Senior Project Instructions and Guidelines for Geography Majors (B.A./B.S.)

The senior project is the final requirement for the B.A. and B.S. degree in the Department of Geography, Environment, and Society (GES) and should reflect your best work. The senior project is a process of research, reflection, and writing. As the culmination of undergraduate training, each project should develop from an interest or specialization defined through geography courses. Students undertake a wide variety of projects, and in all cases submit a “Senior Thesis” prior to graduation. Students usually register for the SP course one semester prior to graduation. Resources: http://www.geog.umn.edu/ugrad/geography.php - seniorProject

**SENIOR PROJECT (SP) OPTIONS**

There are three registration options that fulfill the credit/course requirement for the senior project.

1. **“Two Credit Add On” Option** - GEOG 3997 (2cr + concurrent registration in a Geography course related to area of specialization)
2. **“Stand-Alone” Senior Project** - GEOG 3996 (3-4 cr)
3. **Senior Project Seminar** - GEOG 3985W (4cr) or URBS 3995W (2cr)

**“Two Credit Add On” Option** - GEOG 3997 + GES breadth or elective course

The most common SP option is as an extension of an upper-division Geography course related to your area of concentration. For this option, students concurrently register for a 3xxx-5xxx level GES course of interest and a 2-credit senior project directed reading (GEOG 3997). During the semester, students will complete work beyond the regular course requirements to satisfy the scope and quality expected of a senior project. This project option tends to focus on reviewing and synthesizing existing scholarly work, rather than generating original research. The exact length and format of the project will be determined by the course instructor (i.e. your project supervisor), but may involve:

1. More intensive requirements for an existing assignment. (e.g. if a standard paper is 15 pages with 10 references, a senior project may involve 20-25 pages and 20 references)
2. A synthesis assignment tying shorter course assignments together into a single thesis paper.
3. A shorter thesis paper that is combined with other forms of scholarly work, such as a database, series of maps, poster for presentation at a professional conference, or annotated bibliography.
4. A project that is based on course material and concepts but is otherwise free-standing from existing assignments.

Students should select a course that matches their interests or develops a desired skill set. Ideally, students will have taken at least one previous course with the faculty instructor. Note that some upper-division courses do not offer the 2-credit add-on, so make sure to contact the instructor prior to registration (or as soon as you decide you would like to complete your senior project in coordination with a course). During this conversation, you should also ask about their expectations for workload and determine how much responsibility you will have in picking the topic and structure of the project.

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1 GES courses have GEOG, URBS, or GIS designators
“Stand-Alone” Senior Project - GEOG 3996

Another way to complete the senior project is as a stand-alone 3 credit project. This may be a good option if you have a topic about which you are especially passionate, are interested in doing your own research, or are intending to go to graduate school. The stand-alone option gives you the most flexibility in topic and structure of the senior project, but also requires more self-motivation, organization, effort, and creativity to complete. Students are responsible for contacting a faculty supervisor, proposing a topic, and working with them to refine and carry out the project. Expect that it may take a full year in order to plan the project, collect data, and write up the results.

Stand-alone projects tend to incorporate original research. For students with an environmental geography specialization, this might mean assisting a professor or graduate student with summer field work and then writing up a portion of the results. For those with a GIS specialization, it could entail mapping and analyzing a unique dataset, writing about the value of the new data or the process through which the data was collected. Human/cultural geography students might perform interviews or lead focus groups and examine how the responses support or challenge a theoretical lens for how the world works.

For a successful project:
- Start thinking about topic ideas and discussing them with others early to give yourself enough time to plan and complete the work.
- Make sure to develop a strong working relationship GES faculty by the end of junior year. This may involve taking several of their classes and speaking with them about their research during office hours.
- Depending on the scope of your research project, consider applying for funding (more information in the Resources section below).

Senior Project Seminar - GEOG 3985W or URBS 3995W

The third option offers a more structured approach (though less topical flexibility) to completing the senior project. Students attend a weekly seminar and write an academic paper on a predetermined topic. Faculty instructors and seminar topics vary with every offering, limiting possible areas of focus. Unless you desire to work with the seminar course instructor, this should be considered a “back-up” option.
- GEOG3985W is only occasionally offered and may not be available during the desired semester. Students choosing this format enroll in GEOG 3985W during the regular registration period after contacting the GES Advisor for a permission number (geogadv@umn.edu).
- Those interested in urban studies topics may enroll in URBS 3995W (space permitting) with a permission number from the Urban Studies advisor (pent0006@umn.edu).

**Consult the GES Advisor and the “Timeline for Planning and Completing Your Senior Project” handout for more detailed information about the registration process and necessary paperwork**
**SENIOR PROJECT PLANNING**

**Selecting a Senior Project Format/Registration Option:**

The three options for completing the senior project allow varying levels of responsibility in choosing the topic and structure of the project.

To help decide which of the three options is best for you:

- Make an appointment to browse the collection of Geography student’s senior projects and talk with seniors about their senior project experience.
- Talk with the GES Advisor or a faculty member about your early ideas.
- Consider your short-term timeline:
  - How much time do you have before graduation?
  - How much time are you willing to devote to your thesis project?
  - Do you feel like you have a strong connection with at least one faculty member?
- Consider your long-term goals:
  - Are you planning to attend graduate school, a professional program, or apply for a specific job after graduation? How might your senior project help you attain this goal?
  - Are you unsure what you want to do after graduating? Consider developing a project that would help you explore an area of interest or otherwise help you to define or refine your goals.

To investigate graduate schools and career options, check out the CLA Career Center (www.clacareer.umn.edu), various internship and career fairs on campus, and the Association of American Geographers website (http://www.aag.org/cs/careers) (especially the sections on “Opportunities for Students” and “Preparing for a Geography Career”). Also review our geography website: “Research and Writing Resources” & “Internship, Volunteer, and Career Resources” (http://www.geog.umn.edu/ugrad/)

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**Choosing a Senior Project Topic:**

There are a number of things you can do to brainstorm potential topics and/or decide which upper-division course would best fit your interests. These strategies are especially relevant for those completing a Stand Alone project, as you will be expected to have a very active role in selecting the topic and designing the project:

- Keep a notebook about interesting ideas from courses, extracurricular activities, and conversations with students/faculty
- Attend lectures, colloquia, and community events
- Volunteer, complete an internship, or work in a laboratory or community organization related to your interests and career goals.
- Consider whether a smaller project completed for a course could serve as the basis of your senior project. Is there a topic, concept, or methodology you would like to learn more about or follow through with in greater detail?
- Look at the Geography, Environment, and Society Writing Guide for more tips on choosing and narrowing down topics
• **The Senior Project Supervisor:**

Choose a faculty supervisor who has expertise or interests related to your general topic or who uses methods that are compatible with your proposed topic or approach. Some faculty members will only supervise students with whom they have worked previously, so make sure to take at least one to two courses with potential supervisors. If you choose to complete the 2-credit Add-on or Senior Project Seminar option, your project supervisor will be your course instructor. If you design a Stand Alone Project, you will need to make arrangements with a faculty member to supervise your project outside the framework of a regular course. Regardless of which registration option you choose, be sure to talk with your project supervisor before the beginning of the semester in which you are planning to complete the senior project!

**Tips:** Use faculty office hours to discuss your interests and ideas, not just to pass a course. See their webpages to get to know their broader interests. Meet with faculty instructors of a course you are taking, even if you work more closely with a Graduate TA.

• **The Senior Project Proposal:**

Meet with your supervisor to discuss your interests and their expectations. To prepare for this meeting, you should develop some topic ideas and a sense of existing research related to the area of study. Be professional when contacting and meeting with faculty and use the “8 Questions” to help guide the discussion. Individual faculty preferences vary. Students must complete a Student-Faculty Contract (SFC) form to register for the senior project course; this form may be used for the proposal, or faculty may have you write up a proposal in another format.

**8 Questions You Should Ask your Project Supervisor:**
1. What is the process through which I choose and refine the topic of my project?
2. Do you expect my project to be “scholarly”? Please explain to me what that means to you?
3. How frequently will we meet (or email) to discuss my progress?
4. How many hours per week do you think I will need to put into my project?
5. Will there be “milestones” assigned over the course of the semester (e.g. topic statement, annotated bibliography, rough drafts, etc.)? What are the consequences of late submission of a milestone?
6. What are the minimum and maximum acceptable amounts of data, references, and page length? Does page length include tables, figures, maps, and bibliography?
7. What is the due date for project?
8. What criteria will you use to assess my work and assign a final grade?

• **Develop a Timeline for your Senior Project:**

Students are encouraged to begin the process of identifying a senior project supervisor during their junior year. Make sure to contact the potential senior project supervisor at least one semester prior to when you plan to begin working on the project. Most students begin and complete the project within a semester, while the most successful projects are planned in advance. Integrate applications for UROPs and other fellowships into your timeline; these programs can provide you with funding for your project and may open future opportunities for career or graduate school! Some projects may require more than one semester to complete – see the GES Advisor for registration options.
RESOURCES FOR WRITING YOUR SENIOR THESIS

Read the Geography, Environment, and Society Writing Guide. The guide includes:
• tips for choosing and narrowing down topics and thesis statements
• a detailed description of elements of effective writing
• instructions for making and labeling figures
• writing samples from alumni geography students

Refer to additional style manuals to help structure your paper:
• The Chicago Manual of Style: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org

Check out other U of M Writing Resources:
• Library Page for Geography: https://www.lib.umn.edu/subjects/rqs/103
• Peer Research Consultants: www.lib.umn.edu/services/prc
• SMART Learning Commons: www.smart.umn.edu
• Other Citation Guides (APA, MLA): www.writing.umn.edu/sws/quickhelp/sources.html
• In-Person and Online Tutorials and Workshops on Research: https://www.lib.umn.edu/instruction/tutorials#tools

• Apply for Funding Opportunities:
UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program):
The Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program provides up to $1700 in funding for excellent undergraduate projects. UROP proposals may be written for research in ANY field (including humanities and social sciences.) Application deadlines are usually in October and February, with funding available for the semester following. Recipients of the UROP are required to give a public presentation of their work, such as at the Undergraduate Symposium or another research conference. If you have a project idea and a faculty member you would like to work with, ask for help writing a proposal! For more information about the UROP and other undergraduate research scholarship opportunities, check out: http://www.urop.umn.edu/index.html

Important note: Students may not receive course credit and UROP funds in the same semester. Students may sign up for a senior project course the semester before or after the paid UROP semester. If the senior project course is taken prior to the UROP, after fulfilling the UROP project requirements, students complete their senior project requirements; usually a thesis or formal project report that exceeds the UROP project.

MSROP (Multicultural Summer Research Opportunity Program)
The program provides undergraduate students who are underrepresented in their discipline and/or who are first-generation college students an opportunity to develop research and inquiry skills with a faculty mentor on an individual basis or as part of a research team, which may include graduate students, research scientists, technicians and other MSROP students. Through the mentoring process, students are introduced to the methodology of their chosen discipline by involving them in research and other scholarly activities. Such involvement is expected to improve the quality of the students' undergraduate experience, to enhance the likelihood of their completing bachelor’s degrees, and to attract larger numbers of prepared students of color to graduate or professional schools. See: https://diversity.umn.edu/gradeducation/msrop