DEPARTMENT OF GENDER AND CULTURAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Length: 15,000 words. This does not include footnotes or bibliography.

Presentation: Please use at least 1.5 spacing. Double sided printing is acceptable, although you should observe the conventions that would leave certain pages of the front matter blank (e.g. the reverse side of the abstract). The thesis should be ringbound.

The thesis should include: a title page, including affiliation and statement of originality; table of contents; abstract; main text; and bibliography. It may also, where relevant, include other components e.g. Appendices; List of Illustrations.

Submitting the thesis: You need to lodge 2 hard copies + 1 pdf. Submit the hard copies to the SOPHI office and include a cover sheet. The pdf version should be emailed to the Honours convenor. You will receive detailed instructions about this from SOPHI.

Returning the thesis: The Department will keep one of the hard copies for its internal library. You may like to contact the Honours convenor (by email, or by a note inserted inside the thesis on submission) with your preferences regarding the other copy.

E-Repository, Fisher Library: When you submit your thesis to the SOPHI office, you will also be asked to fill in a form regarding Fisher Library’s E-Repository scheme. Under that scheme, the Department selects certain high-standard theses for inclusion in the Library. You are asked to indicate whether you are willing or not for your thesis to be included should it be selected. You are under no obligation to consent to this. Your decision has no impact on the grading or award of your thesis.

If you do consent, you should be aware that the E-Repository is a public resource, available to anyone who logs into the library catalogue.

Copyright and the E-Repository: The Library have indicated that any theses included in the E-Repository should comply with the following copyright protocol: “if the work contains images, we will accept it as long as the images are properly and clearly cited and attributed. The images should ideally be embedded in the pdf file and be of a low resolution.”

Extensions: You should be aware that extensions are not freely given for the Honours thesis. If you are experiencing difficulties you need to contact the Honours convenor. Special Consideration protocols do apply, but in many circumstances extensions will be modest.

1 At the bottom of the title page: “A treatise submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Arts (Honours); followed by the name of the Department, the University and the date (e.g. October 2013). Then: “This thesis has not been submitted for examination at this or any other university.”
This document aims to flesh out a little more than the Faculty marking criteria what the Department of Gender & Cultural Studies values in an Honours thesis. In reading this document, please note that there is no “recipe” for an excellent Honours thesis. We value different types of work, and each project is assessed in relation to the task it sets out to do. Assigning a grade to a thesis often involves a trade-off between different criteria: a thesis might be extremely original, but written in a pedestrian manner; it might involve wonderful primary research, but be under-theorised; it might be very ambitious, but not completely successful in its aims. This is all to be expected, and the mark assigned will often represent some form of trade-off between the strengths and limitations of a particular thesis.

Having said that, here are some of the things we recognise and value at Honours level.

**Originality**
The Faculty of Arts grading criteria recognise the importance of independent thought and original work, especially within the First Class category. In the Department of Gender & Cultural Studies, originality might involve one (or some) of the following:

- The choice of topic itself (new objects of study)
- Original primary research (e.g. interviews, case studies) or analysis of hitherto unconsidered primary texts
- New theoretical models (e.g. using a cutting edge theorist, or perhaps a lesser known or neglected theorist)
- New combinations of material; drawing connections between different areas to create something new.

A competent but familiar thesis that treads a well-worn path is able to get a First Class Honours, when it is well done, but supervisors may sometimes alert students if in their opinion a topic and/or approach has been thoroughly exhausted within the discipline and will try and steer them towards new and distinctive possibilities within the topic area.

To a certain extent, originality is valued in and of itself, but of course is most valuable when the *significance* of the material or approach has been convincingly argued for.
### Aims & Significance

We value a thesis that is clear about its aims, and that fulfils them. In judging this, a reader will typically ask:

- How useful/appropriate/interesting were these aims in the first place?
- How well did the thesis spell out what its aims were?
- How successfully did it achieve them?

In other words, does the thesis do what it says it’s going to do, and how worth doing was it in the first place?

This latter aspect – how much something was worth doing – is the **significance** of the project. Higher level theses will be able to offer a convincing rationale for the importance of what they are doing – to give the reader a sense of why the thesis *matters* (to you and to others). This is not a matter of over-statement (you do not have to prove that your thesis is earth-shattering) but it is a case of thinking clearly about, and articulating, what is of value in your topic and/or approach and/or findings.

### Methods, Approach and Conceptual Framing

Theses submitted in this department utilise a range of methods and approaches. We value a thesis that has chosen an approach that is suitable for exploring or answering the questions the thesis wants to examine.

- We especially value the careful setting up of a conceptual framework. Theses that don’t interrogate their key terms or concepts (for example, “authenticity” or “community”) or their starting assumptions and premises will not typically be as well received as those that do. That doesn't mean that every thesis needs to have a tedious “definition of key terms”; it means that the candidate has recognised when some of their key starting points are contested, or have a meaningful history that needs to form part of their scrutiny.

- In the case of primary research methods like detailed archival work, or interviewing, we recognise the amount of work that goes into such methods, especially in the context of the short Honours timeframe. But this does not mean that we a priori value them. We value the successful execution of an approach that was appropriate to the project design.

### Framing, Field, & Context

The following elements of framing and set-up are important:
• Knowing and articulating what you are doing (and perhaps what you are not doing).
• Knowing where your work fits – in terms of fields, contexts and key debates. This is so, even when (perhaps especially when) you are choosing not follow a dominant line, or address an issue in the same way that many people before you have done.

Argument

The central argument of your thesis should be spelled out, usually in the introduction of the thesis, and should be visible throughout the thesis.

We do not require you to articulate a line of argument that is cutting edge or trendy. But we DO expect you to know just where your argument fits in the scheme of things. It is one thing for a thesis to run an argument (for example about the effects of media images on women) that isn’t “trendy”; it is quite another thing for a thesis not to display any awareness that certain topics (like this one about media images) have been hotly debated within and between disciplines for a considerable time. Your task is twofold: you need to make a convincing argument and to display relevant knowledge about the discipline (or the topic) and its core debates.

Writing

The Department recognises that there are many writing forms that a thesis may take, including “creative” or fictocritical forms. It does not a priori value a particular style over another (for example, there is no tacit assumption that a “creative” thesis is more worthy than a classic analytical essay). What we value are the appropriateness of the choices made around style and the successful execution of these choices.

Having said that, in all theses we value:
• Accuracy, precision and consistency of grammar, spelling, and referencing.
• Careful editing and proofreading.
• Thesis production with attention to detail.

Higher level theses will also often display:
• A certain style, flair, or elegance.
• A reflexivity about language use and its relation to the chosen topic. This may be openly articulated as a theory of writing or it may remain tacit but be evidenced in a choice of writing style that in some ways speaks to or with the topic or approach.
• A distinctive “voice” (this would usually only be found in upper-level Firsts).

Examiners may differ in their tolerance for minor typographical errors and/or weak style. For some, they might preclude the thesis from getting a First, as there is a
certain level of professionalism required for First Class honours; but in other instances, these criteria will be weighed up against other elements.
Trans/Disciplinarity
The Department recognises that a variety of different kinds of work may fall under the rubric of Gender and/or Cultural Studies. Some of it will be transdisciplinary in nature, but we also value studies that fall within a tighter disciplinary framework. Despite the frequently transdisciplinary nature of work in Gender and Cultural Studies, transdisciplinary work is not a priori more valuable than more focussed work. Some students will enter Honours with a tighter disciplinary training than others, and it may be appropriate for their thesis to remain closer to their training than for someone who comes with a wide-ranging background.

Evidence of Potential to do Further Work
In making these complex judgments and weighing up different forms of value, one criterion that markers will sometimes take into account is whether a thesis demonstrates the potential for the candidate to go on to further study. This is mainly an issue when it comes to extremely high Firsts, but is sometimes a factor when a marker has to weigh up an obvious strength of a thesis against some limitation. Perhaps a thesis didn’t quite pull off its aims, but was evidently trying to do something really interesting and really complicated, which it couldn’t quite manage in the time frame. In such instances, some markers may also try to recognise and reward potential.

II. 1 vs. Firsts
The Faculty of Arts criteria sheet spells out in detail the assessment criteria for the different grades. This document does not aim to replace that one. Since the borderline between a high II I and a low First can sometimes be hard to draw, the following may be useful as a general guide only, noting once again that each thesis is taken on its own terms, and that different examiners may weight particular criteria more highly than others:

A Second Class Honours, Division I is recognised as a high performing thesis – one that is “superior” in relation to the level of Honours work. According to the Faculty criteria, its written standards are high; it demonstrates superior knowledge of the subject and it has a reasonably complex understanding that demonstrates some level of originality.

It may perhaps be less successful in the area of:
• Completion (it may not have been sufficiently well proofed for punctuation, typographical errors and so on); and/or
• Argument (the argument may be unconvincing, or based on false premises, or inconsistent).
• Voice: the tone may be too didactic.
Feedback
We aim to give feedback that is encouraging, that takes into account the stated aims of the thesis, and that recognises its strengths, but which will also suggest possible limitations or suggestions for future work.