

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY THESIS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Prepared by the Office of Graduate Studies and
Research

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Summary of Thesis Review Decisions for Spring, Summer, and Fall of 2005

Completion of a thesis is an alternative culminating experience for most of the graduate degree programs at San Jose State University. Prior to Spring 2005, the tracking of theses within the Office of Graduate Studies and Research (GS&R) was limited to maintenance of a binder indicating the thesis log number, student name, date of submittal and approval status; there had been no attempt to assess the number of theses submitted within a college or degree program, or the approval status for theses submitted in any given semester. In Spring 2005, an Excel spreadsheet was developed to enable tracking of information on individual thesis submittals, including the college and department, thesis number, student name, committee chair, committee members, dates of initial receipt, and approval status for all subsequent submittal dates. In addition, explanatory notes related to the thesis decision can be made; these generally apply to policy issues such as human subjects or animal use approval, copyright permission, and thesis committee composition.

Figure 1 summarizes the data for Spring 2005. Of 62 thesis submittals, 53 percent were not approved by the thesis reviewer following the first review; on re-submittal, 30 percent were rejected a second time (this is 16% of the total theses submitted). Note that a second rejection decision results in the thesis being pulled from review and returned to the thesis committee. This action prevents a student from graduating that semester. Figure 2 provides similar data for the Summer 2005 thesis review period. Note that the increase in theses approved on the first reading includes those rejected twice from Spring 2005.

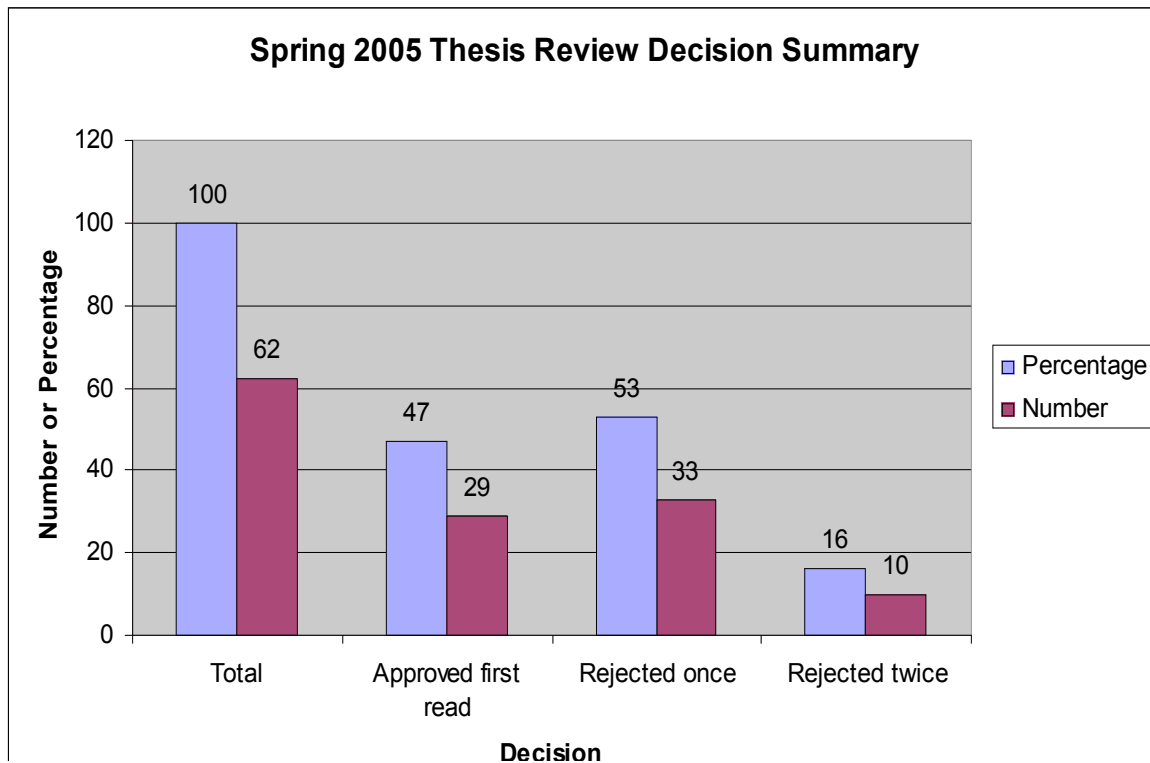


Figure 1. Summary of the Thesis Review Decisions for Spring 2005 Thesis Submittals.

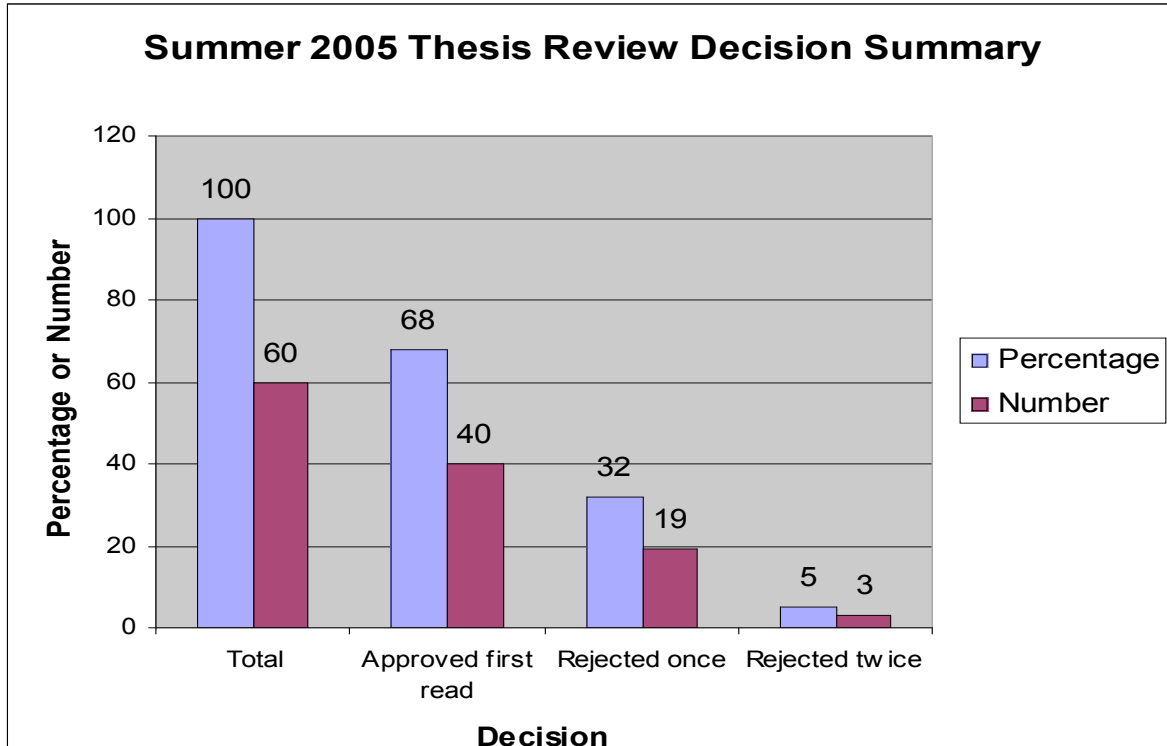


Figure 2. Summary of the Thesis Review Decisions for Summer 2005 Thesis Submittals.

Figure 3 summarizes data for Fall 2005; the data indicate a marked improvement relative to Spring 2005, with the percentage of theses approved after the first read greater than the percentage rejected after the first read. This is a reversal of the Spring 2005 data. The reversal of trends reflects positively on efforts to address the quality of theses submitted for review, however it is important to note that the time period of data collection is short, and not all the data indicate improvement. For example, the total number of theses rejected twice did not change from Spring 2005 to Fall 2005; ten students were prevented from graduating as planned in both semesters. The percentage of twice rejected theses actually increased from 16% to 18% for the same period.

Data for Spring 2006 indicate continued improvement, with 64% of the 78 theses submitted approved in the first read; 4% were rejected twice (Figure 4). The data for Spring 2006 indicate improvement in the number of theses that are rejected twice, with the percentage decreasing from 16% and 18% in Spring and Fall of 2005, respectively, to 4% in Spring 2006. Summer 2006 data continue the trend, with 69% of 51 theses submitted approved the first read; the number of theses rejected twice remained unchanged (4%). Figure 5 summarizes the data for the percentage of theses accepted on the first read as compared to the percentage rejected on the first read. The data reflect dramatic improvement in the quality of theses being submitted for review between Spring 2005 and Spring 2006.

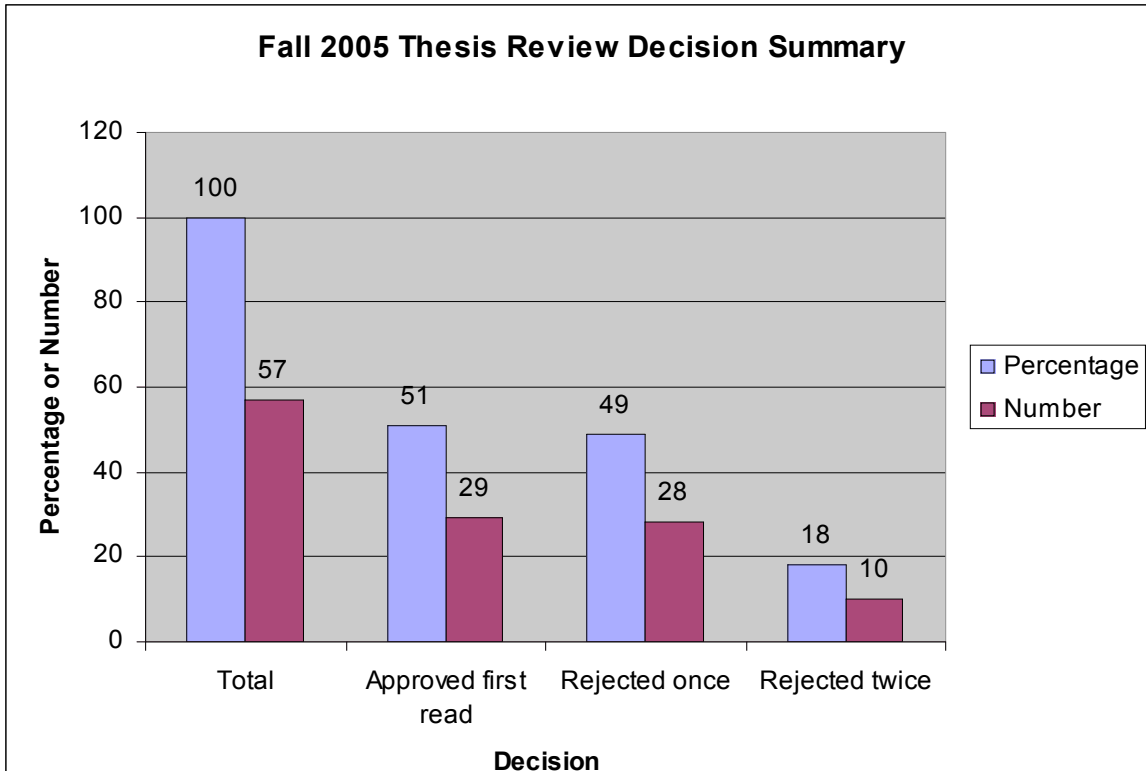


Figure 3. Summary of the Thesis Review Decisions for Fall 2005 Thesis Submittals.

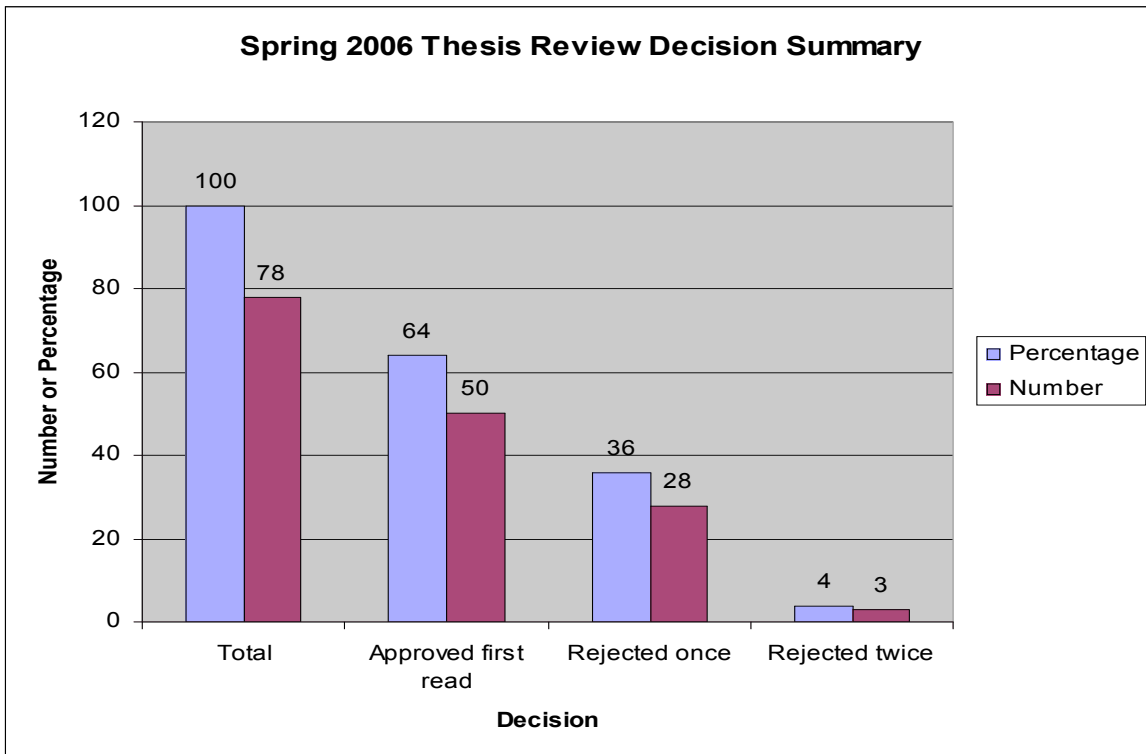


Figure 4. Summary of the Thesis Review Decisions for Spring 2006 Thesis Submittals.

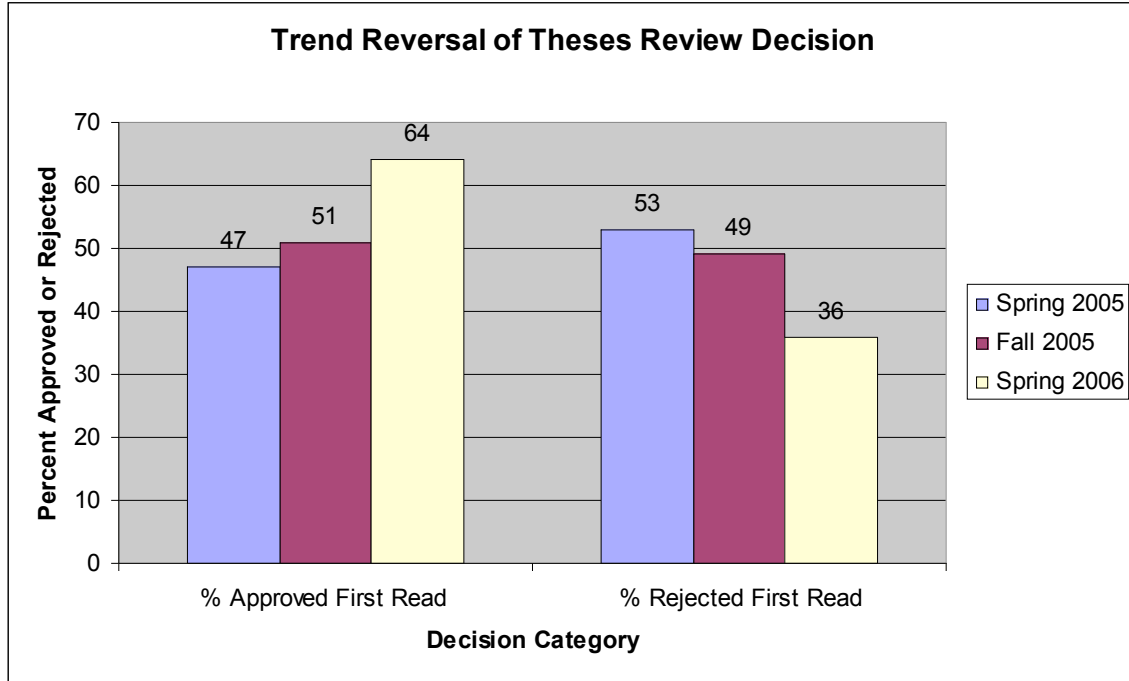


Figure 5. Summary of the Thesis Review Decisions for Spring 2005 to Spring 2006 Showing a Reversal in Review Decisions.

The tracking database provides valuable information on why theses are rejected; reasons are typically a result of format-based, quality-based, and/or procedural-based errors. Format-based errors are generally a result of not following thesis guidelines for margins, spacing, page numbering, and length requirements for the title and abstract. Quality-based errors are generally grammatical errors, sentence structure errors, misspelled words, lack of parallelism, and others. Procedural-based errors include lack of required signatures, lack of copyright permission, human subjects and/or animal research approval forms, incorrect committee composition, missing sections, and others. Many of the errors could have been avoided following a through review of the thesis prior to submittal to GS&R; such review would likely decrease the thesis rejection rate and improve the graduate student experience.

Practices to reduce the overall theses rejection rate were identified in response to the data for Spring and Summer of 2005, and were expanded as more data became available in Fall 2005 and Spring 2006. To date, the following best practices have been implemented or are in progress:

- Thesis Information Workshops for Faculty (Fall 2005 and Spring 2006)
- Revision of the Thesis Guidelines (On-going)
- Revision of the Thesis Information Form (Fall 2005)
- Thesis Preparation Workshops for Students (Fall 2006: 2 workshops)
- Updated Web Information (On-going)

Additional best practices are being identified based on college and department level data.

Figures 1 through 5 summarize thesis data across all graduate degree programs offered by the University; these data have been instrumental in identifying best practices to correct quality based problems, as discussed above. The ability to drill down into the database and extract college level, and even department level thesis information enables a targeted approach to addressing discipline specific issues and concerns. Using the tracking database, it is now apparent that thesis submittals vary between colleges, amongst programs within a college, and from semester to semester. Figure 6 shows the college level data for the number of theses approved on the first read and the number of theses rejected on the first read in the Spring 2005 and Fall 2005 semesters. Over the limited time period, thesis approval and rejection rates were consistent for some of the colleges, while other colleges showed improvement. It is important to note that these early data for theses approval rates are limited to two semesters, and so reflect student work prior to implementation of the best practices noted above. Figure 7 shows data for Spring 2006, after implementation of best practices. The data continue to show variable results by college, as shown in Table 1, which summarizes the percent approval and rejection decisions for Spring 2005 and Spring 2006 for colleges with more than five thesis submittals. Nonetheless even these limited data may be of value in providing guidance on where to direct limited resources and time to better educate the students, the faculty, and the administration. These data will hopefully enable a directed effort at programs in need of theses training efforts. In addition, once the thesis data are coupled with information on human subjects data and competency in written English practices, additional methods of analysis may be more evident.

Table 1. Percentage Approval and Rejected Theses for Colleges With More Than Five Submittals.

College	Spring 2005 Approvals (%)	Spring 2005 Rejections (%)	Spring 2006 Approvals (%)	Spring 2006 Rejections (%)	Approval Trend
CASA	75	25	53	47	↓
Engr	41	59	36	64	↓
Hum. Arts	20	80	83	17	↑
Science	80	20	78	12	Approx. same
Soc. Sci.	40	60	58	42	↑

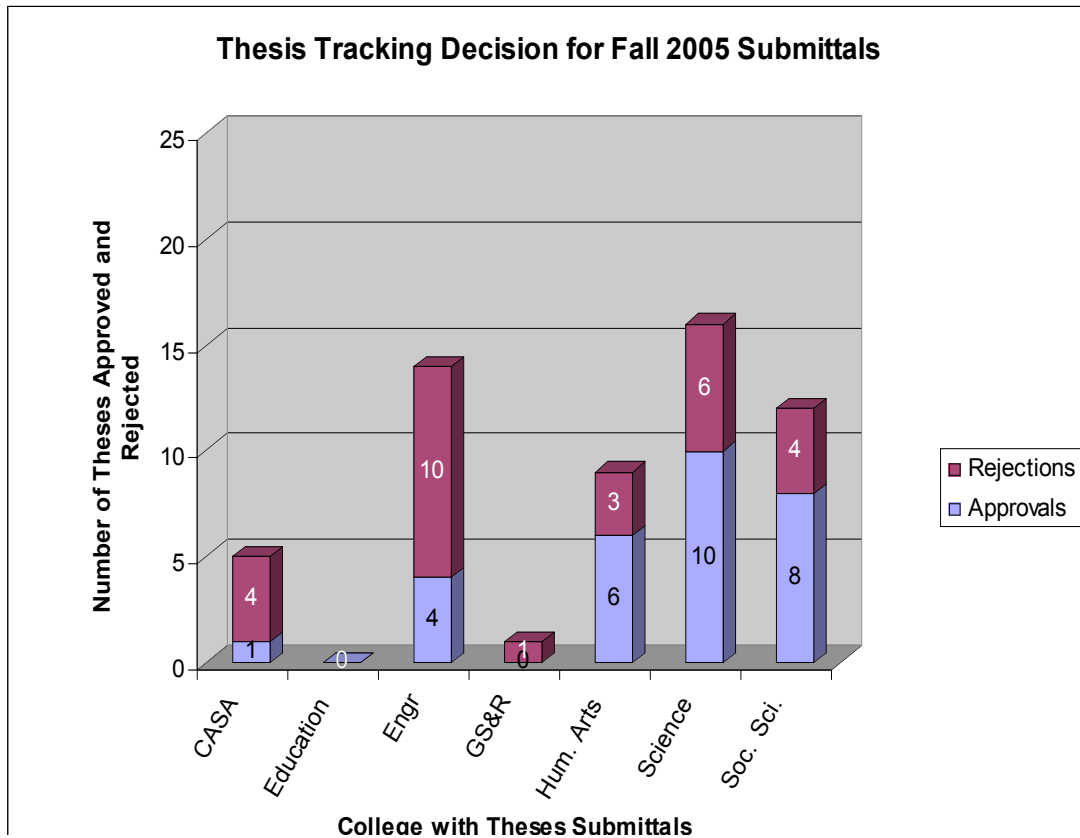
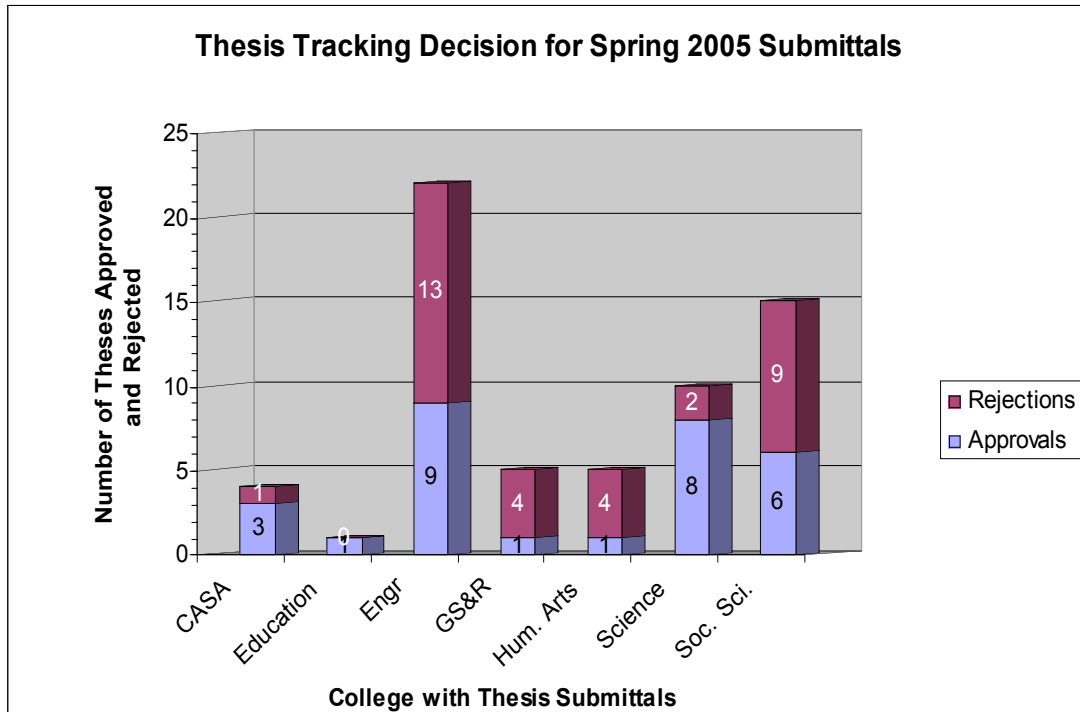


Figure 6. Summary of the Thesis Review Decisions by College for Spring (top panel) and Fall (bottom panel) of 2005.

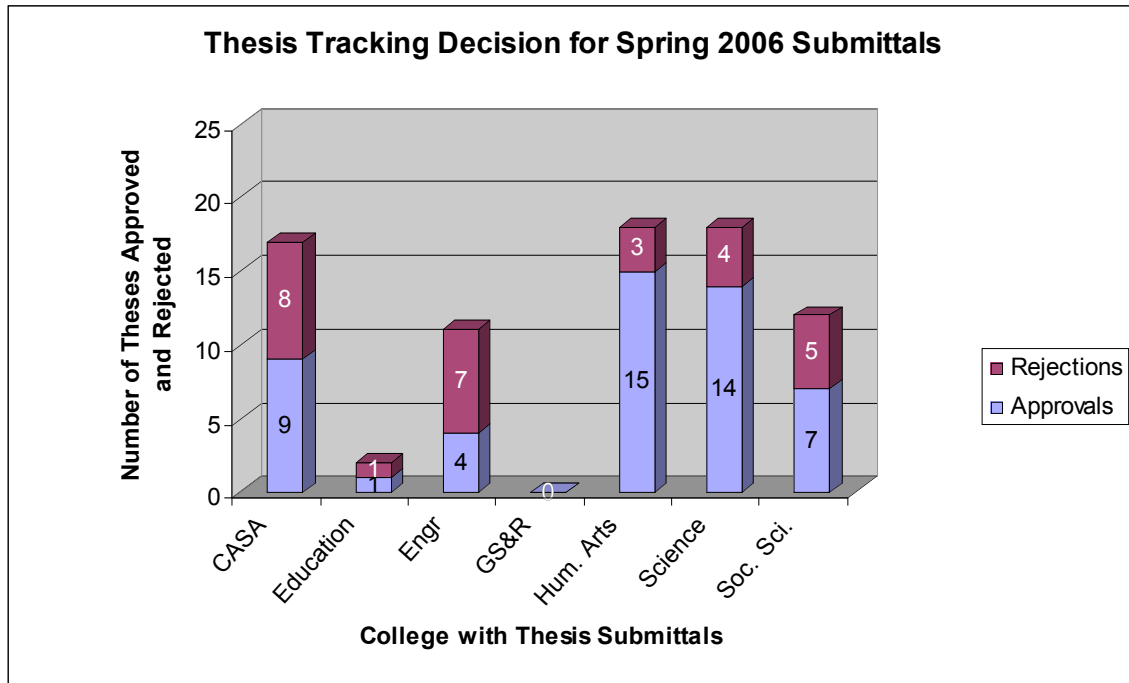


Figure 7. Summary of the Thesis Review Decisions by College for Spring 2006.