Course purpose: To provide guidance and support for M. A. Lit students who are planning to write a thesis or creative project. We will focus on selecting a topic or project, preparing a prospectus, developing a reading list, forming a Committee, and designing a strategy for researching and writing the thesis/project.

A secondary objective of the course is to foster professionalization of graduate students, looking toward conference presentation, publication, Ph.D. level study, and career paths.

The course will be run as a seminar, in which the content each week will be shared by participants who will then receive peer feedback as well as feedback from the instructor.

Learner outcomes:

- Develop a thesis/project topic and define the scope of study.
- Formulate a research plan, including reading list and timeline.
- Identify and utilize appropriate tools and methods for your work.
- Identify and utilize conventions of scholarly research/creative writing and ms. preparation.

Course requirements:

This is a graded class, and there are expectations for participation and performance. Expectations:

- Regular attendance; come prepared, with assignment completed, for each session
- Participate in discussions and feedback sessions energetically. Feedback is helpful, critical commentary, not merely words of encouragement.
- Be open to constructive criticism from peers and instructor.
- Completion of a 10-12 page prospectus which identifies your project in a developed way, where you define your thesis/project’s ideas, methodology, and anticipated structure.
- Completion of a minimum 30-item annotated bibliography according to MLA format (for thesis) or 20-item bibliography (for creative project).

Your final grade will be based on performance in all of these areas. It is expected that you keep up each week, and don’t fall behind. If you do, the sequential nature of the pedagogy will be undermined.

Schedule:

Tu, 4/7: Introduction

Tu, 4/14: Read the chapter called “Dissertation” from Gregory Semena’s book Graduate Study for the 21st Century. This book is available online as an ebook through the Brooks Library. Find it on OneSearch via the author’s last name. Remember, you are writing a thesis, not a dissertation, so you must make
adjustments as you read. [A thesis is usually 50-100 pages long; aim for 50-75 pages, not including the bibliography.] Read also the “Sample [Thesis] Dissertation Prospectus in the Appendix, pp. 280-283. We will discuss the Semenza chapter. Bring questions and concerns to class.

Homework: Over the next week, write one full double-spaced page on an idea for a thesis/project. This initial document will evolve across the quarter to culminate in the 12-page prospectus you’ll submit at the end. For thesis, the proposal should identify your topic, the works and writers you’ll likely explore. For projects, you will identify the genre and style you will aim for, and a general overview of what you hope to produce. For theses, you will identify a preliminary argument; for projects a preliminary theme and focus. Organize into two sections: Topic, and Argument or Theme. This is just a first start, not a contract.

Submit your initial proposal to the Discussion section of Canvas at least one day prior to class meeting on Tuesday. In addition, make hard copies (enough for everyone in class and instructor) and bring to class 4/21.

Tu, 4/21: Read in advance everyone’s posted proposals for discussion, and bring hard copies of yours to distribute during class.

In our discussion, we will assess the preliminary proposals for clarity, focus, ideas, viability, scope, and scholarly and/or creative merit.

Homework: Rewrite your preliminary proposal, taking into consideration feedback from peers and instructor. Post your revised proposal in the Discussion section of Canvas, and bring enough copies of it and the original version to class for discussion.

Tu, 4/28: Class workshop on revised proposals.

Homework: Think now about how to expand your proposal. Revise it into a 5-6 page document. Include a section on “Key Terms” that may need definition for theses. Your 5-6 pages should now have subheadings: Topic; Argument or Theme; Key subpoints or content elements; Key terms.

Exchange these 5-6 page docs with one other class member; meet outside of class to share feedback and advice. Prepare copies for all participants for next class and bring them.

Tu 5/5: Class workshop on expanded proposals.

Bring copies of your expanded proposals to class. Discuss concept of “Situating the Project” which will be the next section added to your proposal.

Homework: Continue to refine, expand, and sharpen your proposal. Get into library and online research and start compiling your source list. Create a folio file for your research, and in include source lists, notes, jottings, downloaded or printed off articles, photocopies from library books, interlibrary loan materials, and other sources. For creative projects, primary source models can also be included.

Tue 5/12: No class.

Homework: Continue research, compiling materials, and refining proposal.
Tue 5/19: Class discussion of “Methodology,” the next section that will be added to your proposal. Discussion of each student’s prospective Committee: who will serve, who will Chair, how you will approach these faculty members, etc. Download and prepare “Option Approval Form.”

Homework: During this week, you will need to approach your chosen Committee Chair and members. Explain your proposal, bring each one a copy of the proposal as it stands, making clear it’s still in the development process, and seek their willingness to serve. (You will give each Committee member a copy of the finished proposal and annotated bibliography at the end of the quarter.)

Also, write and add the “Methodology” section (2 pages minimum, but can be longer by a page or so) to your proposal: describe your approach, justify it, cite relevant critics or writers, provide an overview of the narrative for a creative project. In cases where the project involves poetry, we will discuss options.

Tue 5/26: We will have guest presenters (ideally Dr. Lila Harper who will discuss School of Graduate Studies and Research thesis requirements; a second year graduate student currently completing a thesis. Will also discuss “Timeline of Project” section (1-2 pgs.) to be added to your proposal.

Homework: Create and add “Timeline of Project” and put proposal in SGSR formal. Make an individual appointment with me and one with your thesis advisor during the week. Implement any changes suggested by me or your Committee Chair. Finalize the Annotated Bibliography and other sections still needing completion. Exchange your proposal with another class member and workshop both of them. Adjust as necessary after feedback from peer.

Tu 6/2: Bring completed proposal, with the Annotated Bibliography attached (30 items for thesis; 20 for creative project). I will have a representative from SGSR to discuss the final steps of thesis submission (when the time comes next year) and what you must do to graduate and complete your degree. We will also discuss the Oral Defense process.

Homework: Present your finished proposal and bibliography to each of your Committee members. Also, present them with the Option Approval Form (one form to be signed by all three). Usually, Committee members will sign at this time, but some may ask for changes to proposal before signing. Don’t worry if this happens—you have plenty of time to get signatures and file the form. Turn in the form to me before the end of finals week.

Over the summer: Don’t lose momentum. You have a full year to complete your thesis, and it is likely that some of your proposals elements will change—not a problem. But the proposal should be a guide to help you focus and implement the processes of reading, research, and writing. I will be available for meetings and feedback during the summer on a limited basis.