

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY  
Policy on Graduate Program Culminating Experience Requirements  
(October 17, 2012)

Background: Title 5 specifies “satisfactory completion of a thesis, project, or comprehensive examination” as one of the requirements for all Master’s degrees. For some time, the Graduate Council of Humboldt State University has been concerned about inconsistencies in both the requirements for and the quality of such culminating experiences. Accordingly, the Graduate Council recommends the adoption of the following minimum requirements.

1. All culminating experiences for the Master’s degree, regardless of specific form or discipline, must document the student’s achievement of the program learning outcomes at an appropriate level.
2. All theses, projects, and comprehensive examination responses must be evaluated by at least two faculty members.
3. The use of HSU categories “bound project” and “unbound project” will be discontinued, with all culminating experiences resulting in one of the three forms specified by Title 5 as follows:
  - a. A **thesis** is the written product of a systematic study of a significant problem. It identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The finished product evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough documentation. Normally, an oral defense of the thesis is required.
  - b. A **project** is a significant undertaking appropriate to the fine and applied arts or to professional fields. It evidences originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization, and a rationale. It is described and summarized in a written [document] that includes the project's significance, objectives, methodology and a conclusion or recommendation. An oral defense of the project may be required.
  - c. A **comprehensive examination** is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, show critical and independent thinking, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination evidences independent thinking, appropriate organization, critical analysis and accuracy of documentation. A record of the examination questions and responses shall be maintained in accordance with the records retention policy of The California State University.

Please see the attached table comparing the components of a thesis with those of a project. The Graduate Council believes that in most programs, the document resulting from the culminating experience is a Thesis; however, each program should review the standards of its discipline and the requirements of comparable programs when determining which to adopt.

4. Each program must either (a) adhere to the university guidelines for thesis formatting, as described at <http://www.humboldt.edu/academicprograms/thesis-format-requirements> , or (b) develop and post its guidelines for the project or thesis, including documentation style, limits on length, and other standard elements of document formatting.
5. Students must submit a digital copy of the thesis or project to the University Library, specifying a one- to two-year embargo when appropriate.

Revision: Graduate Council, October 17, 2012

University Senate: Passed Unanimously, 11/27/12

President Richmond: Approved, 11/28/12

**Thesis/Project Comparisons**  
**Title 5**

Thesis	Project
<p>1. Written product of systematic study of a significant problem</p> <p>a. identifies problem</p> <p>b. states assumptions</p> <p>c. explains significance</p> <p>d. sets forth sources and methods of obtaining information</p> <p>e. analyzes the information</p> <p>f. offers conclusion or recommendation</p> <p>3. Must evidence</p> <p>a. originality</p> <p>b. critical thinking</p> <p>c. independent thinking</p> <p>d. appropriate organization and format</p> <p>e. thorough documentation</p>	<p>1. Significant undertaking in fine/applied arts or professional field</p> <p>2. described in written abstract that must include the project's</p> <p>a. objectives</p> <p>c. significance</p> <p>d. methodology</p> <p>f. conclusion or recommendations</p> <p>3. Must evidence</p> <p>a. originality</p> <p>c. independent thinking</p> <p>d. appropriate form and organization</p> <p>f. a rationale</p>