Ratified by NF faculty vote on 10/29/2026

Rubric for Proposed Thesis Projects

Overview
In this rubric, a nonfiction thesis is a long-form project in one, or a combination of, several forms including: memoir, journalism, creative nonfiction, a lyric essay, cultural criticism, or other categories of writing, including travel, nature, science, sports, history, or other forms. It can be one continuous piece or a series of related shorter works.

Eligibility
The student must have more As than Bs in English courses, have taken at least one course in the Nonfiction Writing Program. The student will have taken the three 1000-level Nonfiction courses required for the concentration by the time they graduate, only one of which can be at the 1030- or 1050-level. In general, students have to have taken two Nonfiction courses by the end of their sixth semester, unless an exception is granted by the Nonfiction Honors Advisor.

The Proposal
The proposal demonstrates that the project looks outward at some complex aspect of the world—example areas might be history, science, culture, or politics—and discusses it in a nuanced, artful, and rigorous way. The proposal suggests the promise of substantial research (text-based and/or firsthand observation/interview) and/or substantial cultural criticism.

The thesis has a driving question or a set of questions that does intellectual work by addressing multiple and interacting aspects of its central topic or topics. The thesis reckons with its topics' historical and cultural context, including relevant aspects of inequality and power among people (such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class) and/or among governments, nations, groups, and non-human actors. It incorporates and is responsive to the written and/or spoken words of people other than the writer. If students have any questions about how and whether their interests satisfy these expectations, they can be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

The project is sustainable for over the course of 50+ double-spaced pages and can be effectively addressed within a year's worth of work.

The proposal shows awareness of the ethical concerns—defined as a complex sense of our responsibilities to each other and our world—within the topic(s) and/or situation(s) that it considers.

The proposal conveys the form that the writing will take and the justification for that form.

The proposal should explain the relevance of specific courses to the thesis topic.

The student has demonstrated the ability to work steadily on, and complete, sustained writing projects with examples of previous projects and research.

Requirements
The proposal should include the following:

1) A description, roughly 300 words long, of the proposed project

2) A provisional bibliography of 10 or more books—or their equivalent in shorter works—that demonstrates a thorough preliminary investigation into the subject
3) The writing sample of one or two pieces comprising roughly 15-20 double-spaced pages, total

Rubric for Final Thesis Projects

Overview
The thesis, understood to be a long-form project in nonfiction, looks outward at some complex aspect of the world—example areas might be history, science, culture, or politics—and discusses it in a nuanced and rigorous way. The thesis demonstrates substantial research (text-based and/or firsthand observation/interview) and/or substantial cultural criticism. This research should be tracked and cited throughout the semester in MLA, Chicago, or APA style (or propose an alternative format) and included at the end of the thesis.

The Thesis
The thesis has a driving question or a set of questions that does intellectual work by addressing multiple and interacting aspects of its central topic or topics. The thesis reckons with its topics' historical and cultural context, including relevant aspects of inequality and power among people (such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class) and/or among governments, nations, groups, and non-human actors. It incorporates and is responsive to the written and/or spoken words of people other than the writer. If students have any questions about how and whether their interests satisfy these expectations, they can be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

The topics and themes of the thesis are effectively sustained and addressed in its 50+ double-spaced pages.

The thesis opens with a short introduction where the student places their work in the context with writing that bears formal or thematic similarities, situating this piece within a broader conversation about genre, its history, and its possible futures. It includes consideration of its topics' and situations' relevant ethical concerns, and the form is a functional and effective fit for the material.

The student has taken personal responsibility for setting up regular appointments and following through on the advice from their advisors.

Requirements
Along with the above,the thesis should include the following:
1) An author's note or short introduction (see above)
2) 50+ double-spaced pages of writing which includes consideration of its topics' and situations' relevant ethical concerns with a form that is a functional and effective fit for the material.
3) A works cited in MLA, Chicago, or APA style (or propose an alternative format) and included at the end of the thesis

In order to achieve these goals, the thesis student should have met regularly with both of their advisors—a minimum of every other week with their first reader, and a minimum of three times during each semester with their second reader.