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## M.A. THESIS: GUIDELINES AND TIMELINE

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*Approved February 16, 2016*

### **Eligibility and Purpose**

Students who, in consultation with their Vocation Directors and sending Bishops, choose to pursue a Master of Arts degree, must have a minimum 3.5 grade point average and receive permission from their faculty thesis advisor and the Academic Dean. Students must apply for enrollment in the M.A. track by writing a thesis proposal. A student in the thesis track writes a paper in his focused discipline under the direction of a research advisor who must be a full-time faculty member of Kenrick School of Theology.

The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate the student's competency for guided research in the field of focused study. Generally, the writer of a thesis is not responsible for original research but is responsible for demonstrating an ability to read within the discipline and discuss in writing the issues being read. He is required to demonstrate mastery of the subject matter and the ability to relate the thesis topic synthetically to other branches of theology. The thesis is examined by the director and one other faculty member, and graded on its conformity to these standards.

### **The Application Process**

The application process begins when a student requests a full-time faculty member to direct his thesis and that request is conditionally accepted. The student then works to submit to his advisor a 3- to 5-page abstract that includes the following: a thesis statement, the rationale, a methodology statement, a tentative paragraph outline, and an annotated bibliography.

1. **Thesis Statement:** A thesis statement declares in one sentence a specific goal or goals as derived from a scholarly synthesis of information gathered from research.
2. **Rationale:** The rationale expresses the significance or importance of the question to the specific discipline of study.
3. **Methodology Statement:** The methodology statement provides an explanation of *how* to study the idea articulated in the rationale. For example, a student writing on the Eucharist from the discipline of sacramental theology would most likely employ a different methodology than a student writing on the same topic from biblical theology.
4. **Tentative Outline:** The outline articulates in separate paragraphs the topics that will appear within each chapter of the thesis. These paragraphs are to be developed sufficiently to demonstrate a command of the ideas the student proposes to use in proving the thesis statement in a working draft. It is understood that the proposal is subject to change.

5. **Annotated Bibliography:** The bibliography describes five primary sources and five secondary sources relevant to the topic the student chooses. Some indication of how each source affects particular chapters can be made.

### **Timeline for the M.A. Track**

The deadline for students to apply for the thesis is **April 1<sup>st</sup> of their fourth semester in the program**. Seminarians fill out the [Application for Admission to the M.A. Program](#), which includes thesis proposal form signed by thesis advisor. The form will then be submitted to the Academic Dean for signature and will be filed in the Registrar's office. Late applications will be accepted only with the approval of the Academic Dean.

**By May 15<sup>th</sup> of the sixth semester of the program, the student must submit to his advisor a first draft of the thesis.** Failure to meet this requirement will result in the student's being penalized half a letter grade on his thesis, and could entail the student's discontinuance from pursuing the M.A. degree.

**By October 15<sup>th</sup> of the seventh semester of the program, the student must submit to his advisor a defensible draft.** Failure to meet this requirement could entail the student's discontinuance from pursuing the M.A. degree. If the student is permitted to continue, the defensible draft must be submitted no later than the end of the fall semester, and the student will be penalized half a letter grade.

**The defense date should be before the end of the fall semester in the fourth year.** At the latest, **the student must submit a final text approved by both readers and ready for the defense by February 15.** If there are truly extenuating circumstances, special permission must be obtained from the Academic Dean to delay this deadline. **To be considered for the Glenski award, seminarians must complete and defend their thesis by the end of the fall semester in the fourth year.**

### **Changing Tracks**

Students may voluntarily switch out of the M.A. track without penalty if they receive permission to do so from the advisor and the Academic Dean.

### **Collecting Resources**

Students are required to work with their advisors on the collection of resources to ensure they are including within their bibliographies the seminal texts supporting the thesis or the examination questions. Students will use the Kenrick style sheet in the formatting of their citations and develop a familiarity with each source sufficient to annotate the completed list. The annotation should be no longer than 25 words and should explain the value of the source to the thesis statement. Thesis bibliographies will contain 25-30 source materials (at least 5 of which must be primary sources) at the discretion of the advisor.

### **Composing the First Draft**

Students are required to work with their advisors throughout the drafting process, **communicating their progress at least once a month**, though more meetings should be set up if necessary and as

the date of the defense draws near. The first draft will generally contain three to five chapters of varying page lengths, including an introductory chapter, body chapters, and a concluding chapter. Again, the writer of a thesis is generally not breaking new theological ground but clearly demonstrating an ability to read within the discipline and discuss in writing the issues being read.

During both the research phase and the composition phase, students are expected to invest about 2.5 hours a week in their work.

### **Selecting an Advisor**

The research advisor guides the student's research from beginning to end. In the event that a student's research advisor leaves Kenrick School of Theology, the student ordinarily can keep the research advisor if the student is moving towards defense within a year; if not, then the student must find a new advisor. If it is financially reasonable to bring back the research advisor for a defense during that year, Kenrick School of Theology will cover the expenses; otherwise, a proxy will be appointed by the Academic Dean. A second reader is chosen by the research advisor upon completion of the defensible draft (or earlier).

### **Completion of Project (seventh and eighth semesters)**

*Timeline for completion of a defensible draft.* By October 15<sup>th</sup> of the seventh semester, the student must submit to his advisor a defensible draft of the thesis. A defensible draft is different from the first draft as it represents a greater level of quality in its research and composition. (See defense timeline below.) Failure to meet this requirement could entail the student's discontinuance from pursuing the M.A. degree. The student will also be penalized a half a letter grade.

**Defense.** The order of events leading to the defense is as follows:

The student and research advisor agree the paper is ready for presentation; **the research advisor, if it has not been done already, formally selects the other examiner.** After receiving feedback from the second reader, the student schedules his defense. At least one week prior to the defense, each reader should receive a copy of the penultimate text (final text pending any additional revisions following the defense.) The student notifies the Registrar and Academic Administrative Assistant to generate a grade sheet and to schedule a room for the defense.

**Defense Session.** The student sitting for his oral defense may invite observers after consultation with his faculty advisor. During the defense, which is chaired by the primary research advisor, the student has 15 minutes to present his work to the board, followed by 15 minutes for each of the advisors. The times given here are approximate, but the total length is not to exceed 60 minutes. In his presentation, the student is not expected to deliver a formal lecture which represents his thesis paper. He is instead expected to present a summary in which he explains why he chose the topic, what he expected to find, what insights or surprises he in fact found, what areas remain for further study, etc. The advisors then question the student on the thesis paper. In the course of the defense, advisors may recommend but may not require further changes in the thesis paper.

After the defense and any further revisions the student might make, the student will present an unbound copy on 20 lb. acid-free paper to the Library. The copy becomes the property of the library. The student will not receive a grade until the Registrar receives the acknowledgement form

signed by the Director of the Library.

**Grading.** Each examiner submits a single letter grade for the thesis paper and the defense considered together, with the research advisor computing and announcing the grade at the conclusion of the defense. The grade is to be computed according to the current scale for grade points, and the two grades are to be weighted according to this formula: the primary research advisor's grade is counted for 60% of the total; the second advisor's grade is counted for 40%. Any recommended or required revisions made by the student following the assignment of the grade will not raise the grade. Two semester hours of credit are given for the thesis.

In order to qualify for the M.A. degree, the student must earn at least a grade of B for the thesis.

For the M.A., the final evaluation is based on 80% of the student's earned grade point average, 10% of the score on the oral comprehensive examination, and 10% of the score on the written thesis/defense.