

REL 497  
Thesis Writing  
Seminar

Ashland University

Fall, 2008

M,W 3-4:15 RCRS 13



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SUITE  
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Dr. Peter Slade  
Rinehart 15

email: Use ANGEL's Course Mail  
to contact the instructor

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This Religion Thesis Writing Seminar is designed for religion majors who are undertaking their required religion thesis. Students will engage in the various stages related to researching and writing their religion thesis. Students will also provide support and guidance to fellow thesis writers.

### OBJECTIVES AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

The objectives of this course and outcomes expected for the students are as follows:

1. Students will demonstrate familiarity with the various stages of thesis preparation from proposal through final draft.
2. Students will learn how to develop research methods required for larger writing projects.
3. Students will learn proper research and citation procedures to avoid plagiarism.
4. Students will learn how to work independently and to create a time frame for independent research and writing.
5. Students will provide support, encouragement and guidance for fellow thesis writers in the course.

This class is designed to complement, **not replace**,  
your work with your thesis adviser.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation	15%
Draft Bibliography	5%
Annotated Bibliography	15%
Proposal & Draft Outline	15%
Paper	30% (5% + 5% +20%)
Written Responses	15%
Plan for completion	5%

## Participation (15%)

The value of this class primarily rests on the accountability, support and feedback participants give to one another. The class only meets on Tuesdays and after the first three weeks will not meet every week; check the schedule carefully. Come to class prepared to engage in discussions and to provide feedback to the work of fellow class members.

You are required to attend every class – unwarranted absences demonstrate disregard for the course and disrespect for the professor and fellow students who have prepared for the class.

If you have to **miss a class**, please **contact Academic Advising ext. 5880** at the earliest opportunity. They will send an email to all your professors. When you return to class, please bring primary evidence for the cause of your absence (doctor's note, sports schedule, copy of funeral service, police report, etc.).

While there is no grade assigned for attendance, failure to show up for class will hamper your participation grade.

I reserve the right to lower your **final grade** -- even **to the point of course failure** -- for excessive/extended absences whatever the cause.

## Bibliography (5%) & Annotated Bibliography (15%)

The second week of class you will turn in a draft Bibliography (9/8) which will include books and articles that are significant in your chosen field of research. In consultation with your adviser, you will choose five (or so) significant works from this bibliography and then write a five-page **Annotated Bibliography** (approx 1300 words). **Due (9/22)**

An annotated bibliography includes a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources. Your annotations should start with the bibliographic information of the source (the title, author, publisher, date, etc.) in Chicago or MLA format. Below this:

- **Summarize:** What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say?
- **Assess:** After summarizing a source, evaluate it. Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Is it this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?
- **Reflect:** Once you've summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits into your research. Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape your argument? How can you use this source in your thesis? Has it changed how you think about your topic?

Taken from: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>

This site includes these words of wisdom:

### **Why should I write an annotated bibliography?**

**To learn about your topic:** Writing an annotated bibliography is excellent preparation for a research project. Just collecting sources for a bibliography is useful, but when you have to write annotations for each source, you're forced to read each source more carefully. You begin to read more critically instead of just collecting information. At the professional level, annotated bibliographies allow you to see what has been done in the literature and

where your own research or scholarship can fit. To help you formulate a thesis: Every good research paper is an argument. The purpose of research is to state and support a thesis. So a very important part of research is developing a thesis that is debatable, interesting, and current. Writing an annotated bibliography can help you gain a good perspective on what is being said about your topic. By reading and responding to a variety of sources on a topic, you'll start to see what the issues are, what people are arguing about, and you'll then be able to develop your own point of view.

### **Thesis Proposal (10%) & Draft Outline (5%)**

During the sixth week of the semester **(10/6)**, you will be required to present and discuss your thesis proposal and draft outline with other members of the class. You will post the proposal and outline on ANGEL.

Although there is no set “formula” for the **Religion Thesis Proposal**, it should be presented in two or three carefully crafted paragraphs. (approximately 2 pages altogether). Your completed thesis proposal should include the following elements:

**1. A clearly defined topic.** The proposal should clearly delineate the topic and scope of the work you are undertaking. It should briefly describe the specific problem(s) you are investigating, the question(s) you will be pursuing and what you expect to find or accomplish with your research. Your explanation of the topic should include definitions of any technical terms or theological language so that any educated reader can follow it. You should delineate the scope of your project carefully to demonstrate that you have a feasible plan for accomplishing it within the guidelines of this assignment.

**2. A summary of existing literature on the topic or the current state of the question.** The proposal should place your topic in perspective for those who are both familiar and unfamiliar with the issues you are investigating. It should mention or address relevant literature or current thinking about the topic or issues at hand. The proposal should indicate how your work not only builds upon previous scholarship but also represents new insights or approaches to the topic.

**3. Preparation and methodology.** The proposal should indicate ways in which your previous course work, reading and personal experience has provided adequate background for the research to be done. It should also address the methods or approaches that you will be using to investigate your topic.

Your outline is a detailed plan of your whole thesis: it is the ordered skeleton upon which you flesh out your argument. Present it in note form, listing sections and paragraphs/blocks in order.

**N.B. You must have shown and discussed your draft outline and proposal with your adviser before 10/6. Come to class prepared to share your adviser’s comments.**

### **Paper (30% (5% + 5% +20%))**

The last eight weeks of the class will be devoted to writing a 20-page paper (approx 6000 words). This will be a significant section from your outline (N.B. this can include some reworking of the material from your bibliographic essay). This paper will be the first draft of a significant chunk of your final thesis. Two weeks after starting **(10/20)**, you must post 6 pages of writing to ANGEL (5%); we will meet as a group to hear progress reports. Two weeks later **(11/3)** you will post another 6 pages. You must post your final paper on ANGEL **AND**

email your finished paper as an attachment to the group no later than **midnight 11/24**. – Use your ANGEL email account.

### **Written Responses (15%)**

This will give you a week to respond briefly in writing to each of the selections submitted by your fellow classmates. Written responses should be approximately two hundred (200) words in length and should include a concise summary of the writing sample as well as some substantive comments or suggestions for the author to consider. Submit two copies of your responses (one for the author and one for the instructor).

### **Plan for Completion (5%)**

No later than the last day of class (**12/1**), you must submit to the instructor one copy of a realistic written plan for completion of your thesis. This will include an outline of additional research required AND a timetable (with internal deadlines) for your research and writing. This plan **MUST** have been discussed and approved by your adviser prior to submission. You will need this plan to sign up for REL498 in the Spring.

### **Grading**

**You must successfully complete ALL of the above requirements of this course to receive a Grade in this class.**



### **Honor & Integrity**

The [Academic Integrity Code of Ashland University](#) applies to all aspects of every student's work in this course. In particular, students should familiarize themselves with the Honor Code's policies regarding plagiarism. The nature of an online course means that plagiarism is taken very seriously.

### **Documented Learning Disabilities**

Students with documented disabilities who require academic adjustment for this class are requested to contact me to discuss reasonable accommodations. While not required, it is in the best interest of the student to have this conversation early in the semester. In order to receive academic adjustments, paperwork from Disability Services must be provided to document this need. Disability Services is located in 105 Amstutz, X 5953.



Date	Class	Task
M 8/25	<i>Intro &amp; How to start locating Written Sources.</i>	
M 9/1	<i>Sneaky Research Skills</i>	Meet with Adviser during the week
M 9/8	<i>Using your Written Sources: Reading and Taking Notes Documenting Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism</i>	<b>Turn in first draft Bibliography</b>
M 9/15	X	
M 9/22	<i>Developing a Thesis (and a proposal)</i>	<b>Bibliographic Essay Due.</b>
M 9/29	X	
M 10/6	<i>Class Discussion of Proposals &amp; Outline</i>	<b>First draft proposal &amp; outline posted on ANGEL by midnight on Sunday 10/5.</b>
M 10/13	<i>Writing Style: Organizing and Developing Arguments</i>	
M 10/20	<i>Progress Reports and Collective Troubleshooting</i>	6 pages due on ANGEL by class period <b>(5% of class grade)</b>
M 10/27	X	
M 11/3	X – Dr. Slade at AAR	Another 6 pages due on ANGEL by class period <b>(5% of class grade)</b>
M 11/10	X	
M 11/17	X	
M 11/24 - Midnight	X– Dr. Slade at SBL	<b>Deadline for final paper on ANGEL. (20%)</b> 
M 12/1 	<i>Presentations &amp; discussion of Papers</i>	<b>Post written responses on ANGEL to each paper and your final outline and plan – bring copies of responses to class</b>