

Distinction in Asian Studies

Distinction is a formal academic honor that the Department of Asian Studies may vote to bestow upon senior majors who have demonstrated high academic achievement and an ability to produce independently a work of the highest standard. The Department of Asian Studies invites senior majors who seek a significant and satisfying experience as a capstone of their work in Asian Studies to apply for Distinction.

Asian Studies majors in the class of 2011 may choose either the new guidelines or the previous guidelines in applying for distinction .

New guidelines

Eligibility

A candidate for distinction must have an overall grade point average of 3.6 and a 3.75 grade point average in Asian Studies courses. The grade point average will be initially calculated based on work through the student's junior year. Asian Studies courses include language and non-language courses taught by the Department of Asian Studies and courses related to Asia taught in other departments. Candidacy for distinction will be continued only if minimum grade averages are maintained through fall semester of the senior year. Eligible students will be notified after the completion of their third year that they are eligible to apply for distinction.

Criteria for distinction

Candidates for distinction will assemble a portfolio representing their best work in their Asian Studies major. The portfolio will normally consist of four papers or equivalent work in other formats:

- A substantive Level III original work in any media, such as a scholarly paper, artistic endeavor, or musical composition
- Two additional projects at Level II or Level III, each from a different discipline
- Student work from language courses at the second year or higher level, or equivalent. This work may be written or audiovisual, and need not necessarily be assigned work in a course (e.g. a blog in Chinese or Japanese based on experiences studying overseas or an edited photographic essay with commentary in the target language).
- A reflective essay, approximately 1500 words, on the student's Asian Studies major, including thoughts on how the student has developed in the major, how the student's study and experiences have shaped the student's evolving understanding of Asia, and how the student may apply study of Asia to future plans, whether or not the career will involve Asia. This essay will form the core of the student presentation if granted distinction (see below).

Timetable

Students applying for distinction shall inform the chair of the Department of Asian Studies by November 1. (December graduates should consult the Chair about

relevant deadlines.) Students applying for distinction shall choose a faculty advisor from Asian Studies faculty, preferably a faculty member with whom the student has worked in the past.

The candidate shall submit the portfolio to the chair of the Department of Asian Studies by March 1. The department's Distinction Committee will make a recommendation to the Department of Asian Studies. The department shall vote whether or not to award distinction no later than two weeks after spring break. The chair of the department shall inform the candidate in writing of the department's decision.

If approved for distinction, the student will present their work before Asian Studies students and faculty by the end of spring semester.

Approved by the Department of Asian Studies
August 27, 2010

Previous guidelines

Guidelines for Distinction in Asian Studies

Distinction is a formal academic honor that the Department of Asian Studies may vote to bestow upon senior majors who have demonstrated high academic achievement and an ability to produce independently a work of the highest standard. The Department of Asian Studies invites senior majors who seek a significant and satisfying experience as a capstone of their work in Asian Studies to apply for Distinction. A candidate for distinction must have both an overall grade point average of 3.5 and a 3.5 grade point average in Asian Studies courses.

Distinction will be granted upon the completion and submission of a major, substantive paper/project and upon the approval of the Department of Asian Studies. Projects other than research papers, such as works of art or literature, will also be considered by the Department. Normally the paper/project will be evaluated by two faculty members in addition to the advisor of the project. The paper or project may be one of the following:

1. A seminar or independent research paper or project, substantively revised under the guidance of the project advisor;
2. A major paper or project done for a course and substantively revised under the guidance of the project advisor;
3. An independent project or paper; such a project or paper must still be guided by a St. Olaf

faculty advisor.

4. A project not in the form of a written paper may be accepted if it entails a commitment of time and effort comparable to that required for a distinction paper. It will demonstrate creativity, originality, and appropriate demonstration of the skills of the medium.

Distinction will be granted to those papers/projects which meet the following criteria:

1. Are at least 20-25 pages in length, clearly written, and represent original work.
 2. Clearly state a thesis and support it appropriately.
 3. Demonstrate mastery of important scholarship relevant to the topic of the paper or project.
 4. Demonstrates familiarity with methods, concepts, and theories of the principal discipline from which the paper/project comes; or, in the case of an interdisciplinary project, demonstrates a “capacity to integrate knowledge and modes of thinking from two or more disciplines . . . in ways that would have been unlikely through single disciplinary means.”¹
- A. The project must be approved by the Department of Asian Studies.
1. The student is responsible for choosing an advisor and for informing the Chair of the Department of Asian Studies by November 1. The Chair will choose, in consultation with the advisor, the two other members of the Evaluation Committee. The selection will take place in mid-November.
 2. The preliminary application for departmental distinction, including a copy of the student’s transcript, a brief description and preliminary bibliography, must be submitted to the Chair of Asian Studies by November 15. (December graduates should consult the Chair about relevant deadlines.) Acceptance of the proposal will be by vote of the Department of Asian Studies before November 30.
- B. Candidates for distinction will consult with the Asian Studies librarian about the preliminary bibliography before completing a draft to be submitted to the advisor.
- C. The student should submit a draft of her/his paper or project to the advisor by January 15 in order for the process of consultation and revisions to begin.

¹ Veronica Boix Mansilla, “Assessing Student Work at Disciplinary Crossroads,” *Change*, vol. 37, no. 1 (January/February 2005), p. 16.

1. The student will confer with her/his advisor about the revisions necessary to bring the paper/project up to the level of distinction. Ideally, this discussion will occur in January, but it should be started by the first week of the spring semester at the latest.
 2. The student will submit a draft of the paper/project to the Evaluation Committee by the end of February for initial comments. The Evaluation Committee will respond with written comments within one week of receiving the draft.
- D. The paper or project must be submitted to the *advisor* no later than March 20. After submission of the final paper/project, the student will organize an oral presentation or defense of her/his work before April 15.
- E. After the oral defense or presentation, the Evaluation Committee may ask the student to revise her/his project. A copy of the revised project should be submitted to both the Chair of Asian Studies and to the project advisor.
- F. The Asian Studies Committee will vote on the conferring of distinction at a meeting in April and inform the candidate in writing of its decision.

Copies of past distinction projects may be seen by contacting the Chair of the Department of Asian Studies.

Approved by the Department of Asian Studies
May 17, 2007