RD 808 THESIS SYLLABUS (9 CREDIT HOURS)

PREREQUISITES

Writing a graduate thesis requires careful research, critical thinking, and effective communication. Beyond this, there are three academic prerequisites, all of which must be fulfilled before a student may enroll for the thesis:

1. The student must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.50 or higher.
2. The student must have the approval of the appropriate Program Coordinator, who is responsible for making a judgment about a student's preparation and ability to undertake the rigour of producing a Master's level thesis.
3. The student must have a supervisor (first reader) who is capable and willing to supervise the thesis.

A payment plan must be processed through the Student Finance Office (studentfinance@briercrest.ca) prior to the registration/billing of a thesis.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Students should make plans for the thesis early in their academic program. As part of this plan, students should select at least one course that relates directly to the topic for more intensive study. While faculty will aid and advise, the student must take responsibility for the following:

1. selection of a suitable topic on which the student can work willingly, aggressively, and enthusiastically;
2. determination of research methodology in the particular area which will yield defensible results;
3. collection of data;
4. drawing warranted conclusions;
5. actual production of the written documents;
6. presentation and oral defense of the work;
7. completion of revisions provided by the Thesis Committee;
8. submission of an electronic copy of the thesis to the Archibald Library for final proof reading; and
9. Completion of final revisions as provided by the Archibald Library prior to printing and binding.

*Please note that the Archibald Library has the final say in all formatting and proofreading matters after the defense and prior to printing and binding the thesis. The thesis must conform to the *Thesis Format Requirements and Guidelines,* available on the Briercrest Seminary website. The library will not proofread the thesis until the formatting guidelines have been met. See "Thesis Style" below for further details.

*Please note that a final grade will not be placed on the student's transcript and the parchment/graduation documents will not be forwarded to a student until the Archibald Library has confirmed receipt of the Thesis for final binding.

The thesis topic and research agenda will normally be determined in consultation with the instructor and/or thesis supervisor. Since a thesis represents the work of a student, the student should not expect the thesis committee supervisor to work jointly on the topic.

SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The thesis supervisor will:

1. Outline for the student the remaining stages required for thesis completion and approve timelines for submission of chapter drafts to meet the February 1 deadline for the supervisor's review of the final draft.
2. Clarify any special instructions for the student.
3. Review the student's Research Ethics Board (REB) application, when applicable.
4. Have scheduled meetings with students every 1-2 months while the student is actively working on the thesis.
5. Provide feedback on drafts within 2 weeks.
6. Follow up with the student if he or she is not meeting the agreed-upon deadlines.
7. Act as first reader at the oral defense.

THESIS COMMITTEE

The thesis involves interaction with a "Thesis Committee." This committee is composed of a supervisor, a second reader, and in some cases (as deemed appropriate by the supervisor) a third reader. The supervisor will typically be a seminary faculty member. The second reader will typically be another Briercrest faculty member or approved adjunct faculty member. A third reader, when deemed necessary or advantageous to the student, is an external faculty member who is an acknowledged "expert" in the field.

The Thesis Committee (supervisor and the second reader) holds the authority to approve the content and defense of the thesis—it has the right of final determination in all matters of outline, bibliography, research, methodology, content, conclusions, and defense. This committee may ask for specialized help from members of the faculty, refer the thesis back to the faculty as a whole, or refer the thesis to the Dean of the Seminary for assistance in evaluating the thesis, though such a referral is at the sole prerogative of the committee.

The Dean of the Seminary has *ex officio* status on all thesis committees. In the case of a deadlock of opinion on the thesis committee, an urgent need to fill a vacancy on the committee, or a matter of some significance relating to the thesis that remains unresolved, the Dean of the Seminary has the right to determine the issue at his or her discretion.

The Director of the Library serves *ex officio* on the thesis committee as the final authority regarding form, typography, and proofreading. As such, he or she may delay the acceptance of the thesis until all matters of form and typography are acceptable. The librarian is also available to the student on matters of bibliography and research methodology.

THESIS PROCEDURES

Students must work through the following stages in applying for and completing the thesis.

Stage One: Preparing to Write the Thesis

A. Secure approval of topic and committee

By March 1 of the year preceding the student's intended graduation, the thesis student must submit to the Program Coordinator a Thesis Request Form (with Section A completed) and a two-page overview of the topic.[1] The overview should include the following:

1. a proposed title for the thesis[2];
2. a short introduction to the topic;
3. a thesis statement (or purpose statement or hypothesis depending on the nature of research being done) to be examined;
4. a statement about the type of research being done;
5. a paragraph indicating the value of the topic (re: originality, implications, etc.).

The Thesis Request Form should indicate the proposed supervisor under whom the student wishes to work and the proposed second reader (if determined) for the thesis committee. Both the supervisor and the second reader must be comfortable supervising in the subject area of the study. Whenever possible, the supervisor should be a seminary faculty member at Briercrest. The second (and third) reader may be another Briercrest faculty member or

[1] Students should consult with their program coordinator about their thesis idea well before the March 1 thesis topic deadline.

[2] The Library strongly suggests that students keep thesis titles as short as possible. Due to the problems which arise from stamping long titles on the cover and spine, binderies will charge additional fees to process long titles.

approved adjunct faculty member. Faculty members have the right to recuse themselves from supervising a thesis for any reason.

The student is encouraged to consult with individual faculty members for their advice on the proposed topic, but the student must ultimately take ownership of it. Once a topic is selected the student must find a faculty member who is competent in the chosen topic and willing to serve as the student's thesis committee supervisor. The student should contact the faculty member proposed as supervisor of the committee and indicate the faculty member's willingness to function in the capacity for the proposed thesis if so appointed by the Seminary Dean.

B. Secure approval of the proposal for study

Once the overview of the topic is approved by the Program Coordinator and the student has found a willing supervisor and second reader to work with them, the student prepares a thesis proposal.

The thesis proposal should consist of a 10-15-page document that includes the following elements:

1. Introduction to the Problem;
2. Literature Review (overview of foundational theories, concepts, designs, examples);
3. Methodology and Procedures;
4. Anticipated Conclusions, Hypotheses or Benefits of the Study; and
5. Preliminary Bibliography or Reference List.

Note further details indicated in the Briercrest Seminary Format guide and the Thesis Format Guide, available at https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/currentstudents/documents.

The process for approval is:

1. Step 1: Submit proposal to the thesis supervisor for review. The supervisor will provide feedback on any revisions and indicate that the student is able to submit the proposal to the second reader.
2. Step 2: Submit proposal to the second reader. The second reader will provide feedback to the student and supervisor on any recommended revisions. The supervisor will provide guidance on revisions still required and indicate when the student is able to submit the proposal to the Program Coordinator for approval.
3. Step 3 (if necessary): If research will involve the use of human subjects by any means (i.e., survey, interview, etc.), the student must also apply for and receive approval of the Research Ethics Board (REB) following the approval of the proposal. Students should work with their thesis supervisor to ensure that the REB application is submitted to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board in a timely manner.

4. Step 4: By May 31 of the year prior to anticipated graduation, having obtained thesis proposal approval from the program coordinator, first reader, and second reader, the thesis student must submit to the Office of the Dean of the Seminary: 1) the Thesis Request Form with Part A and B completed, including start and end dates, and signed by the supervisor, second reader, and the Program Coordinator and 2) the approved thesis proposal.
5. Step 5: The office of the Dean of the Seminary will review the submission and inform the student, the program coordinator, and the supervisor once the revision is complete. The student will then initiate a meeting with the supervisor to commence the writing project.

Once approved, the proposal will serve as a guide for the rest of the thesis project. The student will neither be asked nor allowed to make substantive changes to the thesis (i.e., complete change of direction or topic) unless approved by the student's thesis supervisor and the Dean of the Seminary.

C. Thesis writing

The student then proceeds, under supervision, with the actual research and writing of the thesis, chapter by chapter. Students will submit the thesis by chapters as each is completed. The supervisor will read these chapters first and, once the student completes the requested revisions and produces a draft of the whole thesis, the supervisor will pass the thesis on to the second (and third, when necessary) reader for comment.

The student should not anticipate feedback on each individual page as it is written but on the chapters or major sections as a whole. The supervisor may ask the student to attach a summary sheet with each successively revised submission for review, indicating the specific areas where the student is looking for feedback.

The typical length for a thesis will be 100 pages (between 80 and 120 depending on the research approach), though the maximum length of the body of the thesis (i.e., not including front and back matter) is 120 pages.

D. Thesis completion

Complete the thesis in dialogue with the committee within the time period of one year, or by March 1 in the year the student wishes to graduate, whichever comes first. In order to meet this timeframe, due dates for the process include:

a. Full draft to supervisor no later than February 1.
b. Final draft to second (and third, if applicable) reader no later than February 21.

Stage Two: Submission and Examination Process

A. Submission of copies of the thesis to committee

The thesis supervisor will submit a completed electronic draft of the thesis to each reader. This draft should conform to Briercrest Seminary's format requirements (format guide available at https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/currentstudents/documents) and should include all components, including a thesis abstract of 350-500 words with the readers' copies. The only component that cannot be included at this point is the signature page.

B. Oral Defense

The student must offer an oral defense of his/her thesis to his/her committee. **The Oral Defense must be scheduled not later than one week before Commencement.** The thesis supervisor is responsible, in consultation with the student, to set a defense date. The supervisor may invite other faculty members to join the committee for the defense. The oral examination may also be open to the public or held in private, as determined by the committee.

Depending on the judgment of the committee a thesis may be 1) approved as submitted; 2) approved with minor corrections; or 3) deferred pending major revisions. In the case of 3) above, the supervisor will notify the Seminary Dean and they will together, in consultation with the student, determine what steps need to be taken, if any, to complete the thesis. A thesis may only be deferred once. Failure to complete the thesis in one calendar year after a deferral would result in an "F" on the student's transcript.

The supervisor and second reader may suggest changes while additional readers or other faculty members may only ask questions or make recommendations regarding the acceptance of the thesis.

All matters regarding the supervision of the defense of the thesis rest with the thesis committee. Upon completion of the Oral defense, the supervisor must submit a 1-2-page written report of the thesis to the Dean of the Seminary and the thesis committee will assign a grade for the thesis, which is submitted to the Registrar's Office.

Stage Three: Final Copy

A. Proof-reading and style check

Once the student has successfully defended the thesis and made any revisions suggested by the committee, he or she must submit a copy of the thesis to the Archibald Library for proofreading and style check. Proofreaders are arranged by the library. Once the student receives the thesis back from the proofreader, he or she is responsible to make all corrections in a timely manner. The thesis is then sent to the library director for the final check.

Students can normally expect that the proofreading will be complete in a month from the time of submission to the library. However, if there are a number of theses submitted within a short period of time, this benchmark will not be attainable. The library will be in contact with students at the time of submission to confirm what the turnaround time is expected to be.

B. Submission of Thesis for Binding and Archiving

Once all final revisions are complete, the student should submit an electronic copy of the thesis to the Archibald Library for binding and archiving. The library will facilitate collecting the necessary reader signatures for the signature page.

The student is charged all thesis fees, include the cost of printing three copies as arranged by Archibald Library, at the time of course enrolment.

See "Binding and Archiving Theses" section below for further information.

THESIS METHODOLOGY, CRITERIA AND STYLE

Thesis Methodology

The most common type of thesis is a sustained argument on a particular theme or subject within a specific corpus of texts and/or evidence. It may be on any subject appropriate to the discipline—provided that the thesis supervisor has the disciplinary expertise to oversee the topic. Generally speaking, the thesis sets forth a solution to a problem worthy of intellectual investigation. As such, it has the following characteristics:

1. a clearly articulated research question and a logically organized plan for answering it (introduction);
2. a carefully constructed argument in clearly defined chapters; and
3. a summary of findings (conclusion).

At the Master's level, the thesis methodology should align with accepted practices of research within the academic discipline, though non-standard methodologies may be followed. While originality of research is valued, a Master's thesis need not provide an "original contribution" to the discipline. More typically, the thesis will give fresh clarity to a problem or research question through exceptional attention to a particular theme within a specific body of texts and/or evidence.

An alternate form of research at the Master's level is Action Research. This is an applied, practical procedure for exploring new possibilities or solving a problem within a real-world context. This type of research is more exploratory and may or may not arrive at a conclusive solution. This type of thesis will have slightly different characteristics:

1. a clearly articulated research question (introduction);

2. a carefully chosen research framework, methods and timeline for exploring this question in a local context; and
3. a summary of findings (conclusion).

Thesis Criteria

Any thesis type could be considered acceptable if it provides a genuine intellectual challenge to a competent student, meeting the criteria set forth below.

1. Full appreciation of the historical and theological content of the problem.
2. Strong understanding of the methodology and bibliography related to the disciplines in which the student is working.
3. Sufficient knowledge of the retrospective research on the specific topic to indicate good scholarship.
4. Thorough coverage of the relevant primary and secondary sources.
5. Interaction with important scholarly opinion on related questions even if such opinion is mingled with theological or philosophical presuppositions alien to the student. (Action research - careful gathering, handling, and sifting of data in the search for contextual insight.)
6. Sensitivity and objectivity in handling conflicting viewpoints/data on a given problem.
7. Exacting documentation of quotations, paraphrased statements, or conclusions embodied in the text.
8. Rigorous definition and logical argument in presenting material.
9. Ability to organize ideas as well as the overall thesis.
10. An understanding of the relation of the research to the present day.
11. Employment of original languages where applicable.
12. Suggestions of relevant further research.

Thesis Style

Students are required to follow the *Thesis Format Requirements and Guidelines,* available on the Briercrest Seminary website. These format standards ensure consistency and allow for binding requirements. Central guidelines and items unique to Briercrest Seminary are emphasized in this guide; **specific guidelines described in this manual take precedence over the professional stylebooks listed below.** For all other formatting, documentation, bibliography, and typography issues the student must consult either the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th ed. (APA) or A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 9th ed. (Turabian). Counselling and Leadership students are required to use the most recent version of APA formatting for their thesis. Biblical studies students may be required by their supervisor to use *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (2014). Students need to ensure that they choose only one of these formats and apply that format consistently. Questions relating to the interpretation of these standards may be referred to the Director of the

Library (or designate) at any time. Students should not rely on completed theses for details of format as such theses may no longer meet Briercrest standards.

A good writing style allows the writer to communicate clearly and effectively. Academic writing should keep the presentation dignified but also interesting.

Gender inclusive language should be used consistently as appropriate.

The thesis should be logically organized throughout with an introduction, chapters, conclusion, appendices (if needed), and a bibliography.

> The *introduction* should be a clear statement of the thesis topic or problem to be investigated, the importance of the subject and the method by which the inquiry is to be conducted.
>
> The *text* is the substance of the presentation, which is arranged in chapters reflecting the logical grouping of ideas.
>
> The *conclusion* should be a concise summary of the writer's conclusions, and should articulate how the introduction, text and conclusion present a coherent discussion.
>
> *Appendices* may include materials related to the thesis, but not critical to the argument of the thesis. An appendix may also contain materials which offer indirect support for the writer's conclusions.
>
> The *bibliography* is a classified arrangement of works used in the preparation of the thesis.

Documentation

Documentation is the correct acknowledgement of using other people's materials whereas bibliographical description is a careful reiteration of the work used in the process of documentation. The purpose of documentation is to acknowledge the source of information so that the reader may know that reliable material was used or may consult this further information. Occasions which require documentation are as follows:

1. direct quotations;
2. citing authorities for scholarly support;
3. summarizing or paraphrasing viewpoints for the purpose of criticism or comparison;
4. using information (other than common knowledge).

To fail to properly document ideas taken from other sources is plagiarism—a serious academic crime (though citing common ideas “in the public domain” is not). If students are unsure about whether something should be documented, they should consult with the thesis supervisor. Once the thesis has been submitted for oral defense, students are held solely responsible for having properly documented their sources. Instances of plagiarism or academic dishonesty discovered even after a degree has been conferred can have serious consequences, including the revocation of a degree.

REQUEST FOR DEADLINE EXTENSION

A student who is unable to meet one of the specific thesis deadlines due to extenuating circumstances strictly beyond his or her control may request a one-time extension by submitting an appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee (contact Academic Services for information about this process). The Academic Appeals Committee will consult with members of the thesis committee, the Program Coordinator, and (in case of the final copy) the Librarian and will decide whether to grant the extension. Such requests are to be filed before the one-year deadline and four weeks prior to their graduation deadline date.

Failure to meet the extended thesis deadlines set by the Academic Appeals Committee would result in an "F" on the student's transcript. The student could then pursue completion of the thesis through the Course Reinstatement policy or could pursue alternate means of fulfilling program requirements without the thesis.

BINDING AND ARCHIVING THESES

Procedures and Costs

Each student submits an electronic copy of the thesis to the Archibald Library.

The Archibald Library will produce two bound copies of the thesis on approved paper. One copy is for the library and the other will be returned to the student for his or her personal use. A third, unbound copy is printed for the Briercrest archives.

Students may wish to have additional copies of the thesis (bound or unbound) for themselves and/or for the supervisor of their committee. See "Thesis Tuition and Fee Charges" for details on requesting additional copies of a thesis.

THESIS TUITION AND FEE CHARGES

Students who write theses are charged regular tuition according to the number of credits allotted for the thesis (i.e., 9 credit hours). In addition to the regular tuition, thesis students will also be charged a fee of $300 to cover additional costs of processing the thesis. The $300 fee covers the following costs:

1. Professional proofing of the completed thesis;
2. Printing of three copies of the final version of the thesis (two for the Archibald Library, one for personal use); and
3. Binding of two copies of the thesis.

Students who wish to have additional copies of their thesis bound and/or printed may make arrangements with Archibald Library to do so. There is an additional charge of $30.00 for each additional copy of the thesis bound.

Due to the problems which arise from stamping long titles on the cover and spine, the bindery will also charge additional fees to process long titles.

Recommended Resources

Alexander, Patrick, ed. *The SBL Handbook of Style.* Society of Biblical Literature. Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1999. (Especially for those planning to write theses in Old Testament or New Testament Studies)

Booth, Wayne C., et al. *The Craft of Research,* 3d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Coghlan, David and Teresa Brannick. *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization.* 3d ed. Los Angeles: Sage, 2009. (Particularly applicable to those working in Leadership and management)

Heath, Gordon L. *Doing Church History: a User-Friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008. (For those planning to do research in Church history).

Single, Peg Boyle. *Demystifying Dissertation Writing: A Streamlined Process From Choice of Topic to Final Text*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009.

Sprenkle, Douglas H. and Fred P. Piercy. *Research Methods in Family Therapy*. 2d ed. New York: Guilford Press, 2005. (For those working in Marriage and Family Counselling)

Strunk, William and E. B. White, *Elements of Style.* 4th ed. New York: Longman, 1999.

Swinton, John and Harriet Mowatt. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: SCM, 2006. (For those writing theses in ministry areas)

Williams, Joseph M. *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.*