

Guidelines for St. Mary's Project in Philosophy or Religious Studies

Revised November 14, 2006

I. Goals for a St. Mary's Project

- The student initiates, develops, and completes a significant eight-credit project, usually over the course of two semesters.
- The student reflects critically and thoughtfully on fundamental questions, important thinkers, or particular local, regional, or global issues.
- The student shows competence in a relevant body of literature and/or research, and shows awareness of the social context to which the project contributes.
- The student demonstrates methodological and disciplinary proficiency, as defined in consultation with his or her SMP mentor.
- The student develops verbal presentation skills and shares their projects publicly twice: in the first semester as a work-in-progress and as a final product during SMP Presentation Day.

II. The Nature of the Project

Projects in philosophy or religious studies typically involve research, critical reflection, and a written articulation of a topic. Students should be able to make arguments, cite relevant literature, and draw appropriate conclusions in their work. In addition to classic research and argumentative writing projects, the department welcomes collaborative, experimental and/or multi-disciplinary projects. Students might, for example, collaboratively write a dialogue, design a performance, or develop materials for use in the classroom or external organizations (i.e. hospice, schools). Students may also explore interdisciplinary pursuits and engage in dialogue with other disciplines. For example, a philosophy student might philosophically analyze the work of an economist, poet, or sociologist.

III. Suggested Types and Examples of Projects

The following examples and project types are intended to stimulate ideas but are not meant to be restrictive:

- Library research, analysis, and critical evaluation of particular philosophical thinkers or religious systems of thought. (For instance, Martin Buber's theory of ideal (I-Though) human relations, Freudian analysis of rituals, Heidegger's thought on the meaning one's own death, or ecofeminism).
- A community service project that draws on research and involves critical analysis and reflection. (For example, teaching a unit on "philosophy for children" or on "non-violent conflict resolution" in the local school system; Serving as a hospice volunteer and reflecting on the nature of death and religious death rituals).

- Research and reflection on a local issue that has links to religious or philosophical issues--e.g., the history of traditionally Black churches; environmental issues in the Chesapeake Bay Area or St. Mary's College sexual assault policy.
- Reflective papers based on surveys and interviews with people about their ethical or religious ideas on drugs, death, the good life, etc., including knowledge of related secondary research.
- Research and reflection of topics pertaining to international study tours or study abroad experiences --e.g., engaged Buddhism in Thailand, Muslim perspectives on AIDS in the Gambia, coming of age rituals in India.

IV. Components of all Projects

All projects should involve:

1. Research, including the demonstrating of connections to the academic discipline(s) in which it is credited. This research may include personal observations and interviews.
2. Critical reflection, appropriate to the discipline and project chosen. The student should define his or her point of view and make some effort to justify his or her position.
3. Written component, the format and scope of which has been agreed upon with the project mentor.
4. Mid-Term Presentation during the penultimate semester, usually in poster format. The poster will communicate the project's nature, methods, progress to date, and outstanding work.
5. Final presentation, the nature and venue of which will be agreed upon by the student and his or her mentor. Presentations held during the departmental SMP Presentation Day will be attended by the SMP mentor and two other faculty members, one reader and one non-reader. Reader and non-reader will confer with the mentor about the grade of the final product of the SMP (as distinct from the year-long process grade for carrying out the project).

V. Procedures for Undertaking and Completing Projects

A. As students take their courses throughout their first years, they should consider topics or thinkers which they find sufficiently interesting to serve as possible topics for an SMP, and they are encouraged to speak with faculty members at an early date about their ideas.

B. The most common sequence for work on the SMP is as follows:

- spring of junior year: take PHIL 492 or RELG 492: SMP Proseminar (0 credits)
- fall of senior year: take PHIL 493 or RELG 493, for first 4 credits of SMP
- spring of senior year: take PHIL 494 or RELG 494, for final 4 credits of SMP

It is possible to distribute the registration for the SMP over more than two semesters (2-2-4, starting in the spring or summer of the junior year, for example). It is also possible to

condense all 8 credits of the SMP into one semester, although this is not normally advised.

C. SMP Proseminar

Students receive no grade for this course, as it is non-credit, but successful completion of the proseminar entitles the student to register in the next semester for PHIL/RELG 493, which is the first portion of the SMP. Successful completion of the proseminar is measured by the student developing a SMP proposal acceptable to the departmental faculty, which will include the following information:

- the nature of the project and its methodology
- a description of why this project would be meaningful to the student
- what course or co-curricular experiences the student has had which would allow the student to engage in the project
- the sources to be used to allow the student to execute the project, whether bibliographic sources, interview materials, *etc.*
- the planned sequence of credit distribution over semesters (0-8)
- the planned form of public presentation
- budget of expenses (if any reimbursement by department is expected)
- a listing of three departmental faculty members with whom the student would be willing to have as project mentor, and who would be willing to serve as mentor.

For projects commencing in the 2007-08 academic year, the SMP proposal is due **Monday, April 16, 2007.**

Students who expect to be away from SMCM during the spring of their junior year have two options: either (i) complete the work for the SMP Proseminar in the fall prior to departure, or (ii) be in regular contact during the spring with the faculty of the department, in order to complete and submit an acceptable SMP proposal by the same due date governing those on campus.

D. After the department has assigned a project mentor to the student, the student will arrange a meeting with the mentor prior to the close of the semester, in order to discuss in greater detail the project proposal and the **Action Plan**. The semesterly Action Plan is required by the College, and requires the student to set deadlines for the various components of the project. It is to be submitted during the add-drop period of each semester for which the student is registered for an SMP.

The student and the mentor will meet as frequently during the execution of the SMP as the mentor deems necessary, and not less than once monthly.

Students will register for the St. Mary's Project each semester during which they undertake work on a project. The first 4 credits of St. Mary's Project are numbered **493**, and the final 4 credits are numbered **494**. Registration is not final until a proposal, with all signatures, has been submitted to the Office of the Registrar no later than the last day of the College's drop-add period. In the first semester in which the St. Mary's Project is undertaken, the **proposal form**, and an **Action Plan** of goals and activities for that

semester. The proposal form is signed by the student, the faculty mentor, the student's academic adviser, the chair(s) of the student's major(s), the chair of the department in which the project is being done, or the area coordinator of the cross-disciplinary study area. Other requirements for approval and filing of St. Mary's Projects may be established by departments and cross-disciplinary study areas, and students should consult with their faculty mentors to learn of these requirements.

When students register for the St. Mary's Project in the second and any subsequent semesters, an updated **action plan**, signed by the project mentor, must be submitted to the Office of the Registrar. This action plan will describe specifically the actual work to be completed during that semester. If, in the course of this work, the description of the project changes substantially, the mentor will require the student to resubmit the proposal with an updated description and work plan; the mentor may also, as a result, withdraw from serving as mentor for that student. General College information regarding the St. Mary's Project will be transmitted to students by e-mail. Projects are due to mentors **several weeks** before the end of classes in the semester in which they are completed; consult the College web site for exact dates. Archival material must be submitted to the Office of the Registrar on the last day of classes in the appropriate semester.

E. The student makes some form of public presentation of the project and there should also be an appropriate celebration of it. This event would be public, and students who have not yet undertaken projects will be encouraged to attend.

VI. Criteria for Project Evaluation

- Depth/breadth of research
- Evidence of development in knowledge, skills, and creative achievement
- Demonstration of methodological competence
- Degree of care and sophistication
- Strength of writing or other forms of expression
- Degree of attainment of project goals set by student
- Degree to which the work contributes to an academic or non-academic community.

Note that for any student who is using the SMP to fulfill requirements of the Philosophy or Religious Studies major, a grade of C- must be received in EACH segment of the SMP, whether the SMP is divided into two or three semesters or is executed all in one semester. This C- minimum is no different from that required of any other course used to satisfy major requirements in these disciplines. Students failing to meet this requirement will not be able to graduate with a major in either of these disciplines until all major requirements are satisfied, even if this means delaying graduation for a semester or a year.