

After a thesis defense, Clark Honors College thesis committee members evaluate the quality of the overall thesis project. The evaluations are *Pass with Distinction*, *Pass with Honors*, *Pass*, and *Fail*. The committee may decide to withhold a *Pass with Honors* or a *Pass* until necessary revisions are made; a time limit should be set for completion of the revisions.

The evaluation must reflect the student's performance in the following five areas:

- **Initiative and Self-Direction:** independence and initiative to conceive and see a project through to completion; evidence of strong problem-solving skills; productive, proactive, and effective communication with an advisor, committee members, and CHC staff members
- **Relevance and Originality of Research Questions and Topic:** ability to conceive of a research topic that is highly relevant within the discipline and for society more broadly; poses a research problem that exhibits critical analysis and interpretation; asks relevant research questions that build on four years of study within a specific major and within a particular research area
- **Research Quality and Mastery:** demonstrates adequate research skills and practices to thoroughly and effectively investigate a research topic using standards of the major discipline; shows mastery of the relevant content, data, secondary literature, and research material; logically and clearly articulates the research questions, thesis arguments, and conclusions; shows mastery of information related to the particular research topic, field, and discipline; concrete evidence of critical analysis and interpretation
- **Writing Quality:** ability to conceive, frame, and convey arguments eloquently and with compelling evidence; demonstrates one's own intellectual contributions and conclusions that are accurate and compelling to one's intellectual peers; ability to organize a large document with sophisticated ideas in a clear, well-organized, structured, accessible way; the writing adheres to discipline-specific styles while also speaking across disciplines and audiences; clear and concise writing that is free of errors and uses correct citation style for the discipline
- **Oral Defense Quality:** gives a well-organized, engaging, and polished presentation with information that is accurate and compelling; ability to communicate orally one's research questions, arguments, results, and broader conclusions; ability to convey complex and difficult concepts clearly to both specialists and a broad audience; demonstrates capacity to think on one's feet and respond effectively to questions from the thesis committee and audience

**Pass with Distinction** is granted only to those candidates whose performance is *superior in every area* listed above and if the draft presented at the defense requires only minimal revision. Additional guidelines that might be helpful are:

- The thesis is publishable, in part or whole (depending on the traditions of the disciplinary press).
- The thesis is comparable to competent graduate work at the M.A. or M.S. level.
- The primary thesis advisor would be willing to write a recommendation letter on the student's behalf for one of the CHC's thesis awards presented at the honors college commencement ceremony.

**Pass with Honors** should be awarded to students whose thesis work is *very good* in all of the above five areas. A thesis that is outstanding in a few of the categories, but not in most or all, should be awarded *Pass with Honors* rather than *Pass with Distinction*.

**Pass** is awarded to those theses that are *satisfactory*. This includes theses that may be good in a few of the five areas but only adequate in the others. Theses that need significant revisions, which must be approved by the primary thesis advisor, may earn a *Pass*.

**Fail** is for work that is *unacceptable* in most or all of the five areas. Very few Clark Honors College theses are failed, not only because of the general high quality of the work turned in by Clark Honors College students, but also because thesis committee members should discourage students from standing for oral examination if they are not fully prepared and the committee members have not read and approved of the thesis, at least conditionally.

**Thesis Evaluation Checklist (Optional):**

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**Initiative and  
Self-direction**

- Superior
- Very Good
- Satisfactory
- Unacceptable

**Research Questions  
and Topic**

- Superior
- Very Good
- Satisfactory
- Unacceptable

**Research Quality  
and Mastery**

- Superior
- Very Good
- Satisfactory
- Unacceptable

**Writing Style  
and Quality**

- Superior
- Very Good
- Satisfactory
- Unacceptable

**Quality of  
Oral Defense**

- Superior
  - Very Good
  - Satisfactory
  - Unacceptable
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