours a week. PBHA stuff--3 hours a week. I would have gone completely insane or would have been unbelievably miserable if I had nothing to occupy my time but my thesis."

"I was an editor at a campus magazine, which is a 10 hour a week commitment, and I work at a library about 8 hours a week. If I hadn't had these other activities and had stopped going out with my friends, I would have gone insane, so even though they stressed me out

and I didn't give them or my thesis my all as a result, they kept things in perspective. Which is the most important thing, ultimately.”

“Varsity Field Hockey (20+ hrs a week), UNILU homeless shelter (2 hr/week), Harvard Bridge Citizenship tutoring (1 hr/wk). Forced me to manage my time.”

“I worked about ten hours a wk, tutored three hours a week, worked out about fourteen hours a week, and went out to lounges/clubs in the city at least three nights a wk, sometimes up to seven. I was very proud of the fact that I balanced my work well enough so my life didn't really change because of thesis commitments. I went out thurs-fri the wk before my thesis was due, and tutored that Tuesday!”

“I was involved in a major student organization that required involvement over intersession which was a mistake, since I should have worked on my thesis. I was involved about 8-10 hrs/week in this organization. However, what took the most time away from my thesis was participating in Recruiting at OCS--between interviews, phone conversations, emails, information sessions, research etc, I spend about 20-25hours/week on this from September to January, taking significant time away from my thesis.”

### QUESTION 26:

**Who read your thesis other than your adviser? (Check all that apply).**

- A. Nobody
- B. Friend(s)/Roommate(s)
- C. Parent(s)
- D. Other professor(s)/TF(s)
- E. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 33


(Multiple selections per response are allowed.)

A. 21.2% 

B. 60.6% 

C. 33.3% 

D. 24.2% 

E. 6.1% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 2

Other: “previous advisors.”

### QUESTION 27:

**If somebody other than your adviser read a part of your thesis, what was helpful or unhelpful about that experience?**

Number of responses: 24

#### Selected answers:

“It was helpful to have fresh eyes read it, but most people read it in parts, which affected how helpful they could be. And parents and non-h/l friends don't have the same understanding of how writing is for hist/lit.”

“It was very helpful to have friends critique it for me--especially since their comments tended to be far more thorough than those of my advisor.”

“Extremely helpful. A couple of peers read sections of my thesis, which was good but when my mom read it that was amazing! Parents are great. They are smart and thus can understand the complexities you are exploring, yet they don't necessarily know all about your thesis so they can help you with clarity. My mom was also a wonderful copy editor and helped me think of synonyms!”

“It was very helpful to get a different perspective and someone who would catch things that



my advisor hadn't because she's seen my chapters so many times already. It was mostly helpful for proofreading. Sometimes people (especially a Professor I had read it) would suggest changes that I just didn't have time to make so that was a little stressful.”

“I had one very good friend (and fellow Crimson editor) proof my thesis for an entire day... it was absolutely the most helpful feedback (it was two days before the due date). My mother and father both looked over earlier drafts for clarity's sake, and my father did a last check to see if I had formatting okay. It was great to get outside, non-academic feedback.”

“Always good to have an extra set of eyes or two, and different people often find different kinds of mistakes.”

“Having another professor read it was really helpful. Having my roommate proofread parts for content was stressful and a little tense, but ultimately rewarding.”

“I had peer edits from other hist and lit seniors, which was helpful because we could all bring our perspectives on the concentration together. I had peer edits from friends as well, which was great as I got tired towards the end and needed to have things checked for formatting and typos.”

“Self-esteem boost :) My mother's comments consisted of an email with a giant red "A+" in it.”

“Having other Hist & Lit thesis writers was really helpful. Having people read your drafts really late is not very helpful - usually it's just for affirmation because its already too late for you to change anything. It's ok to hand people unfinished drafts so they can help you work out your ideas, otherwise they are just proof-reading for you.”

“Getting a grad student friend in the English department to be a cold reader for the whole draft was immensely helpful. He pinpointed typos, a few places that needed clarification, and a lot of footnotes that could be cut. Getting a friend whose field of study is radically different (classics) was a bad idea: he wasn't going to go with a gender studies argument from the beginning.”

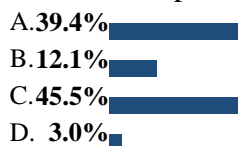
“I had my boyfriend read it and it did help, but he wasn't able to give me the authoritative criticism I needed.”

### **QUESTION 28:**

**Did you participate in the peer review workshop? If so, did you find it helpful?**

- A. Yes, I participated and thought it was helpful
- B. Yes, I participated, but I did not think it was helpful
- C. No, I did not participate
- D. (Either way, if you have comments about the peer review workshop, please insert them here):

Number of responses: 33



### **QUESTION 29:**

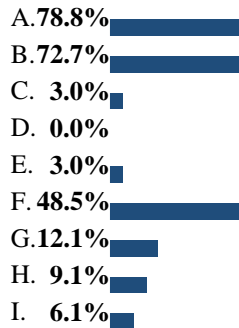
**Who did you turn to, if anyone, for emotional support? (Check all that apply).**

- A. Friend(s)/roommate(s)
- B. Parent(s)
- C. A private therapist/psychiatrist
- D. Someone at the Bureau of Study Counsel
- E. Someone at University Health Services' mental health section
- F. My thesis adviser(s)

- G. A professor/TF who was not my thesis adviser
- H. Nobody
- I. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 33

(Multiple selections per response are allowed.)



### QUESTION 30:

**How did thesis-writing affect your emotional/mental health this year, if at all, and what strategies did you use in response (jogging, baking, talking to friends, etc.)?**

Number of responses: 33

#### Selected answers:

“I’ll be very honest: I think most students enjoy whining and making themselves feel important, and so they complain more than necessary and turn the thesis process into more of an emotional toll than it has to be. That said, it probably did have some negative effects on my emotional and physical health. And my primary ways of dealing (stress eating, sleeping through classes, and celebrating thesis progress by binge drinking with friends) were very UNhealthy.”

“My thesis was not a very good thing for my mental health, and I don’t think I handled it very well. I think dropping all my activities that put me in contact with other people probably helped make me miserable. Also, it was frustrating to live with other thesis writers/busy people because it was harder to find time to talk--it left me feeling pretty alone. Basically, I found the thesis a very lonely process since it was so much about my individual work.”

“I felt pretty good mentally throughout the thesis process. I think this is largely because I deeply enjoyed my topic and thus, I found the hard work worthwhile and satisfying. It is also easier to avoid procrastination when you are motivated. But yeah, NOT leaving things to the last minute helps relieve a lot of stress (I know because in every other situation all I did was procrastinate!). I also told myself in Feb. (when things were the most intense) that I can give up Feb. for my thesis because I have March-May to hangout. It helped avoid the temptations of my slacker 2nd semester senior roommates!”

“Probably lost a few years of my life. Spent a lot of time talking to people.”

“I really enjoyed writing my thesis. I actually think that as stressed out as I was, I was also incredibly happy because I was doing something I loved. I was sad after I turned it in because I no longer had it to work on. I exercised a little bit and made sure to take some time to hang out with friends when it became too overwhelming.”

“Thesis-writing was actually GREAT for my emotional health: putting sustained effort into something that I cared about made me very, very happy. I sometimes exercised to get out of my room, and to burn off steam, but I never felt upset about the thesis... I guess I was stressed, but I towards the end, I was just running on adrenaline.”

“I really liked the experience. Yeah, it was stressful at times, but I had always known I wanted to write a thesis, so I just took it as a given. People get into trouble where they start

to be negative about the experience. You aren't a thesis "victim"--this is something you're choosing to do, and something you have control over, and the sooner you start thinking about it that way the sooner you'll be able to really have fun with it. But definitely there are stressful points. To deal with that, exercise was key, as was just doing something different. And having my thesis adviser as someone I could talk to was also great."

"I loved it after I had a project. In the fall it was a huge weight. But the writing was fun. It helped me focused during senior year when so many non-thesis writers lack purpose."

"It was stressful, mostly because it made me feel incompetent. As a result, I went out less frequently but drank more heavily when I did. This obviously had a negative effect on my health. I took to reading the paper more frequently, however, which helped to put things in perspective."

"The experience was stressful, especially near the end, and I think it was draining emotionally simply because I was tired all the time from working on it and trying not to fall too far behind in my other classes. I gained about ten pounds during the process because I didn't have time to exercise and was eating junk food late at night in order to stay awake. I would not recommend eating as a strategy. However, I do think that removing myself physically from the presence of my thesis and thesis-related materials periodically really helped me. It's nice to go someplace (the movies, the mall, a restaurant) where you can't possibly be working on your thesis for a few hours a week to maintain sanity."

"I actually felt better about myself while working on it. It was the most engaged and fulfilled I felt while I was at Harvard. After turning it in, though, I did get a little depressed. Working out throughout the process was necessary, and retail therapy helped after turning it in!"

"It was such a hard process. It was really scary and discouraging when I got blocks. Also, I didn't get enough exercise. Also, it was bad for me financially since I worked much less. What was great was that it gave me a sense of purpose and direction and when it was good, it was really exciting and rewarding. During Jan and Feb, I wrote all the time with a close friend also in H&L and we supported each other a lot."

"It drove me a little crazy. To deal, I talked about it, exercised, and got Zoloft."

"It was fun!"

"I had a really hard time with writer's block and inadequacy issues. I had such high hopes and expectations that I psyched myself out and prevented myself from achieving them. I made the thesis one monolithic thing rather than taking it step-by-step. I tried to talk to people about it but I didn't want to bore them because it seemed like everyone had the same problem! In all, the thesis was an incredibly negative experience because the people who did know what I was talking about were writing theses themselves and didn't want to talk about it and the people in my life who weren't writing theses couldn't identify with the process. My mother had to come up and stay a few days with me just to calm me down and make me write rather than panicking."






### **QUESTION 31:**

**How many chapters were in your thesis?**

- A. more than 5
- B. 4-5
- C. 3
- D. 2
- E. 1
- F. I didn't organize my thesis in chapters.
- G. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 33

A. **0.0%**

- B. 15.2% 
- C. 57.6% 
- D. 21.2% 
- E. 0.0%
- F. 3.0% 
- G. 3.0% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 1





Other: “Two plus an intro that was almost as long as a chapter.”

**QUESTION 32:**

**What type of editing did you do?**

- A. I edited a LOT: my final drafts looked nothing like my first drafts.
- B. I just proofread and spellchecked my drafts, making no major changes.
- C. Somewhere between A and B: my final drafts resembled my first drafts, after undergoing some significant changes.
- D. Editing? My first draft was my final draft.
- E. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 33

- A. 36.4% 
- B. 0.0%
- C. 57.6% 
- D. 3.0% 
- E. 3.0% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 1

Other: “I edited a lot as I went, but then at the end I didn't do much revision and wish that I had.”

**QUESTION 33:**

**Did you include illustrations or any other appendices? If so, of what?**

- A. No
- B. Yes (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

- A. 47.1% 
- B. 52.9% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 18

Answers to “Yes (please explain)”:

“an appendix”

“photos and images”

“maps and the text of the stories that I close-read”

“images of maps and woodcuts”

“full-text versions of the poems I was examining”

“interview transcripts”

“a timeline”

“illustrations from primary sources, photos from field work”

“illustrations of the technological phenomena I was talking about”

“illustrations of cartoons, advertisements and photographs relating to the religion I was studying”

“summaries of the [relatively obscure] novels about which I wrote”

### QUESTION 34:

**Did you have any problems with printing?**

- A. No
- B. Yes (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

A. 79.4% 

B. 20.6% 

Number of text responses to final choice: 7

Answers to "Yes (please explain)":

"This cannot be done at the last minute."

"It just took a lot longer than I expected."

"I accidentally forgot to print out one of my chapters!"

"I ran out of ink."

"Staples was good for most people but I had a bit of trouble; fortunately I went way early in the morning and still had the thesis in well before the deadline."

"I used Kinkos and Gnomon. Somewhat stressful."

"I printed out in my own room, and hadn't planned on using a whole cartridge! I had to go out to get another."

### QUESTION 35:

**What logistical questions, if any, would you have liked to have had answered before the process (about printing, binders, formatting, etc.), or what logistical tips would you offer future thesis writers? (If the answer is "none," make sure to write "none").**

Number of responses: 33

Selected Answers:

"My advisor called my attention to this great free scanner in Lamont, and that was a great resource for my appendix photos. The resource librarians can help you figure it out. Another great tip I got was to make sure your table of contents is good (clear and well-presented). As my advisor said, make everything as easy as possible for the reader."

"So many! Where to print, perhaps. Also, no one seemed to know how to use the binders--much misinformation flew among thesis writers, and even my advisor was convinced that I needed to take my thesis somewhere to be bound. I think I would have liked more guidance with formatting, too--maybe a sample table of contents and a sample first page in addition to the sample title page."

"That freaking thesis binder is more complicated than it looks! I had to put it between my legs to hold it open and put the thesis in there. Other than that, I would tell thesis writers to plan to print it 24 hours in advance because you never know what can go wrong. Also, in terms of printing drafts--print them in blue to save ink!"

"Formatting stuff was all pretty clear, I thought. It maybe would have been nice to see a demo table of contents."

"Formatting! How to get this done and what to buy for the binding and where. More practical tips."

"I would think more carefully about the footnoting style. I ended up using MLA which probably was not the best suited in the end although it was the only style I knew how to use. Also, I remember having a lot of question about the works cited page and how to cite certain sources which were difficult to figure out."

"Printing takes about 3 times as long as you think it will, so be sure to give yourself plenty of time! Also, formatting is really time-consuming. It is best to do it as you go, rather than

leaving it for the very end.”

“Email yourself everything you write.”

“Get someone else to print it. A friend, anyone.”

“I printed my thesis the day before it was due. I took it to Staples, and everything went surprisingly smoothly, but I think it helped that I wasn't panicked and frazzled when I was explaining everything to them. I think it would have been nice to have much clearer formatting guidelines. Handbooks (like the recommended Turabian) are often confusing and give several different formatting options, especially for footnotes, and even though they seem silly and minor, even those things add to the stress. There really needs to be a standardized, comprehensive formatting guide distributed to every senior. It was not pleasant to spend time wondering how far the indents on my footnotes were supposed to go in or whether or not they should be double spaced.”

“I printed by 12:30 the day it was due, and I was able to turn it in by around 2pm. Printing is scary. I would have loved to have had some information on the website regarding printing and binding--not that it was difficult, but I was just so nervous about getting it wrong.”

“The margin issue wasn't really made clear. I only found out about it a few days before.”

“Formatting pictures into your text is actually not that hard, though people say it is hard. Leave time to do it, but it's not a big deal. Bibliographies are terrible.”

“Print the day before. So much less stress.”

“Turn the file(s) into a PDF if you have images, otherwise formatting gets completely screwy during printing. PDFs are glorious things.”

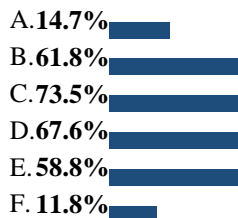
### QUESTION 36:

**What was your schedule like the week before you turned in your thesis? (Check all that apply).**

- A. I maintained my regular schedule
- B. I slept many hours less than I usually do
- C. I skipped some / all of my classes which I would have usually attended
- D. I did not do homework that I usually would have done
- E. I skipped extra-curricular activities which I would not usually have skipped
- F. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

(Multiple selections per response are allowed.)



Number of text responses to final choice: 4

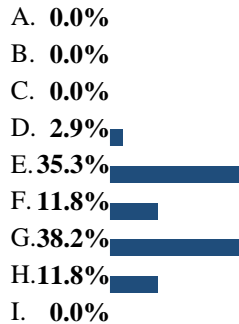
### QUESTION 37:

**When did you turn in your thesis?**

- A. Two days before the thesis was due, or earlier
- B. The day before the thesis was due, in the morning
- C. The day before the thesis was due, in the afternoon

- D. The day it was due (March 1), before 10am
- E. The day it was due (March 1), between 10am and 12pm
- F. The day it was due (March 1), between 12pm and 2pm
- G. The day it was due (March 1), between 2pm and 4pm
- H. The day it was due (March 1), after 4pm
- I. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

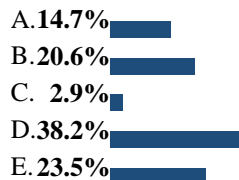


### QUESTION 38:

**How did you choose your thesis adviser(s)?**

- A. I chose a tutor I already knew from sophomore or junior tutorial
- B. I chose a tutor whom I did not know, after reading tutor bios or e-mailing/speaking with tutors
- C. I chose a tutor based on a friend's or on another tutor's recommendation
- D. The department chose my tutor for me
- E. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34



Number of text responses to final choice: 8

#### Answers:

"I worked with a senior faculty member."

"I chose a tutor with whom I was taking a Hist and Lit 91r."

"I chose a tutor who had taught a class I liked freshman year."

"I had put my tutor down as an option on the sheet...I didn't really know him, but his interests matched up with mine. So ultimately Hist and Lit chose him, and it worked out perfectly!"

"Every year I choose a tutor and every year the department chooses someone else for me."

"I chose a professor I had had for a class and was assigned a secondary tutor through h&l."

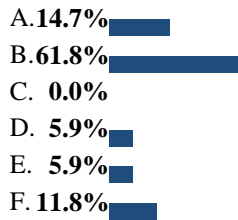
"I was abroad, so it was difficult. The department chose, but I sent in a fairly specific email with suggestions for tutors I wanted."

**QUESTION 39:**

**How often and for how long did you meet with your Hist-Lit adviser?**

- A. Once a week for 90 minutes or more
- B. Once a week for about 1 hour
- C. Every other week for 90 minutes or more
- D. Every other week for about 1 hour
- E. We did not meet regularly; instead, we met whenever we wanted to
- F. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34



Number of text responses to final choice: 4

Answers to "Other":

"One hr/week, 1.5-2 hr/wk when need be."

"We met once a week for one hour and then twice a week in the weeks before the thesis was due."

"Since he was my concentration advisor, not my main advisor, we met about once every two months."

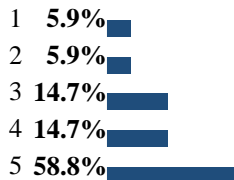
"We met every week, but not for that long. We would communicate through emails during the writing process and then discuss it for about a half hour in person once a week."

**QUESTION 40:**

**On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how helpful was your Hist-Lit adviser in recommending books, articles, or other resources for you during your research?**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Number of responses: 34



**QUESTION 41:**

**How involved was your Hist-Lit adviser throughout the process?**

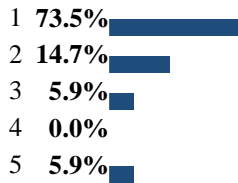
- 1 My adviser was constantly involved (for instance, he/she met with me almost every week, was in touch by phone or e-mail almost every week, read almost all of my drafts, set deadlines, and helped me brainstorm or think about particular sources)
- 2 My adviser was very involved, but not every week or not in every part of the



thesis process (for instance, he/she met with me every other week, or was not always available by phone or e-mail in between meetings, or helped mainly after I had a draft)

- 3 My adviser was involved, but not constantly or not very much (for instance, my adviser did not want to meet regularly, or my adviser did not always respond to e-mails, or my adviser did not have time to read some of my drafts)
- 4 My adviser was not very involved (for instance, my adviser rarely met with me, rarely read drafts, rarely helped me brainstorm)
- 5 Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34



Number of text responses to final choice: 2

Answers to "Other":

"I think my tutor is wonderful, and I WAS working quite closely with a senior faculty member who was my actual advisor, but my H&L tutor had no idea what my thesis was about. She really only read about 10 out of over 100 pages of my thesis. This is not entirely her fault perhaps, because I was working with a faculty advisor??"

"My advisor was alternately very helpful and completely AWOL. But he was most accessible when it mattered most, so I think that's what counts."

**QUESTION 42:**

**If you could have changed something about your relationship with your Hist-Lit adviser, what would it have been?**

Number of responses: 28

Selected answers:

"I would have liked him to read more of the sources that I read, so he could talk them through with greater understanding. Also, I wish we had had more time to talk on a get-to-know level--for most of this year, I have felt not very close and not always comfortable saying exactly how I'm feeling."

"I wish my advisor was more interested in working with me on my writing. She read a couple drafts of each chapter, but she never made any big changes. She also made no effort at all to help me polish my prose. We met to talk about the ideas for my thesis and to go over her (generally quite minor) edits. I chose an advisor based on similar interests, and she was helpful in recommending sources. But in hindsight, I wish I had tried to work with my junior tutor, who was much better at helping me polish my writing/organization, and just planned to go to professors' office hours to get recommendations for sources/material relevant to the topic."

"I have a great relationship with my H&L advisor because she is very nice, but she had WAY WAY WAY too many responsibilities such as her Dissertation due at the same time as my thesis and two or three other students..."

"Nothing, she was really great. I felt comfortable with her, but not like she was my "friend" (as I did with my junior tutor). She was always helpful and gave me a TON of comments. I really couldn't have asked for more."

"I love the guy to death, but sometimes our friendship got in the way of our professional relationship. I sometimes needed a bit more chewing out."

“My advisor was amazing and really helpful all the time. I don't think I could have had a better relationship with her. I think if she had more knowledge in the subject matter I was writing about that may have been helpful but otherwise she was incredibly involved and supportive.”

“Nothing, it was perfect.”

“I would have liked him to not have disappeared for part of January, but other than that I think we had a very good relationship.”

“I would have tried to aggravate him less...”

“She talked a lot. She also was not very familiar with my topic.”

“I would have preferred that she be less rude in her email correspondence and that she had known something about my topic. She was pretty attentive, however, and good with the editing and brainstorming process.”

“Nothing-- she was great! Incredibly helpful and supportive.”

“I would have appreciated strongly editorial advice, by which I mean more than just proofreading and editing and suggestions of material, and more comments on whether certain areas of research were interesting and viable.”

“She was the most amazing adviser I could have asked for.”

“Nothing! She was like a mother to me.”

“I sometimes felt intimidated by them. When I was uninspired, there wasn't much they could do to help me get past my blocks.”

“My advisor was an INCREDIBLE source for stimulating ideas, listening to my ideas, figuring out my ideas--truly thought just like me! However, I wished he had more direct knowledge about sources to recommend that were not so tangentially related to my thesis. I did not realize my tutor was not as good as this until the leader of the peer workshop really recommended some very pertinent sources that my tutor had not mentioned (since I probably should have found them myself!). Maybe my tutor should have recommended that I consult outside tutors more?”

“Maybe a little more brainstorming. But he was awfully helpful in unexpected ways.”

“Nothing. Fantastic.”

“I wish she had been more knowledgeable in my field and more prescriptive in her criticism.”

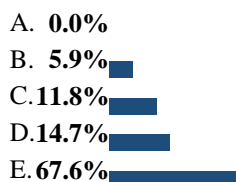
“Nothing. Maureen McLane (and yes, I will use her name) is absolutely amazing.”

### QUESTION 43:

**One a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is the best, how satisfied were you with your Hist-Lit adviser?**

- A. 1
- B. 2
- C. 3
- D. 4
- E. 5

Number of responses: 34



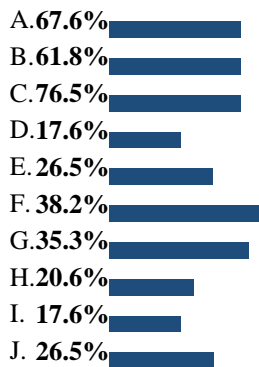
**QUESTION 44:**

**How did you feel after you turned in your thesis? (Check all that apply).**

- A. Pleased
- B. Proud
- C. Relieved to be finished
- D. Upset
- E. Disappointed
- F. Numb
- G. Excited
- H. Depressed
- I. Overwhelmed with other classes/commitments/obligations
- J. Other (please explain):

Number of responses: 34

(Multiple selections per response are allowed.)



Number of text responses to final choice: 9

“Other”:

“Tired and very ill. No sleep and poor diet will do that.”

“My life lost its purpose (temporarily). I was extremely satisfied and proud, but sad to see it go.

“Tired and also weirdly anxious. This was bizarre, but I felt anxious for a few weeks afterward. A bunch of my friends did as well, so don't worry about it! Totally normal. We called it postpartum depression.”

“Exhausted, dirty, hungry.”

“I felt confused and sort of lost.”

“I had postpartum depression.”

**QUESTION 45:**

**A week before turning in my thesis, and/or a week after turning in my thesis, I would have really liked my friend, family, or tutor to... (fill in the blank):**

Number of responses: 21

Selected answers:

“Give me a hug.”

“I think all the people around me were incredibly supportive. I couldn't have asked for anything more.”

“Nothing... but I will say that my advisor locked me in his office three days before the due date and made me go through all the edits chapter by chapter, for nine hours, and it was

the best thing ever.”

“Send flowers! which they did. And celebrate with champagne, which we did.”

“Hook up an IV of caffeine and/or adrenaline.”

“Give me a massage. Buy me food. Let me sleep. Not ask me about it all the time.”

“I really would have liked my friends/family to have read it over for me!! I asked but no one had time. My father did take me out to dinner, which was nice.”

“Suggest more options, to consider what hadn't been handled in the draft thus far.”

“The week before, I wish people hadn't kept asking me about my progress. I didn't want to provide a running commentary. The week after, I wish I'd had more people to hang out with. Everyone else was still working on theses, so life was still boring and permeated with stress.”

“Remind me of how important the process--not just the product--is.”

“A week before, I would have liked my thesis advisor to offer to look at anything I wanted her to, instead of telling me she thought I shouldn't ask her to read any more drafts. I would have loved it if I more friends offered to help out with proofreading too.”

“Given me a pat on the back and made me feel good about myself.”

#### **QUESTION 46:**

**What would you do differently if you were going to start all over again, but with the experiences you've acquired?**

Number of responses: 31

#### Selected answers:

“Write a draft earlier.”

“A lot! More time researching, more time writing, less procrastination.... I spent lots of time feeling guilty for not working on it, and I would just work on it and avoid the guilt. I would also focus my topic slightly more.”

“Start writing sooner, be more realistic about time and balancing the self-indulgent aspect of the experience of independent research with the reality of deadlines, etc...”

“I would have tried to complete the entire thing earlier so that more people could have read it and provided comments.”

“I would have started working rigorously earlier. I don't think I got REALLY serious until January, and then I kicked it into high gear and it was great. I wish I had worked a little bit harder in the fall. Not obsessively, just more consistently.”

“Narrow my topic down more. Do preliminary summer research.”

“I would have had someone who knows about my topic specifically being more involved in my revising process.”

“Maybe more time for revisions, and actually give myself the time needed to write a conclusion that actually drove home my big point. I also would have liked to have someone else read it, although, you never know, and if their comments had been negative it probably would have really freaked me out.”

“I really wouldn't do that much differently. I am very happy with the balance of my senior year and was minimally stressed.”

“I would have found more experts in the field of study to interview.”

“I would pick my own tutor. I would also choose a topic with more historical literature (that is, something that happened in the more distant past).”

“Talk to more faculty, get more recommendations on sources, research historical background more.”

“Think about my thesis in the summer.”

“Be more aware of word count issues because I struggled not to go over in the end. Also, I'd probably narrow my topic down slightly. I think it grew a little too much during the process. be stricter about adhering to my governing question and being sure to continually maintain the central argument.”

“I would try to get my entire draft done by the beginning of February, at least the body.”

"Give myself more time - take less challenging classes in the fall. Quitting all my extra-curriculars was a great idea. I wish I had reached out to more professors and other teachers for research and support."

"Plan more ahead, spend more time just thinking about my topic and thesis, and have more of a consistent research schedule that I would have stuck too--not necessarily more time, but more consistent time spent. Also, finished the thesis a week early so I could have edited--rather than finishing it the day before it was due!"

"I would have given myself a smaller topic and really had fun in the details--and then woven it together into a whole."

#### **QUESTION 47:**

**What, if anything, do you wish someone had told you before you started working on your thesis? (Something you did not know that you have since discovered).**

Number of responses: 25

#### Selected Answers:

"This is supposed to be fun for you. It is not the be-all, end-all of your academic career. And it's 100% ok to ask for help."

"Beware of going over the word limit. Don't choose too broad a topic."

"FOOTNOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, ETC take LONGER than you would ever think."

"I wish someone would have told me what the different grades (i.e., Magna Minus, Cum Plus) are equivalent to on the GPA scale, and how each grade would affect my honors standing because I had NO idea!"

"Work on it consistently throughout the year - if you do it little by little, it makes the entire process not only pleasurable but easier."

"It will be an awesome experience because you chose a topic you love. Keep at it."

"I don't think I would have believed anybody if they told me I was going to feel so great about the whole experience but I think finding that out for myself was part of the fun."

"That it's worth it to put in serious time, early. (Work early and often?) Also, make sure to get lots of sleep, and GO OUT with friends throughout the entire process. You don't need a carrel, they're hugely overrated."

"It's really hard and not fun, think really hard about it if you want to commit to it."

"It will be longer than you think. Always back up your work on email."

"Do some research in the summer."

"IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER! It's a paper, it's slightly longer than the term papers you turn in every semester, and it should be on a topic that you genuinely want to research more about!"

"Edit by printing out copies--I always send in my drafts, and then get paper edits back. I found that when I read something on paper, I not only caught typos more often, but I looked at my own work more objectively."

"Definitely keep a totally open mind about your topic as you enter the sources. I had planned to write my thesis about the conflict between two communities and it turned out that my argument was about their interaction and interdependence. And also, you never know what might end up being relevant. Like I said, my two chapters were on topics I never would have thought to take notes on unless I was taking notes on everything! Especially if you can't get back to the archives, just take everything down."

"I didn't know it was going to be so rewarding and that I would feel so proud, but I had to figure that out anyway."

"The act of thinking--not just researching and writing--is part of the thesis process too & it is important! Also, It's not about researching a lot, but researching efficiently--even though inefficient research is a necessary evil of the process. Also, working consistently! Not necessarily 40 hours/week, but instead, 1-2 hours/day. Finally, consult experts on your topics--not for their ideas but because they can point you to the write resources to make your research more efficient."

"That it won't be all fun and games afterwards. The pile of stuff that accumulates as you're finishing up in February has to be dealt with, and that may take until spring break."

"Write AS you are doing research, not just at the end. Back up your files in many places. My hard drive spun itself into pieces in September, which hurt."

"IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER! It's a paper, it's slightly longer than the term papers you turn in every semester, and it should be on a topic that you genuinely want to research more about!"

#### **QUESTION 48:**

**What did you think you did particularly well, or what worked out well for you?**

Number of responses: 25

#### Selected answers:

"Setting early deadlines with my advisor was good for me."

"I think I chose a topic I was truly interested as opposed to something that was "strategic" that would look good to employers (as my parents sort of tried to make me do)."

"The depth and breadth of my original research was the strongest and most satisfying part of my thesis experience. I think I consulted a very wide range of materials and incorporated them well."

"I think I did a lot of research and read a lot before even writing which I think got me very excited for the writing process. In the end I think my thesis ended up being very well researched and I had a strong grasp of the subject matter."

"Setting aside WORK time and FUN time.... I made sure I was time-efficient and then allowed myself to go out with my friends. Editing and re-reading is crucial. Work closely with your advisor, even if it means being locked in his/her office. Share your topic with friends, talk it through. Go to other classes and do reading (some of my best sources and ideas came from reading for another course that was somewhat related to my thesis topic)."

"I think the attitude I brought to the project kept me positive. My roomies were also writing theses, and we all refused to be melodramatic about it, and that was a great decision. The other thing is that I budgeted my time well, and I did something I was excited about. I looked forward to working on my thesis, or when I didn't, once I started working I would think, wow, this is really interesting. I also want to say that I felt pressure from myself at the beginning to do something really impressive, and also I thought I had to do lots of archival work, etc. I wasn't comfortable with any of that, and I was trying to do this topic that I thought other people would think was important, but that I really didn't care about. It took September for me to realize that I should be doing something else, and once I switched I was really happy. Moral of the story: go ahead and commit to something early, with an eye toward changing it around! That way, you'll be open to pursuing ideas that you might be hesitant to at first. And also just listen to yourself when you're choosing topics or a methodology--if something feels boring or you just aren't into what you're doing, it isn't going to get any better. Switch!"

"I think I kept the big picture well in mind. I know I am not going to be an academic and my thesis was therefore just for me."

"I drafted a lot and constantly and massively revised. I was very conscious of the need to refine my prose and ideas constantly."

"The way it was written was very important to me, and I felt that for the most part my aesthetics and my content were both important to me and worked out. Also my tutor challenged me to be creative and not to envision my project as just an emotion-less academic project."

"My tutor--he was incredible! Was \*always\* there when I needed him, didn't put a lot of pressure on me, was always positive, encouraged my crazy ideas. He became a great friend whom I look to for life advice and academic advice outside Hist & Lit."

"Worked really, really hard, which makes you proud of the process regardless of what everyone else says. Integrated lots of different kinds of research."

“Building on work you've done in other courses. Starting from absolute scratch is painful.”

#### **QUESTION 49:**

**Any funny/serious stories or other anecdotes? Share them here!**

Number of responses: 17

##### Selected answers:

“All I can say is when I printed that thesis on my printer it was a really emotional experience. Some love song was playing like "I can't believe this is happening" and lord I couldn't believe it! It was just so satisfying to finally see the thing in print, on fancy paper, finished!”

“My advice is to know who you're talking to. I had been consulting with a man I believed to be a local Idahonian historian, who seemed to have some expertise on Psychiana, the alternative cult religious movement I was studying. When I met him for lunch in Moscow, Idaho on my research trip, I quickly realized that he was not a local historian at all, but just an avid follower of the religion who was trying to spread the word. Nice guy, but again, would have been good to know I wasn't just walking into an informative Mexican lunch.”

“I already said about how my roommates were placing bets on whether I'd get it finished or not. I also donated \$100 to Hurricane Katrina victims in order to be able to talk to Brian Wilson and ask him a few questions that would relate to the thesis. Helped people and talked to one of my musical idols. That was a win-win situation.”

“When I told people I was writing about "The X-Files," I'd always get the same flabbergasted response.”

“Well, originally I was going to write about a set of monuments in Mexico City from the 19th century and ended up writing my thesis about Maps of the Caribbean Islands in the age of discovery so I think that was a pretty huge change.”

“My advisor refers to me as "the prodigal son." And I deserve it.”

“Three days before my thesis was due, I found a book with a very similar subject to my thesis. I began to hyperventilate and ran to Widener. When I got there, I found that it was about Britain rather than America. I sighed with relief, read the very interesting introduction and footnoted the book in my thesis and made a note to read it in several years. Similarly, two nights before the due date I was reading a book that I planned to cite in my conclusion. I was struck by the beauty of the ideas and of the language, and by the way in which the argument was nuanced and novel as well as easy to follow. I was also struck by the fact that this type of academic writing bore no resemblance to my thesis. I felt sad, but also realized how difficult it is to write well about history and literature, and that I shouldn't expect too much from myself, an undergraduate.”

“I fainted in Lamont the morning my thesis was due. I actually couldn't see at one point. I woke up next to my chair, and my hip was bruised, so I must have hit that on the way down as well.

I forgot to edit a part of my thesis where I wrote in big, bold black letters--"DO I PROVE THIS?". Moral of the story: edit before you hand in!”

“The car I rented to do my field research was a total bucket. Enterprise Rent-a-Car in Central Square is to be avoided.”

#### **QUESTION 50:**

**What were some of the most valuable things you learned from the overall thesis experience?**

Number of responses: 22

##### Selected Answers:

"I practiced a lot of types of researching, reading, writing, editing skills. I also learned to summarize well (especially as I came to summarize my OWN work for others again and again)."

"That I can never, ever enter academia. That I hate writing. That I must find a career as far from the written word as possible."

"I learned a lot about myself, my learning style, the way I work that is good and bad and incompatible with the system, etc."

"The value of details, language. When working on this thesis, every single word mattered, and that's how one should approach everything he or she writes. Hist and Lit concentrators know best that people scrutinize the written word, and now I try to make sure everything I write is meticulous and deliberate."

"How cool it is to be an expert on something. The power of revision. The value of a positive relationship with an advisor - someone who not only gives you great advice and feedback, but necessary support throughout the process. The satisfaction and pride of producing something like a thesis. That I have a unique voice as a writer and it is something I should value."

"That, if pressed, I can write a book."

"I think I learned that I kind of really like academic writing and research, which I wasn't sure I did before. I also just realized that I could write such a big paper and do it well, which I really didn't think I could do after having a sort of stressful experience with my junior paper. My thesis has made me want to keep on researching and writing and has made me want to possibly go to humanities grad school, which were definitely not part of my plans before my senior year. It sounds pretty cheesy but it's definitely been the most rewarding experience of my college career and has really affected me in great ways."

"I CAN write an 80-page thesis!"

"I'm really really glad I wrote a thesis. I guess part of it is the fact that I ended up doing well, and so that's validating. But I think it also shows you that you can do something like this, you can write something that is new and interesting, and it really does distinguish your senior year--I think most everyone feels this really huge sense of accomplishment, and that's awesome. It is also a communal experience in a lot of ways--it bonds you with the other thesis writers."

"That I am not a disaster academically; that I AM a disaster academically. That good scholarship takes a lot of time, a lot of reading, and a lot of living and thinking and that if I can produce something mediocre that opens my eyes a little, then I've done okay."

"Piecing together an opinion about something---trying to think in a new and different way about material. Feeling confident enough about a subject matter to challenge other scholars' opinions."

"My thesis was one of the most incredible experiences I have had. Because I wrote on something that I was so passionate about in my personal life, it felt even more fulfilling to consider it, for the first time, in an academic setting. It brought so many parts of my experiences from the past and at Harvard together. It was absolutely about the process."

"Creating new historiography on a topic that's really important to me was so fulfilling. It made me rethink my decision not to go to grad school for a moment. But the most valuable thing I learned was that I'm not necessarily a slacker! Seriously, this was the only paper of my Harvard career that I really put 100% into, and it felt good to be so proud of that final project. I wouldn't have changed a word."

"Play to your strengths."

"That academic work is something that you can feel really proud of - it can reflect your personality and be creative and beautiful, and that it's totally worth it. I'm glad that Harvard takes the thesis process so seriously, I know that doesn't happen everywhere."



### **QUESTION 51:**

**If you'd like to add anything else, add it here!**

Number of responses: 11

#### Selected Answers:

“Writing a thesis was the best experience I have had here at Harvard. I cannot say enough about it and how meaningful it was to me. You should all look forward to it, it was truly the culmination of an incredible education (thus far!).”

“I live with a few other Hist and Lit seniors, but I was writing my thesis out-of-phase. I think I had an easier/more pleasant time than they did because I wasn't always comparing my progress against other people. I think thesis writers should be careful that they don't get into stressful or unhealthy circumstances where they're with another thesis writer all the time -- writing in the same room, talking thesis at dinner, etc. I felt lucky to have space to talk about other things with people, and talk about my thesis in a non-competitive way.”

“It was an amazing experience. Really stressful at times, but worth it in the end.”

“BACK EVERYTHING UP. MY COMPUTER CRASHED THE DAY AFTER IT WAS DUE. But I emailed everything to myself, to my friends, and even to my adviser for safe keeping. And I had it on disks as well.”

“I feel like it was such a privilege to be able to write a thesis. I also felt respected and like my readers took my academic work seriously.”

“This poll is an EXCELLENT idea! All of the questions were great! I strongly support the formation of a thesis handbook/guide to writing a hist & lit thesis for seniors. Thanks!”

“The best intellectual experience of my time at Harvard, and--in all honesty--the most enjoyable piece of writing I've done here.”

“Good luck guys!”

## Peer Advisors

Several members of the class of 2006 have volunteered to offer email advice to this year's senior class (2007) concerning all aspects of the thesis process, applying for research grants, and/or doing research outside of Harvard or abroad.

Katie Monticchio

Britain

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Iliana Montauk

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[Iliana is happy to talk about applying for grants, doing research abroad, the process of researching and writing a thesis, and emotional/mental health issues related to writing a thesis.]