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M.T.S. PAPER GUIDELINES SUPPLEMENT

Final deadline to submit Proposal is October 15. Final Thesis Paper is due by April 15.

The M.T.S. paper is intended to provide an opportunity for independent study and sustained theological reflection in an area of interest to the student. Its aim is to help a student integrate their program of studies by developing a thesis that focuses in depth on a particular topic. The paper should demonstrate a level of competence commensurate with a graduate degree, and the time and effort of research and writing should be equivalent to the work of a three hour course. Papers will be evaluated on the basis of mastery of the subject matter and execution of stated purpose, clarity of thought and argument, adequacy of research and bibliography, and quality and accuracy of English usage. A standard letter grade (A, A-, B+, etc.) will be assigned to the finished paper by the faculty reader.

The paper is to consist of 12,000 to 15,000 words of typed or printed text. (The word count does not include supporting materials, such as footnotes and bibliography). One copy should be submitted to the assigned faculty reader **on or before March 31 (or the following Monday if the 31st falls on a weekend)**. A copy should be retained for the student's own reference. The paper must include:

- a table of contents
- full text (obviously, matching the table of contents)
- comprehensive documentation of quotations and other references
- a bibliography.

Generally, papers are to conform to the stylistic requirements of the current edition of Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers. A different style (e.g., of noting, attribution, etc.) may be employed with the permission of the faculty reader. Footnotes are preferred over endnotes, although endnotes may be used if acceptable to your reader. Quotations of faculty members must be from published sources only (i.e., not from lecture notes, sermon notes, etc.).

You will enjoy this project and get a lot out of it if you plan ahead and work steadily. But remember, the burden of ensuring timely progress falls on *you*. You are responsible for:

- registering for the M.T.S. Paper course on WesleyWeb (**IS-301**)
- securing the agreement of a Wesley faculty person to serve as reader
- submitting a draft of the proposal to the M.T.S. Program Director by **October 1**
- submitting the final proposal to the M.T.S. Program Director by **October 15**
- maintaining contact with your reader
- submitting the paper to your reader by **March 31** of the following year
- completing any final revisions required by your reader and resubmitting paper by **April 15**

Note: You may take the “M.T.S. Paper” course (IS-301) in either the Fall or Spring academic semester, as you prefer. *This is purely a financial decision and does not affect the M.T.S. Paper time schedule or deadlines in any way.* In either case, students generally work on their thesis over the course of the whole academic year (which is also typically their last year in the M.T.S. program.) Registration for the IS-301 course must occur to fulfill the core requirement (3 credit hours) for the M.T.S. degree.

Thesis Timeline

Spring prior to final year in M.T.S. degree program

- Attend annual “M.T.S. Paper meeting” held by the M.T.S. Program Director, typically held during the Spring semester.
- Ask yourself: “What do I want to investigate in depth? Who would be an appropriate advisor?”
- Approach a prospective advisor with tentative topic and ask them to serve as your reader.
Note: Unless other specific arrangements are made, readers must be full-time Wesley faculty.
- Ask reader for suggestions for summer research.

Summer before final year

- Research, reading, and note taking.
- Determine what literature already exists on your topic, what the most important and relevant contributions are, and who will be your major “conversation partners.”

Fall of final year

- Contact reader and develop proposal in consultation with them.
- Submit draft of Proposal to reader by **October 1**.
- Make revisions and secure reader signature on final copy of Proposal.
- Submit to M.T.S. Director’s office by **October 15**. **Note:** Please submit *two* copies of your proposal and supporting pages.

Fall, Winter, and Spring of final year

- Research and writing, maintain contact with reader, submit drafts, etc.
- Submit final copy of thesis to reader by **March 31**. If the reader determines that further revisions are needed, he or she may return the work to you with directions for improvement. Ensure that an absolute final copy is submitted by **April 15**.

How to Think About Your M.T.S. Paper: Theme, Thesis, and Significance

The M.T.S. thesis project can be one of the most rewarding parts of your studies at Wesley. A key to success is planning ahead and laying a solid foundation. As you begin to prepare to work on your thesis, ask yourself three questions: What is my theme? What is my thesis? What difference does it make?

Theme

Make sure you recognize the difference between a theme and a thesis. A theme (also known as your topic) is the specific area to be investigated in your paper. A thesis, however, is a debatable claim about that theme. (More about the thesis below.) Defining the theme of your paper is the first step toward preparing your M.T.S. proposal. A good theme identifies an area of investigation that 1) is clearly defined, 2) manageable in scope, 3) engages your theological passion, and 4) integrates and/or focuses your degree studies.

Examples of Poorly Defined Themes:

- A Theology for Women's Empowerment
- The Intersection of Music and Worship
- Different Views of Salvation
- Foundations of Prayer

Examples of Overly Broad Themes:

- The Doctrine of Revelation in the Theology of Karl Barth
- The Christian Response to the Sex Trade in Asia
- The Use of Scripture in Arguments Pertaining to Abortion

Examples of Clearly Defined and Focused Themes:

- Sin and Suffering in the *Showings of Julian of Norwich*
- Grassroots Conflict Analysis and Resources for Building Peace in Jos, Nigeria
- The Development of the Problem of Evil in Selected Writings of C. S. Lewis

Once you have identified a theme, it can often be phrased as a question which can in turn be brought to bear on a particular writer or work: "In what ways does Karl Barth's doctrine of Revelation in *Commentary on Romans* incorporate Feuerbach's critique of religion?" The single-sentence answer to that question becomes a potential thesis for an essay: e.g. "Barth's doctrine of revelation incorporates Feuerbach's critique of religion as an account of the sinful human attempt to relate to God in human terms."

Thesis

The thesis is the one main point that the whole essay is designed persuasively to convey. The essay as a whole is, in essence, the development of and support for the thesis. The thesis is thus the skeleton that supports the whole essay.

A good thesis can be stated in a single sentence. Without a clear and cogent thesis, even the most interesting theme quickly becomes little more than pages and pages of meandering discussion. Unfortunately, it is not easy to formulate an interesting and sustainable thesis, especially at the beginning of your work. But don't despair. People usually find that they come to a clearer understanding of their thesis in the course of their research and writing. Once you are able to state your thesis clearly, you can place it at the start of your paper and make sure that the body of the essay supports the claim you are making.

There are no simple cookbook-style procedures you can follow to generate an interesting, workable thesis. However, the following tips may help.

- The thesis should make a **single, unified point**. If it doesn't, then the subsequent essay – essentially a development and explanation of the thesis – can hardly be coherent and unified. (It follows from this principle, incidentally, that one should avoid phrasing the thesis as a compound sentence.)
- The thesis should **avoid a simple listing of topics** – e.g. "Wordsworth's poem shows nature in three different aspects: as a beautiful environment, as a dangerous force, and as a spiritual entity." (Note: Many students have been taught to write five-paragraph essays complete with a three part thesis that functions essentially as a "table of contents" for the essay's body paragraphs. However

useful the five-paragraph approach might be as a way to teach the basic principles of essay organization, it is usually ineffective in the more sophisticated contexts of literary analysis.)

- The thesis should **not be merely a statement of fact**. Facts are – by definition – not subject to debate, and a thesis that merely states a fact will leave you nothing to argue in the body of the essay. Similarly, the claim made in the thesis should not be completely self-evident.
 - Example of a *descriptive* thesis: “The book of Jonah recounts the story of Jonah, son of Amittai, who was called by God to prophesy against Nineveh.” (**Note:** No one would ever disagree with this statement; it only gives a bare statement of the content of the book and it says absolutely nothing about the meaning or significance of the book of Jonah).
 - Example of an *argumentative* thesis: “The book of Jonah’s makes sophisticated use of different names for God to make the point that God is not only the national deity of Israel, but also the compassionate maker of all creation.”
- The claim made in **the thesis should be qualified** – that is, it should be decisive but not absolute. Consider, for instance, the difference between these two potential thesis statements: “The final scene of The Wizard of Oz returns to the black and white cinematography of the film’s opening in order to drive home the theme of nostalgia” and “The black and white cinematography of the Wizard of Oz’s closing scene helps to reinforce the theme of nostalgia.” The first version of the thesis implies that the only explanation for the black and white cinematography is thematic; the second – with the less absolute “helps reinforce” – argues simply that the black and white cinematography is consistent with a theme of nostalgia, not that that is the only possible reading.

Note: For the purpose of the M.T.S. proposal you need only provide a *tentative* thesis, which you can refine as you work on your project.

Significance

If you are interested in and passionate about the topic you have chosen to investigate, you may feel that its significance is obvious. Even so, you should be able to state in a single sentence what that significance is. Note that the question of significance can be raised about *both* your topic (who on earth would want to study *that?*), *and* your thesis (I see your point, but so what?). You should have a clear response to both kinds of questions.

Title

A good title is generally descriptive and accurate, offering a sense of the topic or (less commonly) the thesis of the essay. For the purposes of the M.T.S. proposal, you need only provide a *projected* title.