

Application for Graduation with Distinction in Medieval and Renaissance Studies

The proposal should be approximately three to four pages in length and include your name, expected graduation date, current GPA in the major (3.5 minimum required), and name of your faculty advisor, who is willing and able to oversee your project. The thesis advisor should indicate approval of the project by providing a signature and date at the end of the proposal. **The completed proposal is due to the MEDREN Director of Undergraduate Studies by the end of the junior year.**

The body of the proposal should include the following:

1. Title that succinctly defines the project

2. Brief description of topic, including principal research question

In two to three paragraphs, identify the historical problem or issue that you propose to investigate, suggest how you plan to investigate it, and explain why anyone should care about it (indicate the importance or value of the work).

3. Brief description of primary sources used to answer the research question

Here you should show that you have begun to identify accessible sources (documents, texts, art objects, architectural sites, etc.) that will allow you to answer the questions you would like to pursue. You should also indicate how you intend to make use of those sources. You can find leads to possible sources from several places, including the bibliography and footnotes of relevant scholarship, online databases and catalogs available through the Duke library portal, and consultations with your faculty advisor as well as library or archival staff.

4. Brief description of scholarly literature that bears on the topic

Writing a piece of original research involves joining a conversation already taking place about your topic. You want to familiarize yourself not only with what already has been said but also with the terms of the discussion. Engaging some of the relevant scholarly debates distinguishes a more engaged, analytical research project from a merely descriptive one.

5. One-page bibliography listing the most relevant primary and secondary sources to the inquiry

List the primary and secondary sources you have identified to date.

The proposal you submit constitutes only a starting point, a way to show your seriousness of purpose and viability of your task. Research likely will take you in unexpected directions and the topic may shift significantly, but the proposal offers a good vantage point from which to begin.

Finding that vantage point need not be a lonely task. Enlist the help of librarians, the MEDREN Director of Undergraduate Studies, and other faculty members in addition to your advisor. One of the most rewarding aspects of the thesis experience is the chance to work closely with other scholars. Those students who make the most of the advising process generally craft the best proposals and get off to the best start with their research.