



Visual Arts Thesis Overview and Guidelines

The following guidelines have been composed to assist you in preparing for and carrying out your visual arts senior honors thesis project. This will ensure your work develops your creative elements while meeting research and writing requirements for the Honors in Major designation. Your thesis director should be a full-time professor and will remain your primary point of contact for decisions regarding form, structure, and content. The visual arts thesis will be based on original works in a given medium, the bulk of which are created *after* the approval of their thesis prospectus.

The visual arts thesis, although based in large part on an original creative component, must incorporate a substantial, research-based written component. Along with high-quality images of the original creative work (with the appropriate lists of figures/illustrations, labels under the images, and incorporation within the body of the writing), the thesis has two components: 1) critical introduction and 2) visual/rhetorical analysis of the artwork.

While the length of the visual arts thesis will depend on the medium used, suggested guideposts include: 15-20 pages for the critical introduction and 20-30 pages for the visual/rhetorical analysis of the artwork. More important than length is quality of thought and writing.

Prospectus Guidelines for a Visual Arts Thesis

If you wish to pursue a visual arts thesis, include the following components in your 3-5 page prospectus: 1) Project description (3-5 paragraphs) explaining the project's medium, subject, and scope; 2) An artist's statement (3-5 paragraphs) explaining at least five important influences that have shaped your perspective in relation to the project; and 3) Bibliography including the five influences you mention and at least five secondary theoretical, critical, and/or historical sources.

Visual Arts Critical Introduction Guidelines

The critical introduction will synthesize the work of many sources to generate an analysis of your own creative work.

The medium in which you are working has a history. In preparing to write the critical introduction, first conduct research with the help of your chair and library liaison to identify the key writings which outline this history, including theory and practice. From the list that emerges, think about the sources which are most relevant to your project. Ask: which sources allow for a good historical overview of my medium and subject matter, and which sources provide important theoretical specificity? Which thinkers, theories, or artistic movements am I "working within" and which am I "working against"? All of these will be useful for your critical introduction.

After you have identified and vetted 8-12 potential sources for your critical introduction, read each source and compose an annotated bibliography. List each source in alphabetical order and write a 5-7 sentence annotation under each one. The annotation should include 1) your summary of the key ideas the source offers and 2) your explanation of your creative project's connections to the source. On the basis of your annotations, you will be prepared to begin writing your critical introduction. The central aim of this introduction is to situate your creative project within the artistic traditions you are engaging.

Orient your readers with a literature review that details the main historical, theoretical, and artistic thought on your medium and subject matter. Show how the aesthetic choices you make extend on or depart from this thought by analyzing your artwork. Explain why you do so. Finally, reflect on the meaning of your work. What effect on the audience do you ultimately wish to achieve in this project?

Visual Arts Analysis Guidelines

Organize your thesis chapters by key ideas, rather than by forms or techniques. Extend on the work you started in the critical introduction by going further in depth to show how the aesthetic choices you make create a specific meaning. Break each work into its components, and using your secondary sources where necessary, demonstrate how each component contributes to the meaning of the piece and the effect on the audience you wish to achieve.

Visual Arts Thesis Defense

Within the traditional thesis defense, students pursuing a Visual Arts honors thesis must present “an artist’s talk” which includes a PowerPoint presentation of the images of their work and discusses their artistic process, materials, and a philosophy of what is important to them in their creative endeavors.