

Women's and Gender Studies



WRITING AN HONORS THESIS AND GRADUATING WITH DISTINCTION

This guide describes the policies and procedures for writing an honors thesis in Women's and Gender Studies at UNL. Writing an honors thesis may qualify a student to graduate with distinction in the College of Arts and Sciences. Women's and Gender Studies majors and minors who are in the Honors Program are required to write a thesis. However, a student does not have to be a member of the UNL Honors Program to write an honors thesis or earn a degree with distinction. Students who have compiled a fine academic record (with a GPA above 3.5) by the middle of their junior year (70-85 credit hours) should consider working toward a degree with distinction.

Degrees with Distinction

The College of Arts and Sciences recognizes academic excellence by recommending that some students receive their degrees with distinction. The bachelor's degree can be granted *With Distinction*, *With High Distinction*, and *With Highest Distinction*. The Committee on Academic Distinction and Awards for Students recommends distinction after it carefully weighs and considers all aspects of a student's record which includes: the general quality and breadth of the program, the quality of any transfer credit hours, the number of 300/400 level courses, the number of courses taken P/N, the number of courses retaken to remove "C-", "D" or "F" grades and (when submitted) the quality of the thesis and comprehensive examination as defined by evaluations provided by the co-advisors. Ordinarily only students who have taken their last 48 hours of graded course work while registered in the College of Arts and Sciences are considered. Consequently, it is possible for a student to have a GPA above the cutoff point and still not receive a recommendation for distinction. (NOTE: To determine the level of distinction, the Committee uses the cumulative grade point average based on all credit hours taken at UNL prior to the beginning of the term in which the student receives his or her degree.)

Levels of Distinction Offered Without a Thesis

Degrees with High Distinction and degrees with Distinction **may** be recommended on the basis of a student's transcript alone. To receive High Distinction without a thesis, a student must have a cumulative GPA of 3.92; to receive Distinction a student must have a cumulative GPA of 3.85.

The Role of the Thesis in Awarding Degrees with Distinction

To be eligible for Highest Distinction, a student must submit a thesis and have a cumulative GPA of 3.92 or above. In addition, the student should receive an *Excellent* or *Very Good* recommendation from the co-advisors based upon both the thesis (or comparable creative effort) and the comprehensive thesis examination.

To be eligible for High Distinction, a student must submit a thesis and have a cumulative GPA between 3.85 - 3.92. In addition, the student should receive at least a *Good* recommendation from the co-advisors based upon both the thesis (or comparable creative effort) and the comprehensive thesis examination.

Submission of a thesis allows a student to be considered for a degree with Distinction when his/her GPA is between 3.5 - 3.85 (cumulative GPA as of the end of the term prior to graduation). In such cases, a student needs to receive at least a *Good* recommendation from the co-advisors based upon both the thesis (or comparable creative effort) and the comprehensive thesis examination. No student will be considered for distinction with a cumulative GPA below 3.5.

Note that, while it is possible to receive a degree with distinction without writing a thesis, the thesis is necessary for the highest award and improves a student's chances at the next two levels.

Students should read carefully the general guidelines and procedures for degrees with distinction in the Undergraduate Bulletin and on the College of Arts and Sciences website:

<http://ascweb.unl.edu/students/distinction.html>

The Undergraduate Thesis

The thesis should be a major independent project that demonstrates the student's scholarly and/or creative work in Women's and Gender Studies. In its most traditional form, the thesis is a work of scholarship in the field, usually including primary and/or secondary research, and showing a grasp of Women's and Gender Studies methodology and principles. However, depending on the disciplinary background of the student, a thesis could take many other forms. For example, a student might wish to edit previously unpublished women's writing or develop a Women's and Gender Studies curriculum for a specific group of people. A thesis could also be a creative work showing an understanding of Women's and Gender studies, such as a film, a photography exhibit, a musical composition, a poetry chapbook, or other creative expression, including an introduction that places the work in a Women's and Gender Studies context. There are no set length requirements. In quantity, as in quality, a thesis should go well beyond what is expected of a single course paper or project.

Why write a thesis?

An undergraduate thesis can be a highly satisfying achievement, as it shows a student's understanding of the complex field of Women's and Gender Studies and contributes original research or creativity to the field. Writing the thesis is also good preparation for the work demanded in graduate or professional school or even in many kinds of jobs. Doing research and drawing conclusions from it is a valuable skill that many schools and employers value.

Are there any disadvantages to writing a thesis?

Writing or producing a scholarly or creative thesis is a difficult and time-consuming task. For most students, work on a thesis can take on a life of its own, threatening to push even important responsibilities aside. A student thinking about doing a thesis must balance it with her or his final classes at UNL, applying for post-graduate education, or job-hunting. Still, when all is said and done, these challenges can help make the achievement very fulfilling.

Stages in Writing an Honors Thesis

Students interested in doing an honors thesis should begin planning at least one full calendar year before the thesis is due. Generally the thesis is due in the middle of the semester in which you will graduate. For example, if you plan to graduate in May of 2010, you should be begin thinking about your thesis project in the spring of 2009.

Choosing a Topic

The first step is to find a topic for which you have a passion, something you want to spend a great deal of time immersed in, and something you feel is important.

Finding a faculty director and co-director

The second step is to take your topic to a Women's and Gender Studies faculty member whom you think might share your interest in the topic and be willing to supervise your thesis. It is often best to work with faculty member with whom you have already worked, but if you don't know any faculty members who work in this area, the director of Women's and Gender Studies will suggest appropriate faculty members. Your thesis director will then help you find a second faculty member to be a co-director (or you may have someone in mind yourself), and the three of you can begin meeting to refine your topic and plan a work schedule. Your thesis director will be in charge of giving you a grade for work toward the thesis.

Developing a thesis proposal

Work with your thesis co-directors to develop a proposal for your thesis. When your proposal is ready and approved by your co-directors, you will need to submit it (together with the College of Arts and Sciences "Thesis Prospectus Form") to the Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) director, who will then file it with the student's records in the WGS office. This proposal should be submitted in the semester prior to the one in which you will graduate.

Working on the thesis

Together with your co-directors, you should set up a schedule for completing your thesis in a timely manner. Typically your co-directors will want to read and comment on several drafts of your thesis before it is in final form, so allow plenty of time for multiple revisions. You are allowed to take up to 6 hours of a special independent study course (Women's and Gender Studies 399H) to allow you the time to do your thesis. You should sign up for these 6 credits with your primary advisor during the periods when you expect to do the most intense work on the thesis. The required contract forms for these independent study hours are available in the Women's and Gender Studies office and must be signed by the director.

Completing and Defending the Thesis

After your co-directors have reviewed and given final approval to your thesis, you should set up your thesis defense (or "comprehensive examination") with your thesis co-directors. According to Arts & Sciences rules, the process of writing a thesis is followed by a "comprehensive examination," to be given before the College deadline. The thesis co-directors will be responsible for administering the comprehensive oral exam. In this examination, generally 1-2 hours long, you will be asked to discuss your research and the main argument or focus of your thesis, branching out to how this fits into the field of Women's and Gender Studies more

generally. In the case of a creative thesis, a public “showing” or “performance” could be part of the comprehensive examination. After the comprehensive exam, the thesis co-directors must fill out the College of Arts and Sciences “Thesis Evaluation Form.”

Submitting the thesis

Your co-directors should submit a copy of the thesis, the thesis proposal, and their evaluation form to the WGS director at least one week before the College deadline (see below). The WGS director will ensure that all materials are turned in to the College by the deadline. Once the thesis and the required forms are turned in to the college, they will be reviewed by the Committee on Academic Distinction and Awards for students. That committee will recommend whether a degree with Distinction is to be awarded, and at what level. You will be informed before graduation of the Committee’s decision.

Timing

Your thesis co-directors will work with you to develop a schedule of deadlines, but ultimately it is your responsibility to ensure that you complete your thesis in a timely manner. Check the deadline for delivering the thesis to the Arts and Sciences Dean’s Office and work back from there to set up a realistic timeline.

Due dates for the College:

(Note: These dates are based on tentative graduation dates.)

2016-2017

Fall: October 24, 2016
Spring: March 13, 2017
Summer: July 14, 2017

2017-2018

Fall: October 23, 2017
Spring: March 12, 2018
Summer: July 13, 2018

All materials should be submitted to the WGS Director at least one week in advance of the above dates. To be sure of the College deadline, please check the website:

<http://cas.unl.edu/distinction.shtml>.

If you have any questions, please contact Margaret Jacobs, the Director of Women’s and Gender Studies, at (402) 472-9300 or mjacobs3@unl.edu