

MA Project Guide

We call the culmination of your program with AM ST 580 a "project" rather than a thesis because we recognize that scholarly work can now take several forms. Your project can take a number of forms characterizing scholarship in American Studies but no matter which route you take in consultation with your adviser you will need to submit a narrative. The narrative is bound in the library and available for circulation. The project can be a written essay in the form of a thesis, a video documentary, web-based presentation, a translation project, or an exhibition accompanied by a museum catalogue, to name a few forms of scholarship qualifying for a project.

The project course (AM ST 580) is generally taken for 3 credits. For 3 credits you prepare a work involving original research and interpretation in American Studies. For 6 credits, the work may involve extensive documentation and presentation equivalent to two projects. An example might be a major exhibit and accompanying thesis. Another might be a cataloguing of a collection or transcript of a historic text with an accompanying narrative that will be submitted as the "thesis."

Consult your adviser, program coordinator, or American Studies faculty member about possibilities for a topic. Do not wait until after you have finished your coursework. Give it some thought in your coursework, so that you can lay some groundwork for your topic. Work on focusing your topic into a manageable project. Successful topics are usually specific, with clear, limited boundaries of place, time, and genre.

You officially announce your intention to begin work on the project by preparing a project proposal form on your word processor. See the sample template included in this guide. The proposal needs to be approved by two faculty readers and the program coordinator before you can register for AM ST 580. The proposal outlines your work and designates a first and second reader for the project. The form stays with the program; hand it in to the staff assistant. Discuss with your readers your outline and the form in which the readers want to see drafts of your thesis.

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When you register for the project in a semester, you will sign up for a section supervised by your first reader. THE FIRST READER MUST BE A MEMBER OF THE CORE GRADUATE FACULTY. THE SECOND READER MUST BE ANY MEMBER OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY, BUT PREFERABLY IS ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN STUDIES FACULTY. You can choose a third reader in consultation with your first reader and that person does not have to be a member of the graduate faculty. Having a third reader is optional; every project requires two readers. If you do not complete the project in the semester you enrolled for 580, you will be given a grade of "R." Don't be alarmed. The grade stands for "continuing research" and will not revert to an F as do deferred grades. The "R" will stay on your transcript unless the professor in charge of your project changes it to a letter grade before you complete the program. If the professor does not assign you a letter grade, then the R remains on your record, but does not affect your Grade Point Average. Discuss the letter grade option with your supervising professor.

The deadlines for submission of the project come up about midway into a semester. Check with your supervisor or program coordinator for the exact date. Usually the program coordinator has to certify your completion of the program eight weeks into the semester (the end of September for the fall and the end of February for the spring). That means you should be essentially finished by the mid-point of the semester. So work closely with your first and second readers to arrange for readings of your drafts in advance of the deadline. Keep in mind that your committee members may be away from campus during the summer, so if you're working during that time, you should be sure to check with their schedules. In general, summer registration for the project (580) is discouraged.

Most students prefer to work in the traditional thesis format. At present, submissions are prepared with your word processor on durable white, 8.5 x 11 paper (the standard is 20-pound-weight paper with rag content). The print needs to be letter-quality (not "draft") black ink. Because the thesis upon completion is required to be bound by the library, it is important for you to keep wide margins particularly on the left side. Allow at least 1 1/4 inches from the left. (Many students take advantage of the facilities of the Computer Center at Penn State Harrisburg to prepare their theses; remember there, as elsewhere, to always make back-up copies of your disks). Don't forget to paginate your manuscript, usually in the upper right or bottom center. The

“front matter” of the preface, acknowledgments, and list of figures, if applicable, take lower-cased roman numerals (e.g., i, ii, iii, iv). The title page, permission to copy page, and abstract are not paginated, although they are counted in the pagination, so that when you start your preface, you are likely to begin with iv, v, or vi. You begin your pagination with regular numerals (1, 2, 3, etc) with your first chapter. This format is the standard practice used in books and manuscript preparation. If you are uncertain about the format, check with the program coordinator. The program coordinator has the ultimate approval for projects; you’ll notice that the program coordinator has the final signature on your title page. Even if your readers approve the draft, you still may have revisions to do (usually to conform to proper format) as directed by the program coordinator.

The format for our projects DIFFERS from the general guidelines published in the *Thesis Guide* published by the Graduate School. Use the MA handbook in American Studies as your guide to preparation of the project. Here are some important features you should keep in mind of the program’s format for projects.

Thesis projects should have a standard opening page used by the American Studies Program at Penn State Harrisburg (it varies from the version in the *Thesis Guide*). See the sample in this handbook. The date you place on the opening page should refer to the graduate month and year (e.g., December 2011 or May 2012). Standards for chapter headings, pagination, permission-to-copy page, Table of Contents and abstract do follow guidelines in the *Thesis Guide*. Check the samples in the next few pages. Prepare your final draft on high-quality, white paper (20 lb weight), 8 ½ x 11 inches, letter quality printing (such as high quality ink-jet and laser) with black ink. Figures included in the project should be high quality (usually at least 300 dpi) and contain identifying captions. Be sure you have copyright clearance and permission to use any photographs or illustrations from an external source. If you have figures in your work, you should include a list of figures in the front matter.

Guidelines about length and format should be discussed with your readers; you will want to ask about the structure of your chapters and appendices, if necessary. You may also want to

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arrange to hand in chapters as you complete them to the committee. The procedure upon completion is:

1. A processing fee in the amount of \$25 is to be paid at the Bursar=s Office. This fee covers costs of electronic cataloging. The Bursar=s Office will provide a receipt for the fee.
2. Give the receipt and two copies of the Master=s project in person or by mail to the American Studies Program staff assistant in W356 Olmsted Building for signatures. Be sure to keep copies for yourself and remember to sign the title page in the appropriate line.

The usual format for a thesis is that it contains the following:

Preface in the front matterBoutlining the goals, theses, and sources of the work in line with an American Studies research project. Acknowledgments can be appended to the preface or listed separately. The preface is paginated in roman numerals, lower cased.

Chapter 1Busually is a survey of the scholarship in the field represented by the study and concludes with contextualization of your study within this scholarship (do you test, refute, or supplement the scholarship?).

Chapter 2Busually presents your original research with primary evidence in defense of the thesis or argument of the study.

Chapter 3-a conclusion that integrates the research with the scholarship and discusses the implications or applications of the study.

Notes and ReferencesBthe citation style can be either in-text citation style with a reference list at the end or an endnote system with superscripts in the text. The citations should be thorough and follow one of the standard humanities citation guides such as MLA or Chicago Manual of Style. Discuss the format with your first reader.

Sample Project Proposal Form

(Reproduce on word processor)

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN AMERICAN STUDIES

AM ST 580

PROJECT PROPOSAL SHEET

Student's Name _____

PS ID # _____

Beginning Sem/Year for Program _____

Contact Information (address, email, phone number):

Title of Project _____

Date of Proposal _____

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Background and Description of Project:

Previous Experience (e.g., papers and courses completed, independent studies)

Methodology:

Main Sources: Primary and Secondary:

Outline and Summary of Chapters:

Significance/Interpretation of Project:

Timetable:

First Reader (Chair) _____

Second Reader _____

Additional Readers (if applicable) _____

Program Coordinator _____

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Adviser _____

Sample Title Page

The Image of Pennsylvania-Germans in Political Cartoons
during the Civil War

by

Charles Rebuck

A Project in American Studies
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for a Master of Arts Degree
in American Studies
The Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg
December 2011 [or May 2012]

Author's Signature_____

Charles Rebuck

First Reader's Signature_____

Michael Barton, Ph.D.

Second Reader's Signature_____

Charles Kupfer, Ph.D.

Program Coordinator's Signature_____

Simon Bronner, Ph.D.

Permission-to-Copy Page

A statement granting the University the right to make single copies of the thesis appears following the title page. This occupies a separate page; do not include a page number on this page. Prepare this page as shown below, copy it onto thesis-quality paper, and sign it in dark ink for the first submission of the thesis. The form of your name, both as signed and as typed below the signature line, must be exactly the same as that used on the title page. You do not need to include this page in personal copies.

Whether or not you choose to include a copyright line on the title page, the thesis is your intellectual property. In signing the permission statement you are not relinquishing any right as author, but making it legally possible for the University Libraries to produce a photocopy if someone wants to consult your work.

Sample Permission-to-Copy Page

I grant The Pennsylvania State University the nonexclusive right to use this work for the University's own purposes and to make single copies of the work available to the public on a not-for-profit basis if copies are not otherwise available.

[Type your name here, exactly as it appears on the Title Page]

Abstract

The thesis should contain an abstract of no more than two pages and preferably one page, but it is not included in the Table of Contents. An abstract is a concise summary of the thesis, intended to inform a prospective reader of the thesis about its content. It usually includes a brief description of the problem investigated, the procedure or methods, the results, and the conclusions.

An abstract should not include internal headings. It should not contain parenthetical citations of items listed in the bibliography or reference section. (If a reference is required, sufficient information should be given in the abstract to identify the source fully.) Diagrams or other illustrations should not be used.

The abstract is the summary used when inquiries are made on the content of projects. Looking ahead to on-line searching of theses, the abstract will likely be used for search information.

Sample Abstract

Abstract

*[Title of Project: If this is long, carry it over to the next line and indent the
run over portion]

[Author's name as on Title Page]

[M.A., American Studies; Month and Year of Degree Conferral]

The Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg

[Name of First Reader], First Reader

N.B. The heading is single spaced, but the text must be double spaced.

The abstract should not exceed 350 words. In most fonts, this comes out to roughly one and one-half pages. Every word counts, even *a*, *and*, and *the*.

Table of Contents "Standard" Heading Scheme

(Note use of capitalization for chapter titles and subheadings; these formats should be the same as in your text)

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FINAL STEPS

Plan ahead so that you are able to turn in a draft of your project to your readers before the certification date for graduation. Usually this date falls about 8 weeks into the fall or spring semester. Resubmit your project to your readers who will determine if the work is ready to be submitted. The project may be subject even then to additional revisions after review by the program coordinator. If your readers and coordinator determine that you are ready to complete your program, you have until finals week to complete your revisions and prepare your final copy of the project for submission.

To complete the process, you need to pay a binding fee at the Bursar's office. Take the receipt along with two copies of the project with your signature on both copies to the American Studies Program staff assistant in W356 Olmsted Building. We take care of getting faculty signatures. Then you're done!

Master's students are invited to walk in commencement ceremonies held at the Giant Center in Hershey. You get to walk on stage with your master's "hood" and you are ritually hooded by university officials. At the end of the ritual, your photograph is taken with degree in hand.