



Year 4 Prospectus of Studies - St Anselm's College, Cambridge

1. Purpose of the Fourth Year

The Fourth Year represents the culmination of undergraduate study at St Anselm's College and is designed to transition students from structured learning to scholarly independence. Whereas earlier years of the programme emphasise foundational knowledge and analytical competence, the Fourth Year prioritises intellectual autonomy, depth of inquiry, and the integration of methodological and theoretical skills. Students are expected to formulate original research questions, engage critically with the relevant literature, and demonstrate mastery of appropriate analytical or empirical techniques. The Fourth Year also serves to prepare students for postgraduate study, academic careers, or research-oriented professional environments. Through guided but self-directed work, the student develops resilience, scholarly judgement, and the ability to sustain a complex argument over an extended period. The thesis—both written and orally defended—is intended to reflect the maturity, originality, and precision that define the College's academic expectations.

2. Eligibility and Prerequisites

Entry into the Fourth Year requires evidence of satisfactory academic preparation and intellectual readiness. Students must have successfully completed all compulsory modules from the first three years of the degree and any specialised prerequisites relevant to their intended field of inquiry. Particular attention is given to performance in modules that cultivate analytical writing, research methods, or technical competence. Students must also be in good academic standing, without outstanding disciplinary matters or overdue requirements. Admission to Year 4 further requires approval from the Director of Studies, who evaluates whether the proposed research direction is feasible and whether appropriate supervision can be provided. Students who demonstrate exceptional preparedness may commence preliminary reading during the Long Vacation preceding Year 4, subject to approval. The College reserves the right to deny Fourth Year enrolment should a student lack the necessary academic preparation, methodological readiness, or professional conduct expected at this advanced stage.

3. Thesis Topic Selection

Thesis topic selection forms the foundation of Year 4 study. Students must identify a topic of sufficient scope and academic merit, demonstrating both feasibility within the academic

year and originality appropriate to undergraduate research. Initial topic discussions typically begin during Lent Term of the Third Year, allowing adequate time for refinement. Students prepare a brief proposal outlining the central research question, methodology, and preliminary reading list. Topics must align with the expertise of available faculty and the research profile of the College. Final approval rests with the Board of Undergraduate Studies, which assesses the academic integrity, methodological soundness, and potential scholarly contribution of the proposal. Students are encouraged to select topics that reflect both personal interest and demonstrable gaps in the existing literature. Once approved, the topic becomes binding, although minor adjustments may be permitted with supervisor and Board approval.

4. Assignment of Supervisor

Each student is assigned a supervisor whose academic expertise corresponds to the chosen research area. The supervisor's role is advisory rather than directive; students must assume full responsibility for the conception, execution, and presentation of their research. Supervisors offer guidance on research design, bibliography formation, methodological coherence, and the structure of the developing thesis. They also provide feedback on draft material, although the extent and frequency of such feedback may vary according to the supervisor's discretion. Supervisors assist students in maintaining academic discipline, ensuring that progress remains steady and that deadlines are observed. They also help students navigate potential ethical issues, methodological challenges, and scholarly debates. While supervisors are committed to supporting the student's progress, the independence and originality of the thesis remain the responsibility of the candidate.

5. Structure and Requirements of the Thesis

The thesis represents a substantial scholarly work of approximately 30,000 words, exclusive of bibliography, appendices, and supplementary material. It must demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the relevant literature, a clearly articulated methodology, and an original contribution—either conceptual, analytical, or empirical—to its chosen field. Although undergraduate theses do not typically produce entirely novel findings, they must nonetheless show intellectual initiative, precision of argument, and technical competence. A standard thesis includes: an abstract; introduction; literature review; methodology chapter; results or analysis; discussion; and conclusion. Citations must adhere to an accepted academic referencing system. Students are expected to maintain professional presentation standards, including formatting, consistency of style, and clarity of expression. Drafting is iterative: students should expect to revise multiple times before final submission. A thesis that fails to meet structural or formal requirements may be returned for correction or deemed unsuitable for examination.

6. Research Ethics and Conduct

All research conducted under the auspices of St Anselm's College must adhere to the highest standards of ethical conduct. Projects involving human subjects, interviews, surveys, personal data, or sensitive materials require formal approval from the College Ethics Panel prior to data collection. Students must demonstrate competence in ethical reasoning,

including informed consent, confidentiality safeguards, responsible data handling, and respect for intellectual property. Research using copyrighted or proprietary sources must observe applicable legal regulations. The College prohibits any form of fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misrepresentation of data. Students are responsible for maintaining accurate research logs, safeguarding digital files, and storing sensitive materials in secure environments. Ethical breaches may result in sanctions ranging from grade penalties to dismissal from the programme. Students uncertain about the ethical status of any research activity must consult their supervisor before proceeding.

7. Thesis Supervision and Meetings

Supervision constitutes an essential component of Fourth Year study. Students are expected to meet with their supervisors regularly—typically two to three times per term—although additional meetings may be arranged as necessary. Supervisors may request written submissions at various intervals, including outlines, annotated bibliographies, draft chapters, or methodological statements. Students must adhere to agreed timelines and demonstrate consistent engagement with the research process. Supervisors do not provide line-by-line editing but may comment on structure, clarity, argumentation, and scholarly quality. Students bear ultimate responsibility for initiating communication, preparing materials for discussion, and implementing feedback. Failure to maintain contact or make satisfactory progress may result in warnings or referral to the Director of Studies. The supervisory relationship is a professional one, grounded in mutual respect, academic integrity, and clear expectations.

8. Submission Procedures

The final thesis must be submitted in both printed and electronic formats by the published deadline, typically midway through Easter Term. The printed copy must conform to College specifications regarding paper quality, binding, pagination, and title-page formatting. Electronic submissions must be uploaded to the designated College platform in PDF format. Students are responsible for ensuring that the submitted work is complete, correctly formatted, and free of clerical errors. Late submissions are accepted only under exceptional circumstances and require a formal petition supported by documentary evidence. Extensions are granted sparingly and only through official channels. Failure to submit by the deadline without approved extension may result in automatic failure of the thesis component.

9. Examination and Defence

The examination process consists of two components: written assessment of the thesis and an oral defence (viva voce). Each thesis is evaluated by one internal examiner and one external examiner appointed by the Board of Undergraduate Studies. Examiners assess the originality, scholarly quality, methodological soundness, and clarity of argument presented in the written work. The viva voce requires the student to demonstrate command of the thesis's arguments, defend methodological decisions, and situate the work within broader academic debates. Examiners may probe weaknesses, request clarification, or challenge interpretations. Outcomes range from: (a) pass; (b) pass with minor corrections; (c)

resubmission with major revisions; or (d) fail. The decision of the examiners is subject to ratification by the College's Examination Board.

10. Assessment Criteria

Assessment of the Fourth Year thesis is based on a comprehensive set of academic criteria. Examiners consider the originality of the research question, the depth and accuracy of the literature review, and the coherence and persuasiveness of the argument. Methodological rigour—including the appropriateness of research design, data analysis, and conceptual framework—is central. Students are expected to demonstrate critical engagement with sources, precision of expression, and mastery of academic writing conventions. The viva voce assesses oral communication skills, ability to think reflexively, and capacity to defend the thesis in scholarly dialogue. The final mark reflects holistic consideration of both the written and oral components.

11. Academic Support and Resources

Fourth Year students at St Anselm's College have access to extensive academic resources. These include the College Library, digital databases, specialist archives, software for data analysis, methodological workshops, and academic writing support. Students may attend seminars, research groups, and guest lectures relevant to their thesis topic. The College also provides limited funding for fieldwork, data acquisition, or research travel, subject to application. Technical assistance—including support for statistical software, programming, or laboratory equipment—is available where applicable. Students bear responsibility for making effective use of these resources and for seeking guidance where necessary.

12. Timeline of the Fourth Year

The Fourth Year follows a structured academic timeline designed to ensure steady progress. During Michaelmas Term, students finalise their topic, receive supervisor assignments, and produce an initial literature review. By the start of Lent Term, a methodological plan should be established. Lent Term is devoted primarily to drafting core chapters and refining analytical approaches. Supervisors provide feedback and review progress at regular intervals. Easter Term focuses on revision, final drafting, thesis submission, and preparation for the viva voce. Students are encouraged to practise oral defence techniques, review potential examiner questions, and ensure mastery of the broader scholarly context of their research.

13. Regulations Concerning Academic Integrity

St Anselm's College upholds strict academic integrity standards. Plagiarism, data manipulation, failure to acknowledge sources, or any form of academic dishonesty constitutes a serious violation. Students must submit their thesis to plagiarism-detection software prior to final submission. Research logs, data archives, and drafts must be retained for verification upon request. Penalties may include deduction of marks, failure of the thesis, reputational consequences, or dismissal from the College. The College emphasises education in academic honesty and expects students to adhere to the highest professional standards in all scholarly work.

14. Appeals Process

Students may appeal decisions concerning supervision, examination outcomes, or procedural irregularities. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Academic Appeals Committee within the specified window following notification of the decision. Appeals must present substantive grounds—such as procedural error, bias, or new evidence—not dissatisfaction with academic judgement alone. The Committee reviews the documentation, may request interviews, and issues a binding decision. Appeals do not automatically suspend deadlines unless explicitly stated.

15. Graduation Requirements

Graduation requires successful completion of the Fourth Year thesis, all required modules from preceding years, and all administrative and financial obligations to the College. Students must pass both the written thesis and viva voce components. Degrees are conferred at Congregation, where successful candidates are formally recognised for their achievement. High-performing students may be eligible for academic distinctions or College prizes. The Fourth Year thesis represents the College's highest standard of intellectual achievement and serves as the student's principal scholarly contribution at the undergraduate level.