East Texas Baptist University
School of Christian Studies
Master of Arts in Religion

Manual for Research Theses and Ministry Project Reports

Contents

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Introduction

Research writing at the graduate level, including a research paper submitted for a particular course and a Master's thesis, should demonstrate the following elements:

1. identification of a valid research question,
2. statement of a hypothesis,
3. provision of evidence relevant to the hypothesis,
4. responses to counterarguments against the hypothesis,
5. interaction with current and historical scholarship on the subject, and
6. adherence to recognized standards with respect to form, writing style, and technical issues.

The purpose of this manual is to provide students in the East Texas Baptist University (ETBU) Master of Arts in Religion (MAR) degree program with a guide through the process of completing a graduate research thesis or a graduate ministry project report.[1] A more thorough treatment of the topics addressed here is available in *The Craft of Research*, by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams and in a condensed form in the seventh edition of Turabian,[2] which the student should consult in the process of preparing to conduct advanced research in the ETBU MAR program.

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1. The process for producing a research paper, submitted in partial completion of requirements for a particular graduate course, will be less involved than that required for the successful completion of a graduate thesis. Nevertheless, the general approach to the tasks is very similar. This manual is directed to the concerns of students pursuing the completion of a graduate research thesis or ministry project, but may be of value in the task of preparing a research paper.

2. Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3d ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Characteristics Distinguishing a Graduate Research Thesis from a Ministry Project

While much of the process for completing a ministry project is identical to the parallel effort required for the successful production of a graduate research thesis, the two tasks are distinct from one another. The more obvious characteristic distinguishing the two modes of research involves the immediate application inherent in a ministry project. The results of thesis research can be practical. Employment of a new methodology to demonstrate a particular nuance in a biblical text can lead to applying that text in ways that have profound practical implications for the lives of believers and for the life of the church. Nevertheless, the application of that research is not the primary focus of the research question being posed. Conversely, in a ministry project the immediate application is a necessary element of the research and is manifest explicitly in the statement of the research question.

Another crucial distinction between a research thesis and a ministry project is evident in the role of the researcher. In a ministry project the student is an active, internal participant in the phenomenon being studied whereas in a research thesis (ideally) the student is an objective observer and analyst who is external to the matter addressed in the research. Throughout this manual two examples will be employed to clarify the guidance being provided. In the research thesis example the role of the student is to examine a New Testament text, seeking to comprehend the manner in which that text would have been understood in the context of the original readers of the document. While the student may have a personal preference for a particular answer to the research question, the goal is to consider all options as objectively as possible and to allow the evidence to determine the outcome of the research. Conversely, in the ministry project example the student is understood to be an agent engaged in the process of altering the situation being studied. By involving congregations in a joint project the student seeks to determine whether or not those congregations can be drawn closer together in other ways.

As presented here, a difference between a research thesis and a ministry project could be identified as recognizing the latter as having an "experimental" character whereas the former is "historical" in nature. The flaw in that analysis lies in the fact that a research thesis could involve experimentation. Students engaged in research in the area of psychology of religion or sociology of religion may elect to study how congregations and/or individuals respond to different situations, but these students should not be involved in advocating for a particular response. In a ministry project the student is expected to encourage a change in the population being studied.

Another errant effort at distinguishing between these two categories would be to focus on the church context of the ministry project. In addition to the counterexamples offered in the prior paragraph, a student pursuing the completion of a research thesis in the area of pastoral ministry may choose to examine the possible correlation between preaching style and church growth. Although the student may have a personal preference for a specific preaching style, that student has a responsibility to observe the results as disinterestedly as possible. Clearly, the results of such research would be readily applicable in a ministry setting, but that application is not an

inherent component of the research question. In a conceptually-related ministry project, a pastor/student would be permitted to alter his or her preaching style in an effort to promote church growth; i.e., the researcher is an agent engaged in the immediate application of the hypothesis as a means of testing that hypothesis.

Despite these essential differences between thesis research and a ministry project, much of the process is similar and many of the standards are identical. Consequently, the two modes will be treated simultaneously in this manual, with distinguishing comments where appropriate. If a student requires clarification in determining which type of study is being proposed, the student should consult with a faculty advisor and/or the program director.

1. Identification of a Valid Research Question

The research process begins with a research question. These questions arise out of the student's growing acquaintance with the discipline in which the research is being conducted. Early explorations will follow paths blazed by other researchers. Most of the content of undergraduate courses (particularly introductory-level undergraduate courses) consists of well-studied topics on which a scholarly consensus has been reached. As the student proceeds to more advanced levels in the educational process, an increasing proportion of the course content is concerned with matters on which no consensus exists (i.e., reputable scholars have reached divergent conclusions) or on which no satisfactory conclusions have been presented. These frontiers in the discipline are fertile territory for research questions. Genuine research seeks

- to resolve a dispute between competing solutions to a problem,
- to approach an old problem in a novel manner (with a new methodology),
- to correct a perceived error in previously published research, or
- to offer an answer to a question for which no satisfactory solution has yet been discovered.

In each instance noted here a common quality is that the research must be unique in some way.

Recognition of the opportunity to pursue research in a particular direction will arise from detailed familiarity with the subject area (often acquired through the pursuit of undergraduate study in an academic field followed by preliminary graduate work in that same discipline), and a review of the relevant literature in which the student surveys carefully prior research on the topic of interest.

Literature Review

In consultation with a faculty member, the student will identify a sufficiently specific area of interest and will begin the process of refining the study of the topic to the point where an appropriate research question can be posed. An essential component of this process is the conduct of a literature review. The student is responsible for examining scholarly publications on the topic to discern what research has been conducted in the past, what results have been obtained, and what gaps exist in the study of this field. Classic studies of the subject should be consulted, but the focus should be on recent scholarship on the specific topic being addressed. Some of this recent scholarship will have been published in book form (or ebook form), but the student must examine the relevant scholarly journals and databases of recent theses and

dissertations. The faculty advisor will assist the student in locating the necessary relevant publications, but the responsibility for the thoroughness of the review rests with the student.

In addition to reviewing the state of research in the selected field of study, the student will need to consider the research methodology to be employed. If a specific rhetorical model is to be employed in examining a particular historical text, literature relevant to that model must be considered. If the research will address the rituals of a particular social group, employing a model derived from anthropological research, that anthropological model must be addressed in the literature review. Two concerns in the methodological component of the literature review are to determine if that model has already been employed in a study of this topic and to confirm that the model is commensurate with the research being pursued. An additional function of the review of the methodological literature is to ensure that the student is adequately familiar with the methodology to apply this approach to the subject being studied.

When the student has determined that viable opportunities for research remain in the selected research area and that the research methodology is appropriate for the task, the results of the review are summarized in written form. A narrative summary should address the results of prior research on the subject, including gaps or conflicts in that research. Evidence confirming that the methodology selected for the study is appropriate for the task should be included also. The narrative portion of the literature review need not mention every resource examined, but all relevant materials should be included in the bibliography. The length of this narrative will vary from study to study, depending on the quantity of research in the relevant discipline/sub-discipline. In any case, the narrative should be comprehensive, though not necessarily exhaustive in an absolute sense. Similarly, the bibliography will provide a thorough presentation of scholarly work on the subject, but need not include every book and every article published in the field.

The Research Question

Based on the results of the literature review, the student is prepared to propose a valid research question. Answering this question will seek to accomplish one of the goals identified above:
- to resolve a dispute between competing solutions to a problem,
- to approach an old problem in a novel manner (with a new methodology),
- to correct a perceived error in previously published research, or
- to offer an answer to a question for which no satisfactory solution has yet been discovered.

The preliminary answer to the question constitutes the hypothesis for the research being proposed. Consequently, meaningful research questions must not be answerable with a simple "Yes" or "No." Booth, Colomb, and Williams discussed the kind of question that will lead to

productive research: "Questions that begin with *who*, *what*, *when*, or *where* are important, but they ask only about matters of fact. Emphasize instead questions that begin with *how* and *why*."[3]

The relationship between the literature review and the research question is dynamic; each influences the other as this early stage of the project advances. A common problem faced by novice researchers (including most graduate students) is that the initial statement of the research question is too broad to be answered adequately by a study of the scope envisioned in Master's degree thesis research. In consultation with the faculty advisor, the student will need to consider how to focus the question to the point that a manageable research project can be defined (and, ultimately, completed).[4]

Consider the following example. Based on prior study, the student has developed an interest in the imagery employed in the Book of Revelation. The initial stage of the literature review might lead to a question of the form

What is the significance of the imagery employed in the Book of Revelation?

Consultation with the faculty advisor and initial results of a literature review would soon demonstrate that this question is too broad to be completed as a Master's thesis (or even a Ph.D. dissertation). A slightly narrower question would be

What are the sources of the imagery employed in the Book of Revelation?

Again, as would be clear in the ongoing literature review, this question is too broad for adequate treatment in a Master's thesis.

At this point the student will need to limit the scope of the study in some manner. Limiting the scope of a research project is a legitimate practice as long as the researcher is not motivated by a surreptitious desire to evade difficult questions with a direct bearing on the research.[5] A reasonable approach to reducing the magnitude of this hypothetical study would be to narrow the question as follows:

What are the sources of the imagery in the descriptions of the two beasts in Revelation 13?

This tighter focus on a limited set of the imagery in Revelation allows the literature review to proceed productively. The project remains valid because the narrative describing the two beasts is a coherent component of the document and is a literarily distinctive element of the whole.

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3. Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 42.

4. For additional discussion of the research question, consult Turabian, 7th ed., 5-18.

5. In the example under discussion, the researcher may legitimately exclude questions of the precise identification of the author of Revelation ("Was he John the Apostle or was he someone else?"). Conversely, the ethnic and cultural background of the author should not be delimited in this fashion, because that background is relevant to the sources upon which he may have drawn for his imagery and how he would have understood that imagery.

Considering the comment by Booth, Colomb, and Williams, cited above, additional revision of the question should be contemplated. Transforming the "what" question could yield the following (fourth) formulation:

Why did the author of Revelation depict the two beasts of Revelation 13 in this manner?

In this question the sources of the imagery remain relevant but now the inquiry is about more than "matters of fact." Concerns about motive, purpose, and meaning surface, suggesting that a more provocative study will result. A literature review driven by this question will need to address studies of the two beasts, analyses of the overarching message of Revelation, examination of imagery recognizable to first-century C.E. residents of the Roman province of Asia (the location of the seven cities named as destinations for Revelation), and, methodologically, investigations of the function of imagery in first-century Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. Other avenues to pursue may be uncovered as the review progresses. Eventually, the researcher will be prepared to propose a research hypothesis, as detailed in the next section of this manual.

Literature Reviews and Research Questions for Ministry Projects

In the interest of simplicity and clarity, literature reviews and research questions have been discussed in the context of a research thesis rather than a ministry project. Nevertheless, the substance of the guidance presented above applies to the pursuit of a ministry project. The project emerges from the student's concern about a particular problem (e.g., socio-economic segregation of congregations). With the guidance of the faculty advisor, a literature review commences and a preliminary research question is posed ("*What factors contribute to the socio-economic segregation of congregations?*"). Eventually the dynamic process described above leads to a more refined, unique research question ("*How can socio-economically segregated congregations in Harrison County, Texas be induced to relate more closely to one another?*"). Empowered with this refined form of the question the literature review can be completed.

Research with Human Subjects

A ministry project is conducted in the context of a *vital caution* that must be considered at each stage in the process. Because a ministry project involves research with human subjects, ethical and legal issues must be addressed. Informed consent must be obtained from the people involved in the project and this consent must be documented carefully. Detailing the safeguards governing research involving human subjects is beyond the scope of this manual. *Close cooperation between the student and the faculty advisor and consultation with university officials*

responsible for such matters is an ethical and legal obligation and necessity when the research involves participation of people as research subjects. (The official university policy statement on research with human subjects is available at http://www.etbu.edu/php/pnpmanual/2.5.03.pdf.) Ultimate responsibility for the conduct of such research resides with the researcher (i.e., the student), but the faculty advisor is a valuable resource to ensure that proper standards are maintained.

Concerns about research involving human subjects are not limited to ministry projects. A student pursuing a research project within the field of psychology of religion might elect to interview people about their religious experiences. In that case, as with a ministry project, the cautions regarding use of human beings as research subjects apply.

2. Statement of a Hypothesis

Once a well-refined, carefully-crafted, valid research question has been posed, the statement of a hypothesis involves proposing an unambiguous answer to that question. Completion of the literature survey, in conjunction with prior study on the subject, should have prepared the student to advance a thesis that reflects the highest standards of scholarship in the relevant discipline.

A well constructed hypothesis must be a falsifiable assertion of fact. For a statement to be falsifiable it must be vulnerable to a reasoned argument that demonstrates that the statement is false. Statements of personal opinion are not falsifiable. As a trivial case, the declaration "I like the taste of vanilla ice cream" is not a falsifiable statement because no one other than the person advancing the "hypothesis" has access to the relevant evidence. Similarly, statements of opinion are not falsifiable; "In my opinion, Napoleon Bonaparte was a good leader of the French people" is not a satisfactory hypothesis because the author of that pronouncement may hold that opinion despite any evidence offered to the contrary.

A corollary to the requirement that the hypothesis be falsifiable is the recognition that genuine research may conclude that the hypothesis was incorrect. The true goal of research is not to confirm the hypothesis, but to test the hypothesis. Usually when the researcher has sufficient knowledge of the discipline and significant familiarity with the issues involved in the research question, the hypothesis will be supported by the subsequent research. Nevertheless, a researcher should always be open to the possibility that the evidence will refute the hypothesis. Such a negative result does not negate the value of the work conducted; a negative result can serve the valuable function of alerting other scholars that a seemingly promising approach was, in fact, misguided.[6]

Recalling the examples provided above, in response to the question

Why did the author of Revelation depict the two beasts of Revelation 13 in this manner?

the researcher might advance the following hypothesis:

The author of Revelation depicted the two beasts of Revelation 13 in a manner intended to encourage his readers to reject Roman claims of ultimate dominion and to resist local pressures to conform to the hegemony of Rome.

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6. The transition from research question to hypothesis is discussed in Turabian, 7th ed., 18-20.

This statement is an unambiguous falsifiable assertion of fact. Relevant, publicly available evidence can be provided and that evidence can be evaluated by the audience to whom the researcher's results are presented. Gathering, organizing, and presenting that evidence will be a challenging task, and various researchers may evaluate the evidence differently (and may reach conflicting conclusions), but this statement satisfies the essential requirements for a hypothesis.

Turning to the second example offered above, the question

> *How can socio-economically segregated congregations in Harrison County, Texas be induced to relate more closely to one another?*

could yield the hypothesis

> *Socio-economically segregated congregations in Harrison County, Texas can be induced to relate more closely to one another through joint involvement in disaster relief projects.*

As with the Revelation example, an unambiguous falsifiable assertion of fact has been presented for testing. The first step in testing that hypothesis is the gathering of relevant evidence, and that task is the subject of the next section of this manual.

3. Provision of Evidence Relevant to the Hypothesis

Identifying Primary Source Data and Secondary Source Data

Having posed a valid research question and proposed a hypothesis as the response to that question, the next task is the collection of all relevant data. Identification of "all relevant data" is determined largely by the claims embedded in the hypothesis. The falsifiable assertions of fact in that declaration must be supported by data.

Returning to the Revelation example, the hypothesis is

> *The author of Revelation depicted the two beasts of Revelation 13 in a manner intended to encourage his readers to reject Roman claims of ultimate dominion and to resist local pressures to conform to the hegemony of Rome.*

The initial data will come from the text under consideration, Revelation 13. The specific imagery employed constitutes a productive starting point in the quest for data. This hypothesis makes claims about the presentation of that imagery; consequently, other data from the same historical and cultural context must be collected. These additional data would include examples of imagery employed by the Romans and by their local supporters to advance and promote Roman hegemony. Because the hypothesis identifies a political motive in Revelation 13, examples of political rhetoric from the Greco-Roman world constitute another group of relevant data. The author of Revelation presented his argument in an apocalyptic form; therefore, evidence for the political use of apocalyptic rhetoric must be considered.

In assembling the data, *primary sources should always be preferred over secondary sources*. Primary sources are data directly from the geographic, historical, and cultural context being examined. In strictest terms, a primary source should be studied in the original language in which that source was composed. Secondary sources are the conclusions drawn by other researchers based on their examination of the same (or closely related) primary sources. Secondary sources are useful in research in various ways:

- a means to evaluate the researcher's own assessments of the data,
- an index to identify primary sources of which the researcher was previously unaware, and
- a source of expert opinion in disciplines with which the researcher is less familiar (e.g., analysis of Roman civic architecture when the researcher's primary expertise is in literary analysis of ancient Greek texts).

All researchers will consult secondary sources, but the weight of the argument being presented must be supported by the primary sources.[7]

Obvious primary sources for the Revelation study would include first-century and second-century C.E. texts (mostly in Latin and Greek) advocating support for or resistance to Roman rule in the provinces. Other primary sources would include imperial and provincial edicts, public inscriptions, sculptures and other public political monuments, and city plans suggesting the role of imperial institutions in civic life. Secondary sources would include the voluminous (and sometimes contradictory) assessments of these data. (Upon completion of the M.A. thesis, the student will have created a new secondary source.)

Turning to the ministry project example suggested earlier, the hypothesis is

> *Socio-economically segregated congregations in Harrison County, Texas can be induced to relate more closely to one another through joint involvement in disaster relief projects.*

Secondary sources for this project would include studies of socio-economic segregation of congregations and studies of socio-economic segregation in Harrison County, Texas. Because of the inherent nature of a ministry project, the bulk of the primary source data for this research will be the direct results of the actions taken in the conduct of the project. Assessments of the degree of segregation among the specific congregations being studied would be essential preliminary primary source data. Details of the tasks undertaken to promote joint involvement in disaster relief projects would also be vital primary data. Documentation of the degree of cooperation in disaster relief projects and of any subsequent changes in the degree of interaction between the congregations in other activities would constitute primary data essential to assessing the validity of the hypothesis.

Implicit in the above statements is the ability to measure segregation/interaction. Secondary sources should be consulted in the process of devising a valid procedure to quantify this parameter; the actual measurements will be primary data.

"Critical Texts" of Ancient Documents

When dealing with ancient documents (e.g., the writings of Aristotle, Tacitus, Pausanias, Pliny, Plato, Xenophon, Thucydides, Herodotus, Cicero), the researcher must be aware that the available manuscripts of a particular text are not usually identical to one another, i.e., variants exist among the extant manuscripts. The problem confronting the researcher is to determine which variant text to employ. In this situation the standard approach by scholarly researchers is to use a "critical text." A critical text is the result of a scholarly examination of all available

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7. Issues related to the use of primary sources, secondary sources, and tertiary sources are discussed in Turabian, 7th ed., 25-27.

manuscripts, with the goal of reconstructing (as accurately as possible given the limited material available for the task) the original text of the document.

For most ancient Greek and Latin documents, the standard critical text is the text presented in the Loeb Classical Library (LCL) series (now published by Harvard University Press). The LCL volumes are published with the original language critical text on one page and an English translation of that portion of the text on the facing page. When depending on English translations of these documents, the LCL English translation is a standard translation for the purposes of scholarly work. Researchers may disagree with the choices made in identifying the critical text or with the manner in which the text has been translated into English, but explanations of those disagreements must be based on sound text-critical principles and translation practices.

A similar situation to that described above applies to the biblical text. For the Old Testament the standard critical text is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*; the current standard New Testament critical text is the United Bible Societies *Greek New Testament*, 4th edition or the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th edition.[8] Students who are not equipped to translate the biblical text for themselves should consult their faculty advisor concerning which English translations are appropriate for the research in which they are engaged.

Finally, if the non-biblical ancient text needed for a particular research endeavor is not available in the LCL series, a critical text may be available from another publisher. Students should consult their faculty advisors to determine which texts and/or translations are acceptable for the research being conducted.

Preparation of the Prospectus

Many academic programs, including the ETBU MAR program, require the student to submit a research prospectus prior to proceeding to the latter stages of the research. (Details of the required content of a prospectus for the ETBU MAR program are provided in Appendix 1.) The purpose of the prospectus is to confirm that the proposed research is well-founded (including the criterion that the research will employ a credible methodology) and to demonstrate that the student is equipped sufficiently to complete the research successfully.

Aside from the bibliography, a preliminary identification of data sources is the final element of the prospectus required by the ETBU School of Christian Studies. In this section of the prospectus the student does not need to reproduce all of the evidence that will be employed in the research. Rather, the student must identify the means by which those data will be obtained. For published documents, the student may merely demonstrate the accessibility of the documents. If archaeological data will be necessary, the student should explain how those data

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8. Despite their different titles and histories, these two Greek publications now contain the same critical text.

will be acquired. If interviews will be employed, the researcher must provide evidence that he or she will be able to conduct those interviews with the relevant subjects.

The prospectus will be evaluated based on the criteria described in Appendix 4. *Approval of the prospectus is a required element in the process of completing a research thesis or ministry project.*

Presentation of the Data and the Primary Argument

Much of the task of documenting research involves presenting the relevant data to the readers, enabling those readers to comprehend the argument being communicated and empowering them to evaluate those data independently. Approaches to the presentation of the data vary depending on a wide array of factors: the personal writing style of the researcher, the standards of the specific academic discipline, the character of the methodology employed in the research, and the requirements of the publisher or academic institution to which the research will be submitted.[9] Familiarity with publications within the academic discipline, documenting closely-related research, in concert with the assistance of the faculty advisor, will provide vital guidance in this task. In any case, the researcher should compose the report in a logical manner that facilitates comprehension by the readers.

The primary argument in support of the hypothesis should be integrated into the initial presentation of the data. Such integration promotes the logical clarity necessary in a research thesis or ministry project report. When presented successfully, the reader will comprehend readily why a particular set of data is being introduced at each stage in the presentation.[10]

A clear, concise evaluation of the research hypothesis should be included in the presentation of the primary argument. As the student continues to revise the argument, addressing counterarguments and reflecting on the breadth of scholarship on the subject, the evaluation of the hypothesis may need to be revised. Nevertheless, the thesis/project report should incorporate an unambiguous evaluation of the main hypothesis of the research.

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9. Guidelines for MAR graduate research theses and ministry projects are available in the *Master of Arts in Religion Writing Guide*, available from the ETBU School of Christian Studies and in Appendix 2 to this manual.
10. Planning the argument is addressed in chapter five of Turabian, 7th ed., 48-61.

4. Responses to Counterarguments against the Hypothesis

Paradoxically, identifying and discussing the weaknesses in an argument supporting a hypothesis can strengthen the overall presentation of that argument. This phenomenon is true for a variety of reasons. First, by acknowledging and addressing objections and counterarguments to the primary argument being advanced, the researcher has an opportunity to modify that argument, thereby clarifying or reinforcing the primary argument in anticipation of any objections that critics might raise. Such anticipatory responses can create an opportunity to convince the prospective critic before that person has become an adversary.

Second, when weaknesses cannot be reinforced (because the necessary data do not exist) or when no amount of clarification can resolve a conflict, by addressing the counterarguments in the context of the research thesis or project report, the researcher has an opportunity to frame the discussion in terms of his or her own choosing. In this way, the momentum of the dispute is shifted and the researcher and the presentation are perceived more positively.

Third, failure to address the counterarguments in the initial presentation could create the impression that the student has failed in his or her obligation to examine thoroughly the relevant issues. The competence of a researcher is always a matter of concern, and apparent ignorance of weaknesses and counterarguments creates an impression of incompetence.

Fourth, academic researchers have a responsibility to the academy. That responsibility includes the obligation to advance understanding, which is accomplished in part through the documentation of the research, and the duty to provide guidance for successors. This latter element of the researcher's responsibility can be addressed through identifying new questions for which answers should be sought. When the limitations of a research project are acknowledged, the researcher has begun to fulfill this duty.

Finally, an honest admission of weaknesses creates an impression (hopefully a valid impression) of an appropriate degree of humility on the part of the researcher. As implied in the previous paragraph, the academic researcher is a member of an academic community ("the academy"). Perceived arrogance on the part of the researcher can increase resistance from others in the community, whereas humility can promote helpful (and ultimately useful) criticism.

A final caution is in order. When addressing real or potential counterarguments, the researcher should apply a sort of "golden rule" to the presentation, analysis, and response to those counterarguments. When an interlocutor's counterargument (real or hypothetical) can be interpreted in more than one way, the respondent should always address the strongest possible form of that counterargument. Following this practice will ensure that the response will be as thorough as possible; failure in this regard risks succumbing to the "straw man" fallacy.

5. Interaction with Current and Historical Scholarship on the Subject

Both in the presentation of the primary argument and in the responses to counterarguments, researchers are expected to interact with current and historical scholarship on the subject. As described above, involvement in academic research involves participation in a community. That community extends across national and linguistic frontiers and through time, and the voices of the members of the academy are reflected and preserved in the scholarly production of the community. In the literature review the student should have become familiar with much of this material. The initial refinement of the research question, the formulation of the hypothesis, and the presentation of the primary argument must reflect familiarity with this international, diachronic conversation.

Research is a dynamic process; the conversation arrives at final, definitive answers slowly and often progress is non-linear. This dynamism should characterize the process that leads to the completion of the research thesis or ministry project report. As the work progresses the researcher should expect to encounter previously unfamiliar materials. Some of these resources will compel the student to rethink conclusions and to reconsider arguments in light of the newly acquired information.

Because the questions being asked in contemporary research are related to enquiries that have intrigued people for decades, centuries, and millennia, intricate knowledge of all potentially relevant material is an unattainable goal. Nevertheless, thoroughness remains the goal. Ultimately the researcher will need to conclude the task, but the conclusions will almost always be tentative (a further inducement for the humility discussed above).

Some academic disciplines place legitimate historical constraints on the prior research that must be addressed in current work. Astronomers need not deal with arguments based on a geocentric universe and geographers are not compelled to refute claims that Europe, Asia, and Africa comprise the entirety of the habitable Earth. Generally, students in the theological disciplines find themselves in a different situation. The writings of the ante-Nicene fathers of the church deserve consideration in discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity and Reformation-era theologians should be allowed to speak when the issue of justification arises.

Not all historical scholarship is granted this privilege. With the "discovery" of Koine Greek as the language of the New Testament, theories based on the existence of "Holy Spirit Greek" were discredited thoroughly. Familiarity with current scholarship on a subject and the advice of a faculty advisor should guide the student in determining which sources must be incorporated into the task at hand.

6. Adherence to Recognized Standards with Respect to Form, Writing Style, Technical Issues, and Schedules

Upon completion of any research report, the organization to which the report is submitted will control the submission schedule and will dictate standards for form, writing style, and other technical issues (e.g., length, transliteration of words in other alphabets, translation of foreign terms). The ETBU School of Christian Studies has established standards for research theses and ministry project reports submitted in partial completion of requirements for the MAR degree program. Included in these standards is an oral presentation of the results of the research. This requirement reflects the conviction on the part of the faculty of the ETBU School of Christian Studies that a competent researcher should be able to present the results of his or her research in both written and oral forms.

MAR Research Theses and Ministry Project Reports submitted to the ETBU School of Christian Studies must meet the following standards.

1. Writing style will be in accordance with the standards specified in the *East Texas Baptist University School of Christian Studies Master of Arts in Religion Writing Style Guide*. This Guide is available electronically to ETBU MAR students; the faculty advisor and/or the program director can provide this document to the student.
2. Words in the Hebrew/Aramaic alphabet or in the Greek alphabet do not need to be transliterated. Words in other non-Latin alphabets should be transliterated.
3. With the exception of foreign words that have become technical terms in the relevant academic discipline, foreign words should be translated. Translations of single words or short phrases may be placed in parentheses and quotation marks following the foreign word/phrase in the text. Longer translations of foreign phrases, sentences, or paragraphs should be presented in footnotes and within quotation marks.
4. Unless a different form is specified in the *ETBU MAR Writing Style Guide*, the latest edition of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* is the definitive guidance for matters of form and style.[11]
5. Theses and ministry project reports must be no less than 10,000 words in length (approximately 40 pages for a double-spaced 12-point font) and no more than 25,000 words in length (approximately 100 pages). *Note*: these word counts include only the

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11. As of the preparation of this manual, the current edition of Turabian is the 7th edition, published in 2007 by the University of Chicago Press.

body of the text; footnotes, table of contents, bibliography, dedication, etc. are not to be included in the word count for the purposes of this requirement.

6. The thesis/report should incorporate an *abbreviated* literature review. The student should not reproduce the literature review submitted as a component of the prospectus. Rather, the information in that review most relevant for understanding the final presentation should be emphasized, summarizing the remainder of the review if necessary.

7. One hardcopy of the thesis/report must be submitted to the faculty advisor not later than one month prior to the last regular class day of the semester in which the student intends to complete all degree requirements.

8. Simultaneously with the submission of the hardcopy to the faculty advisor, the student must submit an electronic copy (Microsoft Word format or pdf format) to the faculty advisor. This electronic copy will be uploaded to TurnItIn.com in order to confirm the originality of the text of the thesis/report.

9. The student must complete satisfactorily an oral presentation of the results of the thesis/project not later than two weeks prior to the last regular class day of the semester in which the student intends to complete all degree requirements. *Note*: if the student has presented the results of the research at a conference of a relevant professional society, and the faculty advisor determines that the presentation was satisfactory, the conference presentation can satisfy this requirement.

10. At least three final copies of the thesis/report, incorporating all revisions and corrections required by the faculty advisor, must be submitted to the MAR Program Director not later than the last regular class day of the semester in which the student is enrolled in *RLGN 6201 Thesis/Ministry Project 2*. Each of these final copies must be printed on 100% cotton paper.

11. Each final copy must be accompanied by a signed original of the Research Thesis/Ministry Project Report Approval Form (a blank version of this form is presented in Appendix 2 of this manual).

Compliance with the standards outlined above is included in the criteria that will be employed when evaluating research theses and ministry project reports. The other criteria for the written component of the thesis/project research relate to the issues discussed throughout this manual. Appendix 5 contains the rubric defining all of the criteria by which thesis research and ministry projects will be evaluated in the ETBU MAR degree program.

Conclusion

The process described in this manual is depicted in the following diagram.
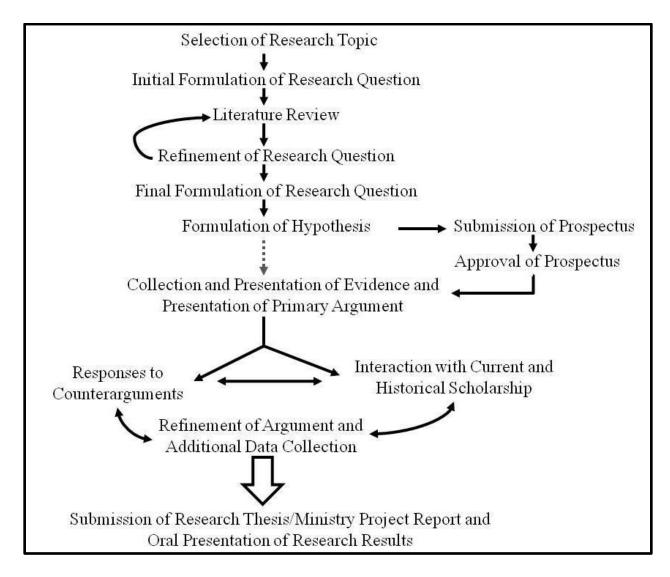

Figure 1. The Research Process for Graduate Research Theses and Ministry Projects

Each of the elements in the process discussed above is represented in this figure. Two important characteristics of the process that is depicted here are the dynamic and non-linear qualities of research. The process is dynamic in that conclusions are tentative; they are subject to revision as

the research proceeds toward publication of those conclusions. Non-linearity is present because these revisions will require the researcher to return to the library or the laboratory to collect additional data and will demand that a previously sound interpretation be modified to account for the new information.

Done properly, research is a rewarding endeavor and a creative task. Genuine research adds to the collective stock of human wisdom. To do research is to think thoughts that no one has contemplated before and to discover intellectual territory that has never before been traversed. Because of the "undomesticated" nature of research, any attempts to define the process too precisely will falter. The goal of this manual has been to place the novice researcher at the trailhead, and to encourage commitment to the adventure that lies beyond that "tame" starting point. Where that journey will end, only the scholar and the data can determine.

To the two disciples who were intrigued with the message of the new rabbi, Jesus responded ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε ("Come and see"; John 1:39). A similar invitation is presented to each student commencing a research endeavor; those who go will see.

Appendix 1
ETBU School of Christian Studies Requirements
for a Prospectus for a Research Thesis or Ministry Project

The prospectus submitted as an intermediate step in the completion of a research thesis or ministry project must include the following elements.

Research Question

Include a statement of the final form of the research question. The process by which an initial topic was refined to yield this final form need not be described.

Hypothesis

Include a statement of the hypothesis to be tested in the research thesis or ministry project.

Literature Review

Present a narrative description of the state of knowledge in the specific research area(s) relevant to the research question. How many research areas need to be addressed in this narrative will depend on the details of the research question and the hypothesis. Issues related to the methodology to be employed in the research should be addressed in the literature review. The literature review should be thorough and comprehensive, covering all relevant matters, but need not be exhaustive (i.e., the review does not need to incorporate references to every entry in the bibliography). The faculty advisor can provide guidance on how to satisfy the requirement for thoroughness.

Identification of Data Sources

Identify categories of data that will need to be collected in order to complete successfully the research being proposed in the prospectus and indicate how those data will be obtained. The actual data need not be included in the prospectus; the focus of this section of the prospectus is on demonstrating that the student has access to all required data.

Selected Bibliography

In appropriate bibliographic form, identify all materials employed in developing the research question, in proposing the research hypothesis, in preparing the literature review, and in identifying data sources. Ideally a bibliography would include all published materials on a particular topic. Given the rapid multiplication of materials, this goal is unattainable in practical

terms. Nevertheless, the objective of the student in compiling the selected bibliography is to be as thorough as possible. The faculty advisor can provide guidance on how to satisfy the requirement for thoroughness.

In addition to the content requirements specified above, a prospectus for a MAR Research Thesis or Ministry Project Report submitted to the ETBU School of Christian Studies must meet the following standards.

1. Writing style will be in accordance with the standards specified in the *East Texas Baptist University School of Christian Studies Master of Arts in Religion Writing Style Guide*. This Guide is available electronically to ETBU MAR students; the faculty advisor and/or the program director can provide this document to the student.
2. Words in the Hebrew/Aramaic alphabet or in the Greek alphabet do not need to be transliterated. Words in other non-Latin alphabets should be transliterated.
3. With the exception of foreign words that have become technical terms in the relevant academic discipline, foreign words should be translated. Translations of single words or short phrases may be placed in parentheses and quotation marks following the foreign word/phrase in the text. Longer translations of foreign phrases, sentences, or paragraphs should be presented in footnotes and within quotation marks.
4. Unless a different form is specified in the *ETBU MAR Writing Style Guide*, the latest edition of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* is the definitive guidance for matters of form and style.
5. One hardcopy *and* one electronic copy (Microsoft Word format or pdf format) of the prospectus must be submitted to the faculty advisor not later than three weeks prior to the last regular class day of the semester in which the student is enrolled in RLGN 6101 (*Thesis/Ministry Project 1*). The electronic copy will be uploaded to TurnItIn.com in order to confirm the originality of the text of the prospectus.

Appendix 2
ETBU School of Christian Studies
Master of Arts in Religion
Research Thesis/Ministry Project Report Approval Form

[*For candidates participating in an oral presentation of results to ETBU MAR faculty*]

Candidate:

Title of the Research Thesis/Ministry Project Report:

I affirm that the research thesis/ministry project report identified above meets the standards specified by the ETBU School of Christian Studies and that, pending completion of all other degree requirements, the student is eligible to be awarded the Master of Arts in Religion degree.

Signature of Faculty Advisor:

Date:

We affirm that the oral presentation of the results of the thesis/project identified above meets the standards specified by the ETBU School of Christian Studies and that, pending completion of all other degree requirements, the student is eligible to be awarded the Master of Arts in Religion degree.

Signature of Faculty Advisor:

Signatures of other faculty members present for the oral presentation of the thesis/project results:

Date of oral presentation:

[*For candidates who have presented research results at a professional conference*]

Candidate:

Title of the Research Thesis/Ministry Project Report:

I affirm that the research thesis/ministry project report identified above meets the standards specified by the ETBU School of Christian Studies and that, pending completion of all other degree requirements, the student is eligible to be awarded the Master of Arts in Religion degree.

Signature of Faculty Advisor:

Date:

I affirm that the candidate presented the results of the thesis/project orally at a professional conference, that the presentation met the standards specified by the ETBU School of Christian Studies, and that, pending completion of all other degree requirements, the student is eligible to be awarded the Master of Arts in Religion degree.

Signature of Faculty Advisor:

Conference Title:

Conference Location:

Conference Date:

Appendix 3
ETBU School of Christian Studies
Master of Arts in Religion
Schedules for Research Thesis/Ministry Project Prospectuses and Final Reports

Deadline for Submission of Prospectus

 One hardcopy *and* one electronic copy (Microsoft Word format or pdf format) of the prospectus must be submitted to the faculty advisor not later than three weeks prior to the last regular class day of the semester in which the student is enrolled in RLGN 6101 (*Thesis/Ministry Project 1*).

Deadline for Submission of Thesis/Ministry Project Report

 One hardcopy of the thesis/report must be submitted to the faculty advisor not later than one month prior to the last regular class day of the semester in which the student intends to complete all degree requirements.

 Simultaneously with the submission of the hardcopy to the faculty advisor, the student must submit an electronic copy (Microsoft Word format or pdf format) to the faculty advisor. This electronic copy will be uploaded to TurnItIn.com in order to confirm the originality of the text of the thesis/report.

Deadline for Completion of Oral Presentation of Research Results

 The student must complete satisfactorily an oral presentation of the results of the thesis/project not later than two weeks prior to the last regular class day of the semester in which the student intends to complete all degree requirements. *Note*: if the student has presented the results of the research at a conference of a relevant professional society, and the faculty advisor determines that the presentation was satisfactory, the conference presentation can satisfy this requirement.

Deadline for the Submission of the Final (Corrected) Copies of the Thesis/Ministry Project Report

 At least three final copies of the thesis/report, incorporating all revisions and corrections required by the faculty advisor, must be submitted to the MAR Program Director not later than the last regular class day of the semester in which the student intends to complete all degree requirements. Each of these final copies must be printed on 100% cotton paper.
Each final copy must be accompanied by a signed original of the Research Thesis/Ministry Project Report Approval Form (a blank version of this form is presented in Appendix 2 of this manual).

Appendix 4
ETBU School of Christian Studies
Master of Arts in Religion
Rubric for the Evaluation of an ETBU MAR Thesis/Ministry Project Prospectus

Criterion	Acceptable	Acceptable Pending Revision	Unacceptable
Research Question	The research question addresses a matter of purpose and/or meaning.	The research question addresses a matter of fact. [*Note*: matters of fact are acceptable when approved by faculty advisor.]	The statement of the research question is absent or unclear.
Hypothesis	The hypothesis is an unambiguous, falsifiable assertion of fact, and is a comprehensive response to the research question.	The hypothesis is an unambiguous, falsifiable assertion of fact, though not a comprehensive response to the research question.	The hypothesis is absent or is not an unambiguous, falsifiable assertion of fact.
Literature Review	The literature review includes all essential materials. Discussion of the literature is thorough.	The literature review includes all essential materials. Discussion of some of the literature is limited.	The literature review omits essential materials.
Identification of Data Sources	All essential data are addressed and the availability of all data is confirmed.	All essential data are addressed, though the availability of some data is unconfirmed.	Essential data are not addressed and/or essential data are not available.
Selected Bibliography	All essential and "background" entries, including primary sources and secondary sources, are present.	All essential entries, including primary sources and secondary sources, are present; some "background" entries are absent.	Essential entries are absent.
Adherence to Technical Issues of Form and Writing Style	The document is in compliance with ETBU MAR standards.	The document is in substantial compliance with ETBU MAR standards, though some problems are present.	The document is not in compliance with ETBU MAR standards.

▪ A prospectus must be "Acceptable" according to all criteria identified above before the student will be authorized to enroll in *RLGN 6201 Thesis/Ministry Project 2*.

▪ A student submitting a prospectus determined to be "Unacceptable" on no more than two of the above criteria or "Acceptable Pending Revision" on no more than four of the above criteria will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit the prospectus not later than the first day of classes for the following semester. (*Note*: one "Unacceptable" rating is equivalent to two "Acceptable Pending Revision" ratings.)

▪ A student who does not complete an "Acceptable" prospectus will be required to complete an elective course in order to complete MAR graduation requirements.

ETBU School of Christian Studies
Master of Arts in Religion
Rubric for the Evaluation of ETBU MAR Theses and Ministry Project Reports

Criterion	Acceptable	Acceptable Pending Revision	Unacceptable
Literature Review	The literature review is an adequate introduction to the issues relevant to the research question.	The literature review omits material essential to comprehension of the research question.	The literature review is absent.
Research Question and Statement of Hypothesis	Research question and hypothesis are unambiguous and the hypothesis is a falsifiable assertion of fact.	Research question and/or hypothesis are stated ambiguously.	The research question and/or hypothesis is/are absent or the hypothesis is not an unambiguous, falsifiable assertion of fact.
Evidence Presented	All essential evidence, including primary and secondary sources, is employed and is treated adequately.	Some essential evidence, particularly primary source evidence, is absent or is treated inadequately.	Evidence from primary sources is omitted and/or treatment of evidence is inadequate.
Presentation of Primary Argument	Presentation is clear and is organized logically. Conclusion regarding hypothesis is stated clearly and is founded securely on the evidence provided.	Some elements of the presentation are unclear and/or disorganized. Limited elements of the conclusion are not founded securely on the evidence provided.	Presentation contains logical flaws and/or is unclear. Conclusion regarding the hypothesis is absent or is not based on the evidence provided.
Responses to Counterarguments	Counterarguments are addressed thoroughly and fairly.	Responses to counterargument(s) omit and/or misrepresent significant elements of the counterargument(s)	Counterarguments are not addressed.
Interaction with Current and Historical Scholarship	Interaction with current and historical scholarship is adequate.	Interaction with current and/or historical scholarship is absent or inadequate.	Interaction with both current and historical scholarship is absent or inadequate.
Adherence to Technical Issues of Form and Writing Style	The document is in compliance with ETBU MAR standards.	The document is in substantial compliance with ETBU MAR standards, though some problems are present.	The document is not in compliance with ETBU MAR standards.
Oral Presentation	Oral presentation of results deemed adequate by faculty advisor and other relevant faculty.	Oral presentation of results deemed inadequate but remediable by faculty advisor and other relevant faculty.	Oral presentation of results deemed seriously deficient by faculty advisor and other relevant faculty.

- A thesis or ministry project report must be "Acceptable" according to all criteria identified above in order for the student to receive credit in *RLGN 6201 Thesis/Ministry Project 2*.
- A student submitting a thesis or ministry project report determined to be "Unacceptable" on no more than one of the above criteria or "Acceptable Pending Revision" on no more than two of the above criteria will have the option to accept a grade of "Incomplete" in *RLGN 6201 Thesis/Ministry Project 2*. If the student elects to accept this option, the student will have the opportunity to remedy the problem(s) and to resubmit the thesis or ministry project report and/or to conduct a new oral presentation not later than the conclusion of the mid-semester period for the following semester. If an "Acceptable" thesis or ministry project report is not submitted by that deadline and/or an adequate oral presentation is not given, the student will not receive credit for *RLGN 6201 Thesis/Ministry Project 2*. (*Note*: one "Unacceptable" rating is equivalent to two "Acceptable Pending Revision" ratings.)
- A student who does not receive credit for *RLGN 6201 Thesis/Ministry Project 2* will be required to complete an elective course in order to complete MAR graduation requirements.