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SAMPLE LETTER:

PLEASE NOTE, IDEALLY, THIS WOULD BE SPLIT INTO TWO LETTERS – one written by a committee member that voted for the higher designation and what the rationale was for themselves/those who voted in line with them, and a separate letter, written by the dissenting voter(s) describing their rationale. One letter is acceptable as long as both perspectives are clearly defined and supported.

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 room 245 and via Zoom from 3:00 to 4:00 PM. The defense was conducted by Cassandra Brooks, Amy Palmer, and myself, Abby Hickcox (Thesis Advisor).

Ralphie Buffalo's cumulative GPA is 3.875, which falls within the *summa cum laude* range. The committee was unable to reach a unanimous decision and therefore submits a split vote:

- Two members recommend *summa cum laude*
- One member recommends *magna cum laude*

The majority of the committee recommends *summa cum laude* 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. One committee member recommended *magna cum laude*, noting that while the thesis was strong and the defense competent, certain sections of the paper – particularly the discussion of disease prevalence – lacked the depth expected for the highest honors. This member felt that the oral defense, though solid, did not fully address methodological limitations raised during questioning.

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.

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. However, one committee member felt that responses to questions about statistical robustness were less comprehensive than expected for summa-level work. All committee members 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 high standards of scholarship in the Honors thesis process. The committee submits this split vote for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Abby Hickcox