Commonwealth Scholar Prospectus Guidelines

A full-scale prospectus for a commonwealth scholar project should, at a minimum, include:

- **A brief, descripitive title.**
- **A concise introduction** that frames a preliminary thesis (claim or hypothesis to be researched/defended), contextualizes it approriately, and outlines a prospective argument for it (contingent, of course, on research findings).
- **A statement about the project's interdisciplinarity.** In the spirit of the liberal arts, all CS theses at MCLA are interdisciplinary, though what this means for a specific project depends to some extent on the topic, and hence on the disciplinary methods and subject matter that are relevant to the inquiry.
- **A summary of methods** to be employed in the scholarship, data collection, and analysis of material constituting the body of reasoning. We understand, again, that methods will have a distinctive character depending on the disciplinary bases of the investigation. However, the student should give some thought and justification to choice of particular methods over alternative possibilities.
- **An extensive bibliography** that illustrates the range of relevant sources as well as the breadth of existing approaches to the topic. This is a working rather than merely a hypothetical bibliography – the text of your prospectus should make reference to much of its contents.
- **A prospective timeline** for completion of various phases of the project.

Commonwealth Scholar Project Schedule:

- **April 1st:** Prospecti are due the first of April of the student's junior year, and should by that time have been developed and refined (see Stage One below) in close collaboration with sponsoring faculty member, and in communication with honors directors

- **Mid-May:** Honors direcctors approve or reject prospecti in consultation with the Honors Advisory Board, after discussion with faculty sponsors. At their discression, the directors may send the prospectus back to the student with requests for a revision, normally due at the end of June.

- **Fall semester:** Approved projects register for CS Thesis Research course (HONR 550) with faculty sponsors. Normally, this will involve at least weekly consultations, depending on the nature of the project. The directors will consult with the faculty sponsor at mid-term to assess progress, and after the end of the semester will make a determination, based on the quality of the work produced so far, whether to allow the project to go forward into the second semester

- **Spring semester:** If the directors allow the project to go forward, the student will again register for HONR 550, CS Thesis Research, with the original faculty sponsor. By the beginning of February, however, a substantially completed draft will circulate to the directors, as well as other members of the faculty with relevant expertise, initiating a collaborative process of critique and revision. By the first week of March, the thesis will be in its finished form, ready to go to an outside reader.

  The public presentation and defense will be scheduled during April. The evaluating committee will consist of one honors director, the faculty sponsor, another member of the faculty (chosen in consultation with the candidate), and an outside reader. The committee members will ask the candidate questions, after which the audience will have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the thesis. The committee will retire to deliberate and vote on the project. The committee may recommment either ***pass***, ***no pass***, or (in rare cases) ***pass with specific revisions***.

  Commonwealth Scholars are expected also to give a presentation at the Statewide Undergraduate Research Conference at U Mass Amherst, normally held in late April, with a submission deadline in early February.

As an aid to developing and refining your prospectus, we recommend that you undertake the following exercises in collaboration with your faculty sponsor:

Stage One (an early exercise for developing the prospectus. To ensure clarity and simplicity this should fill no more than half a page):
> **1)** Give a brief, descriptive **title**.
> **2)** Attempt a coherent, one-sentence **description** of what you hope to accomplish.
> **3)** Briefly **contextualize** the project, including a clear exposition of your methods of research and analysis, what theories or perspectives you will employ, and why they are suitable for your project.

Stage Two (an exercise for keeping the project focused and moving it forward, best undertaken perhaps a month into the first semester of the project):
> **1) Introduction**: Set the stage for the study; present a statement of its intent in relation to both scholarly and wider social contexts.
> **2) Purpose**: What are your reasons and purposes for undertaking the study? What is its significance or rationale?
> **3) Limitations**: How might you still need to narrow the scope of the project to keep it manageable, while still significant? Identify potential weaknesses and limitations of the methods you are using. What will your study *not* do?
> **4) Literature Review:** Survey what others have published on the topic, explaining why your work fills a gap.

5) Methods: develop, now more fully, an account of your methods of research and analysis, and evaluate them in light of your developing understanding of the project.