

## UTRGV MA-English Thesis Proposal Guidelines

Under UTRGV thesis guidelines, the proposal process and defense is an **internal departmental program** affair (i.e. the proposal is not submitted to the Graduate College, nor is there any kind of formal notification to the Graduate College that the proposal has been successfully defended). Once the Thesis Committee is formed and a topic and tentative title for the thesis has been decided upon, the student and thesis chair submit an **application for thesis committee** advising the Graduate College that the student is beginning the thesis process.

**Suitable proposals should average between 10-15 pages (plus bibliography).** What follows is a general guideline for how the proposal should be organized. Some adjustments and modifications to this form are allowed based on the content and research procedures the student will follow. However, a proposal should include the following general elements:

**I) Tentative Title:** this will most likely undergo some revision for the final Thesis product;

**II) A Formal Statement of Thesis** that includes an overview paragraph of the subject/topic of the thesis, as well as 1-2 paragraphs that include an explanation of the specific thesis/argument that the student intends to support through the research and analysis – this section can also include some general remarks about the process by which the student intends to substantiate the argument;

**III) Definition of Terms** – this section is included if there is specific terminology that will be used in the thesis that needs to be highlighted for clarity. If the research does not warrant such specific terminology definitions because the language is self-explanatory, then this section can be left out;

**IV) A short Statement of Research Methods to be used in the thesis:** i.e. historical, biographical, cultural, socio-political sources to provide contextual material as needed, specific critical theory to used (e.g. feminist, post-colonial, psychoanalytical – in some cases, the approach may need to include the specific "sub-category" of a particular critical theory if applicable: e.g. Freudian, Lacanian); this section might also include brief mention of a comparative analysis of texts if applicable, and might also include a mention of any primary sources (e.g. letters, diaries, other personal papers) that the student will consult that have not been published or that have not been used in research of this topic to any major extent before.

**V) A short paragraph describing Limitations to the Research project:** Elements to be included in a Research Limitations statement might include difficulty of finding appropriate critical sources directly related to your topic, which would help to justify your research into the topic because it implies there is a serious gap and "need" for your research; this is something you would mention directly in your research problem statement – that you are undertaking your research in a new direction, having to rely on research sources intended for other subjects or research fields in order to make your "case." (Ex: using a sociological approach not originally intended for literary criticism – like psychoanalysis or ethnography – to analyze a piece of literature.) This section might also include a statement on the other end of the spectrum – that there were so many critical sources, or too many primary sources, you had to limit the scope of the study to a reasonable number for the length/size of the study. Finally, if you find that your research activities have revealed a wealth of material about your primary source(s), but that most of those sources fall into

critical "camps" that have been criticized/questioned by later researchers, you should include a statement that you are limited by the amount of criticism generally **accepted** by the critical community as appropriate and relevant. This allows you to explain, therefore, that your research includes a number of outdated or no longer accepted critical sources in order to provide a proper and thorough "historical" view of your subject and the approaches to that subject (which you can then question, and which leads to a justification of your alternative approach or thesis).

**VI) A brief literature review** of relevant sources that helps to show a) the student has done enough research already to demonstrate there is validity to the thesis the student wishes to argue, and b) the student can effectively evaluate and express the relevance of the research already explored. The literature review should include a brief description of each source already explored and a brief statement of the significance of each source to the student's thesis. It is important to show that the student can coherently and briefly explain why the source is important to the student's own thesis (what will the source and its main points help to support in the student's own research?). This section is meant to provide the **background** and **context** for the research activities the student will conduct once he/she begins to work on the thesis itself; it provides a sense that the student understands the **larger scholarly field** in which the student's own proposed research argument will fit.

**VII) Proposed Structure of Thesis** – this section should include a tentative chapter breakdown, with a short paragraph describing what information each chapter will most likely include. A Master's Thesis **generally** has 5-6 chapters: Chapter I (Introduction, which should include revised versions of sections 1-5 of the prospectus); Chapters 2-4 (or 5) should present the support and analysis for the thesis argument; the last chapter should provide a final statement of significance of the thesis findings, a statement of how and why the thesis is significant to the larger field of study into which the topic falls, and suggestions for further research that this thesis points to.

**VIII) A bibliography** that includes those sources that have been explored thus far as well as any sources the student **knows** will have to be consulted for the thesis itself. This section should be titled **Bibliography** (or **Preliminary Bibliography**) and not Works Cited, as this list will presumably include sources that will not be cited in the proposal.