
McMaster Divinity College Fall Semester, 2015

RESEARCH METHODS PhD CH/TH G100
 MA CH/MS/NT/OT/TH 6ZA6

Time: Mondays, 10:30 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.

Location: DC 231 (Fyfe Room)

Facilitator: M. Knowles
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Course Statement

This course addresses the range of conceptual and practical skills relevant to graduate-level research and explores the theory and practice of research methodologies as they apply to the theological disciplines. Issues under consideration will include the sources, nature, tools, and ethics of scholarly research; building a cogent argument; presentation formats (proposals, reviews, etc.); and the process of compiling a research proposal.

Course Objectives

KNOWING

- ▶ To understand the nature and components of academic research.
- ▶ To reflect analytically on and gain facility in logical argumentation through guided practice and interaction with peers.
- ▶ To gain familiarity with general and discipline-specific research methodologies.

BEING

- ▶ To reflect in personal terms on the rôles of the researcher and scholar as an expression of Christian identity.
- ▶ To be formed as a scholar in the service of particular academic and Christian communities.

DOING

- ▶ To build a critical database of primary and secondary sources for a specific programme of post-graduate research.
- ▶ To formulate a focussed and usable research (thesis/dissertation) proposal.
- ▶ To acquire facility in the presentation of research in a specific range of scholarly formats.

Lecture/Seminar Outline and Schedule

1. Introduction to Research
 - a. The Components of Research September 14
 - i. The Road Ahead: How Do We Get There from Here?
 - ii. Formulating a Valid Research Question
2. Identifying and Analysing Resources
 - a. Library resources and Tour (Rick Stapleton; Mills Memorial Library) September 21
 - b. Evaluating Source Materials: Bibliographies, Annotations, and Book Reviews
Draft Resource List due September 28
3. Philosophy of Method: Research and Christian Faith October 5
Annotated Bibliography due
- Reading Week (no class) October 12
4. Field-Specific Hermeneutics and Methodologies
 - a. Text- and Language-based Research (Mark Boda & Chris Land) October 19
Book Review due
 - b. God, History, and Doctrine: Researching Theology and History (Gord Heath & Steve Studebaker) October 26
Summary of Biblical Methodologies due
 - c. Critical Methods in Ministry Studies (Michael Knowles & Phil Zylla) November 2
Summary of Historical/Theological Methodologies due
5. Building a Coherent Argument
 - a. Reasoning, Logic, and Argumentation November 9
Summary of Ministry Studies Methodologies due
 - b. Research Exercises November 16
6. Writing
 - a. Learning to Write Well: Grammar and Syntax November 23

b. Style, Editing, and Proper Documentation (<i>Style Guide</i>)	November 30
c. Plagiarism and Academic Integrity	December 7
d. Joan Bolker, <i>Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day</i> <i>Draft Research Proposal Due</i>	
Last day of classes/last day for submission of late assignments	December 12

Course Texts and Resources

All students:

- Adler, Mortimer J., and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book. Revised and Updated Edition*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972. MILLS Reserve PN 83 .A43 1972
- Bolker, Joan. *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis*. New York: Henry Holt, 1998. MILLS Reserve LB 2369 .B57 1998
- Heath, Gordon L. *Doing Church History: A User-Friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity*. Toronto: Clements, 2008. MILLS Reserve BR 138 .H38 2008

Biblical Studies only:

- Knight, Douglas. *Methods of Biblical Interpretation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004. MILLS Reserve: BS 476 .M355 2004

Theology only:

- Allen, Paul L. *Theological Method: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum; New York: T & T Clark, 2012. MILLS e-book (online)

Ministry Studies only:

- Swinton, John, and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. London: SCM, 2015.

All texts (including Knight, *Methods of Biblical Interpretation*, which is otherwise out of print) are available for purchase from the College Bookstore (Room 145) and/or

READ On Bookstore	E-mail: books@readon.ca
304 The East Mall, Suite 100	http://www.readon.ca
Etobicoke, ON	Tel: (416) 620-2934
M9B 6E2	FAX: (416) 234-8840

Supplementary Resources available at Mills Library:

Axelrod, Bradley N., and James Wendell. *Dissertation Solutions: A Concise Guide to Planning, Implementing, and Surviving the Dissertation Process*. Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2012. MILLS e-book (online)

Bolich, Gregory G. *The Christian Scholar: An Introduction to Theological Research*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986. MILLS Reserve BR 118 .B558 1986

Thomas, R. Murray, and Dale L. Brubaker. *Theses and Dissertations: A Guide to Planning, Research and Writing*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2000. MILLS Reserve LB 2369 .T458 2000

Assignments

This course is designed to assist the student in developing the skills require to undertake research in a specific field of interest. To that end, the assignments are structured to help students develop a workable thesis or dissertation proposal in the student’s area of research interest.

1. *Draft Resource List*

Following the Library resources lecture (September 21), identify at least one resource from each of the following ten categories:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| i. Biographical source | (2) Applicational |
| ii. Electronic database | (3) Literature survey |
| iii. Encyclopaedia entry | vi. Monographs |
| iv. Inter-Library loan (ILL) item | (1) Standard critical work |
| v. Articles (print + online) | (2) History of discussion |
| (1) Theoretical | (3) Primary source book |

For each item, provide a properly formatted bibliographic entry, following the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guide* (https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdc_styleguide.pdf).

Length: ±500 words

Due: September 28

Percentage: 10%

2. *Annotated Bibliography*

The goal of this assignment is to initiate the process of assembling a database of resources for one’s chosen area of research. Expanding on the previous assignment, students will provide an initial bibliography of ten books and ten peer-reviewed articles relevant to their particular research projects. For each item, provide bibliographic data in standard academic format, followed by a brief description and evaluation of the argument, together with an

assessment of its relevance for your own research (± 100 words per entry, not including bibliographic data).

Length: ± 2000 words

Due: October 8

Percentage: 20%

3. *Book Review*

Prepared as though for publication, the review will describe the content of a recent book in the student's field of research, relate the argument to the current state of scholarly discussion, and assess its contribution to that debate.

Length: 1,500 words

Due: October 19

Percentage: 15%

4. *Summary of Research Methodology*

Faculty guest lecturers will offer a series of basic introductions to methodological issues in their respective fields (i.e. Biblical; Historical/Theological, Ministry Studies). On the basis of one such introduction (and citing any additional resources identified by the lecturer), summarize the critical methodological issues in your academic discipline, with special reference and application to your particular area of research interest.

Length: 1,500 words

Due: October 26 (Biblical)

Percentage: 15%

November 2 (Historical/Theological)

November 9 (Ministry Studies)

5. *Draft Research Proposal*

Following instructions provided in the relevant guidelines (i.e. MA or PhD), each student will compile a draft thesis or dissertation proposal that includes the following standard elements:

- i. Description of the topic and its importance, including a clear thesis statement;
- ii. Research methodology/model/framework;
- iii. Outline/structure of the dissertation;
- iv. Work plan/timeline [may be omitted];
- v. Preliminary bibliography

As a "work-in-progress," the proposal will identify any difficulties that have been encountered or questions that remain unanswered, as well as explaining the anticipated relevance of this research for the church, academy, and society. This assignment will be graded on the logic and clarity of the proposed programme of research, the degree to which it demonstrates a clear understanding of field-specific methodologies, and its integration with existing knowledge. Each student must discuss the proposal with their supervisor prior to completion, indicating the scope and impact of those discussions in the submitted draft.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty: <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>.

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

Style

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses: https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdc_styleguide.pdf. To assist with prose composition, students are encouraged to make use of [grammarly.com](http://www.grammarly.com), which is funded by the university, along with the Writing Support Services provided by McMaster's Student Success Centre (<http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/students/academic-skills/writing-support-services.html>). Lack of conformity to the appropriate format will result in grade reductions. See also "CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS," below.

Cell Phone/Computer Policy

Students are to refrain from conducting cell phone conversations while class is in session. Should you need to maintain contact with family members and/or your church or ministry, please turn off the ringer so as to avoid disturbing others; upon receipt of an urgent call, you may discretely excuse yourself from the classroom. The same policy applies to all computer-generated sound schemes, pagers, or other electronic annunciation systems.

Deadlines and Late Submission Penalty

Assignments are due in class at 10:30 a.m. on the due date, after which they will be considered late and penalized 1% per calendar day. The final date for submission of all course assignments is December 12. Assignments received after this date will not be accepted for grading or credit.

Once classes have concluded, graded assignments will be available for retrieval from the Student Records Office (Room 210) for 30 days after the end of the semester (calculated as the day on which grades are due), following which they will be discarded.

Disclaimer:

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make revisions up to and including the first day of class.

CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Grading of written materials will be based on the following general criteria

Grade Range	Content	Argument	Presentation
90–100 A+ 85–89 A 80–84 A–	Mastery of subject matter; creativity and individualized integration of insights and their relationships; exceeds required elements	Clear, logical structure; comprehensive introduction, persuasive argumentation, and innovative conclusions	Detailed adherence to relevant style for formatting of text, notes, and bibliography; no errors of grammar or syntax; elegant presentation
77–79 B+ 73–76 B 70–72 B–	Above-average grasp of principles and concepts, and their inter-relationship; completion of all required elements	Coherent structure and consistent argumentation; well-stated introduction and conclusion	General adherence to relevant style and format; few errors of grammar or syntax
67–69 C+ 63–66 C 60–62 C–	Adequate understanding of theoretical foundations; minimal completion of required elements	Rudimentary structure; minimal introductory and concluding statements	Significant errors of grammar, syntax, or style
57–59 D+ 53–56 D 50–52 D–	Low level of comprehension; required elements incomplete or missing	Lack of coherence or structure in argumentation; introduction or conclusion missing	Abundant grammatical, syntactical, and stylistic errors
0–49% F	Inability to grasp basic concepts; required elements missing	Incomprehensible or illogical structure and argumentation	Failure to follow stylistic guidelines; incomprehensible syntax