

Topic Proposal, Prospectus, and Dissertation/Thesis

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While the final section of this guide will provide the detailed guide to Graduate School dissertation policies and formatting standards, this section provides a brief summary of the process of submitting a dissertation proposal, a prospectus, and finally the dissertation itself within the Religion Department. These policies and procedures are subject to change, so verify you have access to the current version on the Graduate School website;

<http://www.baylor.edu/graduate/>

- I. Dissertation topic approval process:
 - A. This document is designed to help students select the appropriate topic and mentor for the dissertation or thesis.
 - B. Upon successful completion of preliminary examinations, a student will submit a topic proposal to the area faculty (Old Testament, New Testament, Historical Studies, or Theological Studies).
 - C. Area Approval: The initial proposal will be a maximum of 500 words in length and should be written in consultation with the suggested mentor of the dissertation. After the professor approves the topic proposal, he or she should submit the proposal to the Academic and Student Support Associate in the Graduate Studies office, who will distribute it to area faculty for approval. Area faculty should indicate their approval by initialing the approval form in the Graduate Studies office. After area faculty approve the topic proposal, the Graduate Program Director will present it to the Administrative Committee for approval.
 - D. The proposal should include three items at the top of the page: the student's name, the subject of the dissertation proposal in the form of a working title, and the name of the dissertation mentor who has agreed to supervise the project. The mentor must be a member of the Faculty of the Graduate Program in Religion. The mentor must have demonstrated competence in the dissertation area to serve as its director. "Demonstrated competence" is understood to mean that the faculty mentor has an active publication record in the subject area.
 - E. The Topic Proposal must be vetted by the area faculty, and the student will need to make the necessary changes required by the area faculty. Once completed, the mentor will send the final Topic Proposal (in electronic format) to the Religion Graduate Studies Office. The Academic/Student Support Associate will then forward the Topic Proposal to the area faculty to poll their response via email. The Religion Graduate Studies Office will notify the mentor and student when a majority of the area faculty approves the Topic Proposal.
 - F. Graduate Administrative Committee Approval: The Director of Graduate Studies will forward the area-approved proposal to the Graduate Administrative Committee to poll the Committee's response via email. The Committee will review the information and then either approve it or provide the suggested mentor written recommendations for improving the proposal. If the Committee accepts the area's recommendations, the Graduate Studies Director will inform the student and the mentor that approval has been granted for the student to move to the next stage, the prospectus.
- II. Prospectus Description: The prospectus is a description of a proposed thesis/dissertation idea.
 - A. Format and Content: The prospectus commonly includes:
 1. A clear statement of the purpose of the research project and a statement of the significance of the thesis proposed.
 2. An articulation of the methodology to be used in the study.
 3. Evidence, in the form of a literature review, that the topic has not been previously examined.
 4. A detailed outline and a narrative of the logic connecting the chapters of the thesis/dissertation idea.
 5. Supporting bibliography with emphasis on primary sources.
 - B. Length: The text of the prospectus should be a *maximum of 10 typed*, double-spaced pages, and the bibliography a maximum of 12 pages. The prospectus should be formatted according to the standards of a dissertation.

- C. Style: The latest edition of Turabian is the Department's approved style guide for Historical Studies and Theological Studies area students. Biblical area students will use the latest edition of the *SBL Handbook of Style*. Use of inclusive language is strongly encouraged when referring to human beings.
- D. Resources:
 - 1. Dissertation Abstracts, electronic databases, and published books and articles should be consulted to assure that the proposed idea has not already been researched.
 - 2. Copies of numerous successful proposals are available for reference in the Graduate Studies Office, Department of Religion.
 - 3. Candidates should acquire the Guidelines for Preparing the Dissertation and Thesis and other necessary materials. The most recent edition of Guidelines is available on the Baylor homepage <http://www.Baylor.edu/graduateschool>.

IV. Prospectus approval process:

- A. The student should prepare the prospectus with the advice and consent of the assigned mentor. Several revisions may be required.
- B. Before the prospectus is approved, the student, in consultation with the mentor, should select second and third readers and secure their verbal approval to serve on the committee. The mentor will chair the Dissertation/Thesis Committee. The second reader is chosen from within the Department of Religion and normally from within the student's area. The third reader is chosen from outside the Department of Religion. Readers must have graduate faculty status.
- C. An oral defense of the prospectus must take place as part of the approval process. A Prospectus Approval Committee (PAC) will authorize the approval of the prospectus. The PAC is made up of four people: the three members of the dissertation committee plus the cognate area representative of the Graduate Administrative Committee (GAC). The GAC representative may designate someone else from the cognate area to fulfill this role.
- D. The dissertation mentor will send the PAC members and the Graduate Studies Office an electronic copy of the prospectus at least two weeks in advance of the oral defense. The student bears responsibility for supplying a hard copy to those who wish to receive one, and should contact the committee members once the mentor has sent out the prospectus in digital format. The Department will absorb the cost of any hard copies needed.
- E. The PAC will engage in a formal conversation (or oral defense) with the student regarding the prospectus and following that conversation will vote on one of four options: 1) approve the prospectus, 2) approve pending revisions, 3) revise and resubmit, or 4) fail. Deliberations over the worthiness of the prospectus should adhere to the criteria stated below. This conversation will generally last no more than 1 hour.
 - a. The prospectus provides a thoughtful description of the problem to be addressed or the need for the work (including literature review).
 - b. The subject matter shows potential to make a genuine contribution to a topic significant enough to warrant the study.
 - c. The document exhibits a clear thesis statement and working hypothesis along with enough supporting logic to warrant proceeding on the project.
 - d. The author provides a narrative description of the logic connecting the chapters, including content and sequence (the so-called narrative arc of the dissertation).
 - e. The author provides a three level outline (roughly one page in length) within the prospectus.
 - f. The scope of the project is manageable as a single monograph length work (approximately 250 pages).
 - g. The skills of the student are adequate for the task (especially important for original language research expectations, but exposure to methods in other disciplines may also be a factor).
 - h. The work demonstrates relevance and originality.
 - i. Access to library resources should be adequate to support the project (including our holdings, ILL, special collections off site that the student will visit, etc.).
- F. The PAC must approve their recommendation unanimously. If revisions are required after the oral defense, those revisions must be circulated for final approval by the PAC (normally within ten business

days), but a second oral defense is not required. If the prospectus receives a “revise and resubmit” verdict, a new defense is required, though the makeup of the PAC may be reevaluated at that point if the area of research shifts. The failure option would be reserved for egregious problems (e.g., plagiarism).

- G. The dissertation mentor will be responsible for notifying the Graduate Studies office of the date for the defense and for obtaining the signatures of the committee members at the time of or subsequent to the oral defense of the prospectus. The Graduate Studies office will supply the dissertation mentor with the signature form prior to the defense.
- H. The Graduate Studies office will notify the student of the outcome.

V. Admission to Candidacy: **A student is recognized as a candidate for a doctoral degree only after he or she has met the foreign language requirement, passed the preliminary examinations, and secured prospectus approval by the Department of Religion graduate faculty.** At this point the student can be classified as ABD. The Graduate Studies Office will complete and file with the Graduate School the Admission to Candidacy Form.

VI. End Stages:

- A. Filing for graduation: Students must file for graduation with the Graduate School the **first** week of classes during the semester in which they plan to graduate.
- B. Doctoral Oral Examination/Dissertation Defense:
 - 1. The mentor is considered the chairperson of the Doctoral/Thesis Oral Examination Committee.
 - 2. No less than two weeks before the oral examination, the candidate will submit the penultimate copy of the dissertation/thesis to the chairperson of the Doctoral/Thesis Oral Examination Committee.
 - 3. At **least** two weeks prior to the oral examination, the candidate must meet with Sandra Harman of the Graduate School. The candidate must take a formatted copy of his/her dissertation to her for review and guidance.
 - 4. In consultation with the mentor and the student, the Graduate Studies Director will choose two (one for the M.A.) graduate faculty members from the Religion Department who can serve as fourth and fifth readers and attend the Doctoral Oral Examination.
 - 5. At the time the penultimate copy of the dissertation is approved by the three member Dissertation Committee, the student will arrange with his/her committee members and the fourth and fifth readers to schedule a time for the Oral Examination. The preferred date and time must be submitted to the Religion Graduate Studies office **no less than 4 weeks prior to the desired date and time.** Students are responsible for consulting the Graduate School’s calendar for dissertation defense deadlines each semester.
 - 6. When the oral defense is scheduled, the department will pay to have spiral bound copies made for each of the five members of the examining committee. **Check with the Academic and Student Support Associate in the Graduate Studies office for the procedure.**
 - 7. **As a requirement for graduation, you must provide the Religion Department with two bound copies of your dissertation.** A copy will be given to your mentor and one will be archived in the department. At the time you submit your approved and final copy electronically to BearDocs, you should place an order for two bound copies. **Once you have submitted proof of the order and shipping to the Religion Department (by way of a receipt or confirmation email), and to the Graduate Studies office, the necessary paperwork for you to graduate will be released.** Several options for binding are listed below. These are only options; you may make arrangements for binding however you wish. Baylor University, the Graduate School, nor the Religion Department, officially endorse either of these companies.

Thesis On Demand : online ordering for around \$35-\$65, depending on number of pages, color pages, etc., plus shipping cost.

Houchen Bindery : online ordering; currently \$55 + tax and shipping
Regardless of where you choose to have your dissertation copies bound, they should be printed on 8 1/2 x 11 white paper (typically 60#), single-side or two-sided printing, dark green binding, and

gold lettering. The title, author's last name, degree, and year, should appear on the spine. The title and author's full name should be printed on the front cover.

8. After the Doctoral/Master's Oral Examination, students should complete the following procedures:
 - a. The student has **10 working days** to complete changes to the dissertation recommended by the Doctoral Examining Committee.
 - b. The final copy is printed on standard paper and submitted to the mentor for his or her approval.
 - c. The chairperson signs the Approval of Final Thesis/Dissertation Copy Form and the student then takes it to the Graduate School, Office of the Associate Dean, along with the final copy of the dissertation.
 - d. From this point forward the student is to follow the instructions of the Associate Dean's Office to complete the requirements for graduation.

C. Required Notification: The Graduate Studies Office will complete and furnish to the Graduate School the Oral Examination Form (scheduling form), Change of Grade Form, and Record of Oral Examination.