GUIDELINES ON THE WRITING OF DISSERTATIONS
MA PROGRAMMES IN THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

The final component of the MA course is a dissertation of up to 15,000 words. The dissertation is to be submitted in mid-September of the year in which students are completing their studies:

** before 4pm on Thursday 12 September 2019 **

**Further guidance on the dissertation in TRS can be found here: http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/trs/study/handbook/assessment/taught/dissguide.aspx**

1. Aims
The aims of the dissertation are to provide training and to gain proficiency in independent, scholarly research and writing. The dissertation at MA level asks for you to aim for originality in your analysis of primary and secondary sources.

2. Schedule
This is the schedule you should plan to follow:

- **Feb:** Think about dissertation topic, speak to potential supervisor
- **11 March:** Submit MA Dissertation Proposal Form to the Department Office
- **March:** Your dissertation proposals are reviewed by the Department Education Lead
- **By start of April:** Mid-April: Apply for College Travel Award (if relevant)
- **Early May:** Receive confirmation that your topic has been approved and who your supervisor is
- **Early May:** Apply for research ethics approval (high risk fieldwork only)
- **Mid-May:** Planning meeting with supervisor (at the latest)
- **End of May:** Apply for research ethics approval (low risk fieldwork only)
- **May:** Conduct literature review
- **June/July:** Conduct and collect research
- **August:** Writing up stage (plan to send your draft to your supervisor at least three weeks ahead of the deadline)
- **September:** Edit, edit and edit!
- **13 September:** Submit thesis

Full time students should expect to begin detailed work on the dissertation once they have completed the other assessed elements of the course – i.e. after the May essay deadline. Part time student should make use of the summer before the beginning of the second year of study to finalise their topic, and then should work on the dissertation through the second year.

3. Supervision
You must approach a potential supervisor for your dissertation before you submit the MA Dissertation Proposal Form in March to discuss a potential topic. You will receive email
confirmation of who your supervisor is by early May. Where possible we will try to accommodate your request for a supervisor but this may not be possible in all cases.

It is important to understand that this element of the course is intended to provide training in research, and thus to develop skills of independent study. The Department specifies that students will receive assistance as follows, and no more:

(i) informal advice on selecting a subject
(ii) a supervision to discuss general approach and bibliography in the light of proposal, in writing, setting out the intended field of study
(iii) a supervision in which the supervisor will comment on a draft of the dissertation. It is strongly advised that you submit your draft to your supervisor before the end of August for comment.

MA students are offered up to 6 hours of supervision for their dissertation, divided between the activities listed above.

4. Choosing a topic

The dissertation provides a good opportunity to pursue in greater depth a question that may only have been touched on in work for other modules. It is important that the topic chosen should be one that will encourage critical handling of issues central to the subject are of the MA Programme in which the student is enrolled, and that the topic can be sensibly treated in the number of words available. It is advisable to select a topic for which the taught courses have provided a foundation, rather than branching out on something that is completely unrelated to the work done elsewhere in the student’s programme of study.

5. Research the Dissertation

It is very important to define the scope of the dissertation carefully so that research effort can be directed efficiently and productively toward the required goal. Supervisors will assist in defining an appropriate topic. Students should compile an initial bibliography for discussion with the supervisor. Be sure to take accurate notes and to document all sources accurately. Supervisors will advise on Library resources beyond King’s College that may give access to important material. The inter-library loan facility provided at the Maughan Library may also be an important resource. The internet can also be a useful resource but, in citing works, preference should be given to a hard copy wherever possible.

6. Fieldwork and ethics

Your dissertation may include fieldwork but this is not mandatory.

If you are conducting interviews you must obtain ethical approval from the College. Please consult the College website to see if your project requires full ethical approval:

https://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/Applications/index.aspx

If so, you will need to apply to the College Research Ethics Committee. You are advised to apply for the early May deadline.
Otherwise, you may find that you are eligible to for the Minimal Ethical Risk Registration Process. Please consult the following:

http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/applications/MR-scheme.aspx

7. Writing the Dissertation

A dissertation of 15,000 words requires careful planning. Map out the structure of the proposed argument and determine the appropriate weight to be given to each part of the dissertation. The usual conventions of academic writing apply to the dissertation. Bibliographic information should follow a standard convention appropriate to the field of study. If in doubt, follow the conventions used by a book in your field from a major publisher like Oxford or Cambridge University Press. The dissertation should include a bibliography in which shall be included all works that have been referred to in the dissertation.

8. Presentation and Submission

Be sure to proof read and copy-edit your dissertation thoroughly! Consult the Dissertation Style Guide. Check the accuracy of all citations. There is no particular standard for layout of the dissertation. In general, however, 12pt font should be used, and double spacing. The dissertation should be identified by the student’s candidate number, NOT by name.

To submit your dissertation you need to provide:

One electronic copy of the dissertation, uploaded to the relevant submission area on KEATs. (The submission areas will be made available in early/mid-August.)

Two hard copies submitted to the Department office: VWB3.12

Your hard copies need not be bound, but please make sure that they are securely fastened together. If you are not in London by the date of submission, you are welcome to submit your hard copies by post. The date of posting (recorded as the postmark on the envelope) should be no later than the day of the deadline, and you should take all reasonable steps to ensure that work reaches us as soon as reasonably possible after the deadline. (Use special delivery as necessary.)

Please ensure that all three copies of your dissertation include the standard Arts & Humanities coversheet as the first page, available here:

http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/study/handbook/sguides/assessment/onlinesub.aspx
9. If things go wrong...

As with any summative work, dissertations must be submitted on or before the due date unless prior permission for an extension has been obtained from the Chair of the Departmental MA Assessment Sub-Board. If you think you are encountering difficulties, please do not hesitate to make contact with your supervisor or the Programmes Administrator via trs@kcl.ac.uk. In the event of problems with the supervision process please contact your MA convenor or the Department Education Lead.