

*St John's College Graduate Institute Annapolis*  
**MASTER'S ESSAY GUIDELINES**

Students who have completed at least two segments of the Graduate Institute and who have demonstrated considerable facility in writing and in class conversation may petition the Director and Graduate Institute Committee for permission to write an optional master's essay. Each student is responsible for finding a tutor to serve as advisor during the writing of the essay. Students who wish to submit a proposal to write an essay in their third or fourth semester should consult with the Director early in their second semester.

A master's essay may replace one preceptorial, or it may be undertaken in addition to the full program. In the latter case, students must begin the essay within two years of their graduation. Students who successfully complete the master's essay and oral examination will earn three credit hours.

**Step 1: Submit the Master's Essay Application**

The advisor should be consulted in the formulation of the proposal and must sign the proposal before it can be submitted. Completed proposals include:

- 1) The Master's Essay Application Form
- 2) A three to five page précis or essay proposal with a list of the texts you plan to use
- 3) Copies of two preceptorial essays

Proposals must be approved by the Graduate Institute Committee, and are evaluated on the basis of the student's academic record, writing samples, and topic description. The committee will consult with the student's tutors to determine whether the student is ready to undertake such a project. In order to allow time for the review of applications, the following deadlines apply. If the master's essay is intended to replace a preceptorial in a given term, the application must be received prior to the advance deposit deadline for that term (spring - Oct. 1, summer - Mar. 15, fall - May 1). If the master's essay will be done in addition to the full program, the application must be received prior to the last day of classes in the term preceding the term in which you wish to begin the essay. Once the Graduate Institute Committee has approved the proposal, the student will be enrolled in a three-credit essay course; the tuition charged a student for the master's essay will be equivalent to the tuition charged for one class (three credits) in the Graduate Institute.

**Step 2: Submit the completed Master's Essay**

The goal of the master's essay should be a thoughtful examination of a text or a few texts. The essay is not intended to be a piece of specialized research, but rather a sustained performance in the liberal arts. It is expected that the master's essay will be 30-60 pages long. This quantitative specification is meant more to reflect the expectation of a certain depth of inquiry than to encourage mere length or breadth. The essay should be carefully written and thoroughly edited. References to primary texts and secondary sources (if any) should be documented in a clear and consistent fashion.

An essay is usually submitted in the semester following the semester in which the student is registered for it. In order to allow time for the examining committee to read the papers and for an exam to be scheduled, the essay is due at approximately the midpoint of the semester in which the exam is to be held. The due date for each semester is given in the Graduate Institute calendar.

An essay may not be submitted later than two calendar years from the semester in which the student was registered for it. The writer is expected to meet regularly with his or her faculty advisor to discuss the essay's composition and progress. Nonetheless, a student should not expect assistance from the advisor to extend beyond two successive semesters.

### Step 3: The Master's Essay evaluation and oral examination

A specially selected essay committee of three tutors, including a committee chairperson, appointed by the Director of the Graduate Institute in the summer and fall semesters and by the Assistant Dean in the spring semester, evaluates the master's essay. The essay writer's advisor is not included on the committee.

The grading scale for the optional master's essay is P-Pass or F-Fail. Careful screening of applicants through the proposal process is designed to ensure that failing grades will be extremely rare. A student whose master's essay is not considered passing is not subject to oral examination on the master's essay. However, a student who receives a grade of F on the essay will be given the opportunity to rewrite the essay. Should the student receive an F on the rewritten essay, he or she will receive no credit; only the record of "Master's Essay Work" as a class with no credit in the semester in which the essay was begun will appear on the student's transcript. A student whose master's essay is considered passing is examined orally. The master's essay oral examination is graded as H-Honors, P-Pass, or F-Fail. If a grade of F is given, no record of the master's essay oral examination appears on the transcript and only the record of "Master's Essay Work" as a class with no credit in the semester in which the essay was begun will appear on the student's transcript. If the master's essay receives a passing grade and the oral examination is considered passing or honors, the grades along with the title of the master's essay will be recorded on the student's transcript.

#### Please note:

(1) Students should be aware that opting to write a master's essay might delay their graduation. If, for example, a student has opted to write an essay in place of the fourth preceptorial and the essay is found unacceptable even after it is rewritten, then the student must take a preceptorial to meet degree requirements.

(2) Those students who first choose to write an essay (and work with an advisor) but then decide to take a preceptorial in its stead will have to pay tuition for that class.