

Thesis Prospectus Guidelines

Department of Religious Studies

Formatting and Style

- Page setup: 8.5x11 inches, one-inch margins, page numbering at top right
- Main text: Times New Roman (or similar serifed typeface), 12 point, double-spaced
- Footnotes: Single-spaced, separated from main text by a horizontal line
- Headings: Level 1: bold, flush-left, title case
Level 2 (subheading): italics, flush-left, title case
- Citations: Preferred: MLA (owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)
Alternatives: APA (owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/)
Chicago (www.chicagomanualofstyle.org)

Prospectus Outline

1. Focus (one paragraph)

Describe the problem or question in religious studies that you aim to address in your project, and explain why it needs to be addressed. Try to engage your reader.

2. Initial Thesis (one paragraph, with your thesis as the first sentence)

As clearly and boldly as possible, state your preliminary thesis in one sentence. You may explicate or “unpack” it further in subsequent sentences. Of course, *this will change*. Nonetheless, it is good to begin thinking early in your process about the emerging direction of your work. What do you think you want to say or argue with regard to the issue or problem presented in the previous paragraph (your analysis / diagnosis of it, or your answer / solution to it)? In order to be clear that this is a tentative thesis, you might begin the paragraph with something like, “At this point in my research, I plan to argue that ...,” or “My preliminary thesis is that”

3. Theory and method (two paragraphs)

First, from what theoretical perspective, or with what theoretical lens, are you approaching your focus problem or question? It may be, for example, a sociological perspective informed by Robert Bellah. Or it may be a gender studies perspective informed by Judith Butler. Or perhaps your approach engages more than one theoretical perspective. Second, what is your methodology? That is, how will you proceed in your research? It may be, for example, an ethnographic method based on qualitative interviews with human subjects. Or it may be literary-critical, based on close analysis of texts. Is there a particular scholar whose work provides a model for yours? Name names and titles.

4. Relation to Broader Field of Religious Studies (one paragraph)

Write another paragraph explaining why this focus and thesis is relevant to the academic study of religion. What larger question or issue concerning religious studies does it address or speak to? It may be a theoretical or methodological question, or it may be related to a particular aspect of religion. Again, be explicit, naming names and titles of works that your work intends to engage, even challenge.

5. Literature Review (2-4 pages)

Write an overview of the scholarly articles, books, and other resources that are most relevant to your particular topic and approach. In each case, summarize the work (e.g., what it has argued or shown) and explain what it contributes to your topic. Types of contributions might include: theoretical frameworks for approaching your problem; methodological models for your work; research data on which your work will depend; or primary sources that you will be analyzing.

There is no minimum or maximum number of works to review (your bibliography will include many more works than your review will mention). The goal is to show that you know the most important scholarship on the topic, including what it has contributed, and that you're prepared to contribute something new.

There are many ways to organize your literature review. Look at your list of most important works, and think about how you might categorize them in order to present them in the clearest way. For suggestions on how to organize and structure your literature review, see writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/.

In the final paragraph of your review, try to set the stage for your own work by summarizing what previous scholarship has achieved, but also what is yet to be done – namely, what you will do!

6. Project Overview / Research Plan (one page)

What is your plan for moving forward on this project? What are your steps? What research have you conducted or will you conduct? What are your primary sources or data? What is your methodology? What will be the main parts of your paper? Depending on your project, this section may include a plan or schedule for field research, a list of subjects to be interviewed, survey or interview questions (i.e., your instrument), and/or an outline for the paper itself.

7. Bibliography

Include a bibliography of primary and secondary sources. Be sure to include everything you discuss in your literature review.