

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

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CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Table of Contents

Chicago Theological Seminary's Mission and Commitments 2

Overview of the Master of Sacred Theology Program 3

Requirements for Admission 3

Program Goals and Learning Outcomes 4

Course of Study 4

Advising 5

Concentrations 5

Master's Writing Seminar and Thesis 5

Thesis Oral Exam 6

Master of Sacred Theology (STM) – Course of Study Worksheet 7

Appendix A: Human Subjects Protocol 8

Statement of Mission and Commitments

Chicago Theological Seminary, a graduate school affiliated with the United Church of Christ, serves God, diverse religious and spiritual communities, and the larger world by educating persons theologically and cultivating the intellectual, spiritual, and ethical capacities of lay and ordained religious leaders, scholars, activists, and others who contribute to the increase of justice and mercy.

Guided by the Spirit of the Divine, inspired by ancient and contemporary prophets, sages, and sacred texts, informed by numerous religious and philosophical traditions, 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/24 credits) 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.
- Three letters of reference – at least one must be academic, one may come from a pastor or religious leader in your community, and one may come from a 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.
- Applicants for whom English is not a first language are required to submit language test scores. They may submit TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores that have been completed no more than two years prior to application, or they may take the Duolingo English Proficiency Test; the minimum test score for Duolingo is 120. The language test requirement may 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. 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 concentration area.

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 are available in the Study of Black Faith and Life, Interreligious Engagement, LGBTQ+ Religious Studies, Chaplaincy Studies, and Muslim Studies. 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.

b. Successfully defending the thesis in an oral exam conducted by members of the CTS faculty.
c. For some students, the course and thesis writing will also serve as 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 Thesis 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 instructors.* 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 a rubric as a guideline when evaluating the thesis and the oral exam.

After passing the oral exam, students must upload the final draft of their theses through the submission portal on Canvas in order to be allowed to graduate. Students should consult the submission requirements for their theses which can be found at this link: https://libguides.ctschicago.edu/grad_checklist.

Course of Study Worksheet

Student: _____ Advisor: _____

Entrance Date: _____

Course Title	Term
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8. Master's Writing Seminar	

Appendix A: Human Subjects Protocol

All students intending to use human subjects in CTS PhD dissertations, STM, 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:

1. Human subjects must be treated with dignity and autonomy, specifically that they give informed consent freely to participate in the research;

2. Human subjects are protected from any risks or harms posed by the research.

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

I. Research Overview (Be as specific as possible)

A. Describe the nature and purpose of the research, including the number of human subjects that will be involved and the research instrument(s) to be used, such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, etc.)
B. The Research Procedures: How will the research be conducted? What will it entail? e.g. *(For example, "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, and 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
    a. Pastor/Imam/Other Religious leader
    b. Teacher
    c. Relative
    d. Associate
    e. Other
E. Risks and Benefits: State the possible benefits and risks you perceive the research poses to the subjects. Since the purpose of this review is to ensure research subjects are protected from any harm, please be especially thorough in your assessment of potential risks.
F. Confidentiality and/or Anonymity: Explain how the confidentiality and anonymity of data/subjects 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 secure/ locked manner, and 2) store any key that links the data to the names or identifiers of subjects in a secure/locked manner away from the data.
    2. How long will the data be retained (note: data must be retained for three years), and what is the plan for destroying the data?
    3. What will happen to the data if something happens to you, that prevents you from taking the provisions outlined here?
    4. If applicable, how will you collect and analyze the data to ensure anonymity?
    5. If applicable, how will you officially report that data to ensure anonymity?

G. Provide a list of sample questions you will use in interviews, surveys, or focus groups.

II. Consent Form

The researcher should keep the original signed document and provide 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 for approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Sample Consent Form – Please adapt for your own project

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 Chicago Theological Seminary. I understand that this research will focus on _____

_____

_____ and will involve [interviews/surveys/focus group discussions, etc.] that will take place _____ and will last until _____. I understand that the risks involved in this project include_____,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** _____

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