

## Writing a Full Thesis Proposal

See also the Faculty of Graduate Research website

### WHY write a full thesis proposal?

The aim of your thesis proposal is to convince the Research Committee that:

- Your research will:
  - 'fill a gap' – that what you propose is significant and important, and that you will be contributing something original to your field of study; OR
  - contribute usefully to an ongoing debate among historians; OR
  - evaluate and, perhaps, challenge an established interpretation  
[NB: we expect 'originality' in a PhD thesis more than we do, for example, in a HIST489 research essay]
- Your topic is feasible for a MA or PhD thesis at Victoria University:
  - it has the makings of a 30,000 word (MA) or 100,000 word (PhD) thesis, or a 10,000 - 12,000 word research essay (HIST489);
  - it can be completed within the time limit: PhD- 3 years; MA - one year; HIST489 - 2 trimesters;
  - you will be able to access the necessary library and archival resources;
  - we can provide adequate supervision on the topic
- You have a good knowledge of the existing literature on your topic
- You have given consideration to ethical issues and have planned to obtain the necessary approvals;
- You have a carefully and concisely defined topic on which you can begin systematic work as soon as you enrol.

### WHAT constitutes a full thesis proposal?

Your proposal should include the following:

#### Statement of topic

Tell your reader your general subject area and specify your topic. Briefly point out why it is a significant topic.

#### Aims

State your specific objectives. What do you want to find out? What contribution will your thesis make to the scholarship in your field?

#### Review of historiography

Identify authors whose work is directly relevant to your topic and offer brief evaluations of their work. By means of a review of what has already been written, you place your research topic in its relevant research context and establish what your contribution will be.

Don't go overboard. There is space in the proposal for mention of just the major writings on, or close to, your topic, and so your discussion of the literature needs to be open-ended at this point. Your finished thesis will include a much more developed discussion of the relevant literature.

### **Outline of Theoretical Issues**

Specify the theoretical writings that are relevant to your topic, and indicate which ones you expect to draw on as you define your questions and build a conceptual framework for your thesis.

In the case of a PhD thesis, do you expect to produce findings that will challenge existing theoretical paradigms?

### **Description of Methodology/Approach**

Here you might indicate whether you plan, for example, to:

- rely mainly on "traditional" sources found in libraries and archives
- take an ethnographic approach
- produce a discourse analysis
- make a quantitative analysis that entails data processing
- make substantial use of biographies or fiction
- make use of visual materials such as film, photographs, building plans.....
- use oral histories

### **Tentative chapter outline**

You will find it helpful to look at completed History theses or research essays (ask the Administrator for access to them) to see how they have been organized into chapters.

Indicate how many chapters you expect to write and give a tentative title to each chapter. Brief annotations on each chapter topic would be useful.

### **Timetable**

Draw up a timetable that specifies:

- the length of the pre-writing period (no more than a couple of months; get down to writing as soon as possible)
- a chapter timetable (allowing six to eight weeks per chapter)
- when you expect to deliver a work-in-progress presentation at a Postgraduate Seminar
- COMPLETION DATE!

### **Resource Requirements**

Discuss your resource requirements for the successful completion of your thesis including travel costs, software, photocopying or other necessary research resources with your supervisors and include a brief statement of those needs in the full proposal.

### **Preliminary Bibliography**

List:

- a) all the sources you used when preparing your proposal, and
- b) the sources that you know that you must use when researching your topic.

Your bibliography will, of course, grow as your project develops. You are not expected to produce a list that is a close-to-final list at this stage.

Divide your bibliography into primary and secondary sources. You can use other sub-headings if you so choose.

Please also attach an academic record to accompany your Research Proposal when it is ready to be submitted to the History Programme Research Committee.