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Honors Thesis Rubrics: A Step toward More Consistent and Valid Assessment in Honors

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Several recent issues of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* have devoted considerable space to questions of grading and assessing honors student work: the 2006 Forum on "Outcomes Assessment, Accountability, and Honors" (Frost et al.), the 2007 Forum on "Grades, Scores, and Honors" (Andrews et al.), and Greg Lanier's expansive piece in 2008, "Towards Reliable Honors Assessment." One target of assessment is the honors thesis, which is either a required or optional component of many honors programs and colleges and which poses a myriad of assessment challenges. What follows is a description and analysis of the attempt at the University of Maine Honors College to improve communication and assessment throughout the thesis process and to support both honors thesis students and the faculty members who work with them. As is often the case in honors, this initiative had an informal beginning: a chat between a professor of educational psychology, who was advising his first honors thesis student, and the dean of the honors college.

THESES AND THE HONORS COLLEGE

The first four UMaine honors theses were written in 1937. The honors program began as a small endeavor among liberal arts faculty members but became a university-wide initiative in 1962 and then an honors college in 2002. Even in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the number of honors theses was typically on the order of twenty or so, but numbers have steadily increased over the past decade; now at least seventy, and in some years more than eighty, students write theses annually. This dramatic growth has meant an expansion in the variety of theses, the breadth of disciplines in which theses are written, and the number of individuals involved as advisors or committee members.

These increases have prompted the honors college community to consider questions of expectations and performance from a global perspective. Each student has a thesis advisor who chairs a committee of five, selected by the student in consultation with the advisor. Nearly all advisors and most committee members are UMaine faculty members; other committee members (who, for convenience, will all be referred to as faculty members) include scientific staff, faculty members at other institutions or laboratories, local professionals in private or governmental positions, and doctoral students. Following a two-hour oral defense, the committee determines the degree of honors awarded to the student: no honors, honors, high honors, or highest honors. This decision is based on the written thesis, the student's oral presentation of the thesis, the discussion between the student and the committee about the thesis, an annotated reading list of twelve to fifteen texts significant to the student's academic career, and discussion of the reading list.

Providing consistency in assessment within and across thesis committees has always proved challenging and is increasingly difficult to address with hundreds of individuals involved on thesis committees. One way the honors college has tried to provide consistency has been to require that each committee include a faculty member currently teaching in the honors college's core Civilizations sequence. Additionally, the honors council, the policy advisory body for the honors college, has encouraged the dean to construct guidelines to inform advisors and members of thesis committees about the "community standards" for their deliberations. Beginning with the 2004–2005 academic year, these "Instructions to the Jury" have been distributed to all thesis advisors and printed in the sixty-page *Honors College Thesis Handbook*.

Having a member of the core honors faculty on each committee has provided some consistency, yet the approximately twenty-five faculty members involved in that sequence have varying experience and expectations. Likewise, while the "Instructions to the Jury" have helped to educate individuals involved in the thesis process and described some best practices, they do not directly address the multi-faceted evaluation process that informs the committee's levels of honors deliberations. In addition, neither of these initiatives has provided sufficient detail regarding thesis expectations to all committee members or to students engaged in the process. We needed improved tools to guide committee members and students. Rubrics seemed to be the obvious answer, for reasons to which we now turn.

WHY RUBRICS?

A rubric is a scoring guide for evaluating written products (e.g., essay, term paper, honors thesis), performances (e.g., conducting a lab experiment, playing a musical instrument, defending one's thesis), or any other

demonstration of accomplishment that calls for a qualitative judgment by the appraiser. Rubrics vary in complexity (see, for instance, Nitko & Brookhart 269–76): a holistic rubric yields a single rating, for example, whereas an analytic rubric results in a separate rating for each of several dimensions of proficiency. Rubrics also can vary in generality: a generic rubric has language sufficiently robust that it can be applied to nonidentical tasks, unlike a task-specific rubric that, as its name implies, is limited to the particular task at hand. Analytic and task-specific rubrics were developed for the present project, which we describe below.

Regardless of its complexity or generality, a well-constructed rubric that is used with fidelity has many known benefits (e.g., Arter & McTighe; Suskie 139). First, a rubric enhances the consistency, or reliability, of judgments; this is evident in both "intra-scorer" consistency, the consistency of a person in evaluating several honors theses, and "inter-scorer" consistency, the consistency among persons judging the same honors thesis. Guided by a rubric—an explicit statement of scoring criteria—a student's rating or letter grade or assigned honors level is much less dependent on the idiosyncrasies of the appraiser than would be true in a rubric-free case. Second, because a well-constructed rubric points the appraiser in a meaningful direction when evaluating student work, the resulting judgments are more likely to be meaningful as well. That is, a student's rating or letter grade or assigned honors level will have greater validity—as a representation of student accomplishment in the targeted domain—than would be true in a rubric-free case. In short, a well-constructed rubric fosters both reliability and validity in the assessment process.

As a third benefit, the use of a well-constructed rubric can improve instruction. Consider an analytic rubric for evaluating writing that an instructor plans to use for grading an end-of-term paper. The rubric specifies, with accompanying scoring criteria, the writing dimensions *organization*, *development*, *mechanics*, *voice*, *clarity*, and *persuasiveness*. Insofar as the instructor regards these dimensions of writing as essential and the students will be evaluated according to their demonstrated proficiency on each, the rubric provides a helpful framework for shaping instruction and providing formative feedback to students. Within the context of the honors thesis, for example, an appropriately specific rubric can inform the thesis-related advice and guidance students receive as well as the feedback provided to them regarding work to date.

Fourth, students benefit when a rubric is shared with them in advance. Instructor expectations are made explicit to students, who are thus able to monitor their own progress. Considering the last two benefits simultaneously, one sees that the thoughtful use of rubrics creates a synchronized conversation between instructor and student toward a common goal: student proficiency in the targeted domain.

DEVELOPING THESIS RUBRICS

During the spring semester of 2008, the dean invited the three additional authors to join him as an ad hoc committee to develop a set of rubrics for the honors college thesis process. Haggerty, Killinger, and Slavin had extensive experience serving on thesis committees, and Coladarci brought expertise in academic measurement and assessment.

The committee met on a weekly basis from mid-January through mid-April. Early on, the group determined that thorough evaluation of an honors college thesis required three distinct rubrics: one for the written thesis, another for assessment of the students' reading list and oral defense, and a third for the thesis advisor's assessment (see Appendices A, B, and C).

An initial concern was constructing rubrics that would prove relevant to all disciplines. Honors students at the University of Maine complete a common core curriculum, but they major and write their theses in a multiplicity of disciplines. While we felt we could construct suitable, comprehensive rubrics for the evaluation of projects that followed fairly traditional research models, we felt less certain that these same rubrics would adequately evaluate less traditional thesis projects such as creative writing and visual and performing arts compositions.

We consulted with an art professor who offered a list of the art department's goals from which, in turn, we lifted language to integrate into rubrics in an effort to make them more inclusive. The committee also contacted a poet in the English department who was skeptical regarding the prospect of a common rubric, contending that we would be more successful developing a separate rubric for creative works such as poetry or fiction. Indeed, we realize that producing a universally applicable set of rubrics is an ongoing challenge to which we will have to return in the near future.

Ultimately, our most useful strategy for building a versatile rubric became researching existing honors college thesis rubrics from other universities. After reviewing several examples, the committee agreed that our preferred model was that of the Washington State University Honors College, for both its format and its content. With permission from WSU to use their rubrics as a guide, we spent much of the spring customizing, wordsmithing, prioritizing, and refining. We determined that we would use a numerical rating from 1 to 6, coupled with the semantic labels *unacceptable* (1), *marginal* (3), *satisfactory* (4), and *outstanding* (6). We concurred that the numbers and descriptions were intended not as a literal rating or measurement but rather as a guide for communication of subjective impressions informed by criteria listed for each area of evaluation.

The rubrics we developed were analytic rather than holistic and were intended for students as well as committee members. They were both specific

to the thesis process of the University of Maine Honors College and also generic; we hoped they would be applicable across disciplines. We constructed the "Rubric for the Written Thesis" so that it prioritized four areas of assessment: the research question and creative challenge; the development and implementation of a methodology or approach; the conclusions, implications, and consequences; and the writing. For the "Rubric for the Thesis and Reading List Oral Defense," we prioritized the student's presentation and ensuing discussion with the committee as well as content of the reading list and annotations. Finally, for the "Rubric for the Thesis Advisor's Assessment," we focused on the working relationship between the advisor and student as well as the student's engagement with the overall project.

By April 2008, we decided that the rubrics were ready for presentation to our honors council and, with their stamp of approval, for informal distribution to current thesis writers and for presentation in Honors 391: Introduction to Thesis Research. We provided the rubrics to all our thesis advisors and students for the 2008–09 academic year, and we encouraged them to incorporate these rubrics into the thesis process. In subsequent years, all thesis advisors have been provided with copies of the rubrics (along with our *Thesis Handbook*) as soon as they agree to be mentors. In addition, we require, or at least request, our thesis students to distribute copies of the written thesis and oral defense rubrics to their committee members at the same time they distribute their pre-defense versions of their theses. The use of the rubrics, however, has not been a requirement.

The committee wished to determine the extent to which the rubrics were being used as well as the perceptions of advisors, other committee members, and students regarding the effectiveness and potential of each rubric in both content and process. In the summers of 2009 and 2010, thesis students and faculty members were invited to complete a brief online survey: 212 faculty members and 75 thesis students in 2009, 235 faculty members and 73 students in 2010. (These numbers include only students who had completed their defense, and faculty members often serve on multiple committees.) The survey included selected-response items and also allowed for written responses. While the surveys were designed to provide an early assessment of the rubric initiative, we hoped the surveying process itself would help generate awareness of the rubrics and foster their use as well.

SURVEY RESULTS

FACULTY

Ninety-two faculty members (43%) participated in the summer 2009 survey. In the 2008–09 academic year, 58% of the faculty respondents had

served on more than one thesis committee. Twenty faculty members provided comments on the Rubric for the Written Thesis for the 2009 survey. These comments fell into three general categories: (a) the rubric positively contributed to the written thesis evaluation process (9 respondents, 45% of the subset who provided comments), (b) faculty members were unaware of the existence of the rubric (8 respondents, 40%), and (c) faculty felt no need to use the rubrics (3 respondents, 15%). Fifty-five percent of the faculty did not use the rubric during the evaluation process. In contrast, results from the selected-response items clearly suggest a positive role for the rubric from the perspective of these respondents: between 62 and 65 faculty members responded to the four questions regarding the usefulness of the three rubrics, and 76% of these respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the rubric was useful for the evaluation of the written thesis.

How does one reconcile the mixed sentiments from the written responses with the more positive sentiments from the selected-response items? The former reflect the use of the rubrics during the 2008–09 academic year whereas the latter reflect both use and views regarding their possible effectiveness. Six of the eight respondents who, in their written comments, indicated they did not use the rubrics nonetheless indicated in the selected-response items that they felt the rubrics were effective for future evaluation purposes.

Our analysis also examined various factors that could influence a respondent's view of the use and impact of the rubrics. Advisors and committee members play different roles in the thesis process and thus might use the rubrics differently. Furthermore, faculty members had expressed concerns regarding the applicability of one set of rubrics for creative theses (e.g., art, music, and poetry) as well as more traditional research projects. However, with respect to the perceived value of the written thesis rubric as an evaluation tool, these factors had no impact throughout the analysis except in one case noted below. (All chi-square p values are greater than .10.)

The survey results associated with the oral defense rubric were largely positive. Sixteen faculty respondents contributed written comments. Seven of these respondents were positive about the rubric, seven were unaware the rubric existed, and two perceived no reason to use them. Of those respondents who were aware of this rubric, over 75% saw a positive role for it. As for the selected-response items, 75% of the faculty members either agreed or strongly agreed that the oral defense rubric "was useful for the evaluation of the thesis defense."

The Rubric for the Thesis Advisor's Assessment was apparently used the least of the three rubrics, and the responding faculty members (advisors and committee members alike) perceived it to be the least useful, so it was not included in the 2010 follow-up survey. Of the thirteen committee members

providing comments, nine were unaware of this rubric and three felt it could be helpful if used in the future. These comments were consistent with the selected-response results: only 51% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this rubric was useful in evaluating the thesis defense. Chi-square analyses showed there were no significant differences ($p > .10$) in results depending on whether respondents were committee chairs or committee members, the thesis was a "creative" thesis or traditional research thesis, or the respondent was serving on one thesis committee or more than one committee.

Survey results suggest that faculty members felt the group of rubrics provide a fair assessment of the thesis and its defense. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that using the rubrics generated a fair assessment, thus contributing to the validity of the assessment process.

A follow-up survey was conducted in summer 2010 after the spring thesis defenses; 96 faculty members (41%) participated. We expected greater awareness and use of the rubrics as the students were required to include them when they delivered their theses to committee members. In Table 1, we present the survey results for the question, "Which statement best describes your level of use of the Written Thesis Rubric this past academic year?" In general, the responses to this question indicate that, in the rubric's second year of implementation, 91% of faculty members were using the rubric at least in an informal way. (Four of the eight faculty members who did not use the rubric acknowledged they did not know it existed.) There appears to be a difference in the use between advisors and committee members, with a chi-square p-value = .07. All advisors used the rubric compared with 87% of committee members, and 42% of advisors used the rubric formally to rate the student while only 28% of committee members did.

Faculty members used the written thesis rubric both to evaluate students and to provide them with instruction regarding the thesis process (see Table 2). The vast majority of faculty respondents—80%—found the written thesis rubric useful for understanding the various components of a thesis. Curiously, however, only 33% felt this rubric facilitated the communication of expectations, and still fewer (26%) believed it was useful for providing feedback to students. As an evaluative device, 40% of faculty respondents found this rubric effective in judging the quality of the thesis, and 54% found it useful during committee deliberations and for determining the level of honors.

Levels of use of the oral defense rubric are presented in Table 3. This rubric was employed in patterns similar to that of the written thesis rubric, and there was no statistically significant difference between how advisors and committee members used the rubric (the chi-square p-value > .10). The majority of faculty members (86%) at least referred to the oral defense rubric during the thesis process, with 33% using it in a formal manner.

Patterns of use of the oral defense rubric are displayed in Table 4. This rubric was to be used during the thesis presentation, discussion of the thesis, and discussion of the reading list. Faculty members expressed minimum use for the rubric as an instructional device except in preparing students for the reading list discussion. Only 25% to 30% felt the oral defense rubric was useful for providing feedback to students. Twenty-nine percent and 36%, respectively, indicated this rubric was useful for communicating expectations about thesis presentation and thesis discussion. However, 63% of respondents indicated the rubric was useful for communicating expectations to students regarding the reading list discussion. This result is not surprising, given the uniqueness of the reading list component of the UMaine oral defense although it is surprising that only 26% of faculty members nevertheless found this rubric useful for providing feedback to students. This rubric was seen to be more valuable in determining the quality of the oral performances than the Written Thesis Rubric was in determining the quality of the written thesis. Faculty members also perceived the rubric to be more useful in determining

Table 1. Level of Use of the Rubric for the Written Thesis (faculty, 2010)

	Responses	%
I did not refer to this rubric at all	8	9
I did refer to this rubric, but I didn't formally rate the student	52	58
I did refer to this rubric, and I did formally rate the student	30	33
Total	90	100

Table 2. Usefulness of the Rubric for the Written Thesis (faculty, 2010)

	Responses	%
I did not find this rubric useful at all	2	2
Useful for understanding the various components of the thesis	65	80
Useful for communicating expectations to the student	27	33
Useful for providing feedback to the student	21	26
Useful for judging the quality of the thesis	32	40
Useful for determining the level of Honors	44	54
Useful during the committee's deliberation about the thesis	44	54
Other	6	7
Total Number of Committee Members Responding: 81		

the quality of the performance (63% to 67%) than it was in determining the level of honors (44% to 55%).

STUDENTS

Now we turn to the rubrics from the students' perspective. Thirty-eight students (51%) participated in the summer 2009 survey. Fifty percent of these students felt the written thesis rubric was useful during preparation of the thesis. However, 44% disclosed that they did not consult the rubric at all for this purpose. Similarly, over half (58%) of responding students felt the oral defense rubric was useful whereas roughly a third (36%) did not consult this rubric at all. Perhaps not surprisingly, the thirteen students who did not use the oral defense rubric also did not use the written thesis rubric. As for students' perceptions of the ability of the two rubrics to generate a fair assessment of the thesis and its defense, 61% of these students agreed that the rubrics did result in a fair evaluation, with an additional 8% strongly

Table 3. Level of Use of the Rubric for the Oral Defense (faculty, 2010)

	Responses	%
I did not refer to this rubric at all	12	14
I did refer to this rubric, but I didn't formally rate the student	47	53
I did refer to this rubric, and I did formally rate the student	29	33
Total	88	100

Table 4. Usefulness of the Rubric for the Oral Defense (faculty, 2010)

	Thesis Presentation	Thesis Discussion	Reading List Discussion
I did not find this rubric useful at all	6 (8%)	4 (5%)	12 (16%)
Useful for communicating expectations to the student	21 (29%)	26 (36%)	46 (63%)
Useful for providing feedback to the student	18 (25%)	22 (30%)	19 (26%)
Useful for judging the quality of the student performance	48 (66%)	49 (67%)	46 (63%)
Useful for determining the level of honors	36 (49%)	40 (55%)	32 (44%)
Total Number of Committee Members Responding: 73			

agreeing. There was overwhelming correspondence between the students who felt the rubrics were useful and those who believed they generated a fair assessment. Nine students who believed their committees did not use the rubrics during the defense did not use the rubrics themselves during the preparation of the thesis or its defense, so perhaps student perception of faculty validation of the rubrics is an important impetus for their use.

Thirty-eight (52%) students participated in the summer 2010 survey. This follow-up survey found an increase in rubric use, with 94% of students consulting the written thesis and oral defense rubrics at least once or twice during the thesis process; this was a significant change from the 44% who did not consult the former rubric or the 36% who did not consult the latter rubric during the previous academic year.

Although rubric use increased, students' perceptions of the usefulness of these rubrics were mixed. As an instructional device, the written thesis rubric appears to be effective in helping students understand the thesis process and what is expected of them (see Table 5): 75% of students indicated this rubric was useful for understanding the components of the thesis, and 72% felt it was useful for understanding the associated expectations. However, only 28% of respondents indicated it was useful as an evaluative device for determining the quality of the thesis, and 22% felt it was useful in understanding why they received the level of honors they did.

As Table 6 shows, the oral defense rubric provided a largely helpful framework for students to understand expectations and to prepare for the defense, both of which point to this rubric's instructional value. For example, from 62% to 78% of students found the rubric useful for understanding the expectations associated with the thesis presentation, thesis discussion, and reading list discussion. Somewhat lower percentages, but still representing a

Table 5. Usefulness of the Rubric for the Written Thesis (students, 2010)

	Responses	%
I did not find this rubric useful at all	3	9
Useful for understanding the various components of the thesis	24	75
Useful for understanding what was expected of me	23	72
Useful for communicating with my advisor	11	34
Useful for judging the quality of my work	9	28
Useful for understanding why I received the level of honors I did	7	22
Total Number of Students Responding: 32		

majority of respondents, were obtained regarding rubric usefulness for preparation. In contrast, students found little evaluative benefit in this rubric, with percentages ranging from 16% to 28%. This latter finding is not unlike the students' perceptions with respect to the Rubric for the Written Thesis.

DISCUSSION

The survey results confirmed our perceptions of the need for a rubric to provide inter- and intra-scorer consistency. This confirmation is exemplified by a committee member who stated: "Most of us are fairly idiosyncratic in the way we evaluate writing. However, it was useful to have some central ideas of where we needed to go." On a similar note, another committee member reflected: "Excellent guidelines. I wish these had been available in previous years where I served on more committees and felt the same standards were not applied equally to all students." Such comments suggest a perception of increased reliability and validity in assessment when guided by a thoughtfully constructed rubric. As one respondent acknowledged, these rubrics "give the committee members a structure for discussing the candidate's work in a logical way." So while our rubrics have not wholly satisfied all intended goals, faculty members seem to recognize the need for them and their potential usefulness.

Faculty members were able to use the Rubric for the Written Thesis to identify and understand the components of the written thesis even though this understanding did not directly translate into an ability to communicate expectations or provide sufficient feedback to the student. Thus, while this rubric was personally useful to many faculty members, it fell short as a teaching tool. That said, the extent to which the typical committee member provides feedback to the student prior to the thesis defense is unclear, so the perceived limits of the rubric in this respect may reflect the limited level of interaction

Table 6. Usefulness of the Rubric for the Oral Defense (students, 2010)

	Thesis Presentation	Thesis Discussion	Reading List Discussion
I did not find this rubric useful at all	5 (16%)	6 (19%)	6 (19%)
Useful for understanding what was expected of me	25 (78%)	20 (62%)	21 (66%)
Useful for preparation	20 (62%)	18 (56%)	17 (53%)
Useful for understanding why I received the level of honors I did	5 (16%)	9 (28%)	6 (19%)
Total Number of Students Responding: 32			

between the student and committee member. The Rubric for the Written Thesis was more successful in helping committee members to arrive at an appropriate level of honors than it was at facilitating the determination of thesis quality; perhaps this reflects faculty members' comfort with relying on previous knowledge and experience in evaluating written work to determine thesis quality while, in contrast, feeling a need for the rubric to translate this perception of quality into the less familiar notion of honors level.

Faculty members perceived the Rubric for the Oral Defense to be fairly successful in judging the quality of the oral defenses. However, whereas roughly two-thirds of respondents felt it is useful in this regard, less than half found this rubric useful for assessing the level of honors. The Rubric for the Oral Defense seemed more successful at judging quality than the Rubric for the Written Thesis yet less successful at determining the level of honors. Faculty members were only partially successful at translating the ability to judge quality of the presentation into an ability to determine the level of honors.

Respondents were the most mixed about the usefulness of the rubric in relation to the reading list discussion. On the one hand, almost two thirds of the faculty felt this rubric was helpful for communicating expectations about the reading list discussion (63%) and judging the quality of student performance (63%), yet only one quarter saw the rubric as useful for providing feedback to students, a discrepancy akin to what we observed above with respect to the Rubric for the Written Thesis. A related but more generalized discrepancy is that, while roughly two thirds of faculty respondents found the oral defense rubric useful for judging the quality of student performance across the three targeted areas of thesis presentation, thesis discussion, and reading list discussion, these percentages were much lower when faculty were rating the usefulness of this rubric for providing feedback to students across these three areas.

Unlike the within-rubric discrepancies, a curious between-rubric discrepancy was observed. In the follow-up survey (2010), more faculty members found the Rubric for the Written Thesis useful for determining the level of honors (54%) than found it useful for judging the quality of the thesis (40%). Conversely, more found the Rubric for the Oral Defense to be useful for judging the quality of the student's performance (63%–67%) than for determining the level of honors (44%–55%). Thus, while faculty members appear comfortable with the rubrics as a guide to the quality of the oral presentation and reading list more than to the written thesis itself, the rubric's assessment of the written thesis is more closely related to the level of honors than is the assessment of the other components; we infer that these results are closely related to a sense among faculty members that the written component of the thesis should be weighted more heavily than other parts of the process.

At the very least, such discrepancies suggest the need for continued discussion about the intended role of rubrics. For example, if the oral defense rubric helps an instructor judge the quality of student performance in that context, which our data suggest is the case, then this same rubric should be seen as a useful framework for providing students with feedback about that performance, which our data suggest is not the case. Similarly, if the written thesis rubric helps instructors understand the various components of the thesis, which our data again suggest is the case, then this same rubric should be seen as a useful framework for, say, communicating expectations and feedback to students, which our data suggest is not the case. Only by engaging faculty in such discussions can we hope to uncover the reasons behind the discrepancies we observed in our results.

Students increasingly used the rubrics with apparently mixed results. They acknowledged that the rubrics helped them understand what they had to do and what the expectations for them were with respect to the thesis process, yet comparatively few students felt the rubrics were useful for communicating with their advisor, assessing the quality of their work, or ultimately understanding their level of honors. Here, too, probing these students about their rubric-related views should help clarify the meaning, and possible implications, of these discrepancies.

Having developed and employed our set of thesis rubrics for several years now, we need to build on this assessment and other discussions about the rubrics to determine our future plans. The rubrics have certainly proved useful for some faculty members, for some students, and for some parts of the thesis process. However, they are still new and not integrated into the thesis process—from beginning to end—as much as we would like them to be. With hundreds of faculty members on campus who for years have advised theses, sat on thesis committees, and determined levels of honors without the rubrics, we cannot expect immediate buy-in from everyone. However, we are convinced that the rubrics have merit and, particularly for the student, provide important guidance through the thesis process. We will continue to encourage our advisors, committee members, and students to make use of the evolving rubrics in an effort both to improve the quality in all facets of the thesis experience and to move closer to the consistency and validity we seek in the ongoing assessment of honors student work.

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APPENDIX A

RUBRIC FOR THE WRITTEN THESIS
(adapted, with permission, from the rubric of the
Washington State University Honors College)

Providing brief comments will give additional feedback to the student as well as inform the post-defense deliberation among committee members.

A student who attains *honors* will typically receive a rating of at least *satisfactory* (4) on each of the dimensions below and on the rubrics connected with other facets of the thesis and defense. This is not an inviolable rule. The post-defense discussion should carefully consider the range and pattern of ratings, the rationale behind each committee member's ratings, and the relative importance of each dimension. Likewise, the ratings of a student who receives *highest honors* are almost always all *outstanding* (6).

1. Research question or creative challenge

Unacceptable			Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3		4	5	6
• Unique research question/issue/creative challenge identified						
• Goals/objectives/hypotheses are explicit						
• Historical and contemporary contexts, assumptions/biases, or ethical considerations are identified						
• Thesis presented is within an academic framework						
Comments:						

2. Methodology/approach: development

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6

- Methodology/approach is appropriate to disciplinary/interdisciplinary focus
- Topic is contextualized among sources and materials cited
- Multiple perspectives are considered
- Demonstrates understanding of the content, tools, and structures in the field

Comments:

3. Methodology/approach: implementation

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6

- Quantitative and/or symbolic tools are utilized effectively
- Evidence is sufficient to address the research question and is well utilized
- Accuracy and relevance of evidence are appropriately questioned; possible biases are identified
- Evaluates, analyzes, and synthesizes information
- Demonstrates understanding of professional standards

Comments:

4. Conclusions, implications, and consequences

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6

- Conclusions, qualifications, and consequences, including value of thesis, are presented
- Significance of what was discovered, learned, or created is demonstrated
- Assertions are qualified and well supported
- Demonstrates independent and critical thought

Comments:

5. Writing

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6

- Language clearly and effectively communicates ideas
- Any errors in grammar, spelling, mechanics, and/or punctuation are minimal
- Organization is clear and effective
- Sources and citations are used correctly

Comments:

APPENDIX B

RUBRIC FOR THE
THESIS AND READING LIST ORAL DEFENSE
(adapted, with permission, from the rubric of the
Washington State University Honors College)

Providing brief comments will give additional feedback to the student as well as inform the post-defense deliberation among committee members.

A student who attains *honors* will typically receive a rating of at least *satisfactory* (4) on each of the dimensions below and on the rubrics connected with other facets of the thesis and defense. This is not an inviolable rule. The post-defense discussion should carefully consider the range and pattern of ratings, the rationale behind each committee member's ratings, and the relative importance of each dimension. Likewise, the ratings of a student who receives *highest honors* are almost always all *outstanding* (6).

THESIS

1. Presentation

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6
• Introduction is interesting and engaging • Speech is clear and articulate • Presentation is well-organized and easy to follow • Media and format are appropriate for content • Presentation appropriately represents the thesis project					
Comments:					

2. Discussion with Committee

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6

- Questions are answered well and with reference to thesis student's own work
- Demonstrates knowledge of the subject
- Comfortably engages committee
- Demonstrates understanding of and facility with the content of the thesis
- Demonstrates understanding of and facility with the disciplinary context and implications of the thesis
- Findings central to the thesis are extended to questions external to the discipline

Comments:

READING LIST

1. List and Annotations

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6

- Works demonstrate a breadth of interests and education as well as intellectual depth
- Reading list primarily reflects undergraduate experience
- Annotations provide insight into the works and the student
- Annotations open doors for engaging conversation

Comments:

2. Conversation with Committee

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6

- Student recognizes connections among works
- Student expands upon annotations in a thoughtful and meaningful way
- Student is comfortable responding to questions from committee
- Student is able to explore threads tangential to the works
- Texts are clearly demonstrated to have played a significant role in the student's academic development

Comments:

APPENDIX C

RUBRIC FOR THE THESIS ADVISOR'S ASSESSMENT
(adapted, with permission, from the rubric of the
Washington State University Honors College)

Providing brief comments will give additional feedback to the student as well as inform the post-defense deliberation among committee members.

A student who attains *honors* will typically receive a rating of at least *satisfactory* (4) on each of the dimensions below and on the rubrics connected with other facets of the thesis and defense. This is not an inviolable rule. The post-defense discussion should carefully consider the range and pattern of ratings, the rationale behind each committee member's ratings, and the relative importance of each dimension. Likewise, the ratings of a student who receives *highest honors* are almost always all *outstanding* (6).

1. Relationship with the advisor

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6
- Assesses own knowledge, skills, and abilities accurately - Perseveres toward attaining mutually agreed upon goals - Displays high standards of attendance and punctuality - Responds thoughtfully to feedback - Sets, reflects upon and adjusts priorities in order to balance professionalism					
Comments:					

2. Relationship with the project

Unacceptable		Marginal	Satisfactory		Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6

- Clearly understands the big picture while attending to the details of the specific project
- Works independently; is a consistent "self-starter"
- Reliably recognizes the existence of a problem, identifies potential causes, and implements possible solutions
- Seeks and evaluates information using multiple criteria for topics/issues under consideration

Comments:

3. Assessment of the thesis project

- **Originality of thesis**
  - Was the thesis idea developed by the student?
  - Does the work done for the thesis represent an original perspective?
- **Contribution of thesis to disciplinary or interdisciplinary scholarship**
  - Does the thesis introduce new knowledge or analysis?
  - Will the thesis serve to stimulate other research or scholarship?
- **Publishability of thesis**
  - Is the thesis likely to result in a peer-reviewed journal article?
  - Is the thesis likely to result in a presentation at a professional meeting?
  - Is the thesis suitable for publication in a student journal or presentation at a student session?
- **Comparison of thesis work to master's level work in field**
  - Does the thesis work compare favorably to masters thesis work in the field?
  - Does the thesis work compare favorably to first-year master's student work in the field?