

Guidelines for the MTS Synthesis Essay

The capstone integrative document of the Master of Theological Studies Program at PSR is the MTS Synthesis Essay. The essay is used as a learning tool, to assist you in integrating the various aspects of your theological education prior to graduation, and as an assessment tool, as evidence of the extent to which you have achieved the goals of the degree program, and the extent to which PSR has met the goals it has set out for teaching and learning in the MTS program.

While it is not as long as an M.A. thesis, and does not involve the sort of original scholarly research characteristic of an M.A. thesis, the MTS Synthesis Essay is nonetheless a piece of academic writing. While personal reflection may be relevant in situating the source of your interest in the topic, or the contextual factors that shape the way you ask it, the essay is designed to be an academic exercise using the standards of argument and publicly accessible reasoning that characterize a typical research paper. While it should meet the design requirements discussed below, the essay may build on a research paper you have written or are writing for a course in your degree program.

The Synthesis Essay is 10-15 pages long, and prepared in consultation with your advisor. In the essay you will identify a problem, issue, or topic related to your Area of Interest. The issue/problem should be described clearly and set in its context (social, religious, etc.). The essay should then address this issue by drawing on two of the foundational disciplines (Biblical Studies, Historical Studies, Theology, and Ethics) studied in the program. Usually the Area of Interest is quite broad (i.e. Religion and Psychology; Feminism and Religion, Religious Pluralism; Social Justice; Religion and the Arts). The issue, problem, or topic identified in the synthesis essay must necessarily be much narrower than the Area of Interest, so that you may successfully address it within the recommended 10-15 pages.

So for example, a student interested in ecological justice might focus the essay on the relationship of eco-feminism to the Christian faith in a way that makes appropriate use of religious and theological resources. Such a student might wish to draw on her exposure to Biblical Studies, exploring biblical themes that support or contribute negatively to an ethic of environmental justice. In this case, the student is demonstrating that she has acquired exegetical, historical-critical, and hermeneutical skills appropriate for someone who has obtained a degree in theological studies. Further, she might draw on her exposure to the discipline of theology, identifying eco-feminist strands in a work or works of Christian feminist theology. In so doing, she is demonstrating both critical theological and contextual reflection skills and also actual theological knowledge of thinkers and texts encountered as part of her theological education.

The above example is only illustrative, as there is considerable freedom in the design and content of the essay; the MTS Synthesis Essay is intended to give you an opportunity to integrate creatively your theological education by bringing this education to bear on a question that has motivated your theological education or engaged you throughout your exploration of your particular area of interest. At the same time you will be demonstrating

newly acquired standard critical skills and knowledge from at least two theological disciplines. You may find it helpful to consult with your advisor and perhaps other faculty members as you prepare your essay.

You must register in your last semester for the MTS 5020 Synthesis Essay course. You may choose to take the course for either 0.0 or 1.5 units. The course is intended to require your time and attention for the MTS Synthesis Essay in the first half of your final semester. In order to graduate in May, you must submit your essay to your advisor by April 15th. The essay is graded by your advisor on a Pass/Fail basis. If after you submit your essay to your advisor, the essay needs revisions, you must revise it and resubmit it to your advisor until they approve it by signing the essay. A copy of your final essay signed by your advisor is due to the Associate Dean by the last day of the semester. Once the Associate Dean receives this signed copy, your grade for MTS 5020 will be recorded as "Pass". If the signed copy is not received by the last day of the semester, the grade will be recorded as "Fail" and PSR will not be able to confer your degree.