

January 27, 2016

Dear Class of 2017,

This email discusses your MA capstone requirement. According to the *Brandeis Bulletin*, in addition to other degree requirements, the NEJS MA requires the completion of a culminating assignment, either:

- 1) Writing a MA thesis;
- 2) Completing a significant project; or
- 3) Taking an oral examination.

The thesis is typically 50 to 75 pages and involves original research. The MA thesis must be deposited electronically to the Robert D. Farber University Archives at Brandeis.

The project might take the form of a film or video; a museum exhibition or museum catalog proposal; a musical or dance production; a curriculum with rationale; a website; a photographic or other artistic/visual project; an annotated translation with a scholarly introduction; or another form proposed by the student. The number of hours involved in producing a project is comparable to writing a thesis; only the format is different. Standards for evaluating the thesis and the project are also comparable.

The examination is 1-hour, oral (rather than written), and typically tests factual knowledge, analytical skills, and ability to synthesize relevant material. It may include work covered in courses as well as new material. Students should establish with their examiners an agreed-upon list of materials that the examination will cover.

Class of 2017

After consultation with your NEJS academic advisor, **please email Joanne Arnish to confirm which option you would like to choose** as soon as possible: thesis, project, or exam. If you have any questions about the choice, please be in touch with your NEJS academic advisor or Professor Freeze, Director of NEJS Graduate Studies.

If you are writing an MA thesis or creating an MA project you must submit a written proposal on or before March 30, 2016 to Joanne Arnish. The proposal should be approximately 1 page in length and be accompanied by a preliminary bibliography. Please include a:

1. Working title
2. Clearly stated research question or project goals
3. A brief discussion of why the research question is important
4. Methodology planned (how you plan to do your research)
5. Preference for NEJS thesis advisors
6. Preliminary bibliography of written materials on your chosen topic.

All proposals will be reviewed by a committee of NEJS faculty so that you will have feedback in April. Students may apply for funding assistance, if relevant, via GSAS and/or NEJS GTR.

NEJS Capstone Requirements for the MA Thesis, Project, and Oral Exam

The NEJS MA Thesis, Project, or Oral Examination

The NEJS MA thesis or project serves as a culminating, capstone project for a student's studies in the NEJS MA or NEJS MA/HRNS MA or NEJS/WGS or NEJS/COEX graduate programs. Discussion of these capstone options should begin with a student's advisor in the spring of the first year. The thesis or project is submitted and defended in the student's final semester of study, usually the spring of the second year.

The MA Thesis

The NEJS thesis is the product of sustained investigation of a research question, a relevant scholarly question or contemporary issue using the methodology or methodologies appropriate to that question. The thesis should build on substantial prior knowledge (typically, a student will have taken at least one course on the topic and/or will have carried out a directed reading on the topic, prior to beginning the thesis research) and draw upon multiple primary and secondary resources. The thesis should also reflect significant critical knowledge of the literature and issues in the field. The strongest thesis will present new research and/or findings in the field.

Theses are written documents, typically 50-75 pages long. They should represent a coherent and compelling argument that is attentive to critical issues and supported by the appropriate scholarly documentation. A thesis defense is one hour with the student and the thesis readers and takes place by Friday, April 21, 2017.

The MA Project

The NEJS project offers the opportunity to explore a relevant scholarly question or contemporary issue by creating a written, visual, material, aural, kinesthetic, and/or artistic production in combination with supporting textual material.

The NEJS project is based on a sustained investigation of a research question using the methodology or methodologies appropriate to that question. The project should build on substantial prior knowledge (typically, a student will have taken at least one course on the topic and/or will have carried out a directed reading on the topic, prior to beginning the project).

Projects might take the form of a film or video; a museum, museum exhibition, or museum catalog proposal; a musical or dance production; a curriculum; a website; a photographic or other artistic/visual project; an annotated translation with a scholarly introduction; or another form proposed by the student. Students and advisors should work together to make sure that the student has the appropriate skill sets and background knowledge to plan and implement the proposed project. Project formats must be appropriate to the question and purposes of the project. Project formats must be approved by the advisor prior to the beginning of their creation.

All projects must also be submitted with an accompanying 15-page written document describing the purpose and goals of the project and how they are achieved through the project; demonstrating

intellectual control of the relevant scholarship and bibliography; describing the audience for the project and the project's intended impact on them; discussing why the format is appropriate to the project's goals and intentions; and including an annotated bibliography according to contemporary scholarly standards.

Oral Examination (BANE students see special section following*)

The one-hour oral examination typically tests factual knowledge, analytical skills, and ability to synthesize relevant material. Students taking this examination should choose, in consultation with the graduate program chair, two professors (at least one of whom is a regular NEJS faculty member), to participate in this examination. The student then, with these examiners, will compose a document outlining the goals and content of the examination by October of his or her final year, which must be approved by the two examiners in consultation with the graduate program chair. A student who fails the exam may take it a second time.

Additional Information

Students are encouraged to take NEJS 295a: Readings for Master's Capstone (for credit, typically given by one of the readers or examiners) to help them prepare for each of these options during their third semester. Students should register for the appropriate course during spring 2017 registration: NEJS 299a Directed Research for Master's Thesis, or NEJS 298a: Directed Research for Master's Project. No additional course is needed for the Exam option.

Each of the three options requires a formal presentation in front of at least two faculty members which should be scheduled usually the third week of April. It is the responsibility of the student to find a mutually agreeable day and time and to inform the NEJS office administrator who will assign a room and provide necessary paperwork.

All capstone options are graded fail/pass/distinction; distinction is reserved for truly exceptional circumstances. In all cases, the graduate program chair will arbitrate any grading dispute between the two examiners. The NEJS 200-level courses are usually given letter grades.

Students may apply for funding assistance, i.e. research travel, from GSAS and/or the NEJS GTR fund.

Selecting Thesis and Project Readers

Students should submit their project proposal and the names of any faculty they would like to serve as their thesis or project advisors to a NEJS capstone committee [composed of the graduate chair, the NEJS chair, and two NEJS faculty (on a rotating basis)] **before March 30, 2016**. The NEJS capstone committee will suggest appropriate faculty to work with each student. Thesis/project primary advisors must be NEJS faculty or affiliated NEJS faculty members. Second advisors may be NEJS or other Brandeis faculty members with expertise in the student's field of inquiry. An optional third reader from outside the Brandeis community may be added to the committee, with approval of the NEJS capstone committee and the Brandeis advisors if he or she brings additional expertise not represented on the faculty committee.

Human Subject Research

The NEJS capstone committee will also advise students concerning issues connected to Human Subject Research. Theses or projects that involve data collection from people (e.g., surveys or interviews or focus groups) must comply with Brandeis's IRB (Institutional Review Board) guidelines.

***BANE students: Culminating Oral Exam Recommendations and Requirements**

Students who have specialized in BANE and choose the oral exam (typically attended by all three BANE faculty) should normally do the following:

- a. Read three general books, and at least one on general Near East or Assyriology, and at least one on Hebrew Bible/Israel, to help put their studies in a larger context.

Suggested books include:

Van de Mieroop, Marc. "A History of the Ancient Near East." 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.

Chavalas, Mark, ed. "The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation." Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006. (Has many historical and historiographic texts with good historical introductions and context; a companion volume to the van de Mieroop book, but can be read independently.)

Albertz, Rainer. "History of Israelite Religion." 2 vols. Louisville: Westminster, John Knox, 1994. (= one book)

Collins, John. "Introduction to the Hebrew Bible." Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004.

The BANE faculty will entertain requests for substitutions.

- b. Prepare a list of courses taken by topical area (Hebrew Bible, Assyriology, general ANE, etc.) and email this to examiners a month before the exam. As applicable, include also a list of texts read in a primary and a secondary ANE language (e.g., Hebrew Bible and Akkadian). Advanced students should highlight at least 8 biblical chapters or the equivalent in another ANE language that you will be responsible for in the primary language. Students should prepare half of the Akkadian reading in cuneiform.
- c. Set the date for the exam in early March (for some time in the month of April).

The exam will cover general course work within the framework of the three general books. For the most part broad questions will be asked to let students show what they have learned. More specific follow up questions will be asked. Students should expect to be asked to read a passage from their primary and secondary languages (from the list of texts submitted), translate, answer grammatical questions, and answer more general questions about the passages.