Assessment Criteria for M.A. Thesis Prospectus:
Literary Studies Concentration

1. Student’s prospectus demonstrates a valid and original research question.

EXCELLENT: The prospectus is carefully framed so that its proposed plan of work answers a well-defined and important research question. It identifies key limits and/or unexplored implications of existing scholarship in its field, and effectively articulates how its research agenda responds to or emerges out of those limits/implications. It contains a chapter outline that justifies the selection of its primary text(s) and elucidates the stages and development of its proposed argument.

GOOD: The prospectus proposes a coherent argument shaped by awareness of secondary scholarship in its field. Engagement with existing scholarship is more survey-oriented than analytical in nature, and the research question to be answered is not always clearly distinguished from issues addressed in this scholarship. The prospectus contains a chapter outline that justifies the selection of its primary text(s) and gives some indication of the stages of its proposed argument.

FAIR: The prospectus proposes a relatively straightforward analysis of its primary text(s), the value/importance of which is left largely for its readers to discern. Secondary scholarship is addressed mainly to provide support for specific turns in the proposed argument. The prospectus contains a chapter outline which identifies primary text(s) to be discussed but does not always indicate the relationship between these chapters in the overall project.

POOR: The prospectus proposes an argument that appears to retread, with minimal differences, standard or established readings of the primary text(s). Engagement with secondary scholarship is minimal except when used to provide support for the proposed argument. The prospectus contains a rudimentary chapter outline.

INADEQUATE: The prospectus does not propose a coherent argument nor seek to answer a discernible research question. It displays little awareness of secondary scholarship in its field. It does not contain a chapter outline.

2. Student’s prospectus demonstrates knowledge of major figures, genres, periods, movements in American/British/World literatures as relevant to the student’s proposed area of study.
EXCELLENT: The prospectus demonstrates keen awareness of literary-historical context and seeks to situate its research agenda within that context. It makes illuminating reference to relevant figures, movements, and genre conventions in order to establish the originality and importance of its proposed argument.

GOOD: The prospectus offers literary-historical detail as a backdrop for its proposed argument. Major figures, movements, and genres are mentioned in passing, but there is no concerted effort to situate the research agenda relative to the innovations they represent.

FAIR: The prospectus makes occasional reference to major figures, movements, and genres, but literary-historical context for the proposed argument is generally thin. The prospectus tends to rely on its readers’ ability to supplement its presentation of literary history.

POOR: There is little engagement with literary history in the prospectus. Its few references to major figures, movements, and/or genre conventions appear haphazardly and without clear bearing on the argument proposed.

INADEQUATE: The prospectus does not demonstrate sufficient awareness of the literary-historical context for its proposed argument. Even rudimentary signposting of the relationship between primary text(s) and major figures, movements, and genre conventions is absent.

3. Student’s prospectus demonstrates knowledge of critical and/or theoretical approaches to reading literature and effectively applies them to the proposed area of study.

EXCELLENT: The prospectus demonstrates a well-balanced critical/theoretical approach to the primary text(s). It carefully elaborates its interpretive/analytical assumptions while also remaining attentive to the limitations and restrictions which they impose. It proposes an argument in which its critical methodology is consistently applied and carefully assessed for its relevance to the individual texts at hand.

GOOD: The prospectus articulates its critical/theoretical methodology and justifies its application to the primary text(s). It displays little awareness of the limitations or restrictions of its own methodology and is limited in its engagement with, or ability to imagine, alternative readings or interpretations.
FAIR: The prospectus identifies key tenets of a guiding critical/theoretical model, but the justification for applying this model to the primary text(s) is left for the reader to imagine. There are some inconsistencies in the proposed application of the critical model to the primary text(s), and little if any address to alternative interpretive possibilities.

POOR: The guiding critical/theoretical assumptions of the prospectus are mostly unstated. The relevance and/or fitness of these assumptions for analysis of the primary text(s) is not addressed in detail. Some critical observations conflict with one another and generate inconsistencies in the proposed research plan.

INADEQUATE: The prospectus does not reveal a coherent set of guiding critical, theoretical, or interpretive principles. Its proposed argument is disjointed and consists of isolated observations and comments that bear little relationship to, and sometimes contradict, one another.