

Liberal Studies Thesis Proposal Guidelines

The proposal serves a number of purposes.

First, in the proposal you are asking for approval for a specific capstone project. Thus one goal of the thesis proposal is to demonstrate that your proposed project fits within the guidelines for a Liberal Studies thesis. The three types of capstone projects considered appropriate are described below.

The second purpose of the proposal is to provide a roadmap for the thesis for you and for your advisor. For this reason there should be enough detail so that we all know where you are going.

Finally, the proposal is a form of contract that is made among you, your advisor, and the MALS program. Once approved, it is a sign we have all accepted this specific project. It is normal for there to be deviation from the proposal as the thesis unfolds. However, if there is substantial change in content or approach, then the student should send the Liberal Studies program a new or revised proposal.

There are three types of appropriate Liberal Studies theses.

The first type is called a research paper and depends entirely on library resources. In this case you should have a specific question you plan to address and research. Your paper should be centered on developing an original line of argument with evidence to support it.

The second type of thesis is a research project. In this type of thesis, a student collects data either in the form of interviews, from primary resources, or from people being studied. In this case, the Liberal Studies student should have a specific question he/she wishes to investigate. The data is collected and the student then uses this data to evaluate the answer to the question being considered.

The third type of thesis is an original creation. In this case, the student will write a story, write poems, compose a piece of music, stage a production, develop a design, create a work of art, etc. The proposal is to be used to describe the process by which the piece of work will be created and to give a context and analysis of that production. In addition to the original creation, a context paper (minimum 25 pages) must accompany the piece. In the context paper, the student includes a rationale and explanation for the undertaking, an intellectual context which explains its purpose, and what the student hopes to accomplish with it. The context paper is included with the thesis when it is prepared for binding.

Please note that lesson plans, instructional manuals, business plans, or technical papers are not appropriate as thesis projects. Also, Liberal Studies students occasionally want to do thesis projects on members of their families or personal experiences. This is only acceptable if the person or event is used as an example of a broader issue.

Regarding format:

Listed below you will find the items that you must include in your proposal. Please type into your proposal all the statements that are listed in **bold** and be sure to answer them. Remember when you prepare the proposal that you are now starting out on your thesis project, so this proposal should be a good beginning by being thought-out, organized, and well-written.

The total proposal should be double spaced and in the 2-4 page range. Please use 1 inch margins and 12 point type.

Due Date:

The proposal is due by the last date to add a course for the semester in which you wish to register for Thesis Research (MLS 791). It is recommended that you turn in the proposal well before this deadline.

Approval Process

After you have passed in this form, the MALS Director will evaluate the proposal and respond either with approval or recommendations for revisions. Occasionally a member of the MALS Advisory Committee may also be consulted. These reviewers are used to ensure that the thesis is at an appropriate graduate student level and appropriate to the program

Liberal Studies Thesis Proposal

Please attach this form to the top of your Thesis Proposal and submit it to the Liberal Studies Office before the last day to add classes for the semester.

Date: _____

Student's Name: _____

Advisor's Name: _____

Advisor's Department: _____

Advisor: _____ currently Graduate Faculty
 _____ will be applying for temporary Graduate Faculty status

Thesis Title: _____

Signature indicating that the advisor has approved this proposal:

Advisor _____ **Date** _____

Signature indicating that the advisor's chair approves the advisor acting as supervisor:

Chair _____ **Date** _____

(Please note that faculty cannot act as advisors in a semester in which they have received a course reduction for research or administration duties.)

Signature of Liberal Studies Program Director:

_____ **Date** _____

Please include each of the following components in your thesis proposal:

Title

The title should describe your topic accurately. It should be 1-2 lines long at most.

Thesis Topic

First, indicate which of the three types of capstone projects you are doing (research paper, research project, original creation). Then, you should describe exactly what the nature of your capstone project will be. If this is a research paper or research project, give a brief description of the specific question you are trying to answer. Remember, the more tightly you frame the question, the more focused your thesis will be. Depth is better than breadth. For an original creation, give a brief description of what original creation you will be producing for the project.

Background

If the thesis is a research paper or research project, you should give a background and context of the topic you will be studying. Tell us what you will cover in your thesis and what you will not include. Indicate how this topic fits into the MALS interdisciplinary, liberal arts agenda. Remember that this is just the proposal and that you do not have to specify all your points or provide a complete outline of the thesis. The point is just to lay out for the advisor and the Liberal Studies Director where your question comes from in order to give a basis to the proposal.

For an original creation, give the background for the project. Indicate how this topic fits into the Liberal Studies interdisciplinary, liberal arts agenda.

General Approach

If this is a research paper, discuss how you will approach research this topic. Where are the resources and how will you get them? If you are doing an analysis of specific works, list those. Note if there is going to be a problem obtaining any of these resources. Again, this is a proposal, so all details do not have to be worked out at this time, but you should still take some time to lay out the basic approach.

If you are doing a research project, discuss how you will study this question. Which person(s) will you be studying and how will you study them? In general, whom will you need to contact to get the participants you will need? If you plan to do a survey or interview study, indicate the general kinds of questions you might be asking. Also, consider the skills (such as interview technique or statistical skills) you will need to complete this project and note whether you already have them, or discuss how you will get them. If you are doing research there is also the possibility that you may need to receive approval from Wake Forest's

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research. Check with your advisor on this point. If you will need IRB approval, please discuss the process and time frame for obtaining this approval.

For an original creation, discuss how you will approach creating this project. Consider resources you will need. If obtaining resources will require the support of others, indicate how you will make these contacts. Also, consider the skills you will need to complete this project and note whether you already have them, or discuss how you will get them. The WFU library archives two copies of each thesis. Please consider how you will preserve your creation for the library's archives (photographs, audio or video recordings, etc.) and describe that process. Also, remember that along with the original creation you will need to include a written context section of at least 25 pages. This section is designed to show the reader either the background for the production or how the production fits in with a larger context.

Bibliography

Please include a preliminary set of references for this project. It does not have to be complete but just long enough to demonstrate that some initial review has been done for the topic and that there is sufficient material for the topic to be feasible.

Time frame

Indicate the time period in which you plan to be working on your thesis. Indicate what semester you will be enrolled in Thesis Research (MLS 791). Please indicate how often you expect to be interacting with your advisor on this project. Check that your advisor will be here during the necessary time frame (sometimes faculty are unavailable during summers).