

Statement on Criteria for the Nomination and Award of “Highest Honors”
Undergraduate Honors Program, Department of Political Science

Adopted April 2015

Students who meet the minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 after 60 hours, have a minimum 3.5 GPA in their graduating semester, and complete the required course work and submit an undergraduate honors thesis may be awarded “high honors” or “highest honors.” When faculty mentors in the program recommend highest honors, the honors coordinator forms a review committee of two faculty to review the thesis blindly and make a recommendation. When the two faculty concur in their assessment, the student is awarded highest honors. If the two faculty do *not* concur that the thesis meets the standards for highest honors, the student is awarded high honors. In the case of a tie, the honors coordinator reviews the thesis and breaks the tie.

The Department enthusiastically supports the development of theses from across subfields and welcomes diversity, creativity, and cross-disciplinary pluralism in methodological and theoretical approaches.

To meet the threshold for the designation of “highest honors,” faculty mentors and peer-reviewers take into account the following general criteria:

1. *Grammar and organization.* At a minimum, the thesis should be very well-written, be free of grammatical and sentence structure errors, be well-organized, and convey a mastery of the relevant literature.
2. *Originality.* The thesis should be original, make a contribution to the extant literature on the topic, and address a particular void or voids in the literature using secondary and/or primary sources.
3. *Theory.* The thesis should develop or creatively apply a sound and scrupulous theoretical perspective or “frame” that informs the research topic.
4. *Methodology.* The thesis should develop a rigorous or innovative methodological approach, whether the work is interpretive or positivist in orientation. Whatever methods are employed, the thesis should display a high level of skill and sophistication, and the methods should be used appropriately and correctly.
5. *Clear and Coherent Argument.* The manuscript should link theory and methods in a way that supports the essay’s core argument.
6. *Contribution to the field of political science.* The thesis should reflect a scholarly endeavor that is potentially publishable and/or worthy of presentation at a regional or national conference in the field.