April, 2025

It is time to think seriously about **your senior thesis**. This memo offers you the basic information about senior tutorial.

**The Preliminary Proposal:** Unlike junior tutorial, the senior tutorial allows little time for exploration or experimentation. Instead, it is focused entirely on the research and writing of a thesis under the guidance of a tutor. The thesis can, but does not have to be, related to the work of the junior essay.

**We ask now for a preliminary senior thesis proposal of 750-1000 words, with an initial bibliography of 6-8 works.**  The proposal should identify a complex of questions and texts you wish to explore in your thesis.  I encourage you to consult the document “How to write a good research proposal” on the undergraduate [Senior section](http://complit.fas.harvard.edu/seniors) of the Comp Lit website and to peruse the sample Senior Thesis Proposals on the same page before writing your proposal.  Among the suggestions recommended are the following prompts:

* What has prompted your interest in the topic?
Ease your reader into the field of your research.  A small case-study, a quotation, or an anecdote can be of use here.  This creates the initial "point-of-departure," introducing the reader to the range of questions that motivate your work.
* What kinds of questions will you be asking?
What is your problematic?  What philosophical, literary, social, ideological, or historical problems will your work engage? What kinds of questions *do not* interest you?  What categories of thought and critical assumptions involved?
* How do your questions fit into a broader intellectual tradition?
What is the tradition of answering these types of questions?  Where do you expect to continue or break with the tradition?
* How will you answer your questions?
What are your methods?  Close reading?  Distant reading?  Interviews?  Archival research?  Text analysis?  Be practical and specific here.
* Where will you look for your answers?
Create a sense of your archive.  What kind of materials will you be looking at (literary, legal, scientific)?  What period?  What language?  What medium?  What genre?  This could be as simple as "Ulysses, by James Joyce" and as complicated as "Comparative traditions of Medieval Slavonic hagiography."  How will you structure your research?

**The Thesis Advisor and Mentor:** In addition to developing a plan, students are encouraged to participate in the process of choosing a tutor. I will do my best to accommodate your request. The 2025-26 Tutor profiles will become available within a month or so. Students should feel free to meet casually with prospective tutors. **Remember that you may also ask a faculty member to serve as your senior thesis advisor.**

All seniors will work with a **faculty mentor** as well as a senior thesis advisor. The mentor will serve as an expert consultant. They will work with the student to develop a final thesis proposal, and will meet periodically throughout the year to discuss progress and evaluate the student’s work. **Please indicate on your preliminary proposal the faculty member whom you would like to mentor your work.**  In an ideal world, the mentor would be someone with whom you have taken a class and who is a member of the Comparative Literature department, but exceptions can be made.

**Joint Concentrators:** If you are a joint concentrator, **your thesis must deal with a topic relevant to both departments, so you should be sure to determine in advance the expectations of the other department and to confirm that your topic is acceptable to them**. If you are primary in Comp Lit, you should enroll in Comp Lit 99a/b. If you are allied in Comp Lit, then you should enroll in the thesis tutorial in your primary department, although we will provide you with a thesis advisor in Comp Lit.

**The Orals List:** Finally, please remember to draw up a preliminary orals list of the 5-7 texts (I use the word to include any object that you can interpret—verbal, visual, filmic, musical, etc.) that have been important to you this past year, and to write one or two lines about each work. You will find this a useful resource next spring when you pull your final orals reading list together.

Please submit this list and your senior tutorial request form to Isaure Mignotte (mignotte@fas.harvard.edu) by **2:00 on Wednesday, May 7th.**

As always, I would be happy to discuss any of these matters with you. Don’t hesitate to email me at snaddaff@fas.harvard.edu to set up an appointment.