M.A. in the Study of the Americas  
Thesis and/or Capstone Course  
Version of November 5, 2012

**Directions:** Please read the below as it will help you plan for your graduation, and the related decision that you must make as regards the requirement to take either a capstone course or write a thesis.

**The Thesis and/or the Capstone:**  
Timeline, Formalities, and Decisions

| Vocabulary | The thesis advisor is the **first reader** for a thesis. The **second reader** also supports the research process for the thesis. The role of both the thesis advisor and the second reader is to support your research process. Your topic will be yours. The advisor and the second reader will not necessarily be specialists in your topic. They bring to you their general expertise in research methodologies. So if you choose to write a thesis, you must be comfortable with the research process. Expect that rewriting is part of the process of writing a thesis. The thesis might take between one semester and two years to complete. The thesis process includes:
| 1. a proposal,  
| 2. a 40-60 page thesis with full bibliography, and  
| 3. an abstract of the thesis. |

| The capstone course | is an advanced graduate level course that assumes that you already can research and write at the level of a graduate course. The goal is that you explore ways in which you may make significant interventions in a particular topic. Each capstone course has a general theme, which offers you a means by which to engage your own personal research interest through the prism of the capstone’s theme. |

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| **When do I take the Research Methodologies Foundation course?** | The Research Methodologies Foundation course is offered each Spring semester. There are benefits to taking it at the beginning of your M.A. curriculum, as there are also benefits to taking it towards the end of your M.A. curriculum. In some cases, the M.A. director will instruct you to take the course at a certain moment in your M.A. career.  
- If you take the course at the beginning of your curriculum, the benefits are:  
  - The course can be used as a rigorous review of the research and writing processes. If it’s been a while since you have been out of school, you are expected to write at least one academic essay in |
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| most courses. We suggest that you take fewer courses at the beginning of your course-work, even just one course. Please note that the Research Methodologies Foundation course is not a course that teaches basic writing. For this, please hone your skills by taking fewer courses and visiting the Writing Center at CWE. | ○ That said, you will find that you will be in the course with students working directly towards their thesis proposal.  
・ If you take the course towards the middle or end of your curriculum, the benefits are:  
○ To work towards a first draft of your thesis proposal, which is required for any student opting to write a thesis for his or her graduation requirement.                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| One or two semesters before I would like to register for the thesis credits, I should: | Request a meeting with one or two professors under whose aegis you would like to write the thesis. You may do this either by talking to the professor after class and/or writing the professor a formal email to request a meeting. Before you meet with the professor, be sure to have two to three ideas as regards your thesis topic as well as two to three bibliographic references that relate to your research interests.                                                                                     |
| What do I do the semester before I start writing my thesis?                | 1. Submit the thesis proposal to both of your thesis advisors/readers. We suggest that you consult first with your first reader. Your first reader will then instruct you as regards procedures. See below for the format of the proposal.  
2. Once your two advisors/readers have approved your proposal and signed the thesis proposal form, submit the proposal and the signed thesis form to the director of the M.A. in the Study of the Americas.  
3. The Advisory Committee for the Study of the Americas will review your thesis proposal at their next meeting, and the director will contact you by email after the meeting.                                                                                                                        |
| How do I register for the thesis credits so that I may write my thesis?     | 1. If your thesis proposal is approved, the director will sign you up for the three-credit thesis course that you must take to graduate. Your first reader will be the listed professor on your transcript. You may take another class at the same time, but it is your responsibility to manage your time so that you can write your thesis in a timely manner.                                                                                                                                  |
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<th><strong>fashion. Usually students take between one semester and two years to write their fifty-page thesis.</strong></th>
<th>2. If your thesis proposal is not approved, you will meet with your first reader and the director to discuss whether or not you should register for the thesis three-credits immediately or wait another semester.</th>
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<td><strong>If I have finished all of my course-work, but if I have not yet finished my thesis, then what do I do?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Once you have registered and paid for the three-credit research course with your first reader, and if you have completed your other twenty-seven credits, then you just need to pay the Maintenance of Matriculation (M.O.M.) until you graduate. This cost is less than $200 per semester. You may register for this directly with the Registrar’s office and pay at the Bursar’s office, both uptown at the main CCNY campus. Some caveats:</strong></td>
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|  | • If you plan to study abroad, try to study abroad before you get to this point, because it is difficult to get course credit for study abroad once you are doing the M.O.M.  
• As explained by the Bursar’s office, if you plan to submit your final thesis and graduate during the summer, you must pay the M.O.M. for the summer. If you do not plan to submit the thesis and graduate in the summer, then you only need to pay the M.O.M. in the Fall or Spring semester/s. |
| **How do I plan for my graduation?** | 1. **At least** one to two semesters before you plan to graduate, be sure to see the director of the M.A. program so that you may fill out a ‘Graduation Check.’ In fact, we suggest that you do the ‘Graduation Check’ with the director once you have taken three to four courses so that you may plan the rest of your time in the MA program. |
|  | 2. Consider whether you will take the capstone course or if you will register for thesis credits and write a thesis for your graduation requirement. You may both take a capstone course and also write a thesis, but you must do at least one of the two. This decision should be made in consultation with the director. |
|  | 3. Please note that the capstone course is only taught in the Spring semester. |
Section I: Statement of the Overall Topic and Review of the Literature on the Topic

This section should begin with a brief introduction to the topic in general (for example, primary education in both the Dominican Republic and the United States; or Barbadian Literature, especially the works of one particular author; or Cuban cinema, particularly those films by a specific director), followed by a review of the most important critical literature on the topic to date. You should cite here specific examples of critics and/or scholars whose work up to the present on your subject has been noteworthy and widely considered “expert” in the field. As you cite these specialists, you should also name their major works on the topic, articles as well as books. In each case, you should make their point of view on the topic clear to the reader. What has their research unearthed on this topic, and what position/s on the topic has their research led them to espouse?

Section II: Your Thesis and Its Place in the Overall Debate

In this section, you differentiate your own project from what has already been written. You do so by clearly stating what the argument of your project is. This section should follow logically from the one above, in that it generally considers the previous scholarship within your own thesis statement. For example, following from the above:

• “As noted in Section I, most scholars have considered primary literacy education in the Dominican Republic to be essentially the same as that in the United States. While this is essentially true in many respects, there is one important difference: The Dominican Republic, unlike the United States, has not embraced the ‘whole language’ approach to early literacy. Rather, primary educators in the Dominican Republic remain committed to phonetic and grammatical approaches to literacy acquisition. To date, scholars have ignored this important difference. My thesis will argue that this difference in approach to early literacy is significant, with long-range consequences.”

• “As noted in Section I, little to date has been written about Barbadian literature in general and most of what has been written has concerned male authors. Though there is a small body of scholarship pertaining to the work of Paule Marshall, no one as yet has written an in-depth study of the relationship between gender and real property in her novel Brown Girl, Brownstones. My argument is that the men and the women in the novel have remarkably different relationships with real property. The male idea of ‘home’ is not at all the same as the female idea of ‘home.’ This difference is one of the central themes of this novel and deserves attention.”

• “As noted in Section I, in Cuba, films made by Cuban-Americans or Cubans in exile are not widely distributed or well known, in part because the films deal with the Revolution in a negative light, but also because Cubans on the island dispute the notion of a Cuban diaspora and believe that those who live in exile no longer represent Cuban reality in an authentic light. They take the position that directors who experience life outside Cuba represent Cuba through a distorted lens, and that the films they make are largely works of
propaganda. In this thesis, I will dispute that position. I believe that there is an avid ‘underground’ distribution and viewership of films made by Cuban-Americans in Cuba, and that many in Cuba believe these films to be a more accurate representation of Cuban life than those made in Cuba.”

Follow this statement of your thesis, or argument, with more explanation of your position on the question.

Section III: Research Methods

Your thesis, or argument, should raise a number of questions. Why have Dominican educators resisted the “whole language” approach to early literacy? Why have primary educators in the U.S. embraced it? What sorts of theorists might give us some insights about the relationship of sex and gender to ideas of “home” in immigrant communities? Can one who has lived outside of Cuba for thirty years represent Cuba in an authentic way? What qualifications must a filmmaker possess to produce an “authentic” film? What is “propaganda” and how does it relate to Cuban film made both inside and outside of Cuba’s borders?

After stating the main questions swirling around your research topic, you should move into a discussion about the ways in which you plan to gather evidence for your own argument. You should reflect on the broad analytical approach (education theory, gender theory, cinema theory) and on the school/s of thought that will inform your investigation of the problem (universal core theorists? Marxist theorists? “Queer” theorists?). Moreover, the methods section will comment on the kinds of information you will need to address your central questions. What sorts of things will you need to find out? Will you need archival materials? Are you doing ethnographic research? Will you need oral histories? On the more technical level, this section specifies the precise steps you will take to collect and interpret information (or “data”). What kinds of printed sources will be used (books, articles, government data)? Who will be interviewed, and what kinds of questions will they be asked? What social contexts will be observed and how will your data be organized?

Returning to Section I, perhaps some of the critics you named there have misinterpreted the problem because a different methodological approach shows the problem in a whole new light. For instance, perhaps the forces of gentrification in cities is not sociological, as has been previously written, but rather, economic. In that case, making your methodological approach perfectly clear in Section III may also strengthen the argument as stated in Section II. In other words, this section ties all together.
Specific Timeline for the Thesis

I. Submit the Proposal, as explained above.
   a. Include at the end a table of Contents for your thesis (section headings and approximate number of pages of each)
   
   b. Annotated Bibliography: This bibliography of your sources with a brief discussion of each and how it fits into your project should be submitted with your proposal

II. Once your thesis proposal has been approved, construct a detailed project outline (with section headings and bullet points outlining content for each below). Get feedback from your advisor

III. Draft a couple of sections and again, bring to your advisor for feedback

IV. Revise as necessary

Note Well: For best results, please do follow the above Proposal format and Thesis Timeline. While writing the proposal and following the thesis timeline, be sure to get feedback from your advisor at every step. It may seem desirable to work independently and present a completed work all at once, but this approach could cost you valuable time. Your advisor should have some expertise in your topic and can point you to essential sources you have omitted or to flaws in your argument. Better to know about these problems sooner, rather than later.

Also note that the careful construction of your proposal and annotated bibliography, in close consultation with your advisor, will take some time. But as anyone who has ever written a thesis or a dissertation knows, time spent on the proposal and bibliography is time saved when writing the actual thesis or dissertation. If all is plotted out carefully, the actual writing of the project becomes much easier and moves along much more quickly.