



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT  
**EDUCATION AND  
SOCIAL SERVICES**

# **CESS Scholar of Distinction**

## **Overview and Guidelines**



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## College of Education and Social Services (CESS) Scholar of Distinction

### Overview

#### Background and Purpose

The Scholar of Distinction opportunity grew out of faculty and student interest in recognizing undergraduate student research conducted outside of the Honors College. Following review and approval by the CESS leadership team, Chairs, and faculty, the Scholar of Distinction mechanism was initiated in Fall, 2020. The “CESS Scholar of Distinction” provides CESS undergraduate students with an opportunity to conduct and defend a research project and have that distinction reflected on their academic transcript upon graduation. The research must be overseen by a CESS faculty member who has agreed to serve as the student’s CESS research mentor.

The opportunity is intended to: 1) provide a way to document on a student’s university transcript that they have completed the processes outlined in this document and achieved Scholar of Distinction status; 2) create a consistent college-wide approach to recognition of undergraduate research; 3) document the efforts of faculty who advise and mentor undergraduate students in their research; 4) advance opportunities for undergraduate research in CESS; and 5) provide options for students to present their work in ways that foster integrative learning, perspective taking, and knowledge creation in the context of our CESS mission and vision. These opportunities support the goals of the CESS Strategic Plan, the university’s commitment to promoting high leverage practices for undergraduate students, and the commitments expressed in UVM’s *Our Common Ground*.

Participation is completely voluntary on the part of both students and faculty serving as research mentors. Although they have overlapping aims, the CESS Scholar of Distinction is not intended to replace the UVM Honors College experience. The name “CESS Scholar of Distinction” differentiates it from the “Honors College Scholar” designation awarded to qualifying Honors College (HCOL) students.

#### Eligibility

To achieve recognition as a CESS Scholar of Distinction, a CESS undergraduate student will:

- Have Sophomore, Junior or Senior standing at the time of application;
- Identify a CESS research mentor who agrees to advise the student through the research process;
- Complete at least 6 credits of research-related course work or Independent Study;
- Develop a research proposal, carry out the work, and complete and submit a final Scholar of Distinction Project to a Scholar of Distinction Committee;

- Successfully defend the Scholar of Distinction Project at an oral defense or as part of a presentation in an approved research venue; and
- Pending a positive evaluation of the final project and defense, receive a recommendation from the Scholar of Distinction Committee to be recognized as a Scholar of Distinction on the student's transcript.

Students actively enrolled in the Honors College are not eligible for the CESS Scholar of Distinction pathway as many aspects of these pathways are considered redundant with respect to student effort.

## Guidelines

### Application, Proposal, and Defense Procedures

1. The CESS undergraduate student initiates the process of becoming a Scholar of Distinction by discussing the option with their primary academic advisor and obtaining verbal commitment from a CESS research mentor who will guide them through the research process.
2. The student completes and submits the "Application to Undertake Work for CESS Scholar of Distinction" form (*Appendix A*). This form requires signatures of the student's academic advisor and research mentor, indicating their approval of the student's application and the research mentor's agreement to serve in this role.
3. The student works with their research mentor to develop a "Scholar of Distinction Plan" (*Appendix B*). The plan is designed to identify appropriate timelines for completion of at least 6 credits of approved course work and the Scholar of Distinction Project, taking into account additional demands in the student's major. It is the student's responsibility to manage these timelines and deadlines and to communicate with the research mentor regarding changes to the proposed timeline for completion of the research project.
4. With guidance from the research mentor, the student prepares a "Research Proposal" (*Appendix C*) to be approved by the research mentor as well as one other faculty member who will serve on the Scholar of Distinction Committee. If required, the research mentor will support the student in obtaining IRB approval prior to commencement of the research. If the student's research is to be conducted in conjunction with a larger research team, the research mentor will ensure that the student is listed as "Key Personnel" on the relevant IRB protocol.
5. Following completion of the research, the student presents a "Scholar of Distinction Project" (*Appendix D*) to the Scholar of Distinction Committee. This Committee is comprised of the research mentor and a second faculty member who is mutually acceptable to the student and research mentor. Ideally, the second faculty member will be outside of the student's major or from another college.
6. The final project may take the form of a written thesis or other approved format (e.g., creative work, applied work, curriculum, etc.) that embraces all aspects of the research/inquiry cycle. The project may be one that is completed independently by the

student or in connection to a collaborative research team where the student makes a significant contribution to the research effort and final project.

7. The student presents the final project orally to the satisfaction of the Scholar of Distinction Committee (*Appendix E*). Oral presentations may utilize a typical defense format or may be conducted in conjunction with the UVM Student Research Conference, CESS Scholarship Symposium, or other approved research venue.

### **Research Course Work**

Research-related course work may include research methods classes, applied research classes or approved Independent Study. Students must receive a B or better in order to include the course towards recognition as a Scholar of Distinction. Programs and/or Departments will approve courses to count towards this requirement, with a central list of all approved courses available through the Dean's Office. In the event that a research course is being taken concurrently with application to the Scholar of Distinction opportunity, the student will submit a letter from the course instructor indicating that the student is on track to complete the course with a B or better.

There are several possible approaches to course work that need to be discussed and agreed upon by student and their faculty mentor and academic advisor. One pathway is for the student to take an initial course focused on research methods, followed by a second course that is more directly focused on the student's research project (e.g., an approved Independent Study with the research mentor, the Individually Designed Major (IDM) capstone course, or other applied research course in which the instructor commits to supporting the research of students enrolled in the course). Other students and faculty mentors may decide that the project will be best carried out through 6 credits of Independent Study (approved by the faculty member's Chair) that embeds instruction in research methods into the design and implementation of the final project. Regardless of the chosen pathway, the student and research mentor will need to account for the time needed to propose the research, conduct data collection or other activities, and prepare findings for the final oral and written presentations.

### **Nature of the Research and Final Project**

A student pursuing the Scholar of Distinction recognition may carry out their work individually or as part of a research team led by the research mentor. Although final projects may take on a variety of forms, all projects need to reflect formulation and implementation of a research or inquiry cycle (e.g., identification of a topic, development of research questions, review of relevant literature, identification of research methods/inquiry practices, evidence of analysis, and presentation of key ideas or findings). *Appendices C and D* provide guidance for the development of the proposal and final project.

If the student's research is conducted as part of a faculty-led research team, the final project may reflect independent work conducted by the student within the larger team's efforts, or it

may reflect culmination of the efforts and contributions of multiple team members (e.g., an article or conference presentation by multiple authors, including the student). This is permissible; however, in order to achieve recognition as a Scholar of Distinction, 1) the final project needs to include the research elements specified in *Appendix D*; 2) the student's presentation of the final project will need to include a statement of their substantive individual contribution to the overall project; and 3) the research mentor will be required to attest to student's level of contribution to the overall project. Additionally, the final project must be presented to the Scholar of Distinction Committee through an oral defense or other approved venue.

### **Role of Research Mentor**

The research mentor provides guidance in identification of the research topic and questions, preparation of the research proposal, data analysis, and creation of a final product and oral defense that meet the standards outlined in this document. As noted above, some of this guidance may be provided through an approved Independent Study with the research mentor. The mentor must be a full-time CESS faculty member at the rank of assistant professor or above whose areas of interest and expertise are aligned with the student's interests. The research mentor may be leading a research team that involves the student, or the mentor may advise the student on an independent, student-initiated project.

The CESS Dean's Office will maintain a list of CESS faculty who may be willing to serve as research mentors, including those who are engaged with research projects that could be accessed by CESS students from a variety of majors. Faculty members interested in serving as a research mentor must discuss workload implications with their Chair.

### **Written and Oral Defense**

The student and research mentor will identify one additional faculty member to serve on the student's Scholar of Distinction Committee. Ideally, the additional faculty member will be from outside the student's program or major. The second committee member may be from outside of CESS and may be of any rank. In general, the second faculty member's role will be to bring content or methodological expertise to the project and to assist in the evaluation of the final project and oral presentation.

The two faculty members will review the final research project, attend the oral presentation, and make a determination as to whether the student passes the defense, is required to re-submit with revisions, or does not pass the defense. See *Appendix D* for the Guideline for the Written Thesis/Research Project and *Appendix E* for the Evaluation of the Oral Defense.

The student's final project will be defended orally in one of three ways:

- Presentation to the student's Scholar of Distinction Committee;

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- Presentation at the annual UVM Student Research Conference or other approved professional or research-focused conference, to be attended by the Scholar of Distinction Committee members; or
- Presentation at the CESS Research Symposium, to be attended by Scholar of Distinction Committee members.

At the conclusion of the Oral Defense, the Scholar of Distinction Committee will complete the evaluation form and makes one of the following determinations:

- Student passes the defense at Scholar of Distinction level and is eligible to have the CESS Scholar of Distinction notation on their transcript.
- Student passes the defense at the Independent Study or course level (i.e., receives a passing grade for the Independent Study or other associated course, but does not receive recognition as CESS Scholar of Distinction).
- Student does not pass at the Scholar of Distinction or Independent Study/course level.

In the rare event of a disagreement between the Scholar of Distinction Committee members regarding the determination, committee members are encouraged to consult the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs or another Dean's Office designate to serve as a "tie breaker."

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**Appendix A**  
**CESS Scholar of Distinction Application**

**Application to Undertake Work for CESS Scholar of Distinction recognition**  
***(All fields are required)***

**Instructions:** All CESS Scholar of Distinction applications must be completed, signed, and submitted electronically to the research mentor, academic advisor, and CESS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The deadline for Spring semester applications is March 1. Fall applications are due by October 15. Application decisions will be emailed within 14 days of receipt of the application.

**1. Applicant Information**

**Name:**

**Email:**

**Intended graduation date (month/year):**

**Major:**

**Minor:**

**Certificate, if applicable:**

**Department in which research project will be pursued:**

**Research course(s) taken to date (if any) and grade(s) obtained:**

**Statement of interest** (Include your research topic and general plans for completing the research, including your plans to conduct the research independently or in conjunction with a research team):

**2. Research Mentor Information**

**Name:**

**Department:**

**Email:**

**3. CESS Academic Advisor Information**

**Name:**

**Department:**

**Email:**



**4. Required Signatures:**

**Student**

By signing below, I agree to follow the procedures for receiving recognition as a CESS Scholar of Distinction and to observe all required procedures for conducting research, including obtaining IRB approval if the research involves human subjects.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Research Mentor**

By signing below, I indicate my commitment to serving as the research mentor and to working with the student to ensure that the procedures and requirements associated with recognition as a CESS Scholar of Distinction are followed, including required procedures for research involving human subjects as specified by the IRB.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Academic Advisor**

By signing below, I indicate my approval of this student's application to the Scholar of Distinction opportunity and agree to advise the student in reviewing timelines and selecting relevant courses and/or independent studies.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Appendix B**  
**Scholar of Distinction Research Plan and Timeline**

### Research Plan and Timeline

**Instructions:** This form is to be completed following approval of the student’s application to pursue the CESS Scholar of Distinction opportunity. Students are advised to complete the form with their Research Mentor and to review relevant timelines with their Academic Advisor.

Date of completion:  
 Student Name:  
 Research Mentor:  
 Academic Advisor:

1. Describe plan to satisfy the requirement for at least 6 credits of research-related courses or approved Independent Study. Identify how this requirement will be met and the semesters (including Summer, if appropriate) in which course work or Independent Study will be completed.

2. Timeline of key events

Activity	Anticipated Date of Completion	Person(s) Responsible	Notes
Submission of Research Proposal			
Submission to IRB (if required)			
Addition to list of Key Personnel (for participation in an existing research project)			
Data Collection			
Data Analysis			
Draft of Final Project			
Submission of Final Project to SOD Committee			
Oral Presentation to SOD Committee (include anticipated presentation venue)			
Anticipated date of graduation			

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**Appendix C**  
**Research Proposal**

## **Guidelines for CESS Scholar of Distinction Research Proposals**

**Proposal Guidelines.** The research proposal should be developed by the student with support and consultation from the research mentor. All projects must address and follow the research cycle and components described below. The final research project may be presented through multiple formats, including a traditional written thesis or an approved creative or applied project (e.g., development of a curriculum, artistic rendering of the research, etc.). Regardless of the anticipated form of the final project, all proposals must address Narrative components as outlined below, and provide responses to four questions about anticipated final format, nature of the oral presentation, indication as to whether the project will occur independently or in conjunction with others on a faculty-led research team, and IRB considerations. Students who plan to conduct research as part of a collaborative research team will need to indicate their level of engagement across the research/inquiry cycle. Students whose research involves interaction with human subjects will need to work with their research mentor to obtain approval by the Institutional Review Board. If the research is being conducted as part of an existing IRB-approved project, the student will need to verify that they have been added to the Key Personnel section of the approved protocol.

### **Contents of the proposal**

The proposal must address the following three components:

1. Proposal Version: The proposal should indicate whether it is a new or revised submission.
2. Narrative: The following elements must be addressed in the narrative:
  - Title
  - Abstract (100 words or less)
  - Introduction and significance (Potential contributions of the research)
  - Research questions
  - Brief review of the literature (Annotated bibliography or brief review of 8 – 10 scholarly articles, with a focus on what is already known/not known about this topic and what you perceive to be in need of further study)
  - Proposed Design & Methods/Inquiry Practices (Description of your overarching research design, including proposed methods or practices proposed for inquiring into the phenomena of interest; and relevant research participants; data collection and analysis)
  - References (Include any references cited in the proposal and any important works that you expect to use during your research)
3. Additional Questions:
  - What is the proposed format for the final project?

- This might include a traditional written thesis, development of a curriculum, poster presentation, or creation of some other artifact reflecting your research questions and process. Regardless of the format you select, your final project must reflect the basic components of a research paper: Introduction and Significance, Review of the Literature, Methods, Findings, and Discussion. If you are choosing to present your work in a format other than a written thesis, your proposal must describe how you intend to convey these components in your final project.
- How do you plan to present your project to your Scholar of Distinction Committee? (e.g., oral defense or presentation at an approved research venue such as the UVM Student Research Conference, CESS Scholarship Symposium, or annual conference hosted by a professional academic organization, etc.).
- Will this research be conducted independently or in collaboration with others?
  - If you will be conducting the research as part of a faculty-led research team, describe the nature of your contribution to the project and final product. You may choose to participate in all phases of the research or you may be part of the team but pursue a smaller question within the overall project. You and the faculty lead will want to discuss ahead of time the nature of your contribution to the project to be sure that it rises to the level of a “significant contribution” required for the Scholar of Distinction designation.
- Does this research involve human subjects? If so, describe plans for obtaining IRB approval or being added as Key Personnel to an existing project.

### **Formatting the proposal**

Please create your proposal in a Microsoft Word readable document or an Acrobat PDF (.pdf) following APA guidelines (8<sup>th</sup> edition). Your proposal should not exceed eight double-spaced pages (including any tables and figures but excluding references).

## **Research Proposal Approval Process**

### **Evaluation Criteria**

The Scholar of Distinction Committee will review your proposal and will approve it or ask for revisions based upon the following criteria:

- Is the proposal written clearly and concisely?
- Are research/inquiry questions clear and appropriate given the scope of the work?
- Does the proposal make a clear case for the significance of the work and the potential contributions to the literature, at a level appropriate for undergraduate study?
- Do the proposed research methods or inquiry practices appear appropriate given the research questions?
- Does the proposal cite relevant works in the reference section and relate that work to the proposed project?
- Is the quality of writing (including adherence to APA conventions) indicative of the student's ability to conduct independent research or participate in collaborative research and write about it in a meaningful and coherent way?
- Does the description of the final project indicate how research components will be described?
- Does the proposed oral presentation format seem feasible and appropriate to the project?
- If the student is a member of a faculty-led research team, are substantive individual expectations and contributions clearly described?

### **Revisions**

In the case that a student is asked to revise the proposal, explicit recommendations for revision will be provided to the student by the Scholar of Distinction Committee. Revised proposals must be sent to the Committee within 3 weeks following receipt of feedback and must be accompanied by a letter stating how feedback was addressed in the revised proposal.

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**Appendix D**  
**Guidelines for Final Project**



### **Guidelines for Final Project**

The guidelines that follow are intended to serve as a framework for the final project. Regardless of the format of the final project (written thesis or other approved format), the final project must reflect the basic components of a research project:

- Title
- Abstract (100 words or less)
- Introduction and significance
- Research questions
- Review of the literature
- Methods (Description of your overarching research design, including proposed methods or practices proposed for inquiring into the phenomena of interest; and, as relevant, research participants, data collection and analysis procedures)
- Findings
- Conclusions and discussion
- References
- For research conducted in conjunction with a faculty-led team: Statement of substantive individual contribution to the project

If the final project takes the form of a written thesis, these components will likely be presented in chapters or sections as noted above. If the final project reflects a different format (curriculum, creative project, poster, or artifact), students are not expected to produce a lengthy paper. Instead, the project needs to reflect these components in a different fashion or include shorter written pieces that address required components. If the research is conducted through a faculty-led team and the final product does not address each of the components listed above, supplemental materials must be provided in a format agreed upon by the student and research mentor. The student and research mentor will need to discuss the approach to be used in ensuring that the final project reflects these components.

#### **Chapters/Sections for Written Theses**

For a traditional written thesis, the body of the document will consist of several sections or chapters. The number of chapters and their titles may vary by discipline and topic. Most theses take the form of five chapters/sections listed below:

- Chapter 1: Introduction and Significance
  - In Chapter 1, you will offer a brief introduction to and background on your topic, a statement of the problem or issue to be addressed, and the significance of the issue. This sets the context for your study and provides readers with a sense of what is to follow. This section concludes with a statement of one or more research questions that will guide your work. Key words and/or definitions may be included in this chapter. This chapter is generally 2 - 4 pages in length.

- Chapter 2: Literature review
  - Chapter 2 provides an overview of the research literature on your topic. It offers a recent and relevant research synthesis that progresses logically and intentionally from a broad overview of the topic to a more specific focus on the research question being proposed. The length of Chapter 2 varies but typically ranges between 8 – 10 pages. Your research mentor will guide you in determining the depth and length of your literature review.
- Chapter 3: Methods
  - Chapter 3 includes details of your research methods and identity as a researcher. The chapter should begin with a description of and rationale for your selected approach to the research (e.g., qualitative case study, survey, action research, arts-based research, participatory action research, etc.) as well as a description of your research practices, possible participants and data collection and analysis procedures. This section describes the practices and procedures used to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the study. The latter may include a discussion of your identity and subjectivity as a researcher. Each of these sections are detailed within separate headings. The general length of this chapter varies; 8-10 pages is typical.
- Chapter 4: Findings/Results/Emerging Themes
  - The results of your analyses are presented in Chapter 4. The presentation of results will vary based upon your selected research methods, but the emphasis is on describing findings and emerging themes rather than on discussing or interpreting them through your personal lens. Page lengths may vary; however, 8 – 10 pages for this section is typical.
- Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion
  - The last chapter of your thesis focuses on 1) addressing your research question(s) based upon your findings; and 2) discussing your findings in light of the current research, and 3) explaining how your findings maybe confirming, providing alternative explanations, or extending the existing literature. This section also describes potential implications for practice or policy and recommendations for future study on the topic. The limitations of your research are also addressed in the final section. It is expected that the Discussion and Conclusion section will be 5 – 7 pages long.

## References

Provide a full list of references at the end of the paper. References must align with APA guidelines, unless your research mentor has approved another format.

## Appendices

If necessary, appendices (e.g., interview or survey questions, tables not included in the body of the work) should follow the reference list. This material may all be included in one appendix

(listed in the table of contents as simply Appendix) or may be organized and divided into two or more labeled appendices.

**Defense of the work:**

1. Schedule an oral presentation of your work that conforms to one of the following formats:
  - Oral defense to your Scholar of Distinction Committee, which must be held on or before the Friday of the last week of classes of the semester. You will need to locate a day, time, and location that is amenable to you and your committee members.
  - Present your work at the annual UVM Student Research Conference held in the Spring semester. This presentation requires submission and acceptance of your project through the appropriate channels, as well as a commitment from your Scholar of Distinction Committee members to attend the conference during the time you are presenting.
  - Present your work at the annual CESS Scholarship and Innovation Symposium held during the week following the end of the Spring semester. This presentation requires submission and acceptance of your project by the CESS Research Council, as well as a commitment from your Scholarship of Distinction Committee members to attend the symposium during the time you are presenting.
2. Submit one copy of your final project to your Scholar of Distinction Committee at least one week prior to the date of the scheduled defense.
3. During the presentation:
  - a. You will be asked to explain your project and answer a series of questions about it.
  - b. After the questioning ends, you will be excused while your committee decides whether the final project and oral defense are of a quality sufficient for earning recognition as a CESS Scholar of Distinction. If the designation is approved, this will be noted on the Evaluation form and your research mentor will communicate the information to the Chair of your home department, the CESS Office of Student Services, and the Registrar's Office.
  - c. The Scholarship of Distinction committee may recommend revisions to your final project. These should generally be completed within a week following the defense. You may be asked to submit a copy of the revised project to one or more members of your committee.

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## **Appendix E**

### **Evaluation of CESS Scholar of Distinction Oral Defense**

**Evaluation of CESS Scholar of Distinction Oral Defense**

Sections A-C should be completed by the research mentor and submitted to the CESS Dean's Office and Office of Student Services by the last day of classes in the semester that the student intends to graduate. If recommended for the designation, the Office of Student Services will forward the student's name to the Registrar.

**A. Information**

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Department in which research was performed: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Scholar of Distinction Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

Research Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Faculty Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Defense: \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Qualification for CESS Scholar of Distinction**

The decision of the Scholar of Distinction Committee is that this student: (check one)

- Passed the defense at Scholar of Distinction level
- Passed the defense at the course or Independent Study level (i.e., receives a passing grade for the Independent Study or other associated course, but does not receive recognition as CESS Scholar of Distinction)
- Failed

**C. Grade and Signatures**

The grade (A-F scale) submitted for this work is: \_\_\_\_\_

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Signed: (Research Mentor): \_\_\_\_\_

(Second Committee Member): \_\_\_\_\_

#### **D. Submission to ScholarWorks**

Depending on the nature of the final project, it may be appropriate to ask the student to submit their work to the ScholarWorks database, a public research archive that is the University of Vermont's preferred vehicle for sharing faculty and student research. We are aware that sometimes the publication of student research may compromise the confidentiality of as-yet unpublished faculty research. In light of this and related considerations, please check the appropriate statement below, providing brief explanations if appropriate, and sign:

\_\_\_\_\_ The student **has my permission** to post the thesis to ScholarWorks

\_\_\_\_\_ The student **does not have my permission** to post the thesis to ScholarWorks  
(please explain)

\_\_\_\_\_ The student's work should be **embargoed** on ScholarWorks for a certain amount of time  
(please specify the reason for and the length of the embargo).

Signature of Research Mentor:

\_\_\_\_\_