

## **Guidelines for Students and Advisors for SS 4501 Senior Thesis Sustainability Science and Society Majors**

If you are majoring in Sustainability Science and Society (SSSU), you may choose from a variety of culminating experiences for your degree. One option is the senior thesis, which this document covers. For information on other options such as internships, enterprise, independent projects, or study abroad, see the SSSU advisor.

For the senior thesis option, you should enroll in SS 4501 for the semester you will be working on the thesis. Please enroll for 3 credits in a section under your thesis advisor's name. The Social Sciences Department Coordinator or SSSU advisor can help you with this enrollment process.

If you are considering a thesis, we strongly encourage you to take SS 4630 (Advanced Research in the Social Sciences) in the spring semester before your final year. This course helps you understand what research is, and helps you design your thesis project. If you cannot take SS 4630, you should begin designing your project independently with the advisor you want to work with at least one semester before taking SS 4501. Thus keep in mind that the thesis process will require work over two semesters.

If you are thinking of doing the senior thesis option, please carefully consider the following with your advisor and plan out the semester accordingly:

1. Which faculty member would I like to work with? You need to work with a faculty member in the Department of Social Sciences and who has some expertise that aligns with your research interests. Core faculty in the Sustainability Science and Society major are: [Angie Carter](#), [Kari Henquinet](#), [Don Lafreniere](#), [Nancy Langston](#), [Chelsea Schelly](#), [Roman Sidortsov](#), and [Shan Zhou](#). However, other faculty members--[Richelle Winkler](#), [Adam Wellstead](#), and others-- also have expertise in sustainability, and you may see a good fit with a different [Social Sciences Department faculty member](#) for your project. Please discuss your ideas with the SSSU advisor and talk to a few faculty members about possible thesis ideas before making a decision.
2. What graduate program and/or future career path are you interested in pursuing? Consider what the thesis experience will entail and what the end product will look like by the end of the semester. Because the Sustainability Science and Society major is interdisciplinary, you will want to discuss what kind of a thesis product would be most helpful for your future. For example, sociologists might aim to write an article length thesis modeled on a journal article, while other fields such as history expect a longer (e.g., 40-60 page) document.
3. How will you execute an independent research project? More specifically, how will you frame a research question and identify data that speaks to this question? How will you develop a core argument and/or hypothesis to test that is based on prior research related to your project? Will you need to submit an IRB application and have it approved before you can collect data? For some, thesis research will entail data collection in addition to analysis and writing. Others might analyze primary sources from archives or repositories to test a hypothesis.

4. A brief, but formal proposal for your research project should be written up and approved by the faculty member you will work with for the thesis. This proposal can be something you develop in SS 4630 or write independently in collaboration with the faculty member you plan to work with. Once that proposal is approved, your faculty advisor will give permission for you to enroll in SS 4501, the senior thesis course.
5. You should fill out and discuss the Individual Development Plan form on page 3-4 of this document with your faculty mentor during the first week of the semester in which you take SS 4501.

## Individual Development Plan for Undergraduate Research Theses<sup>1</sup>

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are living planning documents jointly developed and modified as needed by the student and the research mentor. The plan is a tool that helps identify goals, opportunities, and potential hurdles during the student's time with the advisor. The plan also provides agreed-upon expectations that can minimize misunderstandings and conflict among students and advisor, because all involved agree to the plan.

<i><b>Motivation Focus Questions for Advisee</b></i>	<i><b>Motivation Focus Comments by Advisor</b></i>
What is your motivation for pursuing an undergraduate thesis?	Comment on your interest in supervising an undergraduate researcher.
What are your career goals and where do you see yourself in 3-5 years?	Comment on how the planned research experience and resulting mentor-mentee relationship will help to achieve these goals.
What does success in this research experience look like to you?	Comment on what success looks like from the perspective of a research mentor.
What do you consider to be your major strengths and weaknesses in meeting the requirements of the thesis?	Comment on what you can contribute to maximize your mentee's strengths and help overcome any real or perceived weaknesses.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Pavlis Honors College URIP IDP

What actions do you want to undertake now to be better prepared to complete the thesis?	Comment on how the actions can be fulfilled and what resources are needed to accomplish them.
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**Questions that should be discussed by the Mentor and Research Intern**

***These are issues that need to be addressed and clarified; however, a detailed accounting is not required by the Social Sciences Department unless you would like to share. Your signatures below indicate that a discussion of these issues has occurred.***

How many hours per week and at what times/days is the student expected to work and/or meet with the advisor?
What is the primary means of communication between advisor and advisee? Where will shared files be stored?
When will the advisor give feedback to the advisee on performance and make suggestions for how to improve or progress? How should the advisor and advisee prepare for this?
The standard operating procedures for working on this research, which all group members must follow and the mentee agrees to follow include (e.g. documentation procedures, attend weekly lab meetings, cleaning up, notifications, etc.):
Other considerations not addressed above:

By signing below, we agree to these goals, expectations and working parameters for this research project.

Advisee's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Return Completed and Signed form to Kari Henquinet ([kbhenqui@mtu.edu](mailto:kbhenqui@mtu.edu))