

The Honors Thesis is a Four Year Journey



I always knew I wanted to help people find their voice. So naturally, I entered college as a Communication Disorders major so I could eventually become a speech therapist, and **literally** help people find their voice. It seemed like the only logical option at the time.

I remember taking classes in departments like education, kinesiology, psychology, writing, theatre, social justice and gender studies and I loved them! Two years passed, and I realized that my personal goal to help people find their voice was simplified by my major at the time.

As tempting as it was to [major in everything](#), I knew I needed to pick a major that involved all of my interests and a multi-disciplinary curriculum. As a rising junior, I remember thinking that the time to make a change was now or never. I remember frantically searching through the list of majors, and trying to find something that combined my interests, while still accomplishing my long term goals. I think this is something we all experience; I like to call it the **mid-college crisis**.

Lucky for me, once I discovered the Public Health major, the choice was easy. I declared the Public Health major, and a semester later I declared Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies as a second major. I am so happy I made this change, and I am inspired every day by my coursework. For me, changing my major with just two years left of college was possible, and it is possible for many people. Most of the classes I had been taking all along counted towards my new majors, I just didn't know it at the time.

Part of the honors curriculum at UMass Amherst is to complete an [honors thesis](#) during senior year. Now, coming from someone who starts assignments weeks ahead of time, likes planning and meets with professors regularly, I didn't think I'd be the student still trying to register my thesis on October 17th of my senior year, but actually, that happened! But, it's more than okay.

I quickly learned a lot of students have a hard time really nailing down what it is they want to research. I come from a multi-disciplinary background and simply have a lot of thoughts. How was I supposed to pick just one thesis topic? Well, you'll be happy to know I finally did pick a topic, and the rest of this post is its grand debut to the outside world.

I am researching the effectiveness of integrating personal narratives into the medical encounter to help practitioners better understand complex health problems and really try to understand how an individual experiences health. Narratives help place individuals at the center of their health care and narratives also value aspects of identity like race, sexuality, gender, class and ability that impact health. My research is primarily focused on health topics pertaining to women and girls' sexuality, specifically non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming people, since this community accounts for a large number of under-represented people. The end product will be a comprehensive reproductive health education program centered on using personal narratives to expand how we view the complexities of reproductive health.

I am excited about my project, and am looking forward to using my passion and creativity to encourage under-represented people to find their voice; exactly what I have always wanted to do.

So remember my friends, many students think that the honors thesis is the end product of a four year journey, when in reality the honors thesis is a reflection of a four year journey of discovery and growth that happens during college. The thesis starts the day we step on campus as an honors student; I'm just willing to bet that many of us didn't realize it at the time.

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