

# THESIS HANDBOOK

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A Handbook

Prepared for

Students of

Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary

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Updated June 2020

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## INTRODUCTION

The Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary is a graduate school with a mandate to serve the Church. Seminary students are thus part of a churchly community, but also members of a scholarly community. A thesis provides a unique opportunity to make a contribution to both groups. While a thesis should make a significant contribution to the student's primary academic field (i.e., counseling, theology, or biblical studies), the ability to gather information from many resources, to integrate this data into a cohesive whole, and to draw out its implications is equally useful in every phase of ministry.

This document is located on the seminary's web page and can be accessed at <https://www.fresno.edu/students/seminary-students>.

### ■ What is a Thesis?

A thesis is a project that lays out the results of original research. It is an opportunity to integrate one's learning by focusing intensely on a single topic or theme. A thesis should involve substantial research, demonstrate a mastery of research techniques, and effectively communicate the knowledge gained to a larger community of learning. It should make a contribution by producing new information, by organizing information in a new way, and by drawing important conclusions from existing knowledge. While a thesis may build on previous work, students are expected to develop new ideas. The thesis should not duplicate previous work done by the student. Those who contemplate further graduate studies will find the completion of a thesis especially valuable.

The following are the most common types of theses undertaken at the Biblical Seminary:

**Demonstrative Thesis.** The student begins with a problem or question and develops a thesis statement that aims to show a way forward through the particular problem or question. The goal of the thesis project is to demonstrate the validity of the thesis statement. For example, consider this thesis statement: "Hartshorne's process theology, which conceives of God's power not as a monopoly but as an ideal form of give and take, more genuinely recognizes human freedom and fosters responsibility" (L. Kantymir, 2001). The success of a demonstrative thesis project is measured by the persuasiveness of the argument that the student marshals in the project.

**Constructive Thesis.** The student begins with a problem or question and develops a thesis statement that both explores some aspect of how the problem is experienced, as well as how the problem might be resolved. The thesis project constructs a new model or explanation for addressing the problem or question that emerges from the analysis and interpretation of data collected for the project. For example, consider this thesis statement: "This thesis explores atonement in the Canadian context. It aims to construct a contextual understanding of the saving significance of the cross for Canadian culture that connects deeply with Canadians and

challenges them towards faithful living, while at the same time standing as a prophetic witness against those aspects of the culture that oppose the significance of the cross” (D. Eagle, 2002). The success of a constructive thesis project is measured by the persuasiveness of the student’s analysis and by the viability of the model or explanation proposed.

**Quantitative/Qualitative Research.** Theses produced for the M.F.T. department will normally use quantitative or qualitative methods that include the collection and analysis of hard data. (Students completing other degrees may also use quantitative or qualitative methods for their theses when appropriate.) The student begins with a research question and develops a project that collects and analyses pertinent data. The success of a thesis based on this type of research is measured by its design, validity and the reliability of the instruments used to gather the data, as well as its analysis and the implications drawn from the research. Students conducting quantitative or qualitative research must demonstrate through appropriate course work that they have the competency to collect and analyze data. Completion of the *Research Methods* course is a prerequisite to all such research. For research involving human subjects, refer to <http://www.fresno.edu/irb> for guidelines and approval process.

#### ■ Thesis Requirements When Completing Concurrent M.A. Degrees at the Seminary

In the case where a student is completing two programs concurrently, a student may opt to do two theses, one for each degree program. It is also permissible to do one thesis addressing the disciplines of both M.A. degrees. If this latter option is chosen, the Adviser should be from one discipline and the second reader from the other. In this situation the second reader should be more involved than a normal second reader. The extent of that involvement to be determined in conversation with the adviser and the student.

### **CHOOSING A THESIS TOPIC, ADVISER AND SECOND READER**

The topic you choose should be broad enough to sustain a graduate level of research, but narrow enough to make completion possible. It should also be a topic in which you have a personal and sustainable interest. Students are encouraged to choose topics that relate to their field of study, but are also relevant for the Church.

Choosing the right Thesis Adviser will greatly aid the successful completion of the project. The student should consult with the Thesis Coordinator to identify possible advisers for the project. Ideally, the Adviser will share the student’s interest in the topic and be able to serve as a guide and resource for the development of the proposal and the thesis itself. The Adviser is generally a full-time member of the faculty, working in the student's chosen academic field. It is the student’s responsibility to contact potential advisers and secure an initial commitment from a faculty member to serve as Thesis Adviser.

In addition to the Thesis Adviser, a second faculty member will be appointed to read and comment on the thesis. The Second Reader may be in a related field. The student may request a particular second reader when submitting the thesis proposal.

Final appointment of the Thesis Adviser and Second Reader will be made by the Dean, in consultation with the Thesis Coordinator and the Proposal Defense Committee, following approval of the thesis proposal.

## **DEVELOPING A PROPOSAL**

The initial work put into the development of a good proposal will go a long way toward the successful completion of the thesis. Students are expected to have read the appropriate literature and be conversant with the major issues in their field.

### **■ Thesis Preparation Meeting**

Each year the Thesis Coordinator schedules a meeting designed to help students explore the opportunities and challenges of writing a thesis. All students interested in writing a thesis are strongly encouraged to attend before submitting a proposal. Topics include academic expectations, proposal development, choosing advisers, and alternatives to writing a thesis.

### **■ Presenting a Thesis Proposal**

In the year prior to graduation, the student will prepare a thesis proposal in consultation with the Adviser. After the Adviser approves the proposal it will be submitted to the Thesis Coordinator for preliminary review. If all the parts of the proposal are in place, the Thesis Coordinator, with the dean, forms a faculty committee to review the proposal. The student meets with the committee to present the proposal and respond to questions. Following the meeting, the Proposal Defense Committee will respond to the proposal, approving it or requesting clarifications or changes. Upon approval, the Dean will confirm the Adviser and assign a Second Reader.

### **■ Elements in a Proposal (6-8 pages)**

1. Working Thesis Title
2. Tentative Table of Contents
3. Introduction/rationale for the Thesis

The student should address the reason for interest in the topic and its significance. A brief literature review should be included to demonstrate awareness of previous work or literature on the topic. Clearly state the research problem, question, or hypothesis. This should not be more than one paragraph and should contain one sentence that can stand alone as the thesis statement or question. It should either be a question the thesis will answer, a hypothesis the thesis will seek to prove, or a model the thesis will construct.

4. Outline of Methodology  
Here, the student indicates the type of methodology which the thesis will employ such as library research or field research (e.g., survey, ethnography), and the means for data collection and analysis.
5. Tentative Expected Conclusions  
Finally, the student lists the kinds of findings and results that are likely to emerge from the research.
6. Selected Bibliography  
Materials listed should represent each of the major divisions of the thesis and include journal articles. A good bibliography will have a minimum of 50 entries.

Examples of proposals done by previous students are available on reserve in the library. Current projects are posted on the Bulletin Board in the Ontario Lounge in North Hall.

### **THESIS INFORMATION/SCHEDULE**

Thesis preparation, writing and defense normally take place over three semesters. The Thesis Coordinator manages the process and should be consulted as questions arise.

#### **■ Year Prior to Graduation**

(Dates assume a spring graduation. Dates for fall are in parentheses)

1. Participate in thesis exploration meeting (fall semester).
2. Select an Adviser
3. Prepare and Present Thesis Proposal (by end of Spring Semester)

#### **■ Year of Graduation**

1. Register for *Thesis*  
Students may register for 3 units of *Thesis* in two consecutive semesters (e.g., Fall and Spring), OR register for 6 units in the final semester. M.F.T. students may elect to register for 3 units of *Advanced Family Studies* and 3 units of *Thesis*. (If registered over two semesters the student will receive an IP grade after the first semester.)

Note: Theses are not defended in the summer (June-August).

2. Thesis Writing Progression

##### January 2 (August 25)

A working draft of a significant portion of the thesis submitted to the Adviser to demonstrate progress. Failure to show sufficient progress by this date will require a change of enrollment status from *Thesis* to *Senior Seminar*, with a corresponding change from 6 to 3 units of credit. This change will need to be taken into account in the student's plans for graduation.

March 15 (October 15)

A Complete working draft submitted to the Adviser.

April 10 (November 10)

Submit a revised full draft (including changes suggested by a grammarian) to the Adviser for approval. If approved, submit full draft to Second Reader.

by May 1 (by December 1)

Prepare abstract and complete defense.

Note: A defense will be scheduled only after the thesis has been passed for defense by the Adviser.

Before graduation

- Final corrected copy to be submitted to Adviser for signature.
- Final signed copy to be submitted for electronic copying one (1) week before graduation.

### ■ Extensions

After two registered semesters if a student does not finish they will receive an extension of 1 semester (no fee); if the thesis is not finished that semester the student will need to enroll in a 0-unit “Continuous Registration” section in order to continue and will be charged the amount equal to 1 unit of credit. (Note: summer session counts as a semester.)

### ■ Thesis Completion and Commencement

A thesis must be completed, i.e., a final signed copy turned in before graduation in order for a student to participate in commencement exercises. There will be no exceptions to this policy.

## THESIS FORMAT AND STYLE

### ■ Length of Thesis

Maximum length of the body of the thesis is 120 pages. Minimum length is 100 pages. Appendixes and Bibliography may go beyond the stated boundaries.

### ■ Standard for Format, Mechanics, and Style

There are three acceptable style manuals for preparation of theses. M.F.T. students are required to use the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) (7th Edition, c2019) in preparation of theses. O.T. and N.T. students are encouraged to use *The SBL Handbook of Style*. All other programs may use MLA, Chicago, or APA and shall conform to the latest edition of the style manual. *Form and Style: Research Papers, Reports, and Theses*, by Carole Slade and Robert Perrin, is recommended. The student is responsible for any corrections to be made if the format, mechanics, and style are incorrect.

**Documentation.** There are two basic systems of documentation: 1) notes and bibliography, and 2) parenthetical reference with a list of works cited. If the notes and bibliography format is used, the student may choose either footnotes or endnotes. Endnotes are to be placed at the end of the thesis, not at the end of each chapter.

Note: Exception to *Form and Style*: If parenthetical referencing is used, a full bibliography, not just a list of works cited is necessary.

Note: If parenthetical referencing is used and an explanatory note is needed, a footnote, not an endnote should be used.

**Elements of a Thesis.** There are three categories of materials in a thesis: the preliminaries, the body of the thesis, and the reference materials. *Form and Style* provides information on sequence and content of each. **Appendix B** includes samples for title page and signature/disclaimer page. *Form and Style* has additional sample pages. If more than one sample is given, either sample is acceptable.

Further guidance on writing a thesis can be found in David Madsen, *Successful Dissertations and Theses: A Guide to Graduate Research from Proposal to Completion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

**Format for M.F.T. Thesis.** Because the M.F.T. program at the Biblical Seminary integrates counseling and biblical theology, a thesis in this program should reflect a graduate level integration of the counseling and theological literature regarding the problem studied.

An M.F.T. thesis should normally use quantitative methods, including the collection and analysis of hard data. To clearly describe the process of data collection and analysis the thesis should include at least the following sections: (a) Abstract, (b) Introduction (c) Literature review, (d) a description of the methods used for data collections, (e) Results of data collection, and (f) Discussion. The introduction should clearly describe the research question and rationale for the study. The literature review should include a full review of the relevant counseling literature and a briefer, but still graduate level, review of the significant biblical and theological literature and discussion of their interaction. The methods section describes the data collection process sufficiently to permit replication of the study. The results section uses appropriate analysis techniques to summarize the data and draw implications from it. The discussion section includes the implications of the data regarding the original research question, implications for the integration of counseling and biblical theology, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

A theoretical or exegetical thesis, while less common, is also acceptable. That thesis should also integrate counseling and biblical theology and should follow the same structure as a thesis from the theology department.

## ■ Format Guidelines

**Typeface.** Printer fonts which contain at least ten spaces or characters to the inch, such as Courier (10) or Times New Roman (12), should be used.

**Margins.** The margins for the body of the thesis shall be one inch. Follow regulations for spacing of chapter headings and paging as outlined in *Form and Style* or the *APA Publication Manual*.

**Spacing.** The entire thesis must be double spaced with the following exceptions: chapter titles and headings, footnotes, table and figure captions, reference list items, and block quotations. Block quotations should be used for quotes that are five or more lines in length (three or more for poetry), and are indented only from the left margin. There should be no partially filled pages except at the end of chapters. (At least two lines of text must follow a heading at the bottom of a page. If there is insufficient space the heading must be moved to the top of the next page.)

**Page Numbering.** The numbers should be placed in the upper right hand corner, flush with the right margin, preceded immediately by the surname of the writer. Preliminary page numbers are lower case Roman numerals centered at the bottom of the page.

**Justification.** Left-hand justification is preferred. Right-hand justification may only be used if all within-word and between-word spacing remains uniform.

**Hyphenation.** Words should be divided only between syllables. Some words, such as names, should not be hyphenated (*Form and Style* notes other exceptions which you should follow). If in doubt, it is better not to hyphenate. No more than two lines in succession should end in hyphens and a hyphen should never end a page.

## Order of Pages

Preliminary Pages, counted in Roman numerals as follows:

Title Page (counted as page i, not numbered)

Blank Page (counted as page ii, not numbered)

Copyright (counted as page iii, not numbered)

Acceptance, disclaimer, and permission (not counted or numbered)

Abstract Title Page (not counted or numbered)

Abstract (not counted or numbered)

Table of Contents (counted and numbered as iv, etc.)

Lists of tables/figures/plates (counted and numbered)

Acknowledgment (counted and numbered)

Preface (counted as page 1 and numbered 1, etc.)

Body (counted and numbered in Arabic numerals)

Appendices (counted and numbered)

Bibliographies (counted and numbered)

Clearance Forms for quantitative research projects (counted and numbered)

**Title Page.** The title page shall conform to the sample in **Appendix B** at the end of this handbook.

**Acceptance, Disclaimer, and Permission Page.** The acceptance, disclaimer and permission page shall conform to the sample provided in **Appendix B**. It shall be of the same paper and type as the body of the thesis. The following disclaimer statement will be typed on the bottom of the page: “The views expressed in this thesis are those of the student and do not necessarily express the views of the Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary.” The Adviser, Second Reader and student will sign this page.

**Copyright Page.** Placing an electronic manuscript in a library is a form of publication. As such it is copyrighted material and should have a copyright notation. For example: © 2021 your name; All Rights Reserved

### ■ Bible Usage

**Scripture references.** If used in the text of the thesis the name of the book is spelled out. If the reference is given in parentheses it is abbreviated.

Examples: In Romans 1:16 we read, “For I am not ashamed . . .”  
“For I am not ashamed . . . to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

**Punctuation.** Use the system of punctuation and capitalization found in the version of the Bible you are using.

**Italicization.** Words italicized in an English version of the Bible are not underlined in typing, as the purpose is different in normal writing.

**Abbreviations of Books of the Bible.** The following abbreviations, taken from the *University of Chicago Manual of Style*, should be used, except for those using the *SBL Handbook of Style*.

Gen.	II Kings	Isa.	Nah.	Rom.	Titus
Exod.	I Chron.	Jer.	Hab.	I Cor.	Philemon
Lev.	II Chron.	Lam.	Zeph.	II Cor.	Heb.
Num.	Ezra	Ezek.	Hag.	Gal.	Jas.
Deut.	Neh.	Dan.	Zech.	Eph.	I Pet.
Josh.	Esther	Hos.	Mal.	Phil.	II Pet.
Judg.	Job	Joel	Matt.	Col.	I John
Ruth	Ps.	Amos	Mark	I Thess.	II John
I Sam.	Prov.	Obad.	Luke	II Thess.	III John
II Sam.	Eccles.	Jonah	John	I Tim.	Jude
I Kings	Song of Sol.	Mic.	Acts	II Tim.	Rev.

## ■ Language of a Thesis

If a student's preferred language is one other than English, and a thesis Adviser, Second Reader and grammarian can be found who are fluent in that language, the thesis may be written in that language.

Application must be made for this modification in the original thesis proposal, showing that these requirements can be met.

A five-page abstract of the thesis must be written in English by the student and made available three weeks prior to the defense so that participants have opportunity to be familiar with the thesis. The defense will be conducted in English.

## COMPLETING THE THESIS

As noted earlier, a thesis defense will not be scheduled until the faculty Adviser and Second Reader agree that the thesis meets a passing standard. An Adviser will not pass a thesis prior to submission of a complete full draft. It is the student's responsibility to allow adequate time for the Adviser and Second Reader to review the thesis, as well as adequate time to make any required changes or corrections.

## ■ Submitting Full Draft

This is the draft read by both the Adviser and the Second Reader. Please allow a two-week turnaround period. This submission should meet the following requirements:

1. The text must be correctly printed and spaced.
2. The thesis must be correctly paginated.
3. The thesis must have a title page and a table of contents.
4. All additions and corrections already discussed with the Adviser and grammarian should be incorporated into this draft.
5. The bibliography must be complete and in the proper format.

The Second Reader will respond to the Adviser in time for the Adviser to discuss concerns or suggestions with the student prior to the defense. Upon approval, the student is free to schedule a defense. *Please note: Submission of this draft does not guarantee approval for defense.* The student may be required to do significant rewriting and should allow ample time for this possibility.

## ■ Abstract

This is a one-page or two-page condensation of the thesis including:

- a statement of the problem or topic, including the thesis sentence,
- the method of research, and □ major conclusions reached.

Covering the abstract should be a title page (produced in the same form as for the thesis, except that the words “Abstract of” shall appear in a line above the title). The abstract shall be of the same paper and type as the body of the thesis. The abstract should be made available to interested readers prior to the defense date and is included in the final copy of the thesis.

## ■ Thesis Defense

The defense takes place at least two weeks following the submission of the full draft to the Adviser and Second Reader and only after the Adviser has given the thesis an initial pass. The student is responsible for scheduling the defense in consultation with the Thesis Coordinator, the Adviser and Second Reader and for reserving a room. The student will cooperate with the Thesis Coordinator in making announcements and making available an abstract and full copy of the thesis.

The format of the defense shall be as follows (time allotted is 1.5 hours):

1. Student presents a brief summary of the thesis (15-20 minutes)
2. Adviser responds with his/her perspective on the process and raises questions or asks for clarifications.
3. Student Response.
4. Second Reader responds to his/her reading of the thesis and raises questions or asks for clarifications.
5. Student Response.
6. Further questions or response from readers and student response if appropriate.
7. Conversation is opened up to include questions and comments from other faculty and students attending.

The student’s summary and ability to respond to questions is a part of the Adviser’s determination of the final grade given for the thesis. The defense concludes the Second Reader’s responsibilities in the process.

## ■ Producing a Final Copy

**Proofreading and Corrections.** The student is responsible for addressing all corrections suggested by the Adviser, Second Reader and grammarian.

**Copyright Releases.** The student is asked to sign the copyright release form which permits copies to be made for others’ research purposes.

**Signing the Thesis.** After the final draft has been approved, the thesis is submitted to the Adviser and Second Reader for signing.

**Electronic Copy and Binding.** An electronic copy of the final approved draft and a pdf copy of the signed signature page should be submitted to the Thesis Coordinator who will submit it to the

library. If desired, the student may have copies bound at a local copy service or at Valley Library Bindery. All expenses for bound copies are the student's responsibility. (Note, for bound copies the left-hand margin should be changed to 1.5 inches.)

## **GRADING**

When a thesis is completed, a letter grade will be issued by the Adviser in consultation with the Second Reader.

The grade for the thesis is weighted as follows:

1. Written Thesis - 90%

Content - 85%

- All thesis elements present
- Clear statement of purpose or hypothesis
- Appropriate methodology
- Good use of sources
- Good presentation of data
- Sound analysis
- Appropriate conclusions

Format - 5%

- Text (Appropriate typeface and size, margins, spacing, etc.)
- Documentation (footnotes or endnotes, bibliography)
- Format (title page, table of contents, tables, figures, etc.)

2. Thesis Defense - 10%

- Creative, incisive summary of the thesis
- Knowledgeable, gracious interaction with participants
- Ability to defend the thesis
- 

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **■ Thesis Coordinator**

1. Offer initial counsel to students interested in writing a thesis.
2. Schedule a meeting for students considering writing a thesis.
3. Provide initial guidance on writing a proposal and discern with the student who should be the Adviser.
4. Consult with the Dean regarding Adviser assignments.
5. Work with Dean to form and schedule Proposal Defense Committee.
6. Schedule thesis defenses.
7. Attend all the thesis defenses.
8. Submit final signed copy to library.

## ■ Student

1. Participate in thesis preparation meeting.
2. Consult with the Thesis Coordinator to identify topic and possible Adviser.
3. Recruit potential Adviser and receive approval of choice of Adviser from the Thesis Coordinator.
4. Prepare thesis proposal in consultation with Adviser.
5. Submit thesis proposal to Thesis Coordinator.
6. Present thesis proposal at a meeting of the Proposal Defense Committee. .
7. Research and write the thesis in consultation with the Adviser.
8. Secure and pay for the services of a grammarian unless waived by the Adviser. Referrals to recommended grammarians are available from the Thesis Coordinator.
9. Guarantee the accuracy and integrity of the thesis.
10. Make all corrections as required by the Adviser, Second Reader, or Grammarian.
11. In consultation with the Adviser, Second Reader and Thesis Coordinator, schedule a public defense of the thesis, and reserve a room.
12. With Thesis Coordinator arrange for a copy of the thesis and abstract to be made available before the defense.
13. Defend the thesis publicly.
14. Submit the corrected copy to the Adviser and Second Reader for signature.

## ■ Adviser

1. Agree to be the Adviser after soliciting the approval of the Academic Dean.
2. Work with the student to develop the thesis proposal.
3. Select the Second Reader, in consultation with the Thesis Coordinator.
4. Attend the proposal meeting with the student.
5. Work with the student at all stages of thesis research and writing.
6. Assess progress after one semester to determine whether the student should change to *Senior Seminar* or continue with thesis writing.
7. Determine when the thesis is ready for defense.
8. Chair the oral defense.
9. Sign the final copy of the thesis.
10. Submit a grade for the thesis to the Registrar.

## ■ Second Reader

1. Read the draft of the full thesis before the oral presentation, paying particular attention to substance and interpretation.
2. Communicate any suggestions about the thesis directly to the Adviser.
3. Attend and participate in the oral defense.
4. Consult with Adviser regarding final grade.

■ **Grammarian**

1. Reads a complete first draft of the thesis to identify grammatical and stylistic errors that do not meet graduate writing standards. This may be waived by the Adviser.

**APPENDIX**

**SAMPLE PAGES**

The following pages are included as examples for the preparation of theses at FPUBS. They include:

1. Sample title page
2. Acceptance, disclaimer, and permission page

SALVATION IN SUBURBIA:  
A CASE STUDY OF  
THE INTERACTIONAL MODEL OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Divinity

---

by  
William Robert Smith  
May 2020

Accepted by the Faculty of the Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree [name of degree].

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(Name), Adviser

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(Name), Second Reader

The views expressed in this thesis are those of the student and do not necessarily express the views of the Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary.

I grant Hiebert Library permission to make this thesis available through its online discovery service. This use is understood to be within the limitations of copyright.

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(Student) Signature

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Date