

MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY

THESIS PROPOSAL GUIDELINES AND PROCESS

Timeframe and Length of Thesis

The thesis proposal process should begin after the completion of 18-credit hours and before the completion of 24-credit hours. Once the proposal has been approved by the Advanced Degrees Committee, the student should make a written request of candidacy to the program director.

The thesis itself will be 100 pages.

Purpose

The purpose of the S.T.M. thesis is to demonstrate the ability to research an issue and to write in a clear and concise manner. It is not expected that every thesis will be “an original contribution to knowledge,” but it must make a significant contribution to the student’s understanding of his/her area of specialty.

The thesis proposal (3–5 typewritten pages) should state clearly:

- the topic to be studied, and a thesis about the topic
- why that topic has been selected
- what contribution this study will make
- an outline by chapters, including an introduction and conclusion
- a bibliography

Advisor and second reader

You will begin by choosing an advisor in consultation with the director of the Advanced Degrees Program. The advisor, who will also serve as an academic guide, must be on the faculty of the University of the South.

You will discuss the topic on which you intend to write with your advisor. Your advisor will direct you in shaping the proposal, defining the issue or problem, understanding the method of research to be used, and in preparing an adequate bibliography. Once your advisor has agreed upon the content of your proposal, you will submit it to the Advanced Degrees Committee for approval.

You will also need a second reader. You may suggest a second reader from outside the faculty for the Committee to consider, but no formal invitation can be extended except by the director.

Institutional Research Board

Before you begin a project that involves research into living subjects, you should consult the Institutional Research Board (IRB) website

<http://www.sewanee.edu/offices/dean/information-for-faculty/institutional-review-board/>

The website states: "The goal of the University of the South IRB is to assist Principal Investigators at the University of the South in their efforts to protect the rights and welfare of individuals who participate in research conducted at or under the auspices of the University, and to ensure the University of the South's compliance with federal regulations regarding the protection of human subjects. To meet these goals, the IRB will provide Principal Investigators with information about ways to design their research projects in a manner to minimize potential harm to human subjects, review all planned research involving human subjects prior to initiation of the research, approve research that meets established criteria for protection of human subjects, and monitor approved research to ensure ongoing protection of human subjects."

If you are in any doubt, consult the director of the program.

Approval or resubmission of the proposal

Once a proposal is submitted, the Advanced Degrees Committee can either approve or disapprove it. If approved, the student begins to write the thesis. If the Committee disapproves it, they may suggest changes to a proposal that will require some rewriting or rethinking before resubmission.

One of the major problems seen in proposals is the student's failure to state clearly and concretely what the thesis plans to do. The student must look for hidden assumptions, state and demonstrate the assumptions, and have no unexamined and unarticulated assumptions in the proposal.

(Rev. 5/19/17, subject to change.)