



SAMPLE LETTER

November 3, 2025

To the Honors Council:

On November 4, 2025, Ralphie Buffalo successfully defended their thesis *Buffaloes in Their Natural Habitat: Range, Ecology, and Climate Change Impacts*, held in Eaton Humanities 245 and via Zoom from 3:00 to 4:00 PM. The defense was conducted by Cassandra Brooks, Honors Council Representative in Environmental Studies, Amy Palmer, Outside Reader (Biochemistry), and myself, Abby Hickcox, Thesis Advisor (Honors Program).

The committee unanimously recommends *summa cum laude* for Ralphie based on an exceptionally well-researched and clearly written thesis, combined with a thorough and articulate oral defense. Ralphie demonstrated mastery of a complex interdisciplinary topic, integrating ecological science, climate modeling, and conservation policy in a way that advances understanding of large herbivore ecology under climate change pressures. Ralphie's cumulative GPA is 3.875, which is in line with a *summa cum laude* designation.

The thesis addresses a timely and critical issue: the impact of climate change on buffalo populations and their ecosystems. Ralphie's work synthesizes historical range data, ecological roles, and climate projections to produce actionable insights for conservation strategies. The methodology was rigorous, combining satellite imagery analysis, climate modeling, and field observations. The paper not only consolidates existing research but also offers original interpretations of how disease prevalence and habitat shifts may affect buffalo survival. This contribution is significant for wildlife management and climate adaptation policy.

During the defense, Ralphie responded to challenging questions with clarity and depth. For example, when asked about the limitations of climate models in predicting disease vectors, Ralphie provided a nuanced explanation of model uncertainty and proposed mitigation strategies. The committee was particularly impressed by Ralphie's ability to connect ecological theory with practical conservation applications. Ralphie demonstrated confidence, intellectual flexibility, and a strong command of the subject matter. The committee would have liked to hear more about how Ralphie envisioned expanding this research in future studies, particularly in terms of applying the findings to broader conservation strategies or integrating additional species for comparative analysis.

In summary, Ralphie Buffalo's thesis and defense exemplify the highest standards of scholarship. We strongly and unanimously support the recommendation of *summa cum laude*.

Sincerely,
Abby Hickcox

