

# Honors Thesis Evaluation Guidelines

## Honors College, Washington State University

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A thesis committee consisting of the thesis advisor and a WSU faculty thesis evaluator will evaluate the quality of the thesis project, determining the final evaluation of the thesis as *Satisfactory*, *Excellent*, *Pass with Distinction*, *Pass with Revisions*, or *Fail*. The evaluation process will be guided by an Honors faculty host. The evaluation of an Honors thesis considers the student's performance in the following six categories:

Categories for thesis evaluation
<b>1. Initiative/self-direction/originality:</b> Did the student demonstrate initiative, self-direction, and originality in choice of topic and the execution of the project? Did the student communicate effectively with his/her advisor?
<b>2. Relevance/importance of the topic:</b> Is the topic of the thesis significant within the discipline and/or relevant for society more broadly?
<b>3. Quality of the research:</b> Does the thesis demonstrate appropriate competence in its discussion of relevant content, data and secondary literature? Does it exhibit critical analysis and interpretation as well as clear conclusions?
<b>4. Quality and style of the writing:</b> Is the thesis well-structured, displaying sophisticated ideas in a clear, accessible way? Does the writing adhere to discipline-specific styles conveying arguments convincingly?
<b>5. Quality of the oral defense:</b> Did the student give a well-organized, engaging, and polished presentation (or poster) for a compelling discussion? Did the student respond effectively to questions from the thesis committee and audience?
<b>6. The potential impact of the thesis project:</b> Will the thesis be disseminated at a regional, national, or international conference or in another manner of public exposure? Is the quality of the work suitable for publication if so desired (depending on the traditions of the disciplinary press)?

### Thesis Evaluation Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to assist the evaluators in properly assessing the quality of the thesis. Obviously, different academic disciplines will have different measures for what constitutes outstanding undergraduate work in their discipline.

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#### Satisfactory (Pass)

A *Satisfactory* should be awarded a thesis that is deemed overall satisfactory regarding the categories above. A thesis earning a *Satisfactory* may be characterized by an inconsistent but acceptable oral presentation; a written thesis with some correctable problems in argumentation and structure; with adequate content but lacking depth and originality.

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#### Excellent

A thesis awarded *Excellent* is characterized by a competent oral presentation and a written document

with few problems, noteworthy in some of the above categories while it does not reach the level of 'extraordinary' or 'outstanding' in most as required for the level of a *Nomination for Pass with Distinction* (see below).

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### **Pass with Distinction**

A *Nomination for Pass with Distinction* is granted to those students whose performance is outstanding in most of the six categories listed above resulting in a final thesis product of remarkable competence and quality. The evaluators may favorably compare the thesis to graduate student work or deem it of particular value to the academic discipline, potentially to be disseminated as a conference presentation or publication. A thesis nominated for Pass with Distinction will typically have an 'Outstanding' in most, if not all, of the above categories. The Honors Council reviews all nominations and determines which nominations will receive a *Pass with Distinction*. Approx. 10-15% of all Honors theses receive a Pass with Distinction. (To be eligible for a *Nomination for Pass with Distinction* for December 2019 graduates, the Honors thesis must be presented by Monday, April 13, 2020.)

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### **Pass with Revisions**

A *Pass with Revisions* will be awarded if the evaluating team decides that there is a need for revisions in order for the student to obtain a *Satisfactory*. The evaluators will identify areas for revisions and communicate those to the student following the presentation. A deadline will be set for the student to make the revisions to be approved by the thesis advisor. The revised thesis will not be presented.

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### **Fail**

*Fail* characterizes work that is insufficient in most if not all of the categories outlined above. A thesis receiving a *Fail* may be characterized by student failure to communicate productively with the thesis advisor; lack of proofreading of the final thesis; a superficial and unrehearsed presentation. Few WSU Honors College theses receive a *Fail* since unsatisfactory thesis work typically is identified ahead of the defense by the Honors College in support of the student and thesis advisor.

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### **Final evaluation of the Honors thesis**

The thesis advisor and evaluator will receive the completed thesis with rubrics and thesis guidelines a week prior to the scheduled defense. The advisor and evaluator will use two rubrics, one for the written thesis, and one for the oral presentation, and will award 1-4 points corresponding to four levels of competence regarding the written work and the oral presentation. (A poster presentation rubric will be used if the thesis is presented as a poster.) The scoring is considered a guide and need not reflect the outcome of the evaluation. In case of a *Nomination for Pass with Distinction*, the thesis advisor formally nominates the thesis in a letter submitted to the Honors College. The presentation and evaluation is hosted by an Honors faculty member who guides the evaluation process but does not vote on the final outcome. In case of disagreement between advisor and evaluator, the case will be reviewed and resolved by the Honors College.

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