

HONORS THESIS / SENIOR PROJECT

OVERVIEW AND GENRES



WHAT MUST A THESIS/PROJECT *DO*?



PROJECT MUST ...

- Hold your interest
 - Or You Won't Do it!
 - For 12-16 months!
- Be relevant to other people
 - Integrate your thoughts with other people's ideas
 - Consequential, not self-serving
- Be manageable in scope

The purpose of a thesis is to articulate and investigate a question that is both personally stimulating, useful to others, and presented in discipline-specific ways.

-- from the WOU Honors Committee (see your syllabus)



It is a culmination of the student's unbiased research and balanced analysis, sensitive to the arguments on both sides of the rhetorical equation.

-- from the WOU Honors Committee (see your syllabus)

Students should start not with a presumption but with an observation,
then devise a way to seek explanations for that observation.

-- from the WOU Honors Committee (see your syllabus)

MOST IMPORTANT

(KEY)

- Inform and Persuade
- Create and Innovate
- Implement or Pioneer
- Demonstrate or Test
- Measure, Assess, or Evaluate

TYPES OF THESES/SENIOR PROJECTS?



TYPES OF THESIS PROJECTS

Most projects tend to combine 1-2 types. Some projects (esp. 6-10) allow you to focus on aspects of your self/identity.

1. Creative
2. Scholarly
3. Scientific
4. Pedagogical
5. Service Learning
6. Experiential Learning
7. Action Research
8. Leadership Portfolio
9. Wellness Project
10. Culture Project

CREATIVE PROJECTS

- Create original artistic work
- Write a reflective essay that situates your work within a tradition of artistic influences:
 - Other artists or movements or aesthetics
 - Don't interpret your work; rather, reveal how it was influenced by (and therefore converses with) other "texts" or people
- Stage or perform or publish that work (or not ...)

SCHOLARLY PROJECTS

- Inform readers about (recent) past history
- Rationalize need for current study – or recommendation
- Take an arguable stance that emerges from your research
- Support that stance with evidence and examples
- Acknowledge, accommodate, and/or refute counterarguments
- Discuss benefits and drawbacks (or threats & opportunities) to current or future situations
- Conclude/summarize main arguments

SCIENTIFIC PROJECTS

- Rationalize need for further investigation of data or issue
- Explain your method for gathering/collecting data
- Gather and analyze the data
- Clarify how you will measure success/failure
- Discuss consequences that emerge from the data, perhaps making a recommendation
- Discuss need for/scope of future study, if necessary

PEDAGOGICAL PROJECTS

- Analyze current state of an important educational issue
- Rationalize need for change
- Take a stance proposing specific changes
- Connect theory to practice through scholarship
- Discuss benefits/drawbacks (threats & opportunities)
- Explain how to implement specific changes (lesson plans)
- Explain how to evaluate/assess/measure “success”

SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

- Document ~30 hours of volunteerism, logging progress towards completion
- Project should span at least a three month period
- Write a reflective essay that:
 - a. surveys the history and scope of the social problem the charity/organization addresses (larger context);
 - b. clarifies the actions taken by the charity/organization – and also the student specifically – to address these problems (methods, outcomes); and
 - c. examines the personal impact on the student because of their engagement in this project (personal interest, end results)

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROJECTS

“Experiential Learning” is defined broadly. The key is your “ability to contextualize” and also the project’s “analytical rigor.”

Such a project could involve study abroad, travel writing, photo journalism, or other cultural reflections/comparisons/analyses.

Key questions to be answered include:

- a. What was the initiating motivation for the project?
- b. What is the objective that can be articulated?
- c. What meaningful conclusions can you draw?

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

- Action research is a framework by which a researcher identifies a problem in their professional or personal practice(s), then implements an intervention to address it.
- Components of an action research project:
 - a. Identify a problem within your personal or professional practice(s)
 - b. Review the current literature surrounding the problem
 - c. Design a process/intervention to address the problem
 - d. Implement the intervention and gather data on the results
 - e. Write reflectively on the results
 - f. Draw connections to the field as a whole

LEADERSHIP PORTFOLIO

Create a list of 10-12 books on leadership, broadly defined. Then select five to be your core texts.

Write a reflective essay that has three parts:

- a. Literature Review (on the core texts). Approx. 20 pgs., including a rationale for why that book was chosen.
- b. Application Section (present-focused). Connect what you've learned from the core texts to your experiences with student leadership. Experiences need not be WOU-based but should span your college years. Comment on how your leadership confirmed lessons in the core texts and also where you fell short or could have been a better leader. Approx. 15-20 pgs.
- c. Reflection Section (future-oriented): Reflect forward on how this leadership portfolio might help you professionally. The goal of education is to prepare future leaders who are independent and collaborative, local and worldly, self-supporting and self-aware. How has this project assisted you as you begin your career beyond WOU? Approx. 10-15 pgs.

WELLNESS PROJECT

- Identify a specific focus and rationale for improved wellness, broadly defined
- Research core texts on your topic (literature review) to identify best practices
- Develop an action plan for improvement (may involve others/coaches/therapists)
- Implement your plan (with sufficient duration to be meaningful)
- Measure your progress, recording data diligently and including “interval checkpoints”
- Discuss results, perhaps including a cost-benefit analysis (was it worth it?) and/or commentary on how your plan could be improved

CULTURE PROJECT

- Culture projects focus on an aspect of one's "culture," broadly defined. It involves a community or micro-community that you self-identify with. It may also include elements of autoethnography.
- To complete a culture project, students would:
 - a. Identify an investigative question related to an aspect of your chosen community
 - b. Establish best practices for cultural investigation based on peer-reviewed sources
 - c. Incorporate your own experiences, if desired
 - d. Recommend improvements or desired changes in knowledge, belief, or action