

## **THEO 5102 RESEARCH METHODS**

**Fall Semester 2012 – 2013**

**Monday 2:30 – 5:15 p.m. N-21**

**3 credit hours**

**Dr. Carol M. Norén, professor**

This is an introduction to the sources, methods and communication of research in each theological field. The course focuses on research skills, the integration and synthesis of sources, and the presentation of material primarily through the medium of writing. Faculty in various fields (biblical, historical, theological, and ministry) will participate in assignments as needed. This is a core course for the MATS degree and is required for those students writing a thesis.

### Learning objectives

The course is designed to be heavy on assignments and the practice of research and light on course reading that is not in your topic area.

Students will become skilled in:

- Finding and evaluating sources, including internet resources
- Analysis and argumentation
- Constructing and answering good research questions
- Building bibliographies
- Utilizing the library
- Critical reading of texts, including putting sources in conversation with one another
- Formulation of good research projects, including focused topics and theses

Students will be introduced to:

- Library resources
- Theological, biblical and ministry sources
- Methods of reasoning in general fields
- Thesis format and style and required thesis template

### Required Texts

Adler, Mortimer J. and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972. ISBN 0671212095 (Hereafter: HRB)

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. ISBN 13: 978 0 226 06556 3. (Hereafter CR)

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. ISBN 13: 978 226 82337 9. (Hereafter Turabian)

Yaghjian, Lucretia. *Writing Theology Well: A Rhetoric for Theological and Biblical Writers*. New York: Continuum, 2006. ISBN 0826418856.

In addition, selected research articles will be given out in class.

### Assignments and Grading

While students will be introduced to a variety of research methods, the goal is to become skilled in a particular area of research. Even those who may be interested in interdisciplinary work should narrow their focus and methodology and be able to show how they are using or integrating areas of research. Therefore, most of the assignments should serve to develop a student's specific area of research interest. There will be a time audit. The general expectation is six hours work per week outside class for a three credit course. Because some class periods are not scheduled as seat time, you should expect to spend approximately one hundred hours over the semester on this course in addition to hours spent in class.

1. *Class participation*. You are expected to come to class with readings and assignments completed and prepared for the scheduled topic. There are some classes that we will not meet due to times throughout the course of your project where you will need extra time for independent work. In addition, most class sessions are designed in a workshop style, and you will be helping your colleagues in their own research. Any unexcused absences will be an "F" for the day and will affect your grade for the course.
2. *Research Log*. Throughout this course, you will keep a weekly log of your research activity. You may use a notebook, binder, computer folder, or whatever works best for your organization. You must, however, log at least once a week and keep your notes in one place, as they will be collected periodically. Your notes may be bullet points or complete sentences, and should include the following every week:
  - a. Date
  - b. A list of topical reading you have *other than* assigned reading for the course, including the bibliographic information the first time you enter a source.
  - c. Notes on anything interesting you found, including notes on the questions that focus your research project.
  - d. New questions that arose from your reading.
  - e. Problems that emerge or break-through(s) in ideas.
  - f. Twenty minutes of 'stream of consciousness' writing.

The learning objectives of this assignment include the following:

- a. To keep track of your research progress through the semester in case you need to find something quickly or retrieve ideas
- b. To continue developing organizational skill
- c. To hold you accountable to reading every week in your topic area

- d. To develop consistent writing habits that aid you in synthesizing what you have been reading.
- e. To find new questions, new solutions and new problems in your research, all of which cultivate a more refined research question and approach.

The assignment will be graded on consistency, timeliness, and the guidelines stated above. It will not be graded on writing, content (other than that you are reading appropriate sources) or creativity. Feel free to be creative in your thinking, writing, questions, etc. Time Audit: 1 hour/week (14 hours total/semester). Note this audit is for completing the log only, not the time for the topical reading you will be doing. We will check in weekly for this assignment, and are due before class every week. They will be collected periodically, so bring them to class every week.

3. *Research Exercises*. This will include assignments designed to refine students' research and critical thinking abilities. Some will be done in class and evaluated by other students. Some will be done ahead of time and shared with the class. Examples include critiquing research articles in various fields, finding recent sources on a topic, entering bibliographic information, online searches, etc. Most of these assignments build on one another and are geared toward your final research paper. The length of the exercises varies. Some may take you twenty minutes and some two hours. All should be typewritten. Unless otherwise noted, bring a copy of all research exercises for classmates, as we will work on these in class. Late exercises will not be accepted.
4. *Bibliography*. Build a bibliography around your focused topic. Your bibliography should include 10-15 entries. Each entry must be correctly cited or your project will be marked down. For six of the entries, you must include an annotation. Use *HRB*, pp46-47 (chapter 5) as your guideline. Your annotation should answer each of the four questions on pp 46-47 in *HRB*. (Before turning in your bibliography, you must meet with a faculty member who is most familiar with your topic. In grading the assignment, I that faculty member's input on whether it includes the most relevant sources, so utilize them ahead of time!) Students are also encouraged to meet with Sally Anderson or Laura Burt—faculty in bibliography—in the library for assistance.
5. *Syntopical Reading Project*. The assignment is critical in constructing your thesis and outline for your research paper and builds on a number of the research exercises. The key instructional framework for this assignment is chapter 20 of *How to Read a Book*, which you have already completed. In this assignment, you will identify key terms and arguments and put sources in conversation with one another. This will aid in identifying and refining your research question. For clarification of the steps, see *HRB* pp 335-336. (You can also look at *WTW* pp 117fff.) Further instructions (you only need to turn in the steps marked with an asterisk):

#### Part I

Step 1 – Use your bibliography.

Step 2- Inspect all your books and sources (See “Inspectional Reading,” *HRB* pp 31-44).

## Part II

Step 1 – Using at least six of the most relevant sources, identify the most important passages in each source. (You should already have used some of these sources in the *HRB* research exercises.)

\*Step 2 – Bring authors to terms. What are the central categories and terms that you will use in your papers, and how do your main sources employ, define, describe each term/category? (See *HRB*, chapter 8)

\*Step 3 – List three to five central questions that each of your sources address, directly or indirectly.

\*Step 4 – Define the major issues and then the minor issues by showing the positions of your authors in context of the central questions of step 3.

\*Step 5 – Order the questions and issues in such a way as to throw maximum light on the subject. Show how the issues are related.

Approximate time: twelve-fifteen hours. Note that this is in preparation for your research paper. Due: November 2.

6. *Research Paper*. Write a twelve to fifteen page research paper on a focused topic. Your paper should have a clear question that you answer, should address a problem, and include a full bibliography (see earlier assignment). Ideally, your paper will be either (1) a research paper that you are writing for another course, or (2) a chapter of your thesis. If your current work does not fall into either of these categories, we will decide together on another topic for you. In the process of designing your project, you should have a faculty mentor with whom you will work to design your research paper. This will be either the instructor of the course for which you are writing your paper or your thesis advisor.

Approximate time: fifteen hours. This is an estimate, and you should remember that many of the above assignments factor into your paper beyond this estimate.

Due: December 13 or earlier.

### Grading Weights

- Class participation (includes class attendance and preparedness): 10%
- Research Log: 20%
- Research Exercises: 20%
- Bibliography: 10%
- Syntopical Reading Project: 15%
- Research Paper: 25%

### Course Calendar

### Key

“Reading” – reading that is to be completed by class. “Course reading” includes required books and articles. “Topical reading” includes reading done in your area of research. “Assignment” is what you are to have prepared for class that day. Assignments are not turned in but bring them

to class. “Due” means the completed assignment that **will be turned in to me by class period** that day. Late assignments will be marked down a full letter grade per day. See above booklist for book abbreviations.

August 27                      Course overview and brainstorm

Introductions  
 The joys of research  
 Explanation of syllabus and assignments  
 Introduction to the course books and required reading  
 Brainstorm research topic, raise questions, get familiar with areas of interest  
 Assignment: Bring other syllabi OR a paragraph or two on your topic of interest.

September 3                      Labor Day - no classes

September 10                      Library Field Trip

We will meet with a librarian for an orientation of the library, introduction to the reference section, databases, etc. You will be introduced to the skill of building your bibliographies. MEET in the computer lab, second floor.

Reading: *How to Read a Book (HRB)*, chapters 1-7; *Writing Theology Well (WTW)* chapter 5; *The Craft of Research (CR)*, skim chapters 1-2; 2 hours of topical reading (reading in your area of interest).

Assignment: Research logs.

**Due: Research Exercise #1.** Choose a book from your area of interest and X-ray the book. In a few sentences or less, what is the unity (main point) of the book? What is its primary claim? What are the major parts of the book? How are they organized into a whole? (see *HRB*, chapter 7).

September 17                      Evaluating Sources

We will work together through your research exercises, discuss how to evaluate journals and how you can use them in your research and writing.

Reading: *HRB*, chapters 8-12; familiarizes yourself with *The Literature of Theology*; *CR*, chapter 6; two hours of topical reading.

Assignment: Research logs.

**Due: Research Exercise #2.** Choose a journal or periodical that you think will be helpful for researching your topic. (See handout for ideas.) Review the table of contents of ONLY TWO issues per year from the last five years, and answer the following questions: (1) What kind of journal is it? How do you know it is reputable? (2) What is the general topic that the journal covers? (3) What specific topics has the journal covered in the last five years? Can you note any trends in the research? (4) Choose ONE article (include the author, title, journal name/volum/date/pages). What is the main question that the article attempts to answer?

September 24                      Building Bibliographies

Topic reading check-in.

Documenting sources exercise. Bring your Turabian book to class!

Discuss internet sources.

Readings: Familiarize yourself with Turabian's *Manual* and *The Literature of Theology*.  
Four hours topical reading.

Assignment: Come to class with a couple of internet sites that may be useful for your research. Also, feel free to show us any sites that you came across that you thought were unhelpful or poorly done.

**Due: Research Exercise #3:** Reference books are helpful for getting general background information, facts, overviews, etc. Using three different Reference Books in the library (e.g., commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, yearbooks, handbooks), locate five additional sources to which each reference book leads you. For example, a reference book may have an article with a bibliography at the end. You may list these. In addition, a reference book may define a term that causes you to go to another book that has other sources, etc. The format is as follows, using full citations for all your sources:

1. Reference book 1
  - a. Source 1 (What caused you to look at this source?)
  - b. Source 2 (What caused you to look at this source?)
  - c. Source 3 (What caused you to look at this source?)
  - d. Source 4 (What caused you to look at this source?)
  - e. Source 5 (What caused you to look at this source?)
2. Reference book 2 – same as above.
3. Reference book 3 – same as above.

This exercise should help you start your bibliography, further familiarize you with the library, think about your research steps, and gain further clarification on your research topic. Some/most of the sources you find should be included in your Bibliography.

#### October 1                      Topics

We will continue to address the important aspects of coming up with a good topic and ways to continue refine your topic. In class, we will also read one another's topic sketches and help one another think more clearly about each person's topic.

Read: *CR* chapter 3; four hours topical reading.

**Due: Research Exercise #4.** Turn in an interest sketch of a topic that you are considering researching. Include the general topic you would like to research, why you think it is a good research topic, who would be the intended audience, and what you hope to accomplish in researching your topic. (See *CR*.)

#### October 8                      Questions and Problems

Discussion of how to find good problems.

Work through article "Killing in the Name of God."

Discuss Research Exercise #5

Read: *CR*, chapter 4-5; article mentioned above; two hours topical reading.

Assignment: Take notes on the article and come prepared to discuss contradictions inconsistencies, incomplete explanations, gaps. Also, what questions does this article take on? How does it answer or fail to answer them? Does it leave unanswered questions, and if so, what are they?

**Due: Research Exercise #5.** Brainstorm three potential problems your research project might address.

October 15    fall break    -    no classes

October 22                      Questions

Reading: four hours topical reading.

**Due: Research Exercise # 6.** Make a list of ten interesting questions that will help you to continue to narrow your topic and add to your thesis proposal. Choose the three best questions from your list, and be prepared to discuss why they are the best.

October 29                      Methods and Argumentation

Workshop: work through the article below, discuss your own method for presenting your research, discuss writing styles and audience.

Reading: *CR*, chapters 7-11; *WTW*, chapter 6 and skim chapters 2, 7-8 (these will help you think about method/approach).

Assignment: Meet with a faculty member regarding the method you will use to present your research (I will help you decide with whom). Send them an overview of what you are doing in your research paper and your bibliography before you meet with them, and tell them you would like to discuss the following: Is my bibliography sufficient or am I missing key sources? What method would you suggest I use in putting together my research? How should the paper progress? How might I structure my argument? On what points should I spend most of my time, and on which should I spend little time? Can you suggest an example of an article, essay, sermon, etc., that I might use as a model for my own paper?

Take notes on each of these questions (you may use bullet points), as you will turn these in. We will also discuss your conference in class. This exercise is meant to aid you in your approach to your research question and in structuring your paper. I will hold you to the parameters that you set with the your faculty consultant, as part of honing research/writing skills required direction from experienced writers. This is a key part of the research process, so be sure to come prepared and send the agenda to the faculty person ahead of time.

**Due: Research Exercise #7.** Students will write a thesis abstract that is between 300-350 words. See sample abstracts for examples.

**Due:** Bibliography

November 5                      Argumentation, Incorporating Sources

Workshop: Plagiarism exercise, peer writing evaluations (see assignment below), and work on abstracts.

Reading: *CR*, chapter 12; *WTW*, chapter 3.

Assignment: Prepare a short (1-2 page) final form documents that uses correct format, but also smoothly and logically uses an outside source from your bibliography (only 1) to support an argument. You may use the outside source in one of the following ways: direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase (see handout). We will review and critique your samples in small groups/partners.

**Due:** Syntopical Reading Project

