

The Thesis Prospectus

The thesis prospectus has five parts: 1) title and abstract; 2) methodology; 3) significance; 4) annotated bibliography; and 5) committee signatures. The content of each of the five sections are as follows:

1. Title and Abstract (no more than 150 words)

Your abstract should introduce briefly your topic and thesis. A topic is a general research area; a thesis is your interpretation or main argument about your research area. Keep in mind that successful theses are narrowly focused. You should not try to take on more than you would in a seminar paper or journal article. A good thesis will carefully circumscribe your topic and then examine it in depth. Faculty members will be happy to help you craft a suitably narrowed topic and thesis.

2. Methodology (1-2 double-spaced pages)

In your methodology section you should discuss how you will conduct your research. What kinds of materials will you study and how will you study them? If you are going to read closely a set of primary texts, how will you do so? What key ideas or theories are going to help you? If you are going to study a religious community, how and when will you do it? How will you get access to this community? What theoretical materials will help you understand it?

Assembling a methodology section involves understanding 1) what your primary source materials are (which texts, philosophical arguments, ritual behaviors, etc. you will study); 2) how you are going to study these materials; and 3) what theoretical or scholarly ideas or models you will use to help you interpret these primary materials. All of this information should be included in the methodology section.

3. Annotated Bibliography (1-2 double-spaced pages)

In this section you will list the key sources (primary and secondary) that you will use in your thesis. For each book or article in your bibliography you will need to include one or two sentences about the source and why it is important to you. Your annotated bibliography should include 10 to 15 sources.

4. Significance (1 double-spaced page)

In this section you have an opportunity to reflect on your thesis prospectus and what you hope to achieve in your thesis.

5. Committee Signatures

In this section you will need to list your three committee members. You will need to discuss your project with each committee member and *have them sign by their name before you turn in your thesis prospectus*.