

# GUIDELINES FOR THESIS AND DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS: LITERARY STUDIES CONCENTRATION

(Last revised November 2015)

The overall purpose of the prospectus is to provide your readers with a coherent description of your proposed thesis/dissertation. While writing is an exploratory process, and it is possible that your finished work will take a final shape somewhat different from what is envisioned in the prospectus, you should strive to provide your readers, and yourself, with a rationale for what you hope to accomplish in your research and writing, as well as a template for how you plan to accomplish it. To these ends, your prospectus should contain (in this order):

- a) a detailed explanation of your proposed topic, including a justification for your selection of primary and major secondary texts;
- b) a chapter outline in which you briefly explain the stages and development of your proposed argument;
- c) a working bibliography of texts which you plan to consult.

A well thought-out prospectus will provide you with a valuable navigational tool going forward, and it will also enable your readers to better advise you about texts, scholarly trends, and critical/theoretical models relevant to your research goals.

Your thesis/dissertation committee will evaluate your prospectus in three areas:

- 1) *The prospectus elaborates a valid and original research question.* Does your proposed thesis/dissertation attempt to answer a question or resolve an important issue that has not been adequately addressed in your field of study? Why have you decided to examine these novels, poems, plays, or stories rather than others? How has existing scholarship on these texts addressed, or failed to address, the issues you plan to write about? Does your chapter outline describe the development of your argument, including the sequence in which you plan to discuss your primary texts?
- 2) *The prospectus demonstrates proficient knowledge of literary figures, genres, periods, and movements in the area of study.* Do you show familiarity with the broader literary-historical context in which your primary texts have been produced and/or interpreted? Do you refer to major figures, movements, and genre conventions relevant to your argument? How does your proposed thesis/dissertation challenge or invite reconsideration of these figures, movements, or conventions?
- 3) *The prospectus demonstrates knowledge and application of critical, theoretical, or cultural approaches to literary analysis appropriate to the area of study.* What interpretive approach(es) will you use to analyze your primary texts? What are the strengths and limitations of this approach, and why is it better suited to your research plan than other methods or theories you might have employed? Does your chapter outline reveal a consistent application of this theory or model, and if not, why not?

The M.A. Prospectus should be 8-10 double-spaced pages, not including bibliography.  
The Ph.D. Prospectus should be 10-15 double-spaced pages, not including bibliography.

**\*\*The prospectus, accompanied by a signature form, must be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies at least one semester prior to submission of the thesis/dissertation.\*\***