THESIS GUIDELINES
for the MASTER of ARTS in LANGUAGE & LITERATURE

Description: The thesis is a substantial work, written in close consultation with a thesis director, that demonstrates original scholarship in the fields of language and/or literature. In its final form, it should be suitable for presentation at an academic conference and/or publication in a scholarly journal. While it may originate in a previous course project, the final essay will be the result of new research, substantive revision, and significant expansion, as developed in consultation with the director. The essay will be read by both the director and a second reader, who are chosen by the thesis coordinator in consultation with the student. The range of possibilities for an M.A. thesis is immense; areas include (but are not limited to) literary history, textual studies and genetic criticism, intertextuality, literary criticism, literary theory, biographical criticism, translation work, and linguistic studies. In addition to more traditional areas, Signum University welcomes theses that examine areas that have been largely overlooked by the academic community, such as fantasy, science fiction, and other speculative literature; Tolkien and Inklings studies; mass media and popular culture; minority and countercultural perspectives; emergent disciplines, such as digital humanities and computational analysis of literature (e.g., lexomics). The standard length for a Language & Literature thesis will be 10,000 to 15,000 words (excluding bibliography, figures, and notes).

Advising: When students register for the M.A. program, they will consult with their Signum advisor from the student support team and with their academic mentor to identify whether they will choose an area of concentration or pursue a generalist degree. If they choose a concentration, they will take five courses in one of these areas: Tolkien Studies, Imaginative Literature, Germanic Philology, or Classic Literature—and then the thesis will be written in that field. Halfway through the program (i.e., after the student has successfully completed five courses for credit), a team of student support staff will discuss the student's progress and make a recommendation about proceeding toward the thesis.

Requirements: Signum University offers a flexible timeframe; students are granted a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 7 years to complete their degree program, but are otherwise welcome to take most courses at the pace that best suits them. A student must complete 30 semester-hours of language or literature course work before beginning the thesis: the 3-credit Research Methods course (taken as one of the first 4 courses of the program), 6 credit hours of literature, 6 credit hours of language, and 15 credit hours of either literature or language, with at least 5 courses in the chosen concentration. The Master of Arts in Language & Literature degree concludes with a

2-course, 6-semester-hour sequence of thesis research and writing, culminating in a publishable thesis paper.

Thesis proposal: When students register for their 10th for-credit course in the Language & Literature department (and have successfully completed Research Methods, at least 2 language courses, and at least 2 literature courses), they should contact the thesis coordinator to discuss a topic. Students who wish to begin the thesis project in the spring semester must submit a thesis proposal prior to November 15th of the preceding calendar year; by March 15th for the summer semester; or by July 15th for the fall semester. The thesis proposal is a 1- to 2-page document that outlines the following:

1. The proposed research subject in some detail, including which primary texts, historical elements, genre(s), themes, topics, etc. will be under investigation.
2. The major *research question* the student hopes to answer. This needs to be a researchable, objective, unbiased, investigative question to which the student currently does not know the answer, but which background reading suggests will be an engaging question to attempt to answer and which is important to the scholarly field. Its answer would be likely to fill a gap in the scholarly literature and advance our understanding of the text(s) under investigation. This research question will consider such areas as the following: What is the scholarly conversation on this topic? What has already been said, asked, and investigated? What are the major areas of academic interest in this subject area? What question(s) would allow you to enter that scholarly conversation?
3. The scholarly agenda and critical methodology. This includes how the research will be approached and what theoretical lens(es) will be employed, as well as what scholarly works will be used as models, guides, and sources.
4. The areas of expertise the student is looking for in a director.

If the student desires to pursue a longer or less traditional thesis, this document will also explain why and what shape the thesis may take (which may include projects in the digital humanities, translations, commentaries, or other forms). The thesis coordinator will comment on this proposal and make suggestions for revision, refinement, or expansion of the topic.

Once the proposal has been accepted by the thesis coordinator, the student will register for LITZ6398: Thesis Research: Language & Literature. The thesis coordinator will then use the proposal in approaching potential directors.

Supervision: One director will be selected by the thesis coordinator in consultation with the student. The director will work closely with the student throughout both semesters, providing guidance in developing the reading list and commenting upon all assignments and revisions. The director will be responsible for assessing the student's work. There should be a minimum of 4 hours per term of synchronous meetings (phone call, video conference, or in person) between the student and the

director, specifically to discuss research and drafts. Additional meetings are encouraged and may be requested by either the student or the director. Frequent email communication is expected at every stage of the process. An assignment schedule is available on the course LMS, and the director and student are expected to follow this schedule throughout the thesis process.

A second reader will also be selected by the thesis coordinator in consultation with the student. This second reader will read and comment upon the thesis once towards the end of the second semester.

Fees: The cost for the 2-semester thesis program is the standard price of 6 credit hours.

Google Classroom: Each director will receive a Google Classroom space pre-populated with assignment sheets, sample assignments, a timeline/log for deadlines, links to resources, and other helpful materials, and each student assigned to that director will be invited to that Google Classroom. This learning management system will be used for assignment submission, the exchange of materials, and communication. Students and directors may choose to share drafts of work and feedback in whatever way they see fit, but all assignments will be officially submitted via the Google Classroom, and the director will issue assignment grades and final grades in this LMS at the end of the semester. There is also a group chat available for all thesis students where they can discuss their progress and share thoughts.

Deadlines: It is the director's responsibility to hold the student accountable for meeting the deadlines listed in this requirements document. If a student is unable to meet the deadlines due to extreme circumstances, the director should refer to the incompletes and withdrawals policies and/or consult with the thesis coordinator, but must not extend deadlines arbitrarily. All handbook policies, including those relating to withdrawals, refunds, and incompletes, apply to thesis courses.

Semester One: LITZ6398: Thesis Planning: Language & Literature

Format: All thesis assignments will use a single approved style, conforming to high academic standards. MLA is the preferred style guide for the Department of Language & Literature, but the director may decide upon a different style guide if the nature of the research offers a compelling reason for this choice. The director and student will decide upon a style guide early in the process, and the student will follow its format on all submitted works.

Assignments: The following assignments will be produced during the Thesis Planning semester in close consultation with the director. Any or all of these assignments may

be revised at the director's instructions and will be graded by the director on a Pass/Fail/Honors basis. They will be submitted via Google Classroom.

Reading List: Students will develop an extensive reading list of primary texts, secondary studies (including book-length works, essays in collections, and articles in journals), and other related writings germane to the research project. This will be created within the first two weeks of the semester, as the student's goal is to read all or most of the works on the list during the term. Perhaps 20 primary sources (including poems, short stories, screenplays, novels, autobiographical material, etc.), 10 book-length secondary studies, and 10 scholarly articles/chapters might be a good basic formula for the number of works included. **Due: week 2.**

Four Secondary Sources Reports: In consultation with the director, the student will identify which 4 of the book-length, scholarly secondary studies are most important to the topic of the thesis. Other works may be substituted at the director's discretion instead of scholarly monographs, depending on the topic; however, dubious choices should be approved by the thesis coordinator. The student will write a 3- to 5-page secondary sources report on *each* of these 4 works (due at 3-week intervals), surveying the content, quality, and relevance of the book to the topic of the thesis. Sample secondary sources reports are available in the course LMS. **Due: weeks 3, 6, 9, 12.**

Annotated Bibliography: In the last two weeks of the course, the student will produce an extensive annotated bibliography of works relevant to the topic of the thesis. The citations will conform to the approved style. Following each citation, there will be a paragraph or more describing the student's interaction with and assessment of these texts. This will state which portions of the work were relevant to the thesis topic, summarize the major argument(s), evaluate the theoretical basis and currency of the author's argument, discuss its place in current scholarship, etc. While the actual number of sources is negotiable and will change from topic to topic, the reading list and bibliography do need to show mastery of the field. Perhaps 20 primary sources (including poems, short stories, screenplays, novels, autobiographical material, etc.), 10 book-length secondary studies, and 10 scholarly articles/chapters might be a good basic formula. Some topics will lend themselves to reading more heavily in primary sources or in scholarly assessments; some texts have been studied very little and will require creativity in the compilation of a reading list. Students and directors should consider including theoretical works not directly relevant to the topic for the establishment of a methodology or as models of the application of academic approaches. Sample annotated bibliographies are available in the course LMS. **Due: week 10** (may be revised at Director's request).

Prospectus: In the last two weeks of the course, the student will also produce a prospectus. This is essentially a significant revision and expansion of the thesis

proposal, showing how the original research question will be answered (or how its scope has changed). This 3–5 page document describes what the student wants to say in the thesis and why. It proposes the research subject, scholarly agenda, and critical methodology; establishes some possible main lines of argument and perhaps an organization for the thesis; suggests the controlling purpose of the thesis; mentions the selection of the most important literary sources; provides an overview of relevant scholarship and criticism; and argues for the value, interest, and originality of the study. **Due: week 10**(may be revised at Director's request).

Semester Two: LITZ6399: Master's Thesis in Language and Literature

Registration: Following the completion of their first thesis course, students will take the second course of the thesis program: LITZ6399.

Format: The thesis will use a single approved style, conforming to high academic standards. MLA is the preferred style guide for the Department of Language & Literature, but the director may decide upon a different style guide if the nature of the research offers a compelling reason for this choice. The director and student will have decided upon a style guide in the first semester, and the student will follow its format on all submitted works.

Content: As mentioned above, the range of possibilities for an M.A. thesis is immense; areas include (but are not limited to) literary history, textual studies and genetic criticism, intertextuality, literary criticism/theory, biographical criticism, translation work, and linguistic studies. In addition to more traditional areas, Signum University welcomes theses that examine elements of fantasy, science fiction, and other speculative literature; Tolkien and Inklings studies; mass media and popular culture; minority and countercultural perspectives; emergent disciplines such as digital humanities and computational analysis of literature (e.g., lexomics)e. The final product will present a close, convincing analysis of a literary text(s); a sustained, compelling argument; and thoughtful engagement with a large number of primary and secondary sources. It will conform to high academic standards. It will join the ongoing scholarly conversation in its field and offer original insights. It will push that dialogue forward with its rigor and perhaps cover new ground.

Length: The standard length for a Language & Literature thesis will be 10,000 to 15,000 words (excluding bibliography, figures, and notes). From this work, the student should be readily able to produce papers suitable for presentation at a scholarly conference or publication in an academic journal. Students with aspirations to write a longer thesis should discuss this with the thesis coordinator early in the process and again with the director throughout. Non-traditional formats or delivery mechanisms, such as critical editions, commentaries, digital humanities projects, and

translations, are possibilities that can be discussed with the thesis coordinator before beginning the first semester.

Assessment: Both the director and the second reader will offer assessments of the thesis; the director will do so throughout the process, especially at the draft and final revision stages. The second reader will do so only once at the end of the second semester. The student will have to satisfy the director's and second reader's academic standards for sufficient graduate-level work. All work will be graded by the director on a Pass/Fail/Honors basis.

Deadlines: The student will produce a draft of the entire thesis by week 6 of the course and submit it to the director, who will read it and return it with comments in a timely fashion. The student will revise the thesis, following the director's recommendations, and submit a second draft by week 9 to both the director and the second reader. The director and the second reader will read it and return it with comments again. The student will complete final revisions and submit the final, polished version of the thesis to the director during week 12. **Due: weeks 6, 9, 12.**

Presentation: During the last stages of revision or after the thesis has been completed, the student should make arrangements to participate in a "Thesis Theatre" event as part of the "Signum Symposia" series. This will be an interview-style conversation with the series host, talking about the student's thesis. These sessions are free and open to the public, presented using audio and video via live webinar, and will be recorded, archived, and made publicly available.

Dissemination: Students are expected to consult with their director to discuss possible venues for conference presentation and subsequent publication of the thesis. The thesis will be archived in the Signum library.

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