

*HARRIET L. WILKES HONORS COLLEGE***Student Learning Outcomes Assessment****CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (Declarative Knowledge, Research Skills, Technical Skills):**

Through the writing of an honors thesis, students will demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the fundamental concepts and methods in the student's area of study as well as the ability to draw on ideas and methods from related disciplines where appropriate.

In addition, content knowledge will be assessed by the evaluation of a Sophomore Writing Portfolio (SPW) that includes a scholarly paper and a Forum paper written in response to several presentations by experts in different disciplines.

**COMMUNICATION (Written Communication):**

Through the writing of an honors thesis, students will demonstrate proper use of grammar, syntax, structure and style in the creation of a persuasive argument, and/or will meet criteria of competent communication appropriate to the concentration for which the thesis is written.

In addition, written communication skills will be assessed by the evaluation of the Sophomore Writing Portfolio.

**COMMUNICATION (Collaborative Skills):**

Through the process of conducting research and formulating the thesis in collaboration with the thesis advisors, students will demonstrate the ability to interact with faculty by communicating ideas in the process of researching and writing the thesis, responding to criticisms from faculty advisors, taking the initiative, and meeting deadlines.

**CRITICAL THINKING (Analytical Skills; Creative Skills):**

Through the writing of an honors thesis, students will demonstrate the ability to raise appropriate questions and use in-depth analysis in order to make an original contribution to existing scholarship, and/or demonstrate the application of critical thinking skills to the completion of a creative project.

In addition, critical thinking skills will be assessed by the evaluation of the Sophomore Writing Portfolio.

**Details on assessment:****A. Assessment of the Honors Thesis (Outcomes 1-4)**

To prepare for writing a senior thesis, students will complete (1) courses in their concentration aimed at providing the content knowledge needed to write a thesis, (2) writing courses that may include 3-credit writing courses or writing across the curriculum (WAC) courses, and (3) courses

in the core and concentration designed to build critical thinking skills. Students will begin formulating a thesis prior to their senior year. During the senior year they will enroll in thesis research and thesis writing and will produce a draft honors thesis to be evaluated. Assessment will be done by a primary and secondary thesis reader who will use the following standards:

### **Honors with distinction**

- The thesis demonstrates a profound knowledge of the fundamental concepts and methods in the subject area.
- The thesis shows mastery of grammar, syntax, structure and style: it is lucid, well-organized, and stylistically elegant.
- The thesis engages in sophisticated critical thinking and rigorously considers alternate resolutions of a problem in an exemplary fashion or otherwise shows sophisticated critical thinking in an exemplary manner appropriate to the area of study.
- The student demonstrates excellent interpersonal and collaborative skills by communicating ideas with great precision and thoughtfulness in the process of researching and writing the thesis, responding thoughtfully and rigorously to virtually all substantial criticisms from faculty advisors, taking the initiative to a great extent, and meeting deadlines with minimal oversight from advisors.

### **Honors**

- The thesis shows a thorough knowledge of the fundamental concepts and methods in the subject area.
- The thesis shows effective command of grammar, syntax, structure and style: it is clearly written and sensibly organized.
- The thesis engages in sophisticated critical thinking and explores alternate approaches or resolutions of a problem effectively or otherwise shows sophisticated critical thinking in an effective manner appropriate to the area of study.
- The student demonstrates effective interpersonal and collaborative skills by communicating ideas clearly in the process of researching and writing the thesis, by responding to many of the substantial criticisms from faculty advisors, showing the ability to take some initiative, and meeting deadlines without excessive oversight from advisors.

### **Unacceptable**

- The thesis does not show competent knowledge of the fundamental concepts and methods in the subject area.
- The thesis does not show mastery of grammar, syntax, structure, or style.
- The thesis does not competently engage in critical thinking or explore alternate approaches or resolutions of a problem.
- The student does not demonstrate effective interpersonal and collaborative skills; the student does not communicate ideas clearly in the process of researching and writing the thesis, does not respond to many of the substantial criticisms from faculty advisors, does not take the initiative, and does not consistently meet deadlines.

Students whose thesis draft is deemed unacceptable in one of the outcomes may be required to make satisfactory revisions to receive a passing grade on the thesis. This may require doing additional coursework to acquire the necessary knowledge in the subject area.

## **B. Assessment of the Sophomore Writing Portfolio (Outcomes 5-6)**

Through the evaluation of writing done in freshmen and sophomore years, students will be assessed on their ability to communicate effectively and think critically. The portfolio will consist of

a forum essay, completed during the student's freshman year, and an essay completed either freshman or sophomore year for a course other than Forum. The forum paper is a four-page analysis of three presentations in which students must demonstrate an understanding of the larger implications of the presentations and discuss their connections. The other paper must be a scholarly work of at least 5 pages and demonstrate an ability to incorporate evidence from secondary sources and/or analyze a primary text.

Assessment is conducted by a panel of Honors College faculty during the summer who use an assessment rubric:

**For Communication (Outcome 5):** Submissions are evaluated in style and rhetorical awareness; and grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation. Below is a brief description of the ratings:

P = Proficient:

- Demonstrates the skills needed to write a thesis.
- Confidently and consistently demonstrates the writing skills central to college level work.

O = On Track:

- Will be prepared to write a thesis during the senior year if the current level of progress is maintained.
- Inconsistent application of writing skills central to college level work.

N = Needs Improvement:

- May not be prepared to write a thesis during the senior year if the current level of progress is maintained.
- Demonstrates consistent weaknesses in the writing skills central to college level work.

I = In Trouble:

- Will not be able to write a thesis or perform in upper division courses without extensive assistance in writing.

**For Critical Thinking (Outcome 6):** Submissions are evaluated on the basis of the quality of the argument and analysis. Below is a brief description of the ratings:

P = Proficient:

- Demonstrates the skills needed to write a thesis.
- Confidently and consistently demonstrates the critical thinking skills central to college level work.

O = On Track:

- Will be prepared to write a thesis during the senior year if the current level of progress is maintained.
- Inconsistent application of critical thinking skills central to college level work.

N = Needs Improvement:

- May not be prepared to write a thesis during the senior year if the current level of progress is maintained.
- Demonstrates consistent weaknesses in the critical thinking skills central to college level work.

I = In Trouble:

- Will not be able to write a thesis or perform in upper division courses without extensive development of critical thinking skills.