

# MA



## MASTER OF ARTS

### Program Handbook



The Master of Arts in Religious Studies focuses on religious traditions, theology and ethics. In preparation for continued study and teaching, this program allows each student to focus theological study in an area of personal interest.





# **MASTER OF ARTS (MA) PROGRAM HANDBOOK**

**2025-2026**

Revised July 2025



Welcome to the 2025-2026 academic year!

We begin this fall with joyful anticipation and excitement as CTS faculty and staff members have been diligently preparing for the upcoming year. For the last few years, CTS has primarily offered its courses in an online delivery format, and we no longer have semester-long courses that meet on campus. However, opportunities for on campus engagement remain available, and we encourage you to take advantage of one of these opportunities. To understand our course offerings, please note the letters that are used in our course numbering system:

- **Online** – online courses that use both asynchronous (you decide when you do the work) and synchronous (in real time) elements employing Canvas and Zoom; course numbers end in “**O**”
- **Online in real time** – online 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.

We are living in a delicate time marked by apprehension and pessimism about the future. Our concerns encompass a range of critical issues, including divisive politics, economic uncertainty, racist ideologies, gun violence, climate change, and the spread of misinformation, among many others. Amid this moment of uncertainty and distrust, the need for well-educated, compassionate, and visionary religious leaders is more urgent than ever. Our goal in offering you a CTS education is to uniquely position you to guide us through these challenging and uncertain times and to lead us to a place of greater justice, mercy, peace, and hope. Thank you for your dedication to theological education and your commitment to making a difference.

# Table of Contents

<b>Chicago Theological Seminary's Mission and Commitments .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Overview of the Program.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Requirements for Admission.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Program Goals and Learning Outcomes.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Course of Study.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Concentrations .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Master's Writing Seminar and Thesis.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Thesis Oral Exam .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Advising.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Master of Arts (MA) Program Worksheets.....</b>	<b>9-11</b>
<b>Course Prerequisites .....</b>	<b>12</b>
 <b>Appendix A: Human Subjects Protocol .....</b>	 <b>13</b>

## 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 Arts in Religious Studies (MA)**

### **Overview of the Program**

The Master of Arts in Religious Studies (MA) is a two-year program (16 courses/48 credits) that allows the student to focus theological study in a particular area of interest. The MA culminates in the Master's Thesis and is an appropriate theological degree for those preparing for further study at the doctoral level, anyone desiring advanced theological study as a foundation for service in another field, individuals active in their religious communities, lay leaders and educators working in a non-ordained capacity, or others who wish to study theology and religion without connection to professional objectives.

### **Requirements for Admission**

Applicants must have successfully completed a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university. Though a variety of college programs provide adequate preparation, it is to the applicant's advantage to have well developed written and oral communication skills, strong academic references, good critical thinking skills, and coursework in the area of humanities. GRE scores are not required. The MA 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.
- Written materials, including an autobiographical statement, as directed for the degree program.
- 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

- MA graduates will have acquired foundational knowledge of and the capacity to interpret and communicate religious traditions.
- MA graduates will be able to think critically about religious traditions.
- MA graduates will be able to complete graduate level academic research in religious studies.

### Learning Outcomes

- Students will apply foundational knowledge of religious traditions appropriately in scholarly research.
- Students will demonstrate ability to construct and develop a substantial scholarly argument in religious studies.
- Students will demonstrate ability to think and write critically about religious traditions.
- Students will demonstrate in-depth scholarly knowledge in a specific area relating to religious studies.

## MA Course of Study

The program includes 16 courses (48 credits). MA coursework may be completed entirely online. Students already possessing a first theological degree may petition the MA committee to approve a program of study that includes appropriate waivers of introductory-level courses.

There are three tracks available within the MA degree program: Religious Studies (with an emphasis on Christian tradition), Islamic Studies, and Interreligious Studies. The requirements are listed in the table below.

Religious Studies	Islamic Studies	Interreligious Studies
Religious Heritage (RH)		
Interpreting the Hebrew Bible	The Qur'an: Collection, Composition and Teachings	Sacred Text 1: Interpreting the Hebrew Bible, Gospels, or Qur'an
Interpreting the Gospels	Islamic Law and Legal Theory	Sacred Text 2: Hebrew Bible, Gospels or Qur'an



History of Christian Thought	Islamic History	Jewish Thought, History of Christian Thought or Islamic History
RH Elective	RH Elective	RH Elective
RH Elective	RH Elective	RH Elective
<b>Theology, Ethics, and Culture (TEC)</b>		
Systematic Theology	Islamic Theology and Philosophy	Core or Comparative Theology course
Christian Ethics OR Global Sensitivity in Ministry	Islamic Ethics OR Islamic Leadership and Spirituality	Interreligious Engagement
TEC Elective	Interreligious Engagement	TEC Elective (Interreligious or Comparative)
TEC Elective	Sunni-Shia Relations and Intra-Faith issues	TEC Elective
<b>Capstone</b>		
MA/STM Thesis	MA/STM Thesis	MA/STM Thesis
<b>Electives</b>		
6 free electives	2 CTS electives	6 free electives
	4 free electives	

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. CTA suggests a five-year completion as a general guideline. Students should also check with financial aid staff about loan compliance.

## Concentrations

MA concentrations are available in the Study of Black Faith and Life, LGBTQ+ Religious Studies, and Chaplaincy Studies. Persons desiring a concentration in one of these areas will take a minimum of three 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. 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. 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.
- 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](https://libguides.ctschicago.edu/grad_checklist).

## **Advising**

MA students will, as much as possible, be assigned advisors by area of interest. Students are expected to meet with their advisors (in person or virtually) at least once a term to discuss course registration. In the fall of their second year, 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.

**PROGRAM WORKSHEET**  
**Master of Arts in Religious Studies**  
**(16 courses, 48 credits)**

**NAME**

**Academic Requirements (10)**

Interpreting the Hebrew Bible\_\_\_\_\_

Interpreting the Gospels\_\_\_\_\_

History of Christian Thought\_\_\_\_\_

RH Elective (Bible)\_\_\_\_\_

RH Elective (Bible)\_\_\_\_\_

Christian Ethics OR Global Sensitivity in Ministry\_\_\_\_\_

Systematic Theology\_\_\_\_\_

TEC Elective\_\_\_\_\_

TEC Elective\_\_\_\_\_

Master's Writing Seminar (2 semesters, 3 credits)\_\_\_\_\_

**Electives (6)**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

**PROGRAM WORKSHEET**  
**Master of Arts in Islamic Studies**  
**(16 courses, 48 credits)**

**NAME**

**Academic Requirements (10)**

The Qur'an: Collection, Composition and Teachings\_\_\_\_\_

Islamic Law and Legal Theory\_\_\_\_\_

Islamic History\_\_\_\_\_

RH Elective\_\_\_\_\_

RH Elective\_\_\_\_\_

Islamic Ethics OR Islamic Leadership and Spirituality\_\_\_\_\_

Islamic Theology and Philosophy\_\_\_\_\_

Interreligious Engagement\_\_\_\_\_

Sunni-Shia Relations and Intra-Faith issues\_\_\_\_\_

Master's Writing Seminar (2 semesters, 3 credits)\_\_\_\_\_

**Electives (6)**

1. (CTS)\_\_\_\_\_

2. (CTS)\_\_\_\_\_

3. (Free)\_\_\_\_\_

4. (Free)\_\_\_\_\_

5. (Free)\_\_\_\_\_

6. (Free)\_\_\_\_\_

**PROGRAM WORKSHEET**  
**Master of Arts in Interreligious Studies**  
**(16 courses, 48 credits)**

**NAME**

**Academic Requirements (10)**

Sacred Text 1: Interpreting the Hebrew Bible, Gospels, or Qur'an\_\_\_\_\_

Sacred Text 2: Hebrew Bible, Gospels or Qur'an\_\_\_\_\_

Jewish Thought, History of Christian Thought, or Islamic History\_\_\_\_\_

RH Elective\_\_\_\_\_

RH Elective \_\_\_\_\_

Interreligious Engagement\_\_\_\_\_

Core or Comparative Theology course\_\_\_\_\_

TEC Elective (Interreligious or Comparative)\_\_\_\_\_

TEC Elective\_\_\_\_\_

Master's Writing Seminar (2 semesters, 3 credits)\_\_\_\_\_

**Electives (6)**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

## Course Prerequisites

Course	Prerequisites*
RH 302 Interpreting the Hebrew Bible II (or upper-level Hebrew Bible elective)	RH 301 Interpreting the Hebrew Bible
RH 321 Interpreting the Gospels	Strongly recommended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RH 301 Interpreting the Hebrew Bible I</li> </ul>
RH 325 Interpreting the Epistles (or upper-level New Testament elective)	RH 321 Interpreting the Gospels
LM 400 Leadership & Ministry in Context/ Field Ed Placement	<p>Course in History/Foundational Theology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e.g., Systematic Theology, Islamic Theology and Philosophy, History of Christian Thought, Jewish Thought: Historically Rooted and Radically Engaged</li> </ul> <p>Introduction to Pastoral Care/Theology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LM 331, 332, or LMB 484</li> </ul> <p>Additional course in leadership/ministry (LM)</p> <p>Strongly recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TEC 355 Living into Our Commitments</li> </ul> <p><i>*check w/advisor re: best prep for your placement</i></p>
FE 470 Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)	LM 331 Introduction to Pastoral Care LM 332 Introduction to Pastoral Theology Or LMB484 Theories and Practices of Spiritual Care
TEC 321 Intro to Christian Ethics	RH 344 History of Christian Thought
TEC 400 Constructive Theology	<p>Course in sacred text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e.g., RH 301 Interpreting the Hebrew Bible I, RH 321 Interpreting the Gospels</li> </ul> <p>Course in history</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RH 344 History of Christian Thought or equivalent</li> </ul> <p>Course in pastoral care/theology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LM 332 Intro to Pastoral Theology or equivalent</li> </ul> <p>Strongly recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LM 400 Leadership &amp; Ministry in Context</li> </ul>
Arabic 2B	Arabic 2A
Advanced 'Ilm al-Kalam	Islamic Rational Theory: 'Ilm al-Kalam

\*Exceptions must be approved by petition to the MDiv committee

updated: 2-17-2022

## 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.
- 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, 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?

## **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

**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.*





1407 E. 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637  
773.896.2400    [ctschicago.edu](http://ctschicago.edu)

