

HOLY FAMILY ACADEMY
Ad Veritatem per Fidem et Rationem
Grades 11 & 12

ADVISERS: Dr. Fugikawa and Dr. Kryst
COURSE TITLE: Junior and Senior Thesis

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This two-credit course for the eleventh and twelfth grade will focus on the writing and presentation of a thesis in the areas of mathematics, science, history, theology, literature, philosophy, or language (or more than one of these areas.) Each student must ask and answer a question of some “philosophical import.” The thesis will be written in a modified form of the traditional scholastic “Quaestio Disputationis” form that St. Thomas Aquinas exemplifies in his *Summa Theologiae*. The Thesis Presentations represent the culmination of a student’s education at Holy Family Academy. When presenting and defending a thesis, each student demonstrates both the ability **to search for the truth in a logical manner**, and the ability **to present and defend a position publicly**.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The thesis is to be approximately 7 to 8 pages in length and follow a careful plan that includes the following essential elements:

1. **Question:** The title of the thesis is the question posed. The question must be of “philosophical interest.” The question must be about a matter that carries some universal import, and must be a question that has not been resolved simply (at least not resolved obviously¹). The thesis is not a “research paper” yet should engage and reference the intellectual tradition where appropriate in the work.
2. **Introduction:** A brief introduction might explain what the question is and why it is important. It might explain how the question arises. **The last sentence of the introduction should be the thesis statement.**²
3. **Objections:** The stating of multiple strong objections (usually three or four) to the thesis statement. The student is careful to prepare the strongest objections to his thesis that he is able (certainly not “straw man” objections). In this way the student demonstrates an ability to see many sides of a question.
4. **The *Sed Contra*:** The *sed contra* is ideally a quotation from an authority that directly or indirectly supports the thesis assertion.
5. **Respondeo:** The body of the thesis, in the form of an argument (or arguments) of the truth. In this part of the thesis the student demonstrates his understanding that the thesis is a logical exercise. The student must formulate at least one syllogism, the conclusion of which is his thesis. Sometimes the *Respondeo* is comprised of one major argument, a drawn out syllogism in which the **two premises** of his syllogism are brought to light and

¹ It may in fact be difficult to find a question that one or another great thinker has not either asked directly or indirectly, therefore the question does not have to be an “unresolved” question simply speaking. The thesis project may often serve as a way for an individual student to resolve a question in his own mind, make the truth his own, so to speak, and consequently share the truth with his listeners.

² The HFA Thesis does not follow the scholastic form strictly, but is adapted as part of the HFA program in rhetoric. This is in great part not only an exercise in discovering the truth but is also an exercise in **oral** presentation. Therefore to some extent and for the sake of clarity and intelligibility the requirements for the thesis might differ from the requirements of a thesis that is written primarily “to be read.”

defended. In other cases, a student will choose to defend his thesis with multiple arguments (i.e. three of four smaller syllogisms). Both methods are acceptable. It is essential, nevertheless, that the student present syllogisms.

6. **Refutation of objections**, responding one by one to the arguments raised in the second element.
7. **Brief Conclusion** The student finishes with a brief conclusion perhaps recapitulating the argument or suggesting how the solution given has broader significant implications or even raises other significant questions. An annotated bibliography or works cited section must be appended to the final written thesis.

Each student will propose a thesis topic in the first trimester to the Thesis Topic Review Board for approval. Each student will then be assigned a thesis adviser who will direct the composition and presentation of the thesis and determine the student's final grade for the course. The thesis will be presented in two ways: first in its written form as an essay of 7–8 pages and second through an oral presentation of the thesis followed by a defense. Each student will answer extemporaneously questions posed by members of the audience. The written thesis should include proper documentation of sources.

The Junior and Senior thesis program allows each student to choose a topic about which he or she is particularly interested and provides an opportunity to investigate that topic in a deeper manner under the direction of an adviser. Additionally, this program might be seen as the crowning part of the rhetoric curriculum. It is to be hoped that each HFA student will gain the ability to articulate, present, and defend a position in a logical, compelling, and even delightful manner.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE:

First Trimester:

1. Preliminary Research
2. **Selection of Thesis Topic and Scope (10/2) [5% of Course Grade]**
3. Presentation of Objections (10/15)
4. **Proposal Submitted to Thesis Topic Review Board (10/23) [5% of Course Grade]**
5. Revised Proposal Submitted to Thesis Topic Review Board (Early November)

Second Trimester:

6. Primary Research Complete; Annotated Bibliography (12/11)
7. Detailed Outline of Thesis (1/8)
8. **First Draft (1/29) [10% of Course Grade]**

Third Trimester:

9. Editing and Additional Research
10. **Draft of Written Thesis to Be Graded, Due (4/23) [40% of Course Grade]**
11. Thesis Recitation Practice (4/24 – Presentation)
12. Graded Drafts Returned to Student (5/5)
13. **Thesis Presentation [40% of Course Grade]**
(Juniors: Colloquia in May; Seniors: May 15th)
14. **Amended Draft of Written Thesis Due 1 Week After Presentation**

The advisers reserve the right to change or modify this course and the syllabus subject to appropriate and timely notice to the students enrolled in this course.