THESIS/SENIOR PROJECT

Overview and Genres
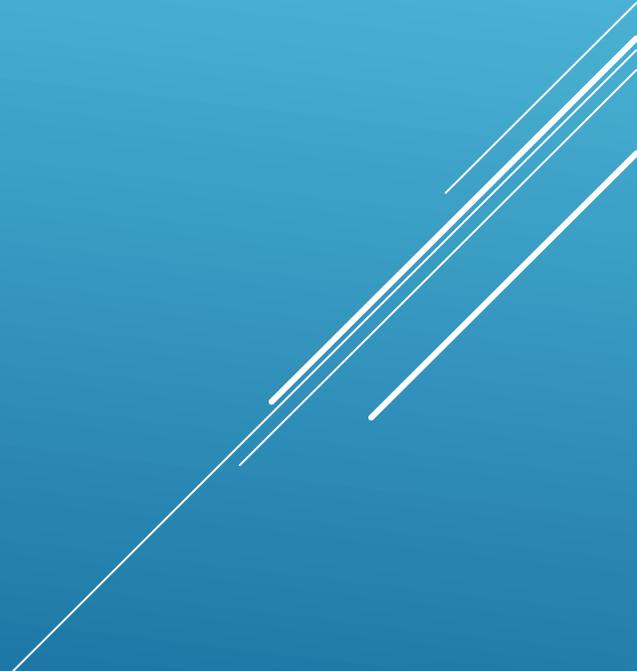
WHAT MUST A THESIS/PROJECT *DO*?
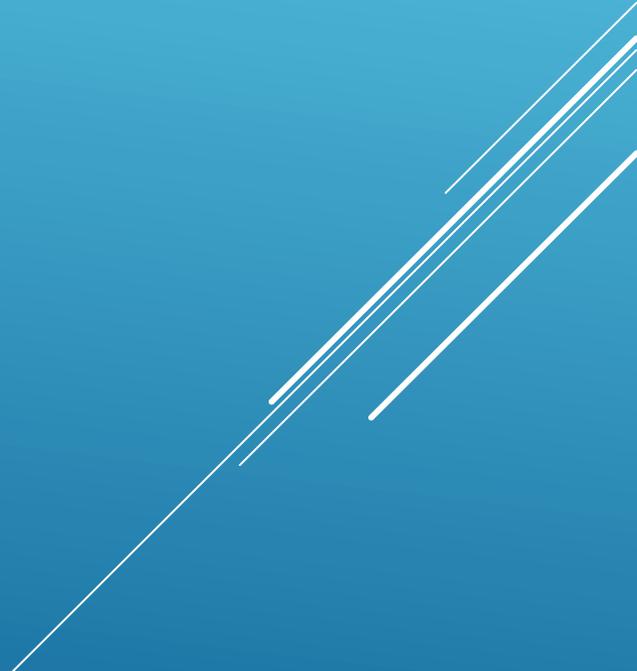
PROJECT MUST …

- Hold your interest
  - Or You Won't Do it!
  - For 12-16 months!
- Be relevant to other people
  - Integrate your thoughts with other people's ideas
  - Consequential, not self-serving
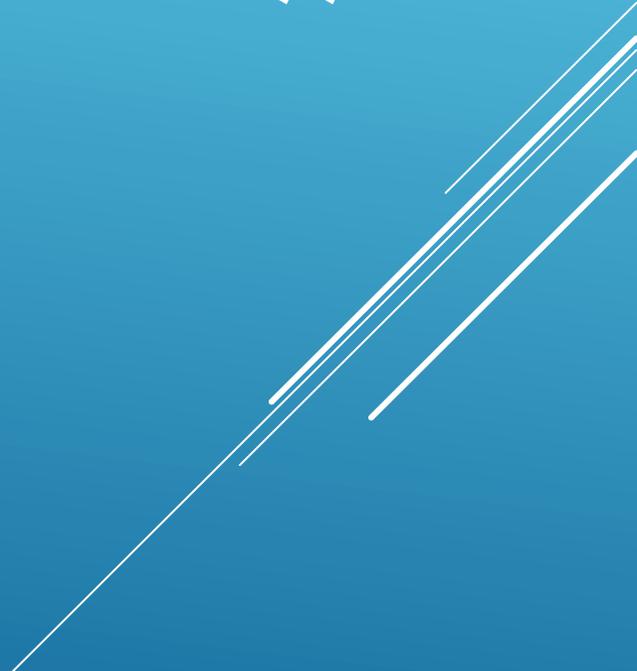- Be manageable in scope

"

The purpose of a thesis is to articulate and investigate a question that is both personally stimulating, useful to others, and presented in discipline-specific ways.

"

-- from the WOU Honors Committee (see your syllabus)

"

It is a culmination of the student's unbiased research and balanced analysis, sensitive to the arguments on both sides of the rhetorical equation.

"

-- from the WOU Honors Committee (see your syllabus)

" "

Students should start not with a presumption but with an observation, then devise a way to seek explanations for that observation.
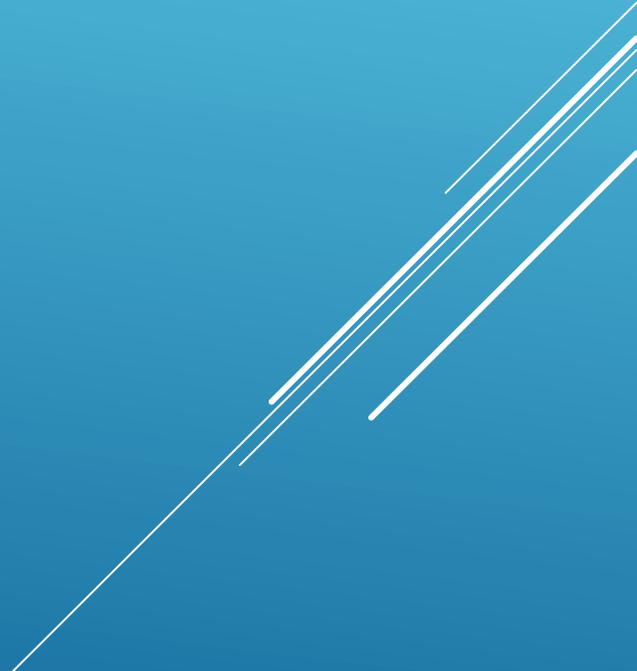
" "

-- from the WOU Honors Committee (see your syllabus)

MOST IMPORTANT

(KEY)

- Inform and Persuade
- Create and Innovate
- Implement or Pioneer
- Demonstrate or Test
- Measure, Assess, or Evaluate

TYPES OF THESES/SENIOR PROJECTS?

TYPES OF THESIS/PROJECTS
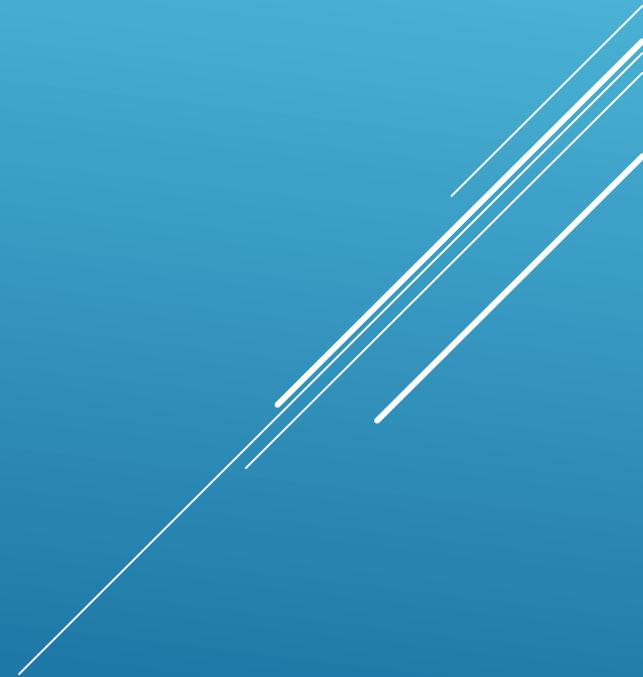
- Creative

- Scholarly

- Scientific

- Pedagogical

- Service-learning

- Experiential Learning

- Action Research

- Leadership Portfolio

90-95% of all thesis/projects fall into the first four categories

More people should consider the possibilities with service-learning or experiential-learning projects!
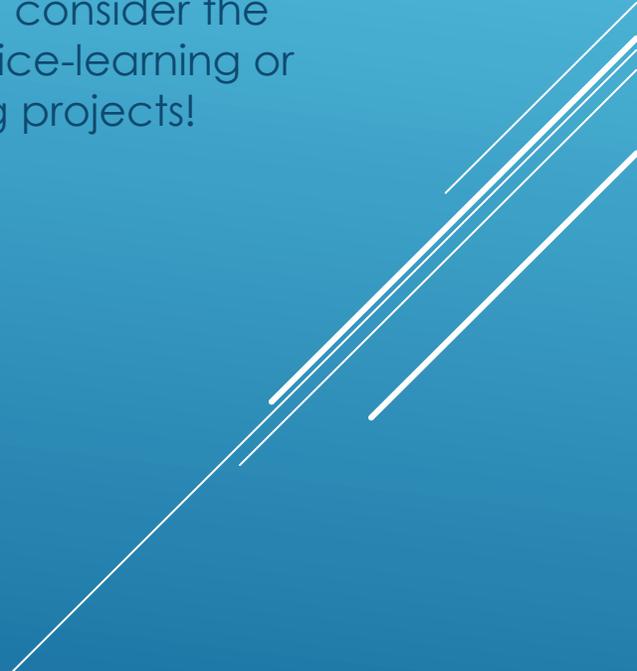
- Create original artistic work
- Write an expository essay that situates your work within a tradition of artistic influences:
  - Other artists or movements or aesthetics
  - Don't interpret your work; rather, reveal how it was influenced by (and therefore converses with) other "texts" or people
- Stage or perform that work (or not …)

CREATIVE PROJECTS

- Inform readers about (recent) past history

- Rationalize need for current study – or recommendation

- Take an arguable stance that emerges from your research

- Support that stance with evidence and examples

- Acknowledge, accommodate, and/or refute counterarguments

- Discuss benefits and drawbacks (or threats & opportunities) to current or future situations

- Conclude/summarize main arguments

SCHOLARLY PROJECTS

- Provide a rationale – or clarify the need – for further investigation of a topic (to yourself & others)

- Explain your method for gathering/collecting data

- Gather and analyze the data

- Clarify how you will measure success/failure

- Discuss consequences that emerge from the data, perhaps making a recommendation based upon it

- Discuss need for/scope of future study, if necessary

SCIENTIFIC PROJECTS

- Analyze current state or situation

- Rationalize need for change

- Take a stance proposing specific changes

- Connect theory to practice

- Discuss benefits/drawbacks (threats & opportunities)

- Explain how to implement specific changes (lesson plans)

- Explain how to evaluate/assess/measure "success"

PEDAGOGICAL PROJECTS

- Student should document at least 30 hours of volunteerism, logging progress towards completion after every significant chunk.

- Project should span at least a three month period, preferably longer.

- Student should write a reflective essay that

    a. surveys the history and scope of the social problem the charity/organization addresses (akin to larger significance section in other kinds of theses/projects);

    b. clarifies the actions taken by the charity/organization – and also the student specifically – to address these problems (akin to methods and outcomes sections …); and

    c. additionally examines the personal impact on the student because of their engagement in this project (akin to personal interest and outcomes or results sections …)

SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

- "Experiential Learning" is defined broadly and can include study abroad or other travel experiences. It is not confined to travel, however. The key is your "ability to contextualize" and also the project's "analytical rigor"

- Such a project could involve travel writing, photo journalism, or other cultural reflection/comparison/analysis

- Key questions to be answered include:

  a. What was the initiating motivation for the project?

  b. What is the objective that can be articulated?

  c. What meaningful conclusions can you draw?

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROJECTS

- Action research is a framework by which a researcher identifies a problem in their professional or personal practice(s), then implements an intervention to try to address that problem.

- Components of an action research project:
  a. Identify a problem within your personal or professional practice(s)
  b. Review the current literature surrounding the problem
  c. Design a process/intervention to address the problem
  d. Implement the intervention and take data on the results
  e. Write reflectively on the results
  f. Draw Connections to the field as a whole

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

- Students will create a list of 12-15 books on leadership, broadly defined. They would then self-select and read 5-7 of these texts. Written components of a leadership portfolio include:

  a. Literature Review (on the 5-7 core texts). Approx. 20 pgs., including a rationale for why that book was chosen.

  b. Application Section (present-focused). Connect what you've learned from the core texts to your experiences with student leadership at WOU. Leadership need not be confined to campus, but only your college years apply. Comment not only on how your leadership confirmed lessons in the core texts but also where you fell short or could have been a better leader. Approx. 20 pgs.

  c. Reflection Section (future-oriented): Reflect forward on how this leadership portfolio helped you conceptualize life after WOU. The goal of education is to prepare future leaders who are independent and collaborative, local and worldly, self-supporting yet self-aware. How has this project assisted you as you begin your career beyond WOU? Approx. 10-15 pgs.

LEADERSHIP PORTFOLIO