

Criteria for Honors in Independent Study

The following criteria are used in evaluating all Honors in Independent Study projects:

Cum Laude - Honors with distinction

To achieve honors, the project must fulfill all of the following criteria:

a. Theoretical understanding: The work demonstrates a substantial knowledge of, and facility with, previous work, underlying principles, and central concepts or theories in areas relevant to the project.

b. Originality: The work clearly shows that the student has established an original thesis or hypothesis, an original interpretation or analysis, a substantial and original synthesis or innovative pedagogical exposition of a sophisticated body of established work or has created a new work of art. In other words, the student must demonstrate that the project does not merely replicate, review, paraphrase, or compile previous work by others.

c. Quality: The work itself is of very high quality and is clear, well organized, and stylistically sound. The paper appropriately frames the original material in the project within the context of established work or relevant traditions in the discipline.

d. Format: The work provides documentation (e.g., bibliographic citations, tables and figures, illustrations) appropriate to the discipline and contains few and relatively minor grammatical or typographical flaws.

e. Research/Creative Process: The project has been carried out competently, diligently, independently, and in a manner that fulfills the basic standards of the discipline.

f. Oral exam: The oral examination reaffirms the student's facility with relevant principles, concepts, and background material; the originality of the contribution and the high quality of the work.

Magna Cum Laude - Honors with great distinction

In addition to fulfilling the criteria described above, the project must fulfill all of the following criteria:

a. Theoretical Understanding: The work demonstrates a level of mastery of, and facility with, relevant previous work, underlying principles, and central concepts or theories of which few undergraduates are capable, as well as a solid grasp of related but peripheral material.

b. Originality: The thesis, interpretation, analysis, synthesis, pedagogical exposition, or creative endeavor encompassed by the project demonstrates unusual and substantial creativity, conceptual innovation, or theoretical sophistication (i.e., an unusual degree of independence of thought) on the part of the student.

c. Quality: The work itself is of outstanding quality and is particularly well written, lucid, and compelling. The framing of the original material in the project within the context of established work or relevant traditions is remarkably sophisticated, revealing a sensitive and advanced understanding of the relationship between the student's contribution and established traditions or theories.

d. Format: The paper contains almost no grammatical or typographical flaws.

e. Research/Creative Process: The project has been carried out with a degree of technical competence, diligence, and independence of which few undergraduates are capable.

f. Oral exam: The oral examination reaffirms the outstanding quality of the work. The student is able to give complete, clear, well organized, and satisfying responses to the examiners' questions without the need for much guidance or prompting from the examiners.

Summa Cum Laude - Honors with highest distinction

This level of honors is rarely achieved and is reserved for those instances in which all components of the project demonstrate a superlative level of excellence. In addition to fulfilling the criteria described above, the project must fulfill all of the following criteria:

a. Theoretical Understanding: The work not only demonstrates an exceptional level of mastery of, and facility with, relevant previous work, underlying principles, and central concepts or theories but also a sophisticated and original critical perspective on this material (i.e., the student possesses informed opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of previous work, theories, and traditions in the area). The student not only intimately understands relevant background material but also has the ability to view this material critically in a wider intellectual context.

b. Originality: The thesis, interpretation, analysis, synthesis, pedagogical exposition, or creative endeavor encompassed by the project demonstrates a superlative level of creativity, conceptual innovation, or theoretical sophistication on the part of the student.

c. Quality: The work itself exceeds all expectations and is exceedingly well written, compelling, and engaging. The framing of the original material in the project within the context of established work or relevant traditions is elegant and subtle, revealing a rare and exceedingly advanced understanding of how the student's project represents a significant contribution to established traditions or theories

d. Format: The paper is technically flawless.

e. Research/Creative Process: The project has been carried out with a superlative level of technical competence, sophistication, diligence, and independence.

f. Oral exam: The oral examination reaffirms that the work is a rare achievement that makes an original and sophisticated contribution. The student is able to give extraordinarily complete and persuasive responses to the examiners' questions without the need for guidance or prompting from the examiners.