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.
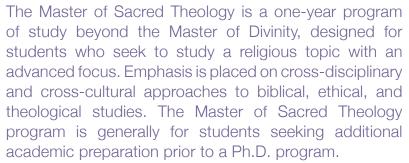
MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY (STM) PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Revised August 2022

During the 2022-2023 academic year, CTS implements a new calendar based on a tri-term model. This new Tri-Term Academic Calendar is designed to help new students begin their coursework earlier while providing more opportunities for students to engage core faculty throughout the year. It is our hope that a shift to this new model will also assist students in completing their degree program earlier and perhaps save money.

Not only is CTS welcoming a new academic model, but also a new president—Shout out to Dr. Brad Braxton. However, some things have not changed. Covid-19 still looms large. CTS continues to make steps toward a return to normal—whatever that means—after over two years of living under the weight of a global pandemic. Covid-19 vaccines and boosters have begun to transform our lives, even though physical distancing, masks, and handwashing still order our days. We are also acutely aware of the work that remains in order to reach sufficient vaccine coverage that can protect the broader population from the disease.

While Covid-19 vaccines abound in many places, it is not lost on us that the spread of monkeypox does not equal its vaccine availability. This dual public health crisis along with economic, political, religious, and additional social challenges makes our work at CTS even more urgent. Here's to praying with our feet and protesting with our prayers.

In our ongoing efforts to deliver a stellar educational experience, we continue with our four-fold modality for the 2022-23 Tri-Term Academic Year. **Courses will be delivered: face-to-face (in-person at CTS with some Canvas support); online (synchronous and asynchronous sessions employing Canvas and Zoom); hybrid (online with required face-to- face sessions); and flex (online with some optional face- to-face sessions)**. See the [course schedule (https://www.ctschicago.edu/course-schedule)](https://www.ctschicago.edu/course-schedule), Campus Café or the Registrar for specifics.

On-campus coursework and meetings are designed to be low-density, with vaccination and boosters highly recommended for in-person class and all on-campus attendance to protect our students, staff, and faculty. Masks are required for in-person courses and on-campus events. If you are coming to campus, you will need to use your keycard for access; please do *not* hold the door open for anyone else, even if you recognize them. Please see the most recent COVID-19 Policy (https://ctschicago.edu/press/cts-covid-19-policy) for details. Our Covid-19 Response Team and Leadership Team will continue to monitor the recommendations of local, state, and federal government officials—prepared to revise policies to advance public safety as necessary.

Covid-19 has left no one unscathed. Many are also being impacted by monkeypox. We have lost so much. Yet, we are still here. We hear you. We see you. Take care of yourself. May we show compassion and take care of each other.

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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 designed to be completed over one academic year, and includes 8 courses (24 credits). 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; the four-year time to completion is a general CTS 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 approximately every other week during the fall and spring terms. The seminar is normally available in both an on-campus 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 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.

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.

MA/STM Thesis and Oral Exam Rubric

Student Name: _____Degree Program: _____Date of Exam: _____Examiner:_____

	DEMONSTRATES EXCEPTIONAL ABILITY	DEMONSTRATES STRONG ABILITY	DEMONSTRATES ADEQUATE ABIILITY	DEMONSTRATES INADEQUATE ABILITY	FAILS TO DEMONSTRATE ABILITY	*Demonstrated by:*
Goal 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)						
Paper address central problem or question of relevance to religious traditions	Central problem or question is of clear, and fundamental relevance to religious traditions, recognizing complexity and ambiguity.	Central problem or question is of clear and compelling relevance to religious traditions.	Central problem or question is of relevance to religious traditions.	Central problem or question is tangentially relevant to these traditions.	Central problem or question is not relevant to these traditions.	*Introduction, conclusion*
Use of religious traditions in discussion of relevant background	Discussion of background shows an exceptional understanding of traditions.	Discussion of background shows a broad understanding of traditions.	Discussion of background shows a general understanding of traditions.	Discussion of background shows gaps in understanding of traditions.	Discussion of background shows a lack of understanding of traditions.	*Content of thesis*
Goal 2: Students will demonstrate in-depth scholarly knowledge in a specific area relating to religious studies.						
Use of religious traditions in discussion of relevant background	Discussion of background shows a deep and complex understanding of the specific topic area.	Discussion of background shows a deep understanding of the specific topic area.	Discussion of background shows understanding of the specific topic area.	Discussion of background shows gaps in understanding of the specific topic area.	Discussion of background shows a lack of understanding.	*Content of thesis*
Use of religious traditions in development of argument.	Development of argument shows a deep, incisive, and exceptional understanding of the specific topic area.	Development of argument shows a deep and incisive understanding of the specific topic area.	Development of argument shows an understanding of the specific topic area.	Development of argument shows gaps in understanding of the specific topic area.	Development of argument shows little or no understanding of topic area.	*Introduction, conclusion, and content of thesis*
Demonstration of knowledge and understanding in regard to examiner inquiries	Responses draw a thorough understanding of specific topic area; responses are robust, self-critical, persuasive and well-supported.	Responses draw a deep understanding of specific topic area; responses are informed, thoughtful, and well-supported.	Responses draw on understanding of topic area; responses are clear and generally thoughtful.	Responses show gaps in understanding of topic area, and/or are confused, muddled, or shallow.	Responses show serious misunderstanding, and/or are incoherent.	*Oral exam*

MA/STM Thesis and Oral Exam Rubric

Student Name: _____Degree Program: _____Date of Exam: _____Examiner:_____

Goal 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, concisely, and identifies a significant problem or question, engages complexity, and articulates compelling 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; locates thesis within corpus of work on the topic.	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, shows self-critical thought	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*
Goal 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, complex, and creative; responds fully to central problem/ question and compellingly supports main claims (or conclusions).	Argument is fluid, fully developed, engaging; 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*

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Demonstration of critical thought and understanding in regard to examiner inquiries	Responses draw on broad, thorough, and profound understanding of traditions; responses are informed, thoughtful, self-critical, and well-supported.	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*

Goal 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, thorough, and sophisticated, and engages complexity and ambiguity	Integration is clear, creative, and sophisticated.	Integration is clear and appropriate.	Integration is muddled or barely present.	No evidence of integration.	*Content of thesis*

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

Comments:

Master of Sacred Theology (STM)
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 <u>away from</u> 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 Accommodations[1]

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 the Assistant Director of Student Formation, 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 Amy 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.

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[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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