

Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures (SPO)

Senior Thesis Handbook

Princeton University

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Writing in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures

An Overview

The Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures (SPO) offers a liberal arts concentration designed to give students a thorough grounding in the language, literature, and cultures of Spanish and/or Portuguese speaking countries and societies. Students are encouraged to complement their courses in Spanish or Portuguese with related and varied courses in other literatures, as well as in art history, anthropology, sociology, comparative literature, and other humanities subjects. In addition to serving as the focus for an education in liberal arts, the SPO concentration can be the basis for graduate or professional study. In mostly small classes and seminars, allowing extensive student-teacher interaction, students become equipped to take up careers in many walks of life, including journalism, business, law, government, service, and international affairs.

In language acquisition courses, students develop the ability to read, write and communicate in Spanish or Portuguese. Content-based instruction seeks to enable undergraduates to become 'cultural translators,' by promoting knowledge and understanding of societies and cultures in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa, as well as in diasporic communities and immigrant contexts. In more advanced seminars, often taught in Spanish and/or Portuguese, students reflect about global perspectives and particular international issues in greater depth. The thesis represents a culmination of this process. Seniors are expected to contribute to a particular field of inquiry, adding to a scholarly conversation by answering a significant question about Spanish or Portuguese languages or cultures in an original way, by reflecting on a substantial body of research, or by crafting an original creative project or translation.

The Senior Thesis is normally written in English, and should be between 15,000 and 20,000 words.

Goals of the Thesis

A senior thesis in SPO should aim to accomplish a set of goals. Our theses are written from a myriad of disciplinary perspectives. In some cases, a student's independent project seeks to creatively explore an aspect of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures. In others, a student might undertake a translation, accompanied by critical commentaries. In most cases, independent work in SPO combines approaches that incorporate analytical tools associated with various disciplines, including literary criticism and theory, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, history, politics, and so forth.

Although each thesis experience is unique, the range of skills developed in the process of writing a senior thesis should serve students well beyond their time in the University. In all cases, senior theses build on what students have learned in the classroom, and as the case may be, during their experiences studying and/or researching abroad. Independent work serves as a platform through which to accomplish the following objectives:

- To pose well-formulated and informed questions about an aspect of Spanish and/or Portuguese languages and cultures, identifying appropriate and successful strategies to answer them.
- To practice the art of reading for substance, argument, and nuance.
- To sharpen the ability to articulate and defend a position, in part by testing hypotheses, considering potential objections, and addressing contradictions.
- To develop deeper knowledge and understanding of Spanish and Portuguese languages and cultures, as well as the ability to relate the findings of a thesis to a larger context.
- To write more clearly and persuasively.
- To become skillful, confident and enthusiastic about interacting with different ways of thinking.

Writing a Thesis: The Process

Brainstorming & Advising

The senior thesis is a major commitment of a student's time and energy, and an important yardstick for choosing a topic is willingness to spend many hours on a particular set of texts or problems. Sometimes, a thesis arises from material covered in class, or in previous research conducted within the context of a final paper or JP. Just as often, topics emerge from experiences abroad, longstanding or new preoccupations, and conversations with faculty members. Students are encouraged to discuss potential thesis topics as early as possible with faculty members, so that they can develop a successful framework.

Students should select a Senior Thesis adviser by the end of September at the latest. Topics chosen in the past have ranged across the whole field of Spanish and Portuguese studies, and have included literature, politics, music, film, art, philosophy, socio-economic questions, and a variety of other issues. Given all of these possibilities, it is essential for thesis writers to define a topic or set of preoccupations that can be successfully addressed within the time constraints of the thesis calendar. To that end, in a small and intimate department like ours, concentrators can count on faculty members as a resource. Students are also encouraged to peruse the department's archive of previous theses, available through the Undergraduate Administrator.

Recommended Reference Works (General)

Students can consult their adviser, the Departmental Representative, and other faculty members for more project-specific sources, texts, and research methods. The following list of works has generally proved to be helpful.

1. For All Students

The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations
MLA International Bibliography (see Databases on University's library web site)
The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics

2. Spanish

Moliner, *Diccionario del uso del español*
Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua española*
Casares y Sánchez, *Diccionario ideológico de la lengua española*

American Heritage Larousse, Spanish Dictionary (Spanish-English, English Spanish)
Corominas, *Breve diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana*
Real Academia Española, *Nueva gramática de la lengua española*
Solé & Solé, *Modern Spanish Syntax*
Rafael Lapesa, *Historia de la lengua española*
Real Academia Española, *Ortografía de la lengua española*
Real Academia Española, *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*
Bosque, REDES. *Diccionario combinatorio del español contemporáneo*
Slager, *Pequeño diccionario de construcciones preposicionales*
Reyes, *Cómo escribir bien en español*
Roca and Lipski (ed.), *Spanish in the United States: linguistic contact and diversity*
Hualde et alii, *Introducción a la lingüística hispánica*
Literature: General

T. Navarro Tomás, *Métrica española*
Juan Luis Alborg, *Historia de la literatura española*. I: Edad media y renacimiento ; II: Época barroca ; III: Siglo XV III ; IV: El romanticismo
History of Spanish Literature. I: A.D. Deyermond, *The Middle Ages*; II: R.O. Jones, *Golden Age: Prose and Poetry* ; III: E.M. Wilson and Duncan Moir, *Golden Age: Theatre* ; IV: Nigel Glendinning, *Eighteenth Century* ; V: Donald L. Shaw, *Nineteenth Century*; VI: Gerald G. Brown, *Twentieth Century*
Jean Franco, *An Introduction to Spanish American Literature*
Sylvia Molloy, *Las Letras de Borges*
Angel Rama, *Más allá del boom: literatura y mercado*
Angel Rama, *La ciudad letrada*

Historical Background

Joseph O'Callagan, *History of Medieval Spain*
J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain*
Domínguez Ortíz, *Golden Age Spain*
Américo Castro, *De la edad conflictiva*
Raymond Carr, *Spain, 1808-1975*
John Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions*
Stanley Stein, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America*
James Lockhart and Stuart Schwartz, *Early Latin America*
Cambridge History of Latin America

3. Portuguese

Antônio Houaiss, *Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa*
Domingos Paschoal Cegalla, *Novíssima Gramática da Língua Portuguesa*
Antônio José Saraiva e Óscar Lopes, *História da Literatura Portuguesa*
Antonio Candido, *Formação da Literatura Brasileira*
Alfredo Bosi, *História Concisa da Literatura Brasileira*

Alfredo Bosi, *Dialética da Colonização*

Lourenço Dantas Mota (ed.), *Introdução ao Brasil: um Banquete no Trópico*

João Cezar de Castro Rocha (ed.), *Brasil Nenhum Existe: uma pequena enciclopédia*

Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (ed.), *História Geral da Civilização Brasileira*

Fernando Antonio Novais (ed.), *História da Vida Privada no Brasil*

Resources

Senior Thesis Writing Group

Independent research can feel like a solitary and daunting activity, but it need not be so. The Department of Spanish and Portuguese organizes an early Senior Thesis Writing Group that meets throughout the fall semester and into April. The group is led by an advanced graduate student, and serves as a platform through which seniors can address a variety of issues. These may range from the mechanics of citing sources to broader questions involving the formulation of a hypothesis, the scope of a project, and writing style. The Senior Thesis Writing Group is a forum where students can “workshop” sections of their thesis, talk about their discoveries and challenges, dispense advice, and learn about the work of their peers. In that way, it often serves as a way to stimulate camaraderie, and can help to turn the pressures of writing a thesis and conducting individual research into a stimulating and collegial activity.

Firestone Library Collections & Librarians

The Librarian for Latin American, Iberian and Latino Studies, Fernando Acosta-Rodriguez, is always available to offer guidance and suggestions regarding research, and particularly about the exceptional resources in Firestone Library. Princeton holds one of the world’s most impressive collections of Latin American Ephemera as well as manuscripts and papers of outstanding authors like Reinaldo Arenas, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Alejandra Pizarnik, Mario Vargas Llosa, and many others. Students are highly encouraged to explore and work with these materials. Regardless of the types of research that their projects might entail, students always benefit from making appointments with Fernando Acosta-Rodriguez as early as possible in the thesis research process.

Contact:
Fernando Acosta-Rodriguez
Librarian for Latin American, Iberian and Latino Studies
facosta@princeton.edu
Firestone Library B-14-P
Tel.: (609) 258-3193

Funding

The Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures is pleased to offer a number of funding opportunities for undergraduate students. Resources are available to assist concentrators with the costs of senior thesis research, including travel abroad. The best time to use these funds is during the summer preceding the senior year. Students should discuss their plans with their adviser and/or the Departmental Representative.

All applications for funding in support of senior thesis research will go through the Student Activities Funding Engine, or SAFE. Please do not apply directly to the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for funds in support of these activities, but submit an application through SAFE.

Juniors wishing to apply for summer research grants apply in the spring, while seniors may apply in the early fall for funds to conduct research over the fall break or during intersession.

The Writing Center

Located in Whitman College, the Writing Center offers free one on one meetings with experienced fellow writers trained to consult on assignments in any discipline. Special 80-minute meetings are available for Senior Thesis writers, who may sign up to work with a graduate student fellow from the department of their choice. The Writing Center also holds 50-minute regular conferences seven days a week, and drop in hours Sunday through Thursday evenings. Enter through Baker Hall. www.princeton.edu/writing/appt

Expectations

Standards and Grading

The final grade will be determined by a consensus between the thesis adviser and a second reader. These general standards are adopted across several of the University's departments.

An A or A- thesis defines a research question, formulates, and advances a clear claim (hypothesis) or set of claims. It gathers, presents, and analyzes evidence in support of its claim(s) while reviewing and engaging the scholarship of others. It assesses critically the strengths and weaknesses of its own logic, evidence, and findings. Finally, it relates its conclusions to a larger context and makes an original contribution to knowledge. An A level thesis is clear, gracefully written, and well organized. It demonstrates that the writer has conducted a close and critical reading of texts and grappled with issues raised in the relevant scholarly literature. Its argument shows intellectual creativity, is sensitive to historical or cultural context, and is supported by a well-chosen variety of specific examples or pieces of evidence.

A B+ or B thesis demonstrates many aspects of A level work but falls short of it in either the organization and clarity of its writing, the formulation and presentation of its argument, or the quality of research. Some theses in this category are solid works containing flashes of insight into many of the issues raised in the relevant scholarly literature. Others give evidence of independent thought, but are not entirely clear or convincing in the presentation of their argument.

A B- thesis demonstrates command of the research material and understanding of historical or cultural context but provides a less than thorough defense of the writer's independent argument because of weaknesses in writing, argument, organization, or use of evidence.

A C+, C, or C- thesis lacks a cogent argument and offers little more than a mere summary of ideas and information, is insensitive to historical or cultural context, suffers from frequent factual errors, unclear writing, poor organization, or inadequate primary research, or presents some combination of these problems. Whereas the grading standards for written work between A and C are concerned with the presentation of argument and evidence, a thesis that belongs to the D or F categories demonstrates fundamental inadequacies

A D thesis demonstrates serious deficiencies or flaws in the student's command of the research material and construction of a cogent argument

An F thesis fails to demonstrate competence in the research materials or the construction of an argument, and/or is unfinished Above all, an F thesis indicates a student's lack of effort.

Senior Thesis and Departmental Prizes

Upon nomination by the Faculty, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures awards the following departmental prizes to distinguished students:

1. Premio Ángel Rama
For excellence by a freshman or sophomore in advanced Spanish courses.
2. Prêmio Machado de Assis
For excellence in advanced undergraduate Portuguese courses.
3. Premio María Zambrano
For an outstanding Junior Paper in the Department.
4. Isidore and Helen Sacks Memorial Prize
For an outstanding senior thesis in Spanish or Spanish-American studies.
5. Vicente Llorens Castillo Senior Prize in Spanish
For overall academic excellence by a graduating senior.
6. Prêmio Lee M. Elman '58
For overall academic excellence in Portuguese courses by an undergraduate student.

There are additional thesis prizes for which faculty can nominate concentrators, including:

- Stanley J. Stein Prize in Latin American Studies
- Kenneth Maxwell Senior Prize in Brazilian Studies
- Carolyn Drucker Prize in Jewish Studies
- Center for Human Values Senior Thesis Prize
- J. Wells Henderson '43 Senior Thesis Prize in Law and Public Affairs

Mechanics

Formatting

In preparing their independent work, students should consistently follow the MLA Handbook or The Chicago Manual of Style. More details regarding thesis submission will be sent by memo in March of senior year.

Title page format for a senior thesis (sample):

Thesis Title

Your Name

Thesis Adviser's Name

Submitted to: Princeton University

Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures

This Thesis represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

Senior Thesis Calendar

All papers are due in the department's office or sent as attachment by 4:30 PM on the date specified. Please sign or type University pledge and signature on all papers.

Please refer to the Senior Calendar on the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures web site:

[\(http://www.princeton.edu/spo/undergraduate/concentration/senior-calendar/\)](http://www.princeton.edu/spo/undergraduate/concentration/senior-calendar/)