The Master of Sacred Theology is a one-year program of study beyond the Master of Divinity, designed for students who seek to study a religious topic with an advanced focus. Emphasis is placed on cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural approaches to biblical, ethical, and theological studies. The Master of Sacred Theology program is generally for students seeking additional academic preparation prior to a Ph.D. program.
# Table of Contents

- **Overview of the Program** .............................................................. 2
- **Requirements for Admission** ...................................................... 2
- **Program Goals and Learning Outcomes** ................................. 3
- **Course of Study** ........................................................................ 3
- **Advising** .................................................................................. 4
- **Concentrations** .......................................................................... 4
- **Master’s Writing Seminar and Thesis** ....................................... 5
- **Thesis Oral Exam** ....................................................................... 5
- **MA/STM Thesis and Oral Exam Rubric** ..................................... 6
- **Master of Sacred Theology (STM) – Course of Study Worksheet** .......... 8
Master of Sacred Theology (STM)

Overview of the Program

The Master of Sacred Theology (STM) is a one-year program of advanced study beyond the Master of Divinity (or its equivalent) designed for students who seek the opportunity to study a topic in theology with an advanced focus. Emphasis is placed on cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural approaches to biblical, ethical, and theological studies. The Master of Sacred Theology program is ideal for: international students desiring additional year of theological study, students seeking additional academic preparation prior to pursuing a Ph.D. program, and pastors on sabbatical who would benefit from one year of advanced academic study in an area of theological interest.

Requirements for Admission

Applicants to the STM Program must have earned a Master of Divinity Degree (or first graduate theological degree providing equivalent theological background) and demonstrate aptitude for advanced theological study. The STM application process includes:

- Official transcripts from all academic institutions attended.
- Four letters of reference – at least two must be academic, one may come from a pastor or other ministry professional, and one may come from a supervisor or friend.
- An autobiographical statement, as guided by the questions stated within the application form.
- A current resume.
- A two-page statement of proposed focus of study, as guided by the application instructions.
- TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores are required of applicants for whom English is not a first language. The exam must be completed no more than two years prior to application. The TOEFL may only be waived if the applicant has completed another degree, in English, in the US.

Chicago Theological Seminary is committed to fostering the full humanity of all its members. All forms of discrimination and harassment impugn the full humanity of any human being and for this reason are not tolerated in this Seminary. Chicago Theological Seminary does not discriminate, or tolerate discrimination or harassment, against any member of its community on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex/gender, age, religion, disability, pregnancy, veteran status, marital status, sexual orientation, or any other status protected by applicable federal, state, or local law in matters of employment or admissions or in any aspect of the educational programs or activities it offers.
Program Goals and Learning Outcomes

Program Goals

• STM graduates will have acquired advanced knowledge of and capacity to interpret and communicate a specific aspect of one or more theological/ethical and religious traditions.
• STM graduates will be able to think critically about theological/ethical and religious traditions.
• STM graduates will be able to complete graduate level academic research in religious studies.

Learning Outcomes

• Students will apply advanced knowledge of religious traditions appropriately in scholarly research.
• Students will demonstrate ability to construct and develop a substantial and sophisticated scholarly argument in religious studies.
• Students will demonstrate ability to think and write critically about religious traditions.
• Students will demonstrate ability to integrate the study of religion, theology and ethics with at least one of the following:
  1. the study of the humanities or social sciences or
  2. significant contemporary social or political issues or
  3. practical engagement with a local congregation or community organization.
• Students will demonstrate in-depth scholarly knowledge in a specific area relating to religious studies.

STM Course of Study

The STM program is designed to be completed over one academic year, and normally must be completed within four years. The program includes 8 courses (24 credits). No more than 3 of the 8 courses may be taken online.

The STM is a flexible program. Each student designs his or her program in consultation with the STM Director, an assigned faculty advisor, and/or the instructor of the Master's Writing seminar. Students must complete seven elective courses and the Master's Writing seminar (see below). Normally, students may not transfer courses from elsewhere into the STM program.
Advising

STM students will, as much as possible, be assigned advisors by area of interest. Students pursuing a concentration (see below) will be assigned an advisor from the corresponding Center’s advisory committee or another faculty member with expertise in the area of concentration.

Students are expected to meet with their advisors (in person or virtually) at least once a term, during the registration period for the following term. At the conclusion of an advising conversation, the advisor will provide the student with an enrollment PIN. Students can then self-enroll in classes via the Student Web Portal (Empower).

Students should consult with advisors about the topic and shape of the student’s thesis project and the thesis bibliography in the fall, and to provide advisors with a thesis draft to read and discuss (normally the second draft) in the spring. The faculty person advises about the thesis, but is not responsible for ensuring the success of the thesis or its oral exam. Advisors may or may not serve as part of the thesis examining team.

Concentrations

STM concentrations in the Study of Black Faith and Life, Interreligious Engagement, LGBTQ Religious Studies, Chaplaincy Studies, and Muslim Studies are available. Persons desiring a Concentration in one of these areas will take a minimum of four of their total of eight courses from courses identified by the Faculty as satisfying the Concentration requirement and will write a thesis on a topic in the Concentration. The Writing Seminar may count towards one of the required four courses. For more information on these concentrations, contact the Program Director.
Master's Writing Seminar and Thesis

The Master's Writing Seminar is a two-semester course taken during the second or final year of study for MA students and during the final or only year of study for STM students. The course normally meets six times during the fall semester and six times during the spring semester. However, this schedule may be adjusted by individual instructors. The seminar is available in both a face-to-face section and an online section.

Through selected readings, class presentations, three (or more) required stages of drafting, as well as through peer and instructor reviews, the Master's Writing Seminar is designed to assist MA and STM students in a) writing a critically informed and academically superior Master's level thesis on a topic that contributes to the study of theology and religion and, when appropriate, the interface of these with other disciplines and contemporary culture; and b) successfully defending the thesis in an oral exam conducted by members of the CTS faculty. For some students, the course and thesis writing will also serve as c) an important initial stage of training for further, especially doctoral level work in theological and religious studies and/or the humanities and contemporary culture.

Because of the short time available to produce a credible thesis, students in the Master’s Writing Seminar are encouraged (and will essentially be required) to discern and “settle on” a research topic as early in the course as possible. For most students, it will be necessary to “build on” work begun, and topics initially explored, in other classes. However, despite this fact, the thesis must be a substantially new piece of work. It ought not to be simply a seminar paper “expanded,” but rather a document that is significantly more substantive than a seminar paper. Normally a successful thesis will be approximately 40-60 pages (normal font, double spaced) in length.

Thesis Oral Exam

Theses will be examined by a faculty committee, but only with the permission of the Master’s Writing Seminar instructor. Examiners will be determined near the middle of the spring semester based on the topic of individual theses and faculty expertise, interest, and availability. Normally, no exam will be scheduled after April 30th in any given year. Possible outcomes of exams include: Pass with Distinction, Pass, Pass with Stipulations (possibly re-examined), No Pass.

As part of CTS’s assessment of its students and program, faculty examiners will use the following rubric as a guideline when evaluating the thesis and the oral exam.
# MA/STM Thesis and Oral Exam Rubric

## Student Name: ____________________________  Degree Program: ____________________________

The result of this thesis exam was *(please circle)*:  
- a. Pass with Distinction;  
- b. Pass;  
- c. Pass with Stipulations;  
- d. No Pass

### Learning Outcome 1: Students will apply foundational knowledge of religious traditions appropriately in scholarly research. (MA)
Students will apply advanced knowledge of religious traditions appropriately in scholarly research. (STM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMONSTRATES STRONG ABILITY</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATES ADEQUATE ABILITY</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATES INADEQUATE ABILITY</th>
<th>FAILS TO DEMONSTRATE ABILITY</th>
<th>Demonstrated by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper address central problem or question of relevance to religious traditions</td>
<td>Central problem or question is of clear and compelling relevance to religious traditions.</td>
<td>Central problem or question is of relevance to religious traditions.</td>
<td>Central problem or question is tangentially relevant to these traditions.</td>
<td>Central problem or question is not relevant to these traditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of religious traditions in discussion of relevant background</td>
<td>Discussion of background shows a broad understanding of traditions.</td>
<td>Discussion of background shows a general understanding of traditions.</td>
<td>Discussion of background shows gaps in understanding of traditions.</td>
<td>Discussion of background shows a lack of understanding of traditions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Learning Outcome 2: Students will demonstrate in-depth scholarly knowledge in a specific area relating to religious studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMONSTRATES STRONG ABILITY</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATES ADEQUATE ABILITY</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATES INADEQUATE ABILITY</th>
<th>FAILS TO DEMONSTRATE ABILITY</th>
<th>Demonstrated by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of religious traditions in discussion of relevant background</td>
<td>Discussion of background shows a deep understanding of the specific topic area.</td>
<td>Discussion of background shows understanding of the specific topic area.</td>
<td>Discussion of background shows gaps in understanding of the specific topic area.</td>
<td>Discussion of background shows a lack of understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of religious traditions in development of argument.</td>
<td>Development of argument shows a deep and incisive understanding of the specific topic area.</td>
<td>Development of argument shows an understanding of the specific topic area.</td>
<td>Development of argument shows gaps in understanding of the specific topic area.</td>
<td>Development of argument shows little or no understanding of topic area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration of knowledge and understanding in regard to examiner inquiries</td>
<td>Responses draw a deep understanding of specific topic area; responses are informed, thoughtful, and well-supported.</td>
<td>Responses draw on understanding of topic area; responses are clear and generally thoughtful.</td>
<td>Responses show gaps in understanding of topic area, and/or are confused, muddled, or shallow.</td>
<td>Responses show serious misunderstanding, and/or are incoherent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning Outcome 3: Students will demonstrate ability to construct and develop a substantial scholarly argument in religious studies. (MA)

Students will demonstrate ability to construct and develop a substantial and sophisticated scholarly argument in religious studies. (STM)

| Articulates an introduction and thesis statement that identifies a central problem or question and articulates main claims (or conclusions) to be argued | Introduction/thesis statement clearly and concisely identifies a significant problem or question and articulates compelling main claims (or conclusions) to be argued. | Introduction/thesis statement is mostly clear and identifies a coherent problem or question and articulates reasonable main claims (or conclusions) to be argued. | Introduction/thesis statement is not clear or concise, central problem or question and/or main claims (or conclusions) to be argued are only obliquely articulated. | No introduction/thesis statement is presented; no problem or question is identified; no main claims (or conclusions) are articulated | Introduction |
| Uses and cites significant scholarly and other resources (books, journal articles, etc.) | Consistently uses and accurately cites appropriate resources; always acknowledges others' work | Usually uses and accurately cites appropriate resources; usually acknowledges others' work | Rarely uses or cites appropriate resources; rarely acknowledges others' work | No use or citation of appropriate resources; does not acknowledge others' work | Thesis content, footnotes, and bibliography |
| Revises thesis in light of critical comments from examiners, if necessary | Understands and fully responds to critical comments with appropriate and complete revisions | Understands and responds to most critical comments with appropriate revisions | Does not respond to most critical comments with limited revisions | Does not respond to critical comments and does not revise | Revision process |

Learning Outcome 4: Students will demonstrate ability to think and write critically about religious traditions.

| Develops an argument that responds to thesis's central problem or question and supports thesis's main claims (or conclusions) | Argument is fluid, fully developed, engaging, innovative; responds fully to central problem/question and compellingly supports main claims (or conclusions) | Argument is coherent and mostly developed; generally or broadly addresses central problem/question and mostly supports main claims (or conclusions) | Argument is disjointed and/or unclear; often fails to address central problem/question and/or to support main claims (or conclusions) | Argument does not exist; central problem/question is not addressed; main claims (or conclusions) are not supported. | Introduction, conclusion, and content of thesis |
| Demonstration of critical thought and understanding in regard to examiner inquiries | Responses draw on broad understanding of traditions; responses are informed, thoughtful, well-supported. | Responses draw on understanding of traditions; responses are clear and generally thoughtful. | Responses are confused, muddled, or shallow. | Evidence of serious misunderstanding, and/or incoherence. | Oral exam |

Learning Outcome 5 (STM only): Demonstrate the capacity to critically integrate the study of religion, theology and ethics with at least one of the following:
1. the study of the humanities or social sciences or
2. significant contemporary social or political issues or
3. practical engagement with a local congregation or community organization.

| Topic is integrated with another field, issue, or ministry context | Integration is clear, creative, and sophisticated. | Integration is clear and appropriate. | Integration is muddled or barely present. | No evidence of integration. | Content of thesis |
Master of Sacred Theology (STM)
Course of Study Worksheet

Student: ______________________  Advisor: ______________________

Entrance Date: ______________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Writing Seminar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>