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MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY

Program Handbook



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.



MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY (STM) PROGRAM HANDBOOK

2023-2024

Revised July 2023



Welcome to the 2023-2024 academic year!

As the year begins, we are thankful for the end of the federal COVID-19 public health emergency, while recognizing the toll that the last few years have taken on all of us in so many ways. We are still finding our way as we adjust to a new post-COVID way of living and working. CTS has been evolving our course offerings in this light, and is currently delivering courses in the following formats:

- **Online** – both asynchronous and synchronous sessions employing Canvas and Zoom); course numbers end in “**O**”
- **Online in real time**, sometimes with an **in-person** option – synchronous courses employing Canvas and Zoom; course numbers end in “**S**”
- **Hybrid** – online courses with required face-to-face sessions; course numbers end in “**H**”
- **Flex** – online with some optional face-to-face sessions; course numbers end in “**F**”

See the [course schedule \(https://www.ctschicago.edu/course-schedule\)](https://www.ctschicago.edu/course-schedule), *Campus Café*, or the Registrar for specifics.

This is the second year that CTS is following a tri-term calendar. This schedule is meant to help students find more opportunities to take courses throughout the year and thus to complete their degrees more efficiently. We are still living into this new calendar, and we welcome your feedback.

After so much change over the last several years, we now speak of “change fatigue” and we yearn for the peace we feel when the ground is not constantly shifting beneath our feet. We hope you can find firm grounding in CTS’s commitment to excellence in education, to building a CARE-full community, and to helping you find success on your path to graduation and to becoming a transformative leader.

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Statement of Mission and Commitments

Chicago Theological Seminary, a seminary affiliated with the United Church of Christ, serves God, Christ's Church, multiple faith communities, and the larger world by educating persons theologically and cultivating the intellectual, pastoral, and spiritual capacities of lay and ordained religious leaders, scholars, and activists who contribute to the increase of justice and mercy.

Inspired by the ministry of Jesus, guided by the Spirit of the Divine, and nurtured by faith and culture, we strive to create a sacred learning community that educates for public ministry, based upon the following interwoven commitments:

- We are committed to a life of mutual teaching and learning, to academic excellence, to open inquiry, and to critical engagement of texts, contexts, and practices in all of our educational programs;
- We are committed, in a world suffering from spiritual impoverishment, which is characterized by meaninglessness, lovelessness, and hopelessness, to proclaim a message of divine purpose, compassion, and promise;
- We are committed, in a society structured by white supremacy and racism, to challenge white privilege, to combat the forces of racial division and domination, and to equip leaders who embrace and celebrate racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity;
- We are committed, in a global context of religious conflicts and a society structured by Christian privilege, to joyous embrace of religious diversity, expanding our ground-breaking work in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Studies to advance understanding and collaboration among the rich multiplicity of spiritual traditions and lifestances;
- We are committed, in a world governed by sex and gender binaries, to advocate gender justice, to nurture movements for women's equality, and to liberate humanity from restrictive gender norms;
- We are committed, in world governed by the presumption of heterosexual expression, to challenge homophobia, to celebrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other individuals within the spectrum of human sex and sexuality, and to develop leadership to encourage faith communities to become more open and affirming;
- We are committed, in a world stratified by economic and social class, to challenge the structures that sustain poverty and economic disenfranchisement, and to join the struggle, as companions with the poor, for liberation of all from want, homelessness, hunger, and disease;
- We are committed, on a fragile planet threatened by pollution and exploitation, to interrogate ecological policies, theologies, and practices, and to challenge materialism and the devaluation of creation; and,
- We are committed, in recognition that social divisions are local, national, and global, to international collaboration among individuals and institutions with similar commitments to our own.

In all these ways, we embrace not only the rhetoric but the reality of diversity, and recognize the vital intersectionality of our commitments, working together to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. We invite others to join us.

Master of Sacred Theology (STM)

Overview of the Program

The Master of Sacred Theology (STM) is a one-year program (8 courses) 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 PhD program, and religious leaders 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 religious leader in your community, 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 an 8-course (24 credits) program that is designed to be completed over one academic year. Students may take any or all of these courses online. As of June 2020, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), one of the accrediting bodies of CTS, no longer provides guidelines on course statute of limitations; CTS recommends a four-year time to completion as a general guideline. Students should also check with financial aid staff about loan compliance if not in attendance full-time.

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 to discuss course registration. In the fall, students should also consult with their advisors about the topic, shape, and bibliography of their thesis project. Students may ask their advisors to review a draft, but the bulk of the work is done in the thesis seminar. 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 Master's 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 throughout the year of study for full-time STM students, or during the final year for part-time STM students. The course normally meets online approximately every other week during the fall and spring terms.

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 stage of

training for 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 should begin the course having already discerned their desired focus. Early in the Master's Writing Seminar, they will "settle on" and refine their research topic. Students may develop topics initially explored in other classes, but the thesis must be a substantially new piece of work. It ought not to be simply a seminar paper "expanded." Normally a successful thesis will be approximately 40-60 pages (normal font, double spaced) in length. See [Theis Guidelines](#) for more information.

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 less than two weeks before Commencement. 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.

Course of Study Worksheet

Student: _____ Advisor: _____

Entrance Date: _____

Course Title	Semester
Master's Writing Seminar	

Appendix A: Human Subjects Protocol

All students intending to use human subjects in CTS PhD dissertations, STM, MARL, MDiv, and MA theses, or DMin projects must follow these guidelines, which will be reviewed by CTS's Institutional Review Board. The purpose is to ensure an adequate review of the research regarding two central ethical concerns:

- Human subjects are treated in a manner consistent with their dignity and autonomy – specifically that they consent freely and in an informed manner to participation in the research;
- Human subjects are protected from any risks or harms posed by the research.

There are two major documents to be completed: 1) Research Overview, and 2) Consent Form. The research review is **NOT** intended to assess either the value of the thesis/dissertation topic or of the research design.

I. Research Overview (Be as specific as possible)

- A. Describe the nature and purpose of the research, the number of human subjects that will be involved and the research instrument(s) to be used. (interviews, focus group, surveys, etc.)
- B. The Research Procedures: How will research be conducted? What will it entail? e.g. (*“I will interview the subjects in their homes or a place of their own choosing. I intend only one interview per subject; the interview should last about one hour. I will take notes during the interview, I will only tape record the interview with the subject’s permission.”*)
- C. Subject recruitment and selection: How will you recruit, select and generate a pool of subjects?
- D. Relationship to these subjects
 1. Pastor or religious leader
 2. Teacher
 3. Relative
 4. Associate
 5. Other
- E. Risk and Benefits: State what benefits and what risks you perceive the research posing to the subjects.
- F. Confidentiality and/or Anonymity: State how the confidentiality and anonymity of data/subject will be preserved. Consider the following questions in your overview:
 1. How will data be stored? (The suggested standard is to: 1) store data in a secured/locked manner, and 2) store any key which links the data to the names or identifiers of subjects in a secured/locked manner away from the data)
 2. How long will the data be kept? How will data be destroyed?
 3. What will happen to the data if something happens to you, preventing you from taking the provisions outlined here?
 4. If appropriate, how will you collect and analyze the data to insure anonymity?
 5. If appropriate, how will you officially report that data to insure anonymity?

II. Consent Form

The researcher should keep the original signed document and give a copy to the subject. The subject should also receive a copy of the survey instrument or schedule of questions used in the research. If the instrument is not yet completed or the interview is to be open-ended, include some sample questions, indicating the nature of the information/data sought from the subject. Also, if the consent form provided does not meet the needs of a specific project, the researcher can create an adapted version in cooperation with the advisor to be approved by the Institutional Review Board.



Sample Consent Form

Title of the Project _____

Name of Researcher _____

I _____ (print) have been asked to participate in a research study as a part of the (PhD/DMin/STM/MA program at CTS). I understand that this research will focus on _____

_____ and will involve (interview/survey/focus group discussion, etc.) that will take place _____

_____ and will last until _____. I understand that the risks involved in this project include [or none] _____, my

anonymity will be protected and the records and information will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to them and they will be discarded after the study is completed. I also understand that I am free to refuse to answer any specific questions and to terminate or withdraw completely from the research at any time. While the researcher has copyright protection and retains all intellectual and commercial rights to the materials, I can have access to cite or quote the work for my own purposes. By signing this document I consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Subject _____ **Date** _____

Signature of Researcher _____ **Date** _____

For information contact Researcher at:

Email _____ **Phone number** _____

Adapted for use from the Doctoral Council, GTU, 2014.

Appendix B: Academic Accommodations Policy

Requests for Accommodations¹

When a verified physical, psychological, attentional, or learning disability impacts a student's academic progress, accommodations may be available to assist the student in meeting academic goals.

If you need accommodations, please fill out the form and contact Rachel Payden, Manager of Student Formation & Community Engagement (rpayden@ctsichicago.edu), to schedule a conversation about the accommodation process and possible study plans.

Diagnostic paperwork or other documentation should be sent to the Registrar, Tina Shelton, along with a copy of your form. All records will be handled in confidence. Once the Dean has approved the accommodations, the Registrar will provide a letter that you should give to professors at the start of every term. This letter will last throughout your program unless your disability is temporary.

Students who believe they may have a learning difficulty that has not been identified can make an appointment to discuss their academic history in order to determine what may be hindering academic progress. Confidential advising with Rachel is available.

Disability Documentation

When determining what accommodations are appropriate for students, it's important to understand how their disabilities will likely impact their academic progress at Chicago Theological Seminary. We request a self-report from students (see below) and support documentation from external sources.

Helpful 3rd-party information includes records of past accommodations and services from college and/or other graduate programs, formal psychological or medical evaluations, and letters from past health or service providers. Students do not need to share *everything*—just those records that are most helpful in documenting the disability/disabilities that prompt the request for accommodations.

¹ Language adapted from Trinity Christian College.

Request for Accommodations

Student's Name _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Diagnosed disability/disabilities relevant to accommodations request:

Please share information that will be useful in thinking about appropriate accommodations to help you succeed in your learning:

- What tools or strategies facilitate your learning?
- What potential barriers can you anticipate?
- How does your disability interact with communication, classroom learning, reading and writing, technology, and the physical environment?

Accommodation(s) I am requesting from the Seminary (permanent and temporary):

I've had the following accommodations at other educational institutions:

Please identify the documentation attached to this request:

I authorize the Seminary to arrange for reasonable accommodation(s), to share limited information with others as necessary, and to obtain additional information from the individual(s) listed below if needed.

Student's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Diagnostician:

Address:

Phone#:

Name of Diagnostician:

Address:

Phone#:

Name of Diagnostician:

Address:

Phone#:



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