

**SENIOR DANCE PROJECT GUIDELINES &  
FACULTY/STUDENT COMMITTEE MEMBER INFORMATION**  
(updated 02/2010)

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**St. Olaf College Dance Department Mission**

The Department of Dance aspires to present and teach dance as a vital form of human communication, expression, and interaction central to both liberal arts and fine arts educational traditions. The dance experience at St. Olaf engages students in the study of dance as a personal art, a cultural art, and a fine art, aspiring to weave the three into a satisfying whole. The B.A. in Dance prepares dance majors for a range of vocational and a-vocational options including performing, creating, teaching, and imagining dance into other fields. It also provides majors with a solid background for continuing dance and movement education. The dance program intends to inspire students toward a life of possibility with strong physical intelligence at its foundation. Students are guided to grow with attention to being a moving, thinking, feeling, and imagining dancer.

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**Dance Major Area of Specialty**

About: Each dance major will design an individualized Area of Specialty. The purpose of the Area of Specialty is to encourage students to make connections between and synthesize aspects of their education within the dance program and the College's liberal arts curriculum. Each student's Area of Specialty should evolve from the individual student's curiosity, deepening interests and developing abilities as a dance major and a student in the College's liberal arts setting. Through the creation of the Area of Specialty, the student will also discover and begin to think about the content area (thesis, hypothesis, or theme) that will be explored in their senior dance project.

The Dance Major Area of Specialty is comprised of the following two components:

- 1) Content Area: the topic or idea the student chooses to explore further as she/he progresses through the dance department curriculum and prepares for and completes their senior dance capstone project, AND
- 2) Research Method (Project Option): the means the student selects to explore and implement their senior capstone project (choreography, performance, written,

combination, other). Detailed information on the various research methods (project options) is presented later in this document.

**Requirements:** The Area of Specialty requires the completion of at least two courses in addition to the 8 required credits in dance technique and theory ([this language will change with approval of the new major](#)). The two courses must support the student's chosen Content Area and/or Research Method of their Area of Specialty. The student must justify an intentional and coherent relationship between the additional courses, the student's chosen Area of Specialty, and at least one core dance theory or language-intensive course. The additional two courses may be selected from within and/or outside the dance department.

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### **Senior Dance Project Faculty/Student Committees**

Each senior dance seminar student is responsible for assembling and convening a committee consisting of two dance faculty (one of whom will be selected to serve as lead faculty for the committee), one faculty member from outside the dance department, and the senior dance student. Each committee will meet periodically throughout the entire senior project process (more info on committee meetings and schedule below).

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### **Senior Dance Project Committee Selection & Area of Specialty Declaration Proposal**

By April 1 of their junior year, each dance major will submit to Anthony Roberts ([awr@stolaf.edu](mailto:awr@stolaf.edu)) a written proposal containing prioritized options for two distinct senior dance project committees and a written description of their Area of Specialty including:

- A brief statement providing a rationale for the selection of the student's Area of Specialty (including Content Area and Research Method/Project Option).
- The names of four dance faculty committee members, two for each distinct (no overlap) committee option, including the selection of a lead dance faculty for each committee.
- The name of their selected and confirmed outside faculty committee member (include department name and email address).
- A rationale for the composition of each proposed committee in the context of the student's Area of Specialty.

The dance faculty will meet collectively to discuss each student's proposal and will submit comments and suggestions for each student's committee after two weekly meetings.

By May 1 of their junior year, each dance major will submit to Anthony Roberts ([awr@stolaf.edu](mailto:awr@stolaf.edu)) their final senior dance project committee selection.

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### **Dance Major Capstone Course: Senior Dance Seminar (dance-399)**

Senior Dance Seminar (dance-399) is the dance major capstone course, which must be taken during the fall term of the senior year. During this course, students design, develop, and implement their senior projects in their individual areas of specialty. Students also prepare for dance and other careers by establishing life and career goals; preparing professional

correspondence material; learning and practicing interviewing skills; participating in, researching and leading dance-related class discussions; and producing video samples of their creative work.

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### **Senior Dance Project**

The dance major's Area of Specialty leads to the creation and implementation of a Senior Dance Project, which comprises a large percentage of each student's coursework for Senior Dance Seminar (dance-399). The purpose of the project is to encourage senior dance majors to synthesize relevant aspects of their learning experiences at St. Olaf College, using dance as a vehicle for critical inquiry, exploration, and problem solving. It is expected that student's senior project will build upon their Area of Specialty. It is also expected that each student will continue to pursue artistic risks and undergo significant challenge, experimentation, and transformation during the senior project process.

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### **Senior Dance Project Options/Research Methods** (detailed information later in this document)

In selecting or proposing a senior dance project option, the student is choosing the method or form in which they will explore, develop, and disseminate the Content Area of their senior dance project.

Each senior dance seminar student will select from four existing senior dance project options: 1) Choreography, 2) Performance, 3) Written Thesis, 4) Combination, or they may (and are encouraged to) envision and propose a new project option. Faculty committee members will be available to offer guidance and support.

The student's Senior Dance Project Option should be a logical extension of the student's previous curricular and co-curricular experiences within the dance department. For example, if a student has not completed Advanced Choreography, they may not select the choreography project option. Also, if a student has had limited performance experiences within the dance department, selecting a performance project option would be inappropriate.

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### **Senior Dance Project Financial Responsibility**

The dance department agrees to provide a venue (Kelsey Theatre or Dittmann Center Studio One) and technical support for the presentation of the student's senior dance project. The dance department will also pay for the costs of printing black and white posters and presentation programs. If the student production committees choose to print color posters and/or programs, the students are responsible for the entire cost of the color printing. The senior student is responsible for all other costs incurred in relation to the implementation of the student's senior project, including but not limited to: performance reception, costume purchase/rental, videotaping services, and lobby decoration material.

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### **Senior Dance Project Contract (separate document)**

Each senior dance major will complete a Senior Dance Project Contract, obtain signatures from and submit copies to each of their faculty committee members and a copy to the instructor of dance-399 (Senior Dance Seminar). The contract includes a narrative of the student's proposed senior project.

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### **Senior Dance Project Faculty/Student Committee Roles & Responsibilities**

- Senior Dance Student:
  - The senior dance student will serve as chair of their committee and will select one dance faculty to serve as lead faculty for the committee.
  - The senior dance student is responsible for convening, organizing the agenda for, and running a minimum of 4 meetings for their senior dance project committee during the fall term.
  - The student will complete a senior project contract outlining the scope of their project and submit it to their faculty committee members for their signatures. The student will then submit signed copies of their senior project contract to all committee members and an additional copy to Anthony Roberts, instructor of dance-399. This contract serves as the formal agreement of terms between the student, the faculty committee members, and the dance department for the duration of the project. The faculty committee members, and/or the dance department faculty as a whole, may ask the student to revise and resubmit the contract if they believe clarification or change to any details of the project is needed.
  - Very early in the fall term, senior students are responsible for devising a semester-long meeting schedule with their committee members.
  - The senior student is responsible for sending reminders of upcoming meetings and notices of changes in the senior project committee calendar to all committee members as soon as possible.
  - Several times during the creative process and depending upon the student's project option, the student will:
    - Choreography/Performance options: participate in and invite faculty committee members to all scheduled public movement showings and submit drafts of their accompanying Artist Statement.
    - Written Thesis option: submit drafts of their written thesis project for discussion and feedback from their faculty committee.
    - Combination option: participate in and invite faculty committee members to all scheduled public movement showings and submit drafts of their written thesis portion for discussion and feedback from their faculty committee.
  - All written work must be submitted to your committee members at least three days prior to a committee meeting planned to discuss your work.
- All Faculty Committee Members:
  - All faculty committee members are responsible for mentoring the student in the development of the ideas and themes of the student's senior project (from conception to the finished paper, final presentation or performance).

- All faculty committee members will contribute to the ongoing and final assessment of the senior dance student, including process and final project.
- All faculty committee members are responsible for attending approximately four senior project committee meetings during the fall term.
- Depending upon the project option selected by the student (more information calendar of events later in this document), faculty committee members are responsible for
  - attending works-in-process showings
  - attending final project presentations
  - reading, assessing and offering suggestions for consideration and improvement of student project written work.
- Outside Faculty Committee Member:
- The faculty committee member who is outside the dance department serves as an important, impartial eye, bringing a fresh perspective with which to view dance and mentor the student's project and process. No previous dance experience is necessary in order to serve and be a valuable contributor to the process.
- Dance Faculty Committee Members:
- The two dance faculty committee members will focus on the craft of the student's choreography, performance and/or written work, in addition to mentoring the student's overall project and process.
- Lead Dance Faculty Committee Member:
- One of the dance faculty committee members will be selected by the student to serve as the lead faculty for the committee. The lead faculty member's primary responsibility will be to send a summary of the student's senior dance project assessment and the final project grade to both the senior dance student and the instructor of Senior Dance Seminar (dance-399), Anthony Roberts ([awr@stolaf.edu](mailto:awr@stolaf.edu)) by the last day of the final exam period.

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### **Senior Dance Project Faculty/Student Committee Meetings**

- Very early in the semester the student is responsible for devising a semester-long meeting schedule with all their project committee members.
- The student is responsible for convening their senior project committee a minimum of 4 times during the fall term.
- In order to support the work of the student, all committee members should be present at every meeting. It has proven to be particularly fruitful for the student's process to have the entire committee engage in face-to-face discussion about the ideas, successes and challenges of the project. If it is not possible to convene the entire committee for a meeting, however, the student may meet with committee members individually.
- Initial Committee Meeting (must occur by the third Friday of the fall term)
- Introduction of committee members
- Introduction of the senior project contract
- Discussion of the grading criteria in the senior project guidelines

- Clarifying committee member responsibilities and dates they need to be present for senior project events
- Share and receive thoughts, ideas and suggestions specific to your senior project
- Set up semester-long meeting schedule
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee Meetings
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> committee meetings are typically held a short time after a scheduled ‘in process’ showing of the movement portion of a senior project or after the due date of a draft of a research-centered project.
  - Final Committee Meeting (generally scheduled to meet during final exams week)
- During the final committee meeting, the faculty committee members and the student engage in a conversation about the senior project and process (successes, challenges, questions, future considerations).
- Prior to the final meeting, the student should thoughtfully consider and prepare thorough responses to the following questions, as these will be discussed during the final committee meeting.
  - A Reflective Question: How have you “discovered and created yourself” over the past 3 and 1/2 years thru classes, outside activities, personal relationships, etc., and how have your experiences influenced your Senior Project? Please be specific and detailed in your response.
  - A Process-Related Question: What did you learn about the way you work through your Senior Project Process? What choices did you make that worked in your Senior Project, and what choices did not? Please be specific and detailed in your response.
  - A Theme-Based Question:
    - As a group, faculty members from each committee will construct a question designed to promote discussion of their individual senior dance student’s specific theme and/or process for their senior project.
    - The theme-based question will be submitted to the student no later than one week prior to the final meeting.
- After concluding the discussion of the student’s senior project, the student leaves and the faculty committee members decide a final grade for the project based upon the senior project criteria for assessment (detailed later in this document).
- The lead faculty reports the grade to Anthony Roberts by the last day of the finals exam period.
- The lead faculty summarizes the final assessment comments of the faculty committee members and sends it and the final grade to the student and to Anthony Roberts ([awr@stolaf.edu](mailto:awr@stolaf.edu)) by the last day of the final exam period.

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### **Senior Dance Project Options / Research Methods / Assessment Criteria**

Each senior dance major will select a senior project ‘option’ or method for realizing and disseminating the senior dance project. Below are several project options typically pursued by students. Students are welcome and encouraged to present alternative options to their committee and the dance faculty for consideration. The precise format and nature of the student’s project

option, including presentation venue, must be planned by the senior dance student, in consultation with the student's faculty committee. Authors of Written Projects have the option of not presenting publicly.

1. Choreography Project Option Guidelines

- Students who choose the choreography project option must have completed Advanced Choreography before starting the Senior Project.
- Taking into account the individual student's Area of Specialty, the student will devise a thesis, hypothesis, or theme to explore through the process of creating (composing, rehearsing and developing) a movement work for public presentation.
- Students are encouraged to re-examine the range of curricular, co-curricular, and personal experiences they have had during their time at St. Olaf, to assist them in determining the theme for their project. Since the theme will evolve from each student's own educational and personal journey, the range of themes for senior projects will and should vary from one student to the next.
- Students will research the theme for their project using a variety of resources (material and faculty from previous courses, library resources, faculty committee, other faculty and/or relationships relevant to the project theme, their dancers and any project collaborators, etc). Project research should deepen the student's knowledge base and connection with the project theme.
- The student's project theme will be approved by the faculty committee and formally written into the senior project contract. The student must take responsibility for regular interaction with his/her committee during the preparation of the project.
- The student will also write a corresponding Artist Statement (in essence, a brief statement providing insight into the student's creative process in general, including previous projects, and the student's creative process for their senior project) to be displayed in conjunction with the public presentation of the senior project. The creative process for the Senior Project and the Artist Statement is iterative. The student will publicly show their senior project in process and submit drafts of their Artist Statement for discussion and feedback from their faculty committees several times during the creative process. More information about the Artist Statement will be presented in dance-399.
- Students are strongly encouraged to use the summer months prior to the student's senior year to solidify their project theme or thesis.

- Assessment Criteria for the Choreography Project Option-

Students will be assessed on the quality and integrity of the completed choreographic project and the myriad facets that comprise the overall process for developing the project, as well as the Artist Statement. There are no minimum or maximum time restrictions concerning the length of the finished work. The student's faculty committee will use the following questions, the College's [Final Grade Marking System](#), and any additional assessment criteria decided upon by the faculty committee in consultation with the student as guides to determine the final grade for the student's senior project:

To what degree:

- ◆ was the student's Area of Specialty relevant and synthesized into the student's project?

- ◆ was the student able to articulate the theme or thesis of their project throughout the project process?
- ◆ was the theme realized (reflected or apparent) when viewing the choreography?
- ◆ has the choreographic work developed and grown throughout the entire senior project process?
- ◆ was the student successful in recognizing and utilizing choreographic concepts effectively?
- ◆ was the student's individual, artistic voice apparent in the work?
- ◆ has the student taken artistic risks?
- ◆ did the student use their dancers effectively?
- ◆ did the student's Artist Statement provide insight into the student's creative process for their senior project, including: project inspiration(s), methodology, developmental process challenges and successes, and contextualization of the current work within the student's previous body of work?
- ◆ did the student effectively respond to and utilize, when appropriate, feedback on the choreographic work and the Artist Statement?
- ◆ did the student consult and effectively utilize the range of resources at their disposal (material and faculty from previous courses, library resources, faculty committee and other faculty relevant to the project theme, their dancers, technical director, costume designer, composer, other collaborators or relationships relevant to the project)?
- ◆ was the student successful in adhering to project schedule, including: committee meetings, project showings, submission of written work, production responsibilities, technical rehearsals, etc?
- ◆ was the student prepared for the discussion of their senior project process during the final committee meeting?
- ◆ was the student committed to the process?

## 2. Performance Project Option Guidelines

\*\*If a student plans to pursue the performance project option, he or she must submit the name of the guest choreographer/artist and a summary of the performance project idea and schedule to Anthony Roberts ([awr@stolaf.edu](mailto:awr@stolaf.edu)) by July 1 of the summer just preceding the student's senior year.\*\*

- The performance project option requires a student who is highly motivated and will flourish while primarily working independently in a solo setting.
- Taking into account the individual student's Area of Specialty, the student will devise a thesis, hypothesis, or theme to explore through the process of commissioning, learning, rehearsing and publicly performing a movement work choreographed/directed by a guest artist. Commissioning a movement work generally involves the payment of a fee to the guest artist. The amount of the commission fee will vary depending upon the guest artist, the specific type of work commissioned, and the amount of time the guest artist commits to the project. The commissioning fee is the sole responsibility of the senior student.
- The guest artist must not be a member of the St. Olaf dance community. The student is strongly encouraged to commission an artist with whom the student has not had extensive previous experience. Exceptions are to this are rare, but may be granted on a case-by-case basis. Considering the student's Area of Specialty, the student is responsible for conducting preliminary research to identify a range of guest artists who appear to satisfy the student's goals for their project. The student is responsible for initiating contact with

the guest artists in order to discuss the project, negotiate a fee, arrange a tentative schedule, and when the student has decided upon a specific guest artist, secure the commission.

- Students will research the theme for their project using a variety of resources (material and faculty from previous courses, library resources, faculty committee, other faculty and/or relationships relevant to the project theme, any project collaborators, etc). Project research should deepen the student's knowledge base and connection with the project theme.
- The student will keep a Performance Project Journal throughout the life of the project that holistically (physical, emotional, and intellectual) addresses the learning process with the guest artist and the student's individual rehearsal and performance processes. The journal should serve as a tool to deepen the student's engagement with the project content through the iterative process of written reflection and inquiry. The student will also maintain a video journal, regularly documenting the movement work in various stages of development. The video journal should be used for the purpose of self-assessment and improvement.
- The student's project theme will be approved by the faculty committee and formally written into the senior project contract. The student must take responsibility for regular interaction with his/her committee during the preparation of the project.
- The student will also write a corresponding Artist Statement (in essence, a brief statement providing insight into the student's creative process in general, including previous projects, and the student's creative process for their senior project) to be displayed in conjunction with the public presentation of the senior project. The creative process for the Senior Project, the Artist Statement and the Performance Project Journal is iterative. The student will publicly show their senior project in process and submit drafts of their Artist Statement and Performance Project Journal for discussion and feedback from their faculty committees several times during the creative process. More information about the Artist Statement will be presented in dance-399.
- Students are strongly encouraged to use the summer months prior to the student's senior year to solidify their project theme or thesis.

- Assessment Criteria for the Performance Project Option-

Students will be assessed on the quality and integrity of the completed performance project and the myriad facets that comprise the overall process for developing the project, including the Performance Project Journal and the Artist Statement. There are no minimum or maximum time restrictions concerning the length of the finished work. The student's faculty committee will use the following questions, the College's [Final Grade Marking System](#), and any additional assessment criteria decided upon by the faculty committee in consultation with the student as guides to determine the final grade for the student's senior project:

To what degree:

- ◆ was the student's Area of Specialty relevant and synthesized into the student's project?
- ◆ was the student able to articulate the theme or thesis of their project throughout the project process?

- ◆ has the performance work developed and grown throughout the entire senior project process?
- ◆ was the student successful in recognizing and utilizing performance concepts effectively?
- ◆ was the student's individual, artistic voice apparent in the work?
- ◆ has the student taken artistic risks?
- ◆ did the student's Performance Project Journal provide insight into the student's creative process for their senior project, including: project inspiration(s), methodology, developmental process challenges and successes, and contextualization of the current work within the student's previous body of work?
- ◆ did the student's Artist Statement provide insight into the student's creative process for their senior project, including: project inspiration(s), methodology, developmental process challenges and successes, and contextualization of the current work within the student's previous body of work?
- ◆ did the student effectively respond to and utilize, when appropriate, feedback on the performance work, the Performance Project Journal and the Artist Statement?
- ◆ did the student effectively maintain and utilize a video journal of their project throughout the process?
- ◆ did the student consult and effectively utilize the range of resources at their disposal (the guest artist, material and faculty from previous courses, library resources, faculty committee and other faculty relevant to the project theme, technical director, costume designer, composer, other collaborators or relationships relevant to the project)?
- ◆ was the student successful in adhering to project schedule, including: committee meetings, project showings, submission of written work, production responsibilities, technical rehearsals, etc?
- ◆ was the student prepared for the discussion of their senior project process during the final committee meeting?
- ◆ was the student committed to the process?

### 3. Written Thesis Project Option Guidelines

- Taking into account the individual student's Area of Specialty, the student will devise a movement-centric thesis, hypothesis, or theme to explore through the process of writing either an original research paper (analytical, argumentative, etc.) or a piece of creative writing (autobiography/memoir, journal, poetry, short story, etc.). The written thesis project, regardless of the genre of writing selected, is expected to be the climax of the student's thoughtful and rigorous process of research, source evaluation, critical thinking, synthesis, organization, and composition.
- Students are encouraged to re-examine the range of curricular, co-curricular, and personal experiences they have had during their time at St. Olaf, to assist them in determining the theme for their project. Since the theme will evolve from each student's own educational and personal journey, the range of themes for senior projects will and should vary from one student to the next.
- Students will research the theme for their project using a variety of resources (material and faculty from previous courses, library resources, faculty committee, other faculty and/or relationships relevant to the project theme, etc). Project research should deepen the student's knowledge base and connection with the project theme and advance the research in the topic area.

- The completed written thesis project must be a minimum of 25 pages, including notes and bibliography. The student's project theme, type of research paper, citation style and other project logistics will be discussed with and approved by the faculty committee and formally written into the senior project contract. The student must take responsibility for regular interaction with his/her committee during the preparation of the project.
- Students are strongly encouraged to use the summer months prior to the student's senior year to solidify their project theme or thesis.

-Assessment Criteria for the Written Thesis Project Option-

Students will be assessed on the quality and integrity of the completed written thesis project and the myriad facets that comprise the overall process for developing the project. The student's faculty committee will use the following questions, the College's [Final Grade Marking System](#), and any additional assessment criteria decided upon by the faculty committee in consultation with the student as guides to determine the final grade for the student's senior project:

To what degree:

- ◆ was the student's Area of Specialty relevant and synthesized into the student's project?
- ◆ was the student able to articulate the theme or thesis of their project throughout the project process?
- ◆ was the thesis statement for the written project clear, effective and relevant?
- ◆ has the written work developed and grown throughout the entire senior project process?
- ◆ was the supporting research effective and integral to the project?
- ◆ was the student successful in recognizing and utilizing concepts of effective writing?
- ◆ was the student's individual, artistic voice apparent in the work?
- ◆ has the student taken artistic risks?
- ◆ did the student effectively respond to and utilize, when appropriate, feedback on the written thesis project?
- ◆ did the student consult and effectively utilize the range of resources at their disposal (material and faculty from previous courses, library resources, faculty committee, other faculty relevant to the project theme, other collaborators or relationships relevant to the project)?
- ◆ was the student successful in adhering to project schedule, including: committee meetings, submission of drafts, etc?
- ◆ was the student prepared for the discussion of their senior project process during the final committee meeting?
- ◆ was the student committed to the process?

4. Combination Project Option Guidelines

- Taking into account the individual student's Area of Specialty, the student will devise a thesis, hypothesis, or theme to explore through the process of combining, to some degree, the choreography or performance project options and the written thesis option. Please refer to the choreography, performance, and written thesis project options for a detailed description of those projects.
- The specific nature of the combination project will be decided upon in collaboration with and approved by the student's senior project committee.

- This option is especially appealing for, but not limited to, those students with double majors or Areas of Specialty that cross two disciplines.
- Students are encouraged to re-examine the range of curricular, co-curricular, and personal experiences they have had during their time at St. Olaf, to assist them in determining the theme for their project. Since the theme will evolve from each student's own educational and personal journey, the range of themes for senior projects will and should vary from one student to the next.
- Students will research the theme for their project using a variety of resources (material and faculty from previous courses, library resources, faculty committee, other faculty and/or relationships relevant to the project theme, etc). Project research should deepen the student's knowledge base and connection with the project theme and advance the research in the topic area.
- Students are strongly encouraged to use the summer months prior to the student's senior year to solidify their project theme or thesis.

-Assessment Criteria for the Combination Project Option-

Please refer to the assessment criteria for the choreography, performance, and written thesis project options. Specific assessment criteria for the combination project will be decided upon in collaboration with and approved by the student's senior dance project committee. The student's faculty committee will use the College's [Final Grade Marking System](#), and any additional assessment criteria decided upon by the faculty committee in consultation with the student as guides to determine the final grade for the student's senior project:

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