Identifying thesis topic and thesis advisors

Finding a thesis topic does not mean brainstorming to discover an idea on a moment’s notice. Instead, consider that the thesis is:

- the culmination of work in a major, i.e., a natural outgrowth from and expression of the ideas, problems, and approaches taught in their discipline, a creative application of the methods of the discipline, and an interrogation of their power and limits; and
- a reflection of dialogue, common work, and apprenticeship with faculty members in their specialized field of interest

The best theses usually begin as term papers; the best advising relationships usually begin in the classroom. Working with an advisor with whom one has taken a class already means beginning with a shared bibliography, a shared understanding of relevant questions and disciplinary standards, and a shared experience of work and personal relationship that facilitates communication during the thesis process.

Choosing a thesis advisor with whom one has not previously studied should be an exception. Students are well advised to choose coursework with professors whom they think they might want to work with on a thesis. Moreover, it is never too early to begin discussing possible extended research projects with faculty with whom one gets on well.