

# Guidelines For Students in the M.A. Program

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The M.A. is primarily an academic degree. As a terminal degree, it is appropriate for those with an interest in a doctoral program, a view to secondary level teaching in Quaker or other parochial schools, or some other form of educational ministry that benefits from sound research skills. Students are encouraged to consult with their M.A. Committee and other faculty regarding their post-ESR plans as soon as possible.

## Program Objectives

Graduates of the M.A. program will:

1. Demonstrate an ability to research and think critically.
2. Demonstrate an ability to write creatively and constructively at a Master's level.
3. Attain a survey knowledge of various theological disciplines.
4. Attain a focused knowledge in a specific discipline or topic.

The following guidelines are intended to clarify the steps needed to finish the degree in good order. M.A. students should be immediately aware that courses in the Formation Core and Ministry Emphasis or Applied Theological Preparation for Ministry normally *do not apply* toward the M.A. degree.

## I. General Requirements

### A. Foundational Requirements

The M.A. consists of 48 semester hours. **Basic foundation in Biblical Studies and Theological Studies (BS 101, B 102, and TS 101) are required for upper level course work.** Students who have studied in these areas have the option of fulfilling the credit requirements by satisfactorily passing a proficiency exam for that course.

In addition, the M.A. requires the following courses:

- 2 upper level courses (300) in Biblical Studies (6 credits)
- 2 courses in Historical Studies (6 credits)
- 2 upper level (300) courses in Theological Studies (6 credits), one of which **must be** Constructive Theology (TS 375)
- 1 Elective course (3 credits)
- 3 upper level (300) courses in the Area Emphasis (9 credits)
- Thesis (9 credits)

No more than one year of full time study (24 credit hours) can be transferred in from another graduate institution.

### B. Language and Research Skills

There is no general language requirement for the M.A. degree. Certain areas of research require language or other research skills. The student's M.A. Committee determines these, but the following pattern is typical.

Students in Biblical Studies are normally required to demonstrate reading proficiently in Hebrew or

Greek. This can be satisfied either by examination or by the successful completion of a year of study in the same language.

Students in Theological Studies, Peace Studies, Quaker Studies are normally required to show reading competence in a foreign language if they do research that draws upon primary sources in that language. A requirement in the language can only be fulfilled by examination.

Depending upon the nature of the research a student may require learning a specific research skill, such as statistics, economic analysis, human research, etc.

Course work needed to satisfy language or research skills may be used to fulfill the credits for the Elective course, but otherwise do not count toward the 48 hours of the degree. If a language or research skill is needed, students should demonstrate they have the necessary language or skill or that they are making progress toward fulfilling the requirement at the time of the MA thesis proposal application.

Testing of competency in languages or research skills should be coordinated with appropriate faculty members in consultation with the planned thesis director. The language requirement or research skill(s) should be satisfied no later than at the conclusion of the first 3 thesis credits.

Students who plan to pursue a doctoral program should think seriously about pursuing language studies concurrent with the M.A. degree work. Most Ph.D. programs in Theology and Church History require two modern languages. Biblical Studies usually require knowledge of Hebrew, Greek and reading ability in French and German.

Students undertaking research with human subjects must assume the obligations for the welfare of those research subjects. Please consult the Guidelines for Research with Human Subjects policy.

## **II. Application For Degree Candidacy**

*Note: Faculty approves all parts of the application and the proposal.*

### **A. General Comments**

M.A. students must submit an application for candidacy for the M.A. Degree. This includes a petition for candidacy itself, a proposal for a thesis project and the proposed M.A. Committee. A student may submit the MA application once s/he has completed eighteen semester hours of work toward the degree. These must include the courses BS 101, B 102, and TS 101 (either through credit or examination) and one course each in upper level Biblical Studies, Historical Studies, and Theological Studies.

### **B. Steps In The Process**

#### **1. Choose An Area Of Emphasis**

The student must decide on an area of emphasis. ESR offers specialization in four such areas: Biblical Studies, Theological Studies, Quaker Studies, and Peace and Justice Studies. A proposal should grow out of a decision to concentrate studies in one of these five areas.

#### **2. Choose A Two-Member M.A. Committee.**

The student must recruit a two-member M.A. Committee, one of whom will be the chairperson. There are three matters that will be important to consider here. One has to do with the expertise of the faculty member. Students should consider faculty members who have the expertise in their area of

interest. Second is faculty leaves of absence and sabbaticals. The student should consult with any potential members of his/her Committee to make sure that person will be available to read the Thesis when it is submitted and work with the student through the revisions and into the Oral Examination. Faculty on leave or on sabbatical do not read theses. Third is the eligibility to serve on the Committee. The Chair is *always an ESR or Bethany faculty member*. The second reader should be chosen in consultation between the student and the Chair. If the Chair is an ESR faculty member, this reader may be a member of either the ESR or Bethany faculty or someone from outside the seminary faculties, such as Earlham College, who has the expertise in the student's area of emphasis. If the Chair is not an ESR faculty member, the second reader must be an ESR faculty member. Occasionally an additional reader is invited to be a member of the committee because of their particular expertise. Outside of ESR faculty, someone's participation on the committee may be solicited, but not presumed.

### 3. Choose The Traditional Thesis Or The Three-Paper Option

#### a. The Traditional Thesis

For the traditional thesis, the student chooses a specific topic of investigation. The topic should be sufficiently attractive to sustain passionate interest and sufficiently focused to get the depths of it in a thesis length essay. It is best to consult with some person on the faculty with expertise in one of the four areas of emphasis before writing a proposal. Faculty input will be valuable in helping the student specify research intentions and phrasing of the topic and thesis proposal. See Thesis Proposal Guidelines below.

#### b. The Three-paper Option

The three-paper-option thesis is somewhat more complicated. These papers have their origin in additional courses, or independent studies, that the student takes beyond the 3 upper level courses in the Area of Concentration required for the degree. Each paper will be on a separate topic and may draw upon different disciplines or methodologies, but the together must be thematically related.

The Faculty of ESR wish to make clear that even exceptionally well done papers in the context of courses may prove inadequate to the M.A. Committee, which will be evaluating the three papers not in relation to course work but in relation to Thesis work.

The quality of all thesis work, whether a traditional thesis or a three-paper option, is expected to be of publishable quality.

### 4. Write the Thesis/Three-Paper Option Proposal

The proposal is a 15-20 page document that includes:

- A personal statement as to why the student is interested in this topic and how the work contributes to their anticipated ministry (e.g., graduate school, teaching at Quaker boarding school, research)
- An initial (not final) thesis statement as a hypothesis of what they think they will find and establish (the Three-Paper Option should include the rationale for the three papers, including the three courses or independent studies in which these papers will have their origin)
- A statement of the methodology that will be employed in the thesis/three papers and its appropriateness to the topic, including necessary research skills (see above)
- A review of literature related to the topic. The description of the literature should demonstrate a student's preliminary knowledge of the topic of study, including vocabulary, theories, methods, history, and influential authors.
- A preliminary outline of the project, perhaps in chapter form

- Bibliography

- In the case of the Three-Paper Option, a similar process should followed demonstrating the relationship of the three parts to the larger theme.

The student should work with their “proposed” M.A. Thesis chairperson in the writing of the proposal. The Second Reader may decide whether or not they want to see the proposal prior to its approval. Students should expect to revise their proposal at least once before it comes before faculty. Faculty may also require revisions before final approval is granted.

5. Once the M.A. Thesis Chairperson is satisfied with the proposal's readiness for faculty consideration, the Chairperson will bring the petition and proposal to the next regularly scheduled faculty meeting at which it will be considered. With faculty approval, the required signatures, and submission of the form to Academic Services, the student is admitted to Candidacy for the M. A.

#### **IV. Credit For The Thesis**

After receiving approval for the thesis project, students must enroll for nine (9) semester-hours of thesis credit, but no more, before receiving the degree. Semester hours taken as part of extra courses in the three-paper option will substitute for that portion of the nine semester-hours of thesis work. The Business Office bills semester hours taken for thesis work at the same rate as other courses.

Sometimes students register for 3 credits in one semester and 6 in another or vice versa or all nine hours in one semester, depending on their situation. However, the student, in consultation with their Chairperson, should use the following guidelines for registering for thesis credits.

1. To receive three credits, the student would have to complete the M.A. application and have the proposal accepted by faculty. In addition, the student will do one or more of the following: have several meetings with the committee, develop drafts of one or more chapters, complete one of papers in the three-paper option.
2. To receive the next three credits the student would complete a first draft of the entire thesis or the three papers as described in Sections V.C. and VI, and meet regularly with both the Chairperson and Second Reader.
3. To receive the final credits the student would have a good revision of the first draft, a successful oral exam, and complete the Final Draft as in Sections V.E, F and G.

#### **V. Researching And Writing The Thesis: Option #1: The Traditional Thesis**

##### **A. Style And Length Expectations**

ESR has as its style manual Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, the latest edition. Copies of this are available in the Earlham Bookstore. Theses that do not conform to one of the formats in Turabian will not be accepted. The M.A. student should take time at the beginning of his ESR career to learn the correct form. It will save a lot of grief in the future! Remember, the Committee's responsibility is to evaluate the content of a thesis. It is the student's responsibility to put that content into a readable, grammatically accurate and technically consistent stylistic form.

Students very often ask how long a thesis they are to write. There is no set number of pages required. The purely formal answer to the question is that it should be as long as is necessary to cover the chosen topic. A check of recent M.A. theses at ESR will show that the average length has been about 100 pages or 25,000-30,000 words.

## **B. Time Needed To Write The Thesis**

As a rough rule of thumb, our experience has shown that the minimal amount of time that has been required from the start of the formal research after submission of the proposal to the submitting of the first draft is about six months. It is the nearly universal experience of all thesis writers at ESR and elsewhere that the process of writing itself takes substantially longer than initially planned. A student should not be surprised or discouraged if the process takes longer than the "ideal" schedule. There will be revisions.

The completion of a thesis has everything to do with achieving a graduate level of research and writing and little to do with pre-determined time schedules. This is a word of benefit for the wise.

## **C. The First Draft**

This is NOT a rough draft and NOT a preliminary study. It is the final best job the student can do. Thus it is the first draft of the completed project. It should be free of typos, and should be formatted in good style, following Turabian.

The complete first draft is due to the Committee no later than February 1 for a May graduation and October 1 for a December graduation. The student's M.A. Committee will need to see earlier, preliminary drafts. The student, in consultation with their M.A. Committee, will need to schedule due dates for preliminary work so a final First Draft is to the Committee by the required dates. A student should expect that preliminary drafts will require revision.

If the First Draft requires significant revision, the likelihood of a May graduation is close to zero.

## **D. Consultation With Thesis Committee**

Upon submitting the First Draft, the student should meet with the members of the thesis committee either individually or in a committee meeting. This will give the committee an opportunity to review the thesis with the student and to indicate any necessary changes. It is the student's responsibility to arrange the meeting(s). In setting meeting date(s), allow at least two week's reading time for the committee members between the time of submitting the draft and the date of the meeting(s).

## **E. Revision Of The First Draft**

The changes needed may be substantial or they may be very minimal. They may have to do primarily with form or primarily with content. Usually the changes required involve elements of both. The best way to avoid the necessity of substantial re-writing or re-constructing the thesis is to keep close check with your committee chairperson as you are developing your thesis project.

An acceptable reworked draft should be in the hands of the committee by March 1 for a May graduation, or November 1 for a December graduation.

## **F. The Oral Exam**

After the committee has granted initial acceptance of the thesis, the student will be ready to stand for the oral examination. The oral must be completed successfully by April 1 for a May graduation, or by November 15 for a December graduation.

This examination will be organized by the chairperson of the M.A. Committee and will last approximately two hours. A student, in consultation with the M.A. Committee, may decide to have their oral open to others, such as students and faculty of the seminaries or other invited guests. At the conclusion of the examination the student will be excused and the committee will decide about the acceptability of the student's performance in the exam. The student will be recalled and informed of the

committee's decision.

Students are encouraged to present their research publicly beyond the oral examination.

### **G. The Final Draft**

After completing the oral exam, the student is ready to prepare the final draft. See the **MA Thesis Style Sheet** for directions on the formatting. It is a good policy to look at the first ten pages before proceeding to make sure the formatting is as it should be. It is better to find stylistic errors in the first ten pages than throughout the first hundred! The final draft of the thesis is to be printed on 20 weight acid-free paper. A high quality printer should be used. One copy will be placed in Lilly Library, and one will be housed at ESR.

The M.A. Committee will need to approve the Final Draft. When approved the Committee will complete the ESR M.A. Final Approval form and submit it to Academic Services.

The student should fill out, sign and attach to the front of the Final Draft a "Permission Form For Copying Of Thesis," which is available on the Academic Services web page under "Joint Seminary Forms."

In addition to the original printed copy of the Final Draft, the student will make two photo copies and submit all three to the secretary for Academic Services. After having each copy bound, Academic Services sends the original to Lilly Library for cataloging and shelving, one copy to the Academic Dean at the School of Religion for shelving in RBC, and the second copy to the student, who will be billed for the cost of binding all three copies and for mailing. Students may request additional bound copies, but will be charged for the cost of binding.

The final draft must be in the Academic Services Office no later than May 1 for May graduation or December 1 for December graduation.

### **VI. Researching And Writing The Thesis: Option #2: The Three-paper Option**

Students who decide for the three-paper option in the masters degree program do not write a traditional thesis, but they do write three major research papers. All the processes and deadlines above, however, apply to this thesis project as well as the traditional one, with some provisions.

1. A student may complete the three papers separately from each other. Because of this, the student must plan these completions carefully, with the understanding that the submission of the First Draft constitutes the submission of all three papers, with all the research and writing already accomplished that is needed to bring the collective work up to thesis quality. Everything said above about the First Draft of the traditional thesis applies to the set of three papers as a whole.
2. It is important to remember that a paper that might be judged acceptable for fulfilling the requirements of the course in which it was originally written, may be judged to need further work and revision as a major research paper for the Three-paper Option. In such cases, the M.A. Committee will indicate the needed revisions and improvements. Students should finish these papers in plenty of time to engage in such revisions.

### **VII. Summary of deadlines and timing**

**After eighteen semester hours of M.A. study:** submit an M.A. Application For Degree Candidacy.

**Before completing twenty-seven hours of M.A. study:** demonstrate research-language competency.

**By February 1:** submit the First Draft. (October 1 for December graduation.)

**Schedule a consultation with the M.A. Committee:** allow at least two weeks reading time for Committee members.

**By March 1:** Submit a revised thesis to the Committee. (November 1 for December graduation.)

**By April 1:** Oral Examination. (November 15 for December graduation.)

**By May 1:** submit the Final Draft of the Thesis and two copies to Academic Services. (December 1 for December graduation.)

Any exception to these deadlines will require special action by the Faculty. Students graduating in December may participate in all commencement activities the following May. December graduates may participate in the baccalaureate dinner and service the previous May, but not commencement.

All work for the Master of Arts degree, including approval of the thesis and the passing of the oral examination, *must be completed within five years of the date of enrollment at ESR for residential students and seven years for Access students*. If added time is needed, the faculty on an annual basis will consider applications for extension. Applications must be received no later than the last regular faculty meeting of Spring Semester.

M.A. students who have completed the required courses, who are not enrolled for classes or thesis credit, and who continue working with ESR faculty on their thesis, are charged a Continuing Research Fee of \$200 per session. This fee covers the costs of community activities, library privileges, and consultation with faculty. M.A. students who are not enrolled and who are not actively working with faculty will be charged the fee on a session-by-session basis at any time that they re-establish active work on their thesis project.