

## **An Outline For The Writing of M.A. Thesis Proposals**

### **Department of Religious Studies**

What follows is itself an outline. Theses in our department vary in topic, scope, and method. No one thesis project will fit exactly into the grid found below.

Under each heading, choose what you find useful and, with your advisor, address the points that apply to your project.

Even if each proposal is different, you should expect to have a proposal that runs approximately 20 pages in length without bibliography.

#### **A. Introduction/Topic**

A statement, in one paragraph, of what you will argue (it is probably easier to write this section last).

#### **B. Thesis Statement**

What do you think you will find/prove/conclude? What do you hope to show?

#### **C. Review of the Literature and Approaches**

1. -What academic works are you using/consulting?
  - Which original sources?
  - Which monographs (studies)?
  - What commentaries?
  - What indexes/databases/journals will you look at or have you looked at?
  
2. -What kinds of approaches (for example, feminist, theological, historical, socio-cultural, anthropological) have been used in this area/topic/thinker?
  - have there been changes in opinions or approaches?
  
3. - The state or status of the question: what have scholars generally said about your topic, what sorts of methods have usually been used? What is the current debate?
  
4. What is unique about your thesis project?
  
5. How does your topic relate to the wider field of Religious Studies?

#### **D. Methodology**

This is the section where your advisor will be of most help to you. Students are often nervous when it comes to methodological issues and unclear about them. Your advisor is your best

resource for discussing the topic, its scope and the method. Begin by being clear about the first point below and then tackle the issue of method.

1. What is the question/issue that is being explored in your thesis?
2. How are you going to do it? What is the method(s)? It may be that you will use one of the following:
  - a. Historical analysis: use of source material; situating material in a historical era and discussing its context.
  - b. Historical criticism: what is author's background? Where and when was the work written or the issue raised? To whom was the work addressed? Why was it written or discussed? What was the social, political, or religious setting?
  - c. Literary criticism: use of biographical or autobiographical materials; interpretation of the text in historical/philosophical/linguistic/religious ways.
  - d. Philosophical analysis: examination of certain terms or ideas; their place in the text, history, thinker or tradition; original meaning or use of a term or an idea; historical development and changes; comparison of one thinker or text to another.
  - e. Socio-cultural analysis: relationship of religious institutions and social structures; impact of religion on society or vice versa.
  - f. Theoretical analysis: examining the genealogy of a specific term or idea; its place in text, history or tradition.

This list by no means exhausts the methods available to you; as well, you may also be employing more than one method.

Some proposals may have special areas of concern; studies with human subjects, for example, must complete ethics clearance. How you will address these special issues is something that will need to be included in your proposal. If you will use questionnaires, include a sample or describe the questions you will pose.

### **E. Scope of the Thesis**

1. - What texts, people, era, or issues are you discussing?
2. - How are you limiting them? (chronologically, topically, by nationality, approach and so on)
3. - Why?

### **F. Organization**

Some thesis proposals will be based on research that is advanced enough to include a brief synopsis of each chapter as a description of the scope of the thesis.

Even without this amount of preliminary research, you should include a tentative outline of how you see the thesis, what it will cover, and how you plan to divide the information.

Include a substantial bibliography in your proposal. You may want to divide your bibliography into primary sources (possibly by language) and secondary literature. Make sure you have included the most recent scholarly work in your area.

### **G. Note**

Remember that you can revise parts of this proposal as your thesis develops. If you find that some parts of your outline no longer applies or that something else has developed from your research, your outline and your thesis can be amended in discussion with your advisor.

### **H. Nuts and Bolts**

1. The title Page should include: Title; A thesis proposal submitted by \_\_\_\_\_ : Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ : Date.

2. Under title try to describe your topic clearly; sometimes adding a subtitle is useful.

3. For MUN's School of Graduate Studies style, presentation, and so on, see

[http://www.mun.ca/sgs/go/guid\\_policies/theses.php](http://www.mun.ca/sgs/go/guid_policies/theses.php)

*Guideline for the Preparation of Research Papers and Theses: General Instructions* gives examples of inclusive writing, the humanities style of endnotes, footnotes, and bibliographic entries. Various style guides are also available to help in your writing, for referencing styles such as Turabian.

### **4. Plagiarism**

The MUN Calendar "General Information and regulations Governing All Graduate Students," L2, "Academic Dishonesty" defines plagiarism as "the act of presenting the ideas or works of another as one's own. This applies to all material such as thesis, essays, laboratory reports, work term reports, design projects, seminar presentations, statistical data, computer programs and research results. The properly acknowledged use of source is an accepted and important part of scholarship. Use of such material without acknowledgement, however, is contrary to accepted norms of academic behaviour."

The SWGC Learning Centre also notes that according to the *Random House Dictionary* (1987) "plagiarism is defined as: n. 1. the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work. 2. Something used and represented in this manner."

If you are not sure about how to document your sources or if you want more information on the issue of plagiarism, please see SWGC Learning Centre webpage on plagiarism with examples and a discussion of plagiarism on the Internet ( and/or Wilfrid Laurier University, Religion and Culture webpage where under " Stylesheet and Guideline for the Preparation of Research Papers and Theses, " General Instructions, Part 3. They have a long, and useful section on plagiarism and how to document material properly).

*See Also:*

Writing better papers (MUN, Political Science):

<http://www.mun.ca/posc/undergraduate/planning/papers.php>

Wilfrid Laurier University: <http://www.wlu.ca/documents/468/plagiarism.pdf>

MUN Writing Centre: <http://www.mun.ca/writingcentre/plagiarism/>