



RD 701 Theological and Ministry Research Fall 2024

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Course Dates: September 4th—December 18th, 2024
Course Delivery Method: Online

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides instruction in doing biblical/theological and ministry research as a lifelong learner. In addition to exploring the spirituality of scholarship and issues in theological epistemology, students will engage in a practical set of exercises in which they learn to select and narrow a research topic, identify and review relevant literature, design a research methodology, learn intermediate library skills, collect, organize and analyze data, and develop an argument. Students will prepare a preliminary proposal for either a thesis or a specialty research project (SRP) as a major component of the course.

ONLINE STRUCTURE AND COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This course is 12 weeks long (8 weeks online, 4 weeks to complete after the online portion), and hosted entirely on the Briercrest curriculum management system, *Canvas*. The structure of the class is as follows:

- 1) Pre-course preparation in the week or two (or sooner if you wish) prior to the start of the class. This includes beginning to think about the topic(s) for your final research proposal and beginning textbook reading or specific assignments as soon as you are able.
- 2) Eight weeks of one-week-long modules from September 8th to October 30th, during which you should be prepared to put in 5-10 hours per week on your own time and by your weekly schedule. In this regard, it is best to set aside devoted time to work on the course, especially if you are engaging in this course while working full-time.
- 3) Four weeks after the last module to complete two final assignments for submission.

COURSE TEXTS

David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*. Illinois: Crossway, 2010.

Kibbe, Michael. *From Topic to Thesis: A Guide to Theological Research*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2016.

For Mdiv Students Only: John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, London, SCM Press, 2013.

For MA Students Only: Torrance, T.F. *Reality and Evangelical Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003.

Guretzki, David. "10 Commandments for Theological Students." Available online:
<http://dguretzki.wordpress.com/pages/10-commandments-for-theological-students/>

Warfield, Benjamin B. "The Religious Life of Theological Students." *Themelios* 24.3 (May 1999): 31-41. (Available online in PDF format here: http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/24.3_Warfield.pdf).

All assignments must be written in accordance with the Chicago Style Guide. The Chicago Manual can be found here: <https://www.mybriercrest.ca/college/documents/>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Articulate a personal "spirituality of scholarship" as a component of their philosophy of ministry.
2. Think about how their research should contribute to the larger cause of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God.
3. Sharpen their ability to identify research topics, problems, and questions.
4. Be more effective in library research techniques.
5. Prepare and write a literature review.
6. Understand the nature of plagiarism and how to avoid it.
7. Be aware of the unique research and methodological requirements specific to their discipline.
8. Become better equipped to gather, document, and retrieve research material, including making a decision about adopting a research retrieval system.
9. Prepare a proposal for a Specialty Research project (SRP) or Thesis.
10. Become willing to subject their own written work to constructive scrutiny by their peers.
11. Become more confident in their own ability to listen, think, speak, and write about matters about which they are most passionate.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND WEIGHTING

There will be various short projects and discussions assigned throughout the class. Mostly, these assignments will be included in the final portfolio and proposal noted below. However, note the following assignment, which you can work on in advance.

1. ***Preliminary Topics (5%)***

The final project for this class will require each student to prepare a carefully considered and written thesis or SRP proposal.

After reading Kibbe, identify three topics you might be interested in pursuing as a major project in the future, along with ONE preliminary source (book, article, etc.) that might be worth looking at for this topic. (Note: reading the book or article in full is unnecessary, but having at least some sense of its content will be necessary).

A topic statement should be a single sentence written according to the following format:

I want to study:

Because I want to find out what/why/how:

Preliminary source [full bibliographic citation required]:

Do not worry if you do not have time to do much preliminary research before doing this exercise. This is only to get you started in thinking about some topics well before you begin writing.

This assignment will be at most **1-page**. Total marks are possible, provided it is completed on time and submitted in the form noted above.

Preliminary Topics Assignment Due: 18 September 2024

2. ***Theology and Spirituality of Scholarship and Research (15%)***

Using concepts gleaned from your reading of Clark's *To Know and Love God*, Guretzki, Warfield, and/or from your discipline-specific texts (Torrance for MA students, Swinton et al for MDiv students) as well as any other sources you wish to cite, write a **4-page** paper in which you write a theology and spirituality of scholarship and research. The paper will be divided into two parts:

Part 1 (2 pages): Articulate a theology of scholarship and research relative to your discipline. In this part of the paper, you will discuss how Scripture informs what it means to carry on in a life-long pursuit of learning and research ("scholarship") in your disciplinary area. In other words, articulate an answer to the following question: What is the biblical/theological basis for why ongoing learning and research is vital to your ongoing spiritual development and anticipated direction of ministry and/or vocation?

Part 2 (2 pages): Reflect upon and report your own strengths and weaknesses as it pertains to your own attitudes, abilities, and habits of life-long learning and research. In light of this self-evaluation, identify a specific strategy for how you will plan to integrate life-long learning and research towards your own personal and ministry growth. In other words, articulate an answer to the following question: Given your own strengths and weaknesses in learning and research, how will you plan to engage in a life of research and learning ("scholarship") as part of your life and ministry?

The specifics of what you address in the paper should reflect a keen awareness of your own situation and the goals and struggles that you may be having at this stage in your academic and ministry life. I encourage you to make this an exercise in seeking after God and so prayer, meditation, and scriptural reflection will be a natural part of the process of writing this assignment.

Theology/Spirituality of Scholarship Paper Due: 25 September 2024

3. ***Discipline-Specific Textbook Response Paper (10%)***

Read the discipline-specific text assigned above (Torrance or Swinton/Mowatt). In no more than **3 pages**, respond to the following question:

What two or three concepts or methodologies described in the text will likely impact the way I think about and carry out the research and thinking on my identified topic? Describe why and how you anticipate that impact.

These papers will be shared within your disciplinary group, and you will be required to respond to one another's papers.

Discipline-Specific Textbook Response Paper Due: 16 October 2024

4. ***Forum Participation (5%)***

The successes of an online course depend upon the participation of students in the online forums and discussions. Students must respond at least once to each weekly instructor's forum questions and provide at least one response to other students for each discussion. I.e., 8 weekly forums = minimum of 8 responses to instructor and 8 responses to fellow students.

Post-Course Assignments

5. ***Peer Review (5%) – IMPORTANT***

Exchange a copy of your preliminary proposal (not the whole portfolio) with your peer reviewer by **November 6th, 2024**. Provide a written response to your peer's proposal by **November 20th, 2024**. Instructions on giving good peer feedback will be provided during the course.

6. ***Methodological Analysis (20%)***

Identify either a scholarly monograph or completed dissertation/thesis that is related to your chosen topic. Read the work in its totality and then write a **4-5 page** methodological analysis of the book in which you answer the following questions:

1. What is the topic of the work? (provide a single summary paragraph of the whole work).
2. What is the primary problem, research question, thesis, and argument the work is making?
3. What are the theoretical frameworks that are identified or assumed within the work?
4. What explicitly identified "limits" have been placed on the work? (i.e., limits to the literature, population sample, certain problems which are not being dealt with, etc.).
5. What is the methodology and/or approach used in the work?

- a. If there is an explicitly stated methodology or approach being used in the work, identify it as such and summarize it in your own words.
 - b. If there is no explicitly stated methodology or approach, summarize it as you understand it in your own words.
6. What is your evaluation of the benefits and shortcomings of this methodology relative to the stated problem and the type of argument used?

It is recommended (but not required) that the student consult either with the instructor of record or with a supporting faculty member about the suitability of the text selected for this assignment.

Methodological Analysis Due: 4 December 2024

8. Theological Research Portfolio and Proposal (40%)

Throughout the online portion of the course (8 weeks), you will begin to work toward defining a research topic, problem, research question, methodology and bibliography, and complete short weekly assignments.

Once the course ends, you will submit all the components in a “research portfolio.” You will then refine and sharpen your thinking about the problem in a well-defined, well-written research proposal—the final element in your research portfolio.

The proposal (**8-10 pages** in length) will demonstrate that you have identified a problem to be dealt with in the literature and a proposed method of dealing with the problem. The proposal itself will include a preliminary thesis, but unlike most research papers you may have done, you are not expected to complete the full research for the paper.

The focus of this assignment is on identifying a research problem and question, locating significant primary and secondary sources, justifying the worthiness of the topic of research, gaining critical feedback, and engaging in preliminary reflection on the methodology that would be employed in doing the research, regardless of whether you go on to finish the research. A checklist of all components required for the portfolio will also be available on *Canvas* during the course weeks.

Breakdown:

- Portfolio components and assignments from weekly modules: 10/40 (simply completing the components and assignments is sufficient to obtain the full 10 marks).
- Final Research Proposal: quality, clarity, completeness, feasibility: 25/40
- Grammar, format, style, etc.: 5/40

Theological Research Portfolio and Proposal Due: 18 December 2024

COURSE OUTLINE

Full Course Outline is available in the “Modules” Section on Canvas

SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current Seminary Calendar:

<https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/academics/calendar/>.

Attendance Policy

In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

Modular Courses

Students are expected to attend 100 per cent of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one (1) full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Online Courses

If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Semester-Based Courses

All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

Course Schedules

Modular classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

As members of the Briercrest learning community, students have a responsibility to conduct themselves with integrity and honour. Students who cheat on exams, plagiarize, inappropriately collaborate, or use generative AI without instructor authorization violate the trust placed in them by their instructors, fellow students, and the seminary. Any such actions constitute a breach of academic honesty and will result in serious consequences, such as failure of an assignment, failure of a course, or expulsion from the seminary.

Plagiarism, whether intentional or involuntary, is the submission of the work of others, published or unpublished, in whole or in part without acknowledgment or proper documentation. All information, ideas and/or direct quotations taken from other primary or secondary sources must be documented appropriately.

Generative AI is an umbrella term for a type of machine learning and a group of algorithms that can create new content, such as text, code, images, videos, music, or a combination of all these formats. Generative AI produces output in response to a query or prompt using generative models such as Large Language Models (LLMs) that rely on large datasets. Generative AI features are also often embedded within tools such as Grammarly, allowing these tools to generate new content, such as the rewriting, paraphrasing, or summarizing of existing text. The generated responses of these tools are probabilistic, which can result in errors and biases in responses.

The use of generative AI to create audio or visual media, to produce outlines, to generate partial or complete drafts of assignments, to answer questions on quizzes or exams, or to edit the grammar of assignment drafts is considered unauthorized unless it is explicitly permitted by the course instructor in writing. All use of generative AI tools must be properly documented.

Students are responsible for ensuring they are using their sources and completing their assignments with transparency and honesty. For more details, consult the [Seminary Calendar](#) and the Briercrest Format Guide. In addition to being familiar with these pages, instructors assume that you have completed the Briercrest Academic Integrity course on [Canvas](#) and understand the information contained in it.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition (mental or physical) who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should contact the ARC Coordinator in person (L234 in the Library), by phone (1-306-801-6159), or by email (arc@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.). It is recommended that students meet with their professors to discuss the requirements of their accommodations (i.e., how the student will receive lecture notes, or how the professor wants to receive extension requests).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Full Bibliography available on Canvas