

Amherst College Library & Writing Center

Support for Thesis Writers

The Library and the Writing Center provide a range of support services in a variety of formats to support thesis writers throughout the year. While our teaching often emphasizes the development of knowledge, skills, or habits, we also create opportunities for students to build a community of support, talk openly about their struggles and successes, motivate each other, work in groups, and share their work with a broader audience.

This document highlights the programming and services we offer in a typical year.

SUMMER (BEFORE SENIOR YEAR)

Weekly Thesis Research Table

Organizer: Library, Writing Center

Purpose: community building, knowledge-skills-habits

The thesis research table meets weekly over the course of the summer to give thesis writers the opportunity to discuss research and writing strategies, tools, and practices with librarians and writing associates. The group also plays a role in helping students develop a cohort of support.

Summer Workshops (see Fall & Spring semesters for descriptions of specific workshops)

Organizer: Library, Writing Center, Academic Technology Services, Center for Community Engagement

Purpose: various

We offer a variety of writing and research workshops for thesis writers each summer, covering topics such as developing productive habits for large projects, writing and reading while researching, citation management, finding and using images, and using alternative writing software/apps.

Research appointments

Organizer: Library

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

Typically 30-60 minutes, research & instruction librarians meet one-on-one with students to discuss the kinds of sources that might be most useful, construct search strategies for books, media, and relevant databases, and map out topics and research plans.

Writing appointments

Organizer: Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

Writing Center Associates offer one-to-one writing mentoring for thesis students at any stage of their writing process. Associates work with students on time management and planning, establishing productive habits, integrating research and writing processes, processing feedback on early drafts, acting as a test reader, and developing revision skills.

FALL (SENIOR YEAR)

Weekly Thesis Write-in

Organizer: Library, Writing Center

Purpose: community building, knowledge-skills-habits, working

Every Thursday night, the Writing Center and Library open up the Center for Humanistic Inquiry to students writing theses (and similar long-term, complex writing projects) to work side-by-side, fueled by snacks, coffee and camaraderie. Materials are provided to help with goal-setting and project management.

Planning and Mapping out Your Thesis

Organizer: Library, Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

Library and Writing Center staff guide students through the processes of mapping out the thesis project to begin to develop a clear, tenable research plan and a timeline in which to execute it. We also discuss some of the habits for productivity and creativity that can help students make steady, incremental progress.

Reading and Writing While Researching

Organizer: Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

This workshop offers instruction and practice in: varying reading strategies and speed, according to the purpose for reading a particular source; reading effectively and efficiently; and writing throughout the research process, to help students both articulate what they have learned and develop their own ideas.

Image workshops

Organizer: Library

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

This workshop focuses on finding and using high-quality images in a variety of subject areas, with emphasis on subscription and publicly available image resources, and proper use and citation of images in theses, presentations, and creative projects.

Zotero

Organizer: Library

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

These workshops offer tips and techniques for organizing and managing citations, as well as creating in-text citations and bibliographies in Microsoft Word using the free bibliographic manager Zotero.

Productive Work Habits

Organizer: Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

This workshop introduces students to habits associated with productive writing and with strategies for time/project management. Students are led through a process of designing working plans for their own thesis projects.

Journaling for Thesis Writers

Organizer: Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

Writing Center associates offer a workshop that introduces thesis writers to the idea of keeping a journal while writing a thesis. Kinds of entries that might be useful are presented and practiced, such as They Say/I Say while reading sources, reflecting on writing and research processes, and preparing for and reflecting on meetings with an advisor.

Introduction to Scrivener

Organizer: Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

Scrivener is writing software that facilitates a flexible writing process, and many thesis writers find it useful in creating and revising their projects. This workshop introduces its basic features and prompts students to consider how it might affect their writing process.

Research appointments

Organizer: Library

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits
See previous description (Summer)

Writing Appointments

Organizer: Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits
See previous description (Summer)

Political Science Thesis Workshops

Organizer: Department, Library, Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits, community building

Librarian and Writing Center Associate host seven workshops for Political Science thesis students. Workshops walk students through the thesis process beginning with solidifying a topic through to revising the written draft, culminating in public speaking practice in preparation for the defense. Students talk in groups about their processes and ideas, and for each workshop, a different faculty member participates to facilitate department-specific conversations.

Anthro/Soc Thesis Workshops

Organizer: Department, Library, Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits, community building

Librarian attends the first three required workshops to discuss how to formulate a researchable question, manage citations, and review individual research plans. Writing Center Associates host a two-part workshop for Anthropology and Sociology thesis students. In the first workshop, students reflect on their thesis writing process and discuss how to break the thesis into manageable parts. In the second workshop, students learn about the conventional patterns and features of theses in these disciplines.

Workshops for Art History Majors

Organizer: Library

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

Subject librarian introduces students to core resources in Art History and related disciplines, and leads a discussion of research strategizing, finding and using images, and citation management.

Economics 498

Organizer: Library

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

Librarian makes two visits to the Senior Departmental Honors Seminar. During the first visit, librarian shows students how to find economic literature using three strategies: browsing journals' table of contents, browsing using the Journal of Economic Literature Classification scheme, and database keyword searching. During the second visit, librarian shows students how to find statistics and data using print statistical sources and online data repositories.

INTERTERM

Jump-Start Your Science Thesis

Organizer: Library, Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

Science thesis writers gather to discuss their writing progress with peers and learn strategies for writing and revising their Introductions and Materials & Methods sections. Students also leave with a plan for completing the remaining sections of their thesis.

Research appointments

Organizer: Library

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

See previous description (SUMMER)

Writing Appointments

Organizer: Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

See previous description (SUMMER)

Thesis Retreat

Organizer: Writing Center

Purpose: community building, peer motivation, working;

Students may sign up for multiple week-long, structured retreats during Interterm, in which they are expected to attend daily sessions, share Purpose before writing, work side-by-side, and then reflect on their progress.

SPRING (SENIOR YEAR)

Weekly Thesis Write-in

Organizer: Library & Writing Center

Purpose: community building, knowledge-skills-habits, working

See previous description (FALL)

Zotero

Organizer: Library

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

See previous description (FALL)

Research appointments

Organizer: Library

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

See previous description (SUMMER)

Writing Appointments

Organizer: Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits

See previous description (SUMMER)

Amherst Explorations

Organizer: Library, Writing Center, Academic Technology Services, Center for Community Engagement

Purpose: community/social, recognition

The Library, The Writing Center, Academic Technology, and the CCE sponsor Amherst Explorations, a showcase of student research and creative work that spans across all academic departments. This event provides a rare opportunity for thesis students to present original research, innovative projects, and creative endeavors with a broad, campus-wide audience.

Political Science Thesis Workshops

Organizer: Department, Library, Writing Center

Purpose: knowledge-skills-habits, community building

See previous description (FALL)