Assessment of Senior Theses for the Program in Integrated Studies at Utah Valley University
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Questions to be addressed, based on a random sample of each thesis year:

- Quality of research?
- Quality of writing?
- Quality of integration of disciplines?
- Adherence to prescribed format and manual of style?
- Use of primary and secondary sources?
- Creativity?
- Changes in quality year to year?

Six theses per year, specific notes on every third thesis read.

2009 Understanding the Abilities of the Disabled. [Lorem Ipsum]. (52 pages)
- NO Approval page
- Table of Contents
- Abstract
- Not sure if this is a research-driven thesis or personal opinion piece on how mentally disabled are able to provide “help us all by their subconscious example to love, laugh, and accept. . . . but it comes as second nature to these individuals.”
- Is the author mentally challenged? What is her relationship to the community?
- Unclear thesis
- Unclear about what disciplines were selected to focus on and how they were integrated
- Focus of the thesis begins with the mentally challenged which would have been sufficient for the thesis scope, but then it introduces the elderly as a disabled group, obfuscating the focus of the thesis
- Citations use a fairly consistent punctuation style (MLA or APA);
- Citations are lacking page, or for internet sites, paragraph numbers
- Section headings provide a great “road map” to the structure of the argumentation
- Topic is engaging and integrates arguments from both Business and Science in a balanced manner
- Some of the arguments need better documentation, these are not “common knowledge” and I was looking for support
- Bibliography demonstrates great breadth and balance between digital and
conventional academic sources, and other “commercial” internet sites

- Good demonstration of research, but I was just not clear whether this was a research thesis or creative work (personal narrative)

2009  Branding of Mormon Elective Political Candidates and its Consequences: An Historical Analysis. (36 pages)

- Approval page
- No Table of Contents
- No Abstract
- Great adherence to style, format, and structure
- Great presentation of ideas, focus on two Mormon presidential candidates, and historical trends of “Mormon branding” between Reed Smoot and Mitt Romney
- Great demonstration of research with adequate number of sources for a study of this kind
- Good demonstration of integration between Marketing and Religious Cultural Studies (for lack of a better term)

2009  Planning Communication and Marketing Strategies: Taking a Sociological Approach at Nu Skin. (98 pages)

- NO Approval page
- No Table of Contents
- No Abstract
- What the hell is this?!!! All I was able to see were 96 pages of marketing materials from Nu Skin and a two-page explanation of the author’s role in preparing those materials. Is this a creative work? Is there a new category of thesis? There is no original content and analysis of the material. The title page indicates that this is somehow the integration of Communications and Sociology. The Communications focus is apparent in marketing materials, but there is no research to demonstrate any kind of grounding within a tradition of marketing theory, and zero integration of a sociological framework in an attempt to demonstrate anything.

2009  Cryptozoology is a legitimate scientific filled worthy of the same level of attention and respect that any other science is allotted. (99 pages)

- Approval page
- Table of Contents
- No Abstract
- Glaring typo on Title Page that completely obfuscates the description of the thesis.
- Clear thesis statement and explanation of research direction
- Great adherence to style, format, and structure
- Excellent demonstration of research with superior number of references (573) and
sources (approx 80) for a study of this kind
- Good demonstration of integration between History and Social Science, but it is not a stretch

2010  Speaking for a Silent People.  (33 pages)
- Approval page
- Table of Contents
- No Abstract
- Clear thesis statement and direction of research
- Great adherence to style, format, and structure
- Devolves into personal narrative from her very good introduction and road map
- Good demonstration of integration between Community Health and Deaf Studies

2010  Biometrics: The Future of Payment and Key to Stopping Fraud.  (40 pages)
- Approval page
- No Table of Contents
- No Abstract
- Clear thesis statement and direction of research
- Great adherence to style, format, and structure
- Unclear referents (this, these, those) to preceding ideas
- Unclear logical fallacy between many businesses having online presence “causing or creating” internet fraud. Shouldn’t “the economy” and unemployment be the catalyst for the rise in online fraudulent behavior?
- Great charts
- Good integration of Psychology (theoretical framework) and Business Management (online consumer fraud)

2010  Rushdie and a New Awakening to the World: A Reading of Salman Rushdie’s Life and Works.  (37 pages)
- Approval page
- No Table of Contents
- Abstract
- Clear thesis statement and direction of research
- Great adherence to style, format, and structure
- Good integration of Philosophy (theoretical framework) and Literature (novels of Salman Rushdie), but this integration is not a big stretch
- More than Adequate number of references to sound scholarship
- Engaging discussion and compelling arguments
2010 Making Every Drop Count: Economical and Environmental Benefits of Applying Technological Advances to the Western US Water Crisis. (21 pages)

- Approval page
- Table of Contents
- No Abstract
- Clear thesis statement and direction of research
- Adequate adherence to style, format, and structure
- Not an especially engaging or compelling read

2010 Psychological Effects of Breast Cancer. (25ish pages. No pagination really? )

- Approval page
- Creative Work, personal narrative with insights from research and reading that she has done about cancer
- Provocative read
- Not certain beyond the personal narrative if there was meant to be a point
- no adherence to style, format, and structure
- Is this a recycled paper from another course?

2010 Workplace Wellness for Obesity and Overall Health. (35 pages)

- Approval page
- Table of Contents
- No Abstract
- Reads like an underclassman paper not a senior thesis. Too many short, choppy sentences, sweeping generalizations, and unsubstantiated claims
- Adequate adherence to style, format, and structure

2011 EGroup Text: A Community Engagement Texting Solution. (80 pages)

- Approval page
- Table of Contents
- No Abstract but Executive Summary
- Basically a Business Plan for a startup company
- Is this a new category of thesis? Applied Thesis?
- Well researched, illustrated and well thought out
• Great adherence to style, format, and structure of a formal business plan

2011  Prophecies or Profit: Clashes of Native American Religion and Private Industry. (47 pages)
• Approval page
• No Table of Contents
• No Abstract
• Clear thesis statement and direction of research
• Great adherence to style, format, and structure
• Good integration of Philosophy (theoretical framework) and Literature (novels of Salman Rushdie), but this integration is not a big stretch
• More than Adequate number of references to sound scholarship
• Engaging discussion and compelling arguments

2011  “The a la Menthe ou t’es Citron”: Problems in Translating French into English. (254 pages)
• Approval page
• Table of Contents
• No Abstract
• Clear thesis statement and direction of research
• Great adherence to style, format, and structure
• 26 pages of research and methodology behind translation of this play
• More than Adequate number of references to sound scholarship
• Would have liked to see more side-by-side translation comparisons excerpted from Appendices

2011  Student/Landlord Dispute Resolution. (30 pages)
• Approval page
• No Table of Contents
• No Abstract
• Clear thesis statement and direction of research
• Great adherence to style, format, and structure
• Another Applied Thesis?
• Good focus
• Very engaging and well-written account of disputes between students and landlords
• Excellent documentation and supporting materials
2012 The Utah Tiger Muskellunge Project.  (30 pages)
- Approval page
- Table of Contents
- No Abstract
- No pagination
- Clear thesis statement and direction of research
- Applied thesis on spawning Muskie with supporting documentation and illustrations

2012 Local Biases on Abstract Art and Classical Realism: A Fieldwork Approach Examining Trends in Visual Arts Education.  (60 pages + appendices)
- Approval page
- Table of Contents
- No Abstract
- Clear thesis statement and direction of research, but begins thesis with a cliché. This practice is something I’d expect from a freshman writing course
- Great adherence to style, format, and structure
- Engaging and compelling read
- Great documentation and supporting materials
- Integrates personal narrative with her research
- Well-done.

Overall
- Wide varieties of topics from Cryptozoology and scrapbooking to health and business-related topics, and creative works of a graphic nature to personal narratives
- Still a wide disparity in quality, but with marked improvement overall—in other words—the good theses are really good, and while the really poor quality works still demonstrate a significant improvement from past years, I would have questioned whether the theses should pass the requirements, and yet they did. Passing a student based on poor performance will ultimately lower the overall quality and integrity of the program.
- Poor quality works by poor performers demonstrate a lack of supervision by advisors and faculty to meet regularly with students on theses progress
- Wondered about the originality of some of the theses or whether the papers had been “recycled” from other courses because of their lack of any clear attempts to integrate two disciplines
- Inconsistent page length. Is there a hard and fast requirement? Should there be?
  YES, students want to know what the least amount of work it will take to complete the task
Assessment Conclusions:
Senior theses from Utah Valley University (UVU), Integrated Studies Program were selected at random for semesters and terms occurring between the years 2009 through 2012. Compared to the previous three assessments performed on senior theses, the quality of research, writing, and compliance to prescribed styles for writing continues to improve steadily and significantly. It is clear that the faculty and administrators of the Integrated Studies Program have executed several of the recommendations from the previous assessments. Additionally, it is apparent that the quality of students attending UVU and participating in this program has risen. Both these factors contribute significantly to the increased quality of the senior theses.

While improved adherence to manuals of style has been more consistently enforced by faculty, there are still a few exceptions. The importance of adhering to the manuals begins in freshman writing courses, but falters in other courses requiring written work. Quite often in these courses, the faculty is unclear of writing expectations and grades are mostly based on content. This oversight of style and other mechanics signals to students that “it really does not matter”.

Continuous improvement in how well-integrated the topics or disciplines are in the theses has been clearly demonstrated over previous assessments. There were a few exceptions, but overall this concern demonstrated marked improvement. I attribute this improvement to more clear defined expectations being communicated to students. While this communication most likely takes place during consultations, it is also reinforced through the course syllabus. Here is an example taken from Nancy Rushforth’s syllabi and used in LI 511 taught by Scott Abbott:

The thesis should integrate the two emphases you have chosen for Integrated Studies. Each thesis should reflect serious academic research, clear and concise writing and should consist of an in-depth discussion and analysis of the topic. The length of the thesis should be determined by the topic and the disciplines involved. For instance, a thesis discussing a mathematical problem might be fully analyzed in a few pages, while a philosophical, theoretical thesis could take 30 pages to discuss. The thesis should include a clear statement of purpose or thesis statement, substantial supporting evidence for each assertion made, clear documentation of sources and a summary of the issues presented as a conclusion. The thesis should also include a works-cited section. Sources should include professional journals, books, articles, newspaper articles, documentaries, archives, personal interviews, etc. Internet sources may be used, but only with careful scrutiny as to original source and author and only to supplement other sources.
Recommendations

Expectations regarding thesis requirements have begun to improve and this clarity is reflected in the overall improved quality of writing. I will review previous recommendations and provide an evaluation of current status.

1. Development of Thesis Requirements

The development of Thesis Requirements should be based on three types of projects (or more as the case may be) so that these types of writing require similar kinds of rigor, discipline, research, and scholarship. These three types of projects might include, Standard Research Thesis, Thesis Based on Primary Research, and Creative Thesis. Some of the parameters might include:

- A bibliography demonstrating a balance of research in both areas of the integrated disciplines. The number of sources for a thesis should have an arbitrary measure (perhaps one to two unique sources for every page of writing). Demonstrates considerable improvement.
- A section discussing methodology for those theses which have primary research. This section would be helpful for the reader to ascertain the how and why a particular approach was taken.
- A section discussing an author’s statement of purpose for a creative work, one grounded in some kind of theoretical framework
- Is there a common style manual that is expected of students or is it left to the discretion of the advisors? It appears that there were primarily three manuals used, APA, MLA and Chicago. This issue has improved considerably.
- In the event of a Creative Thesis, is there a style manual to follow or a set of parameters that is expected by faculty? This particular type of theses needs better requirements and more explicit guidelines. A creative work is a major achievement, but how does it fulfill interdisciplinary integration? Perhaps in addition to the creative work, an analysis using integrated or comparative frameworks would provide the rigor required for the thesis requirement of the program. These requirements need to be clearly articulated. Are marketing materials created as part of a requirement of one’s employment considered creative? If this type of thesis is acceptable, then there needs to be some kind of analytical framework equaling that of a research thesis.

2. Performance Measures that Contribute to Raising Quality

While quantitative measures run counter to evaluation processes in the Humanities, in determining accreditation legislators and outside organizations speak this language and like metrics. There is a way to measure performance I renew recommendations below.

- Number of pages, number of poems, number of short stories, research sample, etc. all of these things can be measured and be included among
the thesis expectations to students/advisors

- Specific number of unique sources expected for a thesis of certain page ranges
- Demonstrated improvements in literacy skill levels in reading, in critical analysis, writing
- Implementation of a self-evaluation as part of the thesis process with guidelines to specific areas named above
- Assessing the value of doing the thesis: tracking and measuring students who have done the thesis and entered graduate school, what kinds of employment they entered, what kinds of scores they achieved on GRE, LSAT, GMAT, etc.
- Student exit surveys about the value of the thesis process in preparing them for other life activities

- Employment placement metrics
- Graduate and professional school acceptance rates metrics

Future Considerations

There seems to be a continued focus on traditional genres, communities and social conventions, most likely encouraged by faculty who are comfortable with those forms and topics. Technology has introduced a plethora of emerging and changing genres and communities that have no traditional dimensions of time and space or materiality. Virtual communities, social media communities, crowd-sourcing, etc await critical study and analysis. UVU students are right in the middle of this information revolution and there are scholars coming out with analytical critiques from several theoretical vantage points every week. Encouragement by faculty to explore these communities would push students to be more cognizant of their own roles in the changing world brought about by technological innovations. Including these communities as part of course materials would stimulate students to explore these communities in more depth.