

GS 3000 Graduate Project and Seminar

Atlantic School of Theology

Fall/Winter 2013-2014

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Office Hours by appointment

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Course Description

The Graduate Project and Seminar is a required course for the M.Div Program. This course will provide the student with an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of a question or issue in ministry that has captured the student's imagination. The project will be based in a research context chosen by the student within which the project is developed, executed and evaluated. Students will become familiar with current trends in qualitative research methodologies. They will also sharpen their capacity to analyze a phenomenon in ministry. Participants are expected to produce a piece of novel research—and present these insights in a public forum—that has consequence for the student and the wider church.

2 credits (1 credit for GS 3000A in the Fall Term 2013 and 1 credit for GS 3000B in the Winter Term 2014). *Prerequisites:* This course is normally taken in the final year of the M.Div Program and presupposes the completion of all first and second year required courses including all Foundations, and SFE courses.

Significance

Research is the heart of social inquiry and crucial, if underrated resource for understanding and practicing ministry. Research is about paying attention to the world in mindful and disciplined ways. One important goal of theological education is to train students to be disciplined, productive researchers.

Students will engage a variety of theological disciplines as they come to a deeper understanding of the workings of communities of faith in order to develop their leadership. Excellent leadership depends upon the capacity to ask thought provoking questions, to call upon the wisdom of the tradition and to courageously move beyond the status quo. It is crucial that leaders in ministry see themselves as researchers, theologians and social scientists for adaptive change.

"A mind nimble and versatile enough to catch the resemblances of things (which is the chief point) and at the same time steady enough to fix and distinguish their subtler differences; ... the desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to reconsider, carefulness to dispose and set in order; [a mind which] neither affects what is new nor admires what is old, and that hates any kind of imposture."

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

"You can observe a lot by watching."

Yogi Berra

Goals

- The Grad Project is the culmination of intense theological education, and is an opportunity for participants to explore in-depth a question or issue that has captured their imaginations, will enhance their ministries, and will have broader application as the projects are presented publically.
- Students will learn about and practice and develop competency in qualitative research methods for theological and congregational research.
- Students will develop their ability to articulate their theological understanding of the issues that emerge in the research questions.
- Students will share their own research and support the research of others in the course. Students will receive and give criticism, ideas and encouragement.
- Each student will present his or her project and all are responsible for planning a public event on **March 11, 12 and 13, 2014** for the presentation of the projects.
- A final research paper (35-40 pages double spaced) is due on **March 25** (see Requirements below for paper description). The professor will mark your paper and then return it, and then you will have one week to make revisions.

Recommended Texts (on reserve in library)

John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* 2nd Edition (CA: Sage Publications 2007).

Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008).

Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2009).

Class Meetings

A schedule will be provided by the professor. Class meetings may not occur every week since the expectation is that students will be doing research between class meetings. We may have some online meetings via Google Hangouts.

Course Requirements/Marking

The Graduate Project and Seminar are worth three credits in the final phase of the M.Div program; one credit assigned in the Fall Semester and one in the Winter Semester. Grades will depend on the degree to which each member of the seminar addresses the goals of the course. The mark for the first term will be based on engagement with both the participation and research components and progress in the research process. The final mark for the second term will be based on seminar participation (20%), the public presentation (40%) and the final paper (40%). A grade of **B- or higher must be achieved in all portions of the final mark.**

A. Participation Components

1. Attendance/ Seminar participation. In-class and outside learning activities. These will include course reading, writing, discussion and other learning activities. Graduate study means learning to learn from every possible source -- from your readings, your peers, your life experience, your professor, your research. Participating in discussions is one of the best ways to learn. You are expected to contribute your questions and insights to the class. The culture of the class will, I hope, be a congenial one for self-expression and peer feedback.

Please be prompt. Everyone has unforeseen occasions that may cause you to be late to class, but persistent tardiness will result in a lower course mark. You may miss important information.

2. Public Event Planning and Implementation. Students are required to plan the Graduate Project Presentation Event, including theme, advance promotion, set-up, videotaping, etc. Notes are available from previous events. This is your day to shine! You are expected to invite persons to AST for their presentation. Attendance and participation is crucial and will be **20%** of your course mark. It is expected that all assignments will be completed, additional deductions in marks for late or missing assignments.

B. Research/Project Components

1. The Research Question. The Graduate Project Seminar serves as a forum for focusing on the themes and questions that arise from your identity as a pastoral practitioner. Each student will formulate a question from a topic that grabs your imagination that you are

passionate about. The question will be explored and refined in the context of the seminar discussion. The question chosen will correspond with an appropriate research method. **You must obtain final approval of your research topic and question from the course professor on or before October 3.**

- 2. Research Proposal.** You will write a proposal using a template based on one provided by St. Mary's. We will work on these in class. This must be approved by AST's **Research Ethics Board (REB).**

Every research project that deals with human subjects is expected to file a proposal with the REB. AST has a commitment common with accredited colleges and universities throughout North America that research involving human subjects conducted by faculty or students will be reviewed by the ethics board in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Subjects. This may be found at http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf

No research may be done with subjects/participants before REB approval has been granted. A certificate of approval from the REB must be issued and included with your final paper.

Your REB proposal will include your research question, research methodology, data collection method and interview questions.

REB proposal due to the professor on October 10. I may have some changes before you submit the final one to the REB. Note the REB usually returns their comments by 2 weeks.

Informed Consent: All subjects/participants in your research are required to sign an informed consent indicating that they are aware of the nature of the project, how the data will be used and protected. A template form will be provided for you. Signed informed consent forms must be submitted at the time of the final paper.

Students will need to purchase, borrow or obtain some device for recording interviews. You will then transcribe your interviews. The professor will listen to portions of your interviews and review your transcriptions at some point during the second term.

- 3. Literature Review.** You will write a 4-6 page review of the literature related to your topic. This paper outlines debates/discussion relative to your question (A library lab session will provide instruction on how to write a lit review). **Due date October 3.**
- 4. Research Consultants.** Students will, in consultation with the professor, select at least two research consultants to provide suggestions and help with your project. You may use faculty or others with professional expertise in your topic area. You will be expected to initiate one or two meetings with your consultants. Consultants may offer leads for sources, help with research design and method, help identify themes in your data, offer critical feedback and suggestions about how to present your findings most effectively. Please invite your consultants to your public presentation.

- 5. Theological Essay.** You will write a 6-8 page paper outlining the biblical, historical and theological background and implications of your project. This paper develops the foundation for the project. It lays out the biblical and historic context of the question within the tradition. **Due date: December 5.**

You will receive a mark and feedback on the above assignments. These marks will be part of your final paper and course mark.

6. Public Project Presentation. On March 11, 12 and 13 (the dates set by the school) each participant will present his/her project orally to the wider AST community. You will have 30 minutes to present followed by 20-30 minutes of question/answer. Presentation software, charts graphs, images are encouraged and will enhance your grade. Be creative in your presentation, but present your project clearly. You will need to include the following:

Why you chose the topic (briefly)

Your research question and purpose/goals of the project

Methodology

Situate your topic within a theological framework (what theologians, scholars, etc. have to say about it that could boost your argument)

Data and data analysis

Why it matters

Implications for the church and theology

I will solicit feedback on the projects from some of the attendees/other faculty members. This feedback figures into your final mark. The Project Presentation is **40%** of your final mark.

7. Final Paper.

Your final paper will describe all aspects of your project in 35-40 pages. Various parts of the paper will come due during the course of the 2 terms. It is to your extreme advantage to meet these deadlines. The final paper is **40% of your course mark and due March 25.**

It is to include the following:

Table of contents

Introduction-your interest in the topic

Purpose and Research Question

Review of Literature

Method

Data collection

Data analysis

Evaluation and Implications for pastoral theology and ministry

Bibliography

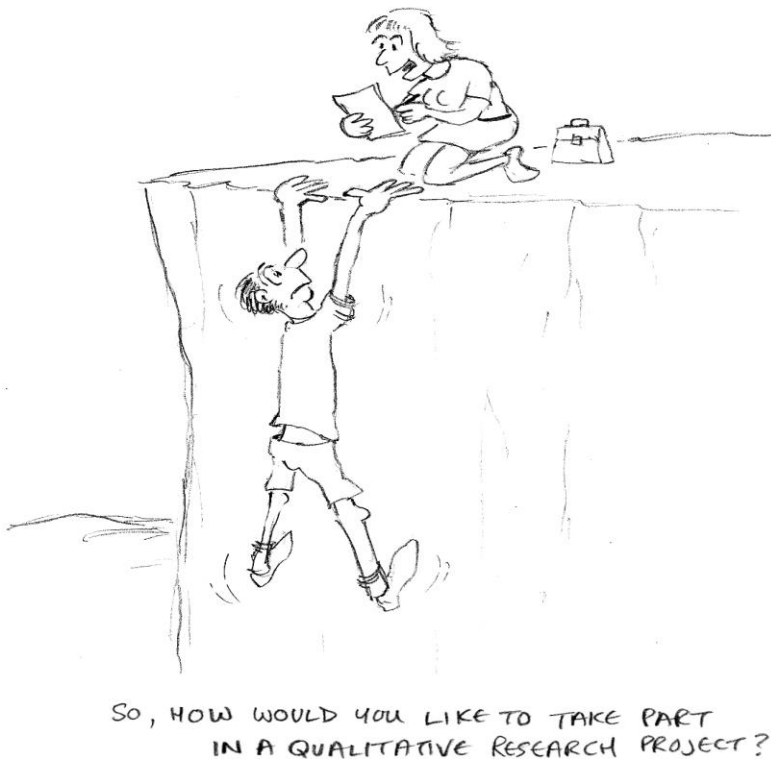
Appendixes (transcriptions, data, etc. not counted in the 35-40 pages)

When submitting your final paper, you are also asked to hand in the data material required for safe storage according to ethics protocol—tapes with recorded interviews, all signed consent forms, field notes, etc. This material should be in an envelope that can be sealed, marked on the

outside with your name along with the contents of the envelope and the date when the material can be destroyed—one year following the due date. Data should be stored on a password protected computer. You will need to describe this process in your REB proposal using the approved template provided.

After you submit your paper, the professor will review it and return it to you with any suggested revisions and corrections. After you make those corrections/changes, you will then re-submit it to the professor for a grade. After the final paper has been graded, selected students will be asked to submit an edited electronic copy for the AST Library (see attached guidelines, p. 8-9).

***Note: The professor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus as necessary.**



Cartoon from Terry Fletcher, AST student and Pastor of Londesborough United Church and Knox United Church, Auburn. Used by permission.

Fall Term Due Dates

October 3 Research topic area and/or research question approval

October 3 Literature Review

October 10 REB Proposal

December 5 Theological Essay

Fall Class Schedule (subject to change)

Sept. 12 Class meeting: Introduction, syllabus, expectations

**Sept. 19 Class meeting: Primary research methodologies
“How to write a literature review” (library staff)**

Sept. 26 No class Project Week

Oct. 3 Class meeting: Discussion of research questions and REB, Literature Review

Oct. 10 Class meeting: REB Proposals due, in-class discussion of research

Oct. 17 Class meeting online via Google Hangout

Oct. 24 Reading Week, no class

Oct. 31 Class meeting: Progress check-in

Nov. 7 Class meeting: Progress check-in REB review

Nov. 14 Class meeting: Research plans

Nov. 21 No class. Research in progress

Nov. 28 Dr. David Deane in class

Dec. 5 Last day of class for Fall term. Theological essays due.

GRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT FORMAT PROCEDURES

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY PRIOR TO SUBMITTING YOUR GRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT

I. FORMAT REQUIREMENTS

The **body of the GRP** must be formatted to fit these specific requirements:

- Legible font
- Text must be double spaced on single sided pages
- Left margin must measure 1.5” or 3.8cm
- Right, top and bottom margins must measure 1” or 2.5cm
- Page numbers, headers and footers must be within the margin measurements
- Ensure charts do not exceed page margin measurements

The **title page** must include the following information:

- Title of thesis
- Name of author
- Degree to be awarded
- The words “Atlantic School of Theology”
- The words “Copyright [author’s name, year]” or “© [author’s name, year]”
- Date of submission

The **abstract** must:

- NOT exceed 300 words
- Be single spaced
- Include the word “Abstract”
- Include author’s name
- Include thesis title
- Include date of submission (title page date and signature page date must be the same)
- Have print of good quality

Examples of title pages and abstracts can be viewed on the AST Library website at
< <http://www.astheology.ns.ca/library/theses.html> >

II. COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

If you included material that you did not write or create yourself (such as questionnaires, graphs, tables, maps, illustrations, web pages etc.), you must submit a letter of permission from

the copyright holder (i.e. the creator) granting you permission to use their material. **All materials copied from web sites are considered to be copyrighted unless a statement on the site explicitly says otherwise, in which case a copy of that public domain statement must be submitted with your manuscript.** Failure to include proof of public domain or a permission letter from the copyright holder is a serious offence. This letter of permission should be addressed to you. Referencing/citing the material in your thesis is not sufficient; copyright permission must be obtained. Graduate Research Projects with outstanding copyright infractions will not be added to the Institutional Repository until corrected by the student.

III. RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

If you used human subjects as part of your research (for example, conducted interviews or surveys), you will have obtained a **Certificate of approval** from the University's **Research Ethics Board**. The original or a copy of the certificate should be submitted with your project. This policy is in accordance with Section 1, B.3, Article 1.4.c. of the Tri-Council Statement on Research Involving Human Subjects.

IV. SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

When the GRP has been approved, submit:

1. A single file PDF copy of your GRP to bmurray@astheology.ns.ca
2. Any applicable documentation to Brad Murray at the AST Library (REB certificate, restriction letters, copyright letters, etc.)

QUESTIONS

If you have questions about the Graduate Research Project procedures, contact Brad Murray at the AST Library (423-0111, bmurray@astheology.ns.ca)