

## **GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE PROPOSALS**

### **General Guidelines for All Proposals:**

Make sure that the proposal has a clear focus and identifies a subject area and an argument about that subject area, as well as a methodology or approach. This does not necessarily mean adopting a specific critical position, though it may. Methodology can involve identifying a topic or problem, and explaining the approach that will be taken in relation to it. The proposal should make clear why this approach was chosen: why is it appropriate for the topic? what does it illuminate? And what is the significance of this argument? How does it relate to prior scholarly work in this area? How does it contribute to the ongoing critical conversation?

The bibliography can do a lot for the proposal: it should be selective, indicating that preliminary research in the field is already underway. It can be helpful to subdivide the bibliography into sections for primary texts, selected criticism of these primary texts, and one or two lists of studies related to larger background questions (criticism of a general problem, cultural-historical writings, etc.). For example, a project on Puritan allegory in Hawthorne might be divided into: 1. primary works by Hawthorne, 2. relevant critical studies of those works, 3. General studies of allegory, and 4. intellectual and social histories of Puritanism. If your work is interdisciplinary, you can demonstrate this more clearly by grouping your texts according to the different fields relevant to your study.

## **MASTERS**

### **MA Research Paper**

Length of Proposal: 3 pp., double-spaced; plus a Bibliography 2-3 pp.

Length of Paper: 40-50 pp.

Method of Evaluation: graded by supervisor and one departmental member serving as a Second Reader.

The proposal should identify the topic and outline the general approach, explaining why it is helpful and appropriate. Some general hypotheses about the conclusion of the argument should be presented, though the stages of

argument do not need to be outlined. The relation of the argument to previous research in the field should be briefly suggested.

## **MA Thesis**

Length of Proposal: 4-5 pp., double-spaced; plus a Bibliography: 3-4 pp.

Length of Paper: approx. 75 pp. (maximum 100)

Method of Evaluation: Evaluated by an External Examiner nominated by the student in consultation with the supervisor. Evaluation administered by the McGill Thesis Office.

The proposal should identify the topic and outline the general approach or methodology, suggesting why this approach has been chosen. It should position the topic in relation to current criticism in the area; though the MA thesis does not have to be original, it must demonstrate a capacity for scholarly research. In contrast to the proposal for the research paper, the M.A. thesis proposal should normally include a brief outline of the organization of sections or chapters which suggests how they work to present a connected, unfolding argument.

## **PH.D.**

### **Ph.D. Research Projects**

#### **1. Optional Research Project**

Time: 3 months (December - April, during first year of program)

Length of Project: 40 pp.

The optional project must be the equivalent of two courses in terms of scope and reading. It must fit in with the student's program of study as a whole, and particularly satisfy the coverage requirement. It therefore should not duplicate the material or approach of the compulsory research project. Students wishing to undertake the optional project must consult first with the Graduate Program Director to make sure the project fulfills these requirements.

Method of Evaluation: Project is given a letter grade by supervisor and two committee members, based on written paper and oral presentation. The parameters for the exam are set in a preliminary meeting, normally held two weeks before the final exam.

Length of Proposal: 4-5 pp.; Bibliography: 5 pp.

The proposal should identify a narrow focus for the written work, but position it in the context of a broader set of readings, delineated in the bibliography, upon which the student will be examined in the oral defence. It should outline a topic and an approach, suggest some possible conclusions, and demonstrate a familiarity with previous work in the field.

## **2. Compulsory Research Project**

Time: 8 months (completed during winter term of second year in program)

Length of Project: approx. 40 pages.

The compulsory project is designed to lead into the dissertation, normally as a preliminary investigation of the area of specialization or relevant background material. It is analogous to field exams set by other universities, and, in the oral exam, the student is expected not only to defend the written project but also to demonstrate a knowledge of the broader field related to the argument and indicated by the preliminary bibliography.

Method of Evaluation: Project is given a pass/fail grade based on evaluation of written paper and oral presentation by supervisor and two committee members. The parameters of the exam are set in a preliminary meeting, held normally two weeks before the final exam.

Length of Proposal: 4-5 pp.; Bibliography: approx. 7 pp.

The proposal should present the focused argument that will be the subject of the written paper; it should also indicate, partly through the bibliography, the broader research field involved, upon which the student will be examined orally. Like the optional project, it should outline a topic and an approach, suggest some possible conclusions, and demonstrate a familiarity with previous work in the field. It should also briefly indicate how the project ties

in with the student's larger program of research, and in particular, the relationship to the dissertation.

## **Dissertation**

Time: 2 years recommended (PhD4 and 5).

Proposal Length: maximum 10 pages; Bibliography: 10-20 pages.

The proposal should identify a topic and outline a conceptual framework. It should position the work in relationship to previous scholarship in the area, to show both how the research addresses current criticism and how it is original. The bibliography should also suggest a preliminary coverage of the field. In most cases, it seems best to include a chapter-by-chapter breakdown that indicates how the argument will progress in stages. In all cases, the shape of the argument as well as the issues to be addressed must be outlined.

Method of Evaluation: graded by one External Examiner (an expert in the field, from outside the university and the department) nominated by the student in consultation with the supervisor; also examined orally at a thesis defense, made up of departmental and university members. Evaluation administered by the McGill Thesis Office.