
Pacific School of Religion

ACADEMIC PROGRAM MANUAL

Part I (of II)

for the

MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Office of the Dean and Registrar

Effective August 2010

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WELCOME TO THE MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES PROGRAM

Welcome to the Master of Theological Studies program. You have entered a graduate degree program designed to provide a generalized yet rigorous course of theological studies without research or thesis requirements. Some of you are pursuing lay or ordained ministries in churches and other faith communities. Others have an interest in the intersection of religion, theology, Christian ethics or spirituality and your current vocation. Still others seek to deepen or broaden your understanding of any number of fields within theological studies in the context of a seminary. Whatever has led you here, we are glad to have you with us and welcome the perspectives and inquiries you bring. This program is designed to help students achieve:

- A knowledge of a range of basic theological disciplines
- The ability to bring these disciplines into creative and critical inter-play with one other
- A critical and contextual appropriation and appreciation of Christian tradition
- The ability to think and to analyze theologically
- Particularized competency in an area of interest

The M.T.S. program is designed to be a two-year, full-time (up to four years part-time) program offering students a broad yet comprehensive education in theological studies, across a range of disciplines. Building on a core of foundational courses, the program allows you to focus on and gain competency in more particular areas of interest compatible with the resource of the school. M.T.S. students are encouraged to take full advantage of the Graduate Theological Union's schools, centers, and institutes during their course of study.

WHY A PROGRAM MANUAL?

It is standard academic policy that students are governed by the requirements of the catalog under which they were admitted. This manual is an official and necessary supplement to the catalog. The standards, requirements, policies, and procedures of the program presented here provide a common understanding of these elements of the program among PSR faculty and students enrolled in the M.T.S. program.

Registration in a PSR degree or graduate certificate program assumes the registrant has read and agreed to the terms as outlined in the program manual appropriate to their year of entry. The M.T.S. Program Manual consists of two parts:

- 1) Part I: This portion of the program manual outlines academic standards, requirements, policies, and procedures that are particular to the MTS program.
- 2) **Part II:** This portion of the program manual outlines academic standards, requirements, policies, and procedures that are common to all PSR programs. It covers in more detail the following topics:

[Academic and Administrative Calendars](#)

[PSR Extended Calendar](#)

[Academic Resources](#)

[Course Catalog](#)

[ONLINE GTU Course Catalog](#)

[Degree and Certificate Programs](#)

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[Registrar](#)

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The manual was prepared by the Office of the PSR Dean and Registrar. It is our attempt to provide clear explanations of the structure of the program and to provide resources for you as you move through the program. We hope that you will use it frequently. Any questions of clarification should be directed to the dean or registrar.

Administrative procedures can be modified at any point in order to improve and clarify the program, so students and faculty are urged to be attentive to supplementary pages distributed during their course of study which may reflect changes in the program.

This manual reflects the details of the program as of August 2010.

This is an academic program manual. Information on other aspects of student life at PSR can be obtained through the offices of Admissions, Community Life, Housing, and Financial Aid.

M.T.S.-SPECIFIC COURSE PLANNING INFORMATION

Using Your M.T.S. Worksheet

The *M.T.S. Worksheet*, found at the end of this manual and available in front of the Office of the Dean and Registrar, is your planning document. All the course distribution expectations are listed for you to follow. Using this worksheet will ensure that you meet the program's requirements. Review this document with your advisor by the beginning of each semester of your program.

M.T.S. Course Distribution

M.T.S. students are required to complete a minimum of 48 credits. Twelve (12) credits must be taken as foundational courses in designated areas (see below). Each foundational course may not be less than 3.0 credits and must be taken for letter grade. It is recommended that courses in this category be introductory level. Course distribution is as follows.

Foundational courses (12):

- 3 credits in Biblical Studies (BS, OT or NT)
- 3 credits in Historical Studies (HS)
- 3 credits in Christian Theology (ST)
- 3 credits in Christian Ethics (CE)

Area of Interest courses (24)

Electives (12)

Total M.T.S. courses (48)

Twenty-four (24) credits must be taken in an Area of Interest defined in consultation with the faculty advisor. The Area of Interest may consist of a particular field (e.g. biblical studies) or a broader topic of interest (e.g. feminist studies, religion and health). In either case, the student is advised to approach the area of interest in an interdisciplinary manner. All Area of Interest courses must be taken for a letter grade to count toward the M.T.S. If you register for a class for a pass/fail grade, it will not count for these requirements. The remaining 12 units are elective credits.

M.T.S.-SPECIFIC ACADEMIC STIPULATIONS

Required Number of PSR Credits

In all certificate and degree programs, at least one-third of all credits earned toward the program, including transfer credits from within and outside the GTU, must be earned from PSR courses. In the M.T.S., this totals a MINIMUM of 16 PSR credits. A PSR course is one in which the "School Course Ownership" field of the online course schedule is PSR. Usually at least one instructor of the course is PSR faculty.

Expected Program Time

For the M.T.S. to be awarded, the equivalent of 48 credits, which usually translates to two full-time academic years, must be spent as a PSR student. In order to complete the M.T.S. degree in two years, you will need to average 12 credits per semester (if no Intersession or summer courses are taken), or 24 credits per year.

Time Lapse Rule

While the M.T.S. is a two-year program, you may take up to four years of part-time study to complete the M.T.S. degree including semesters on leave. The beginning of the lapsed time period starts with the first course work applied to the degree, including transferred courses. Any extension beyond the stated lapsed time may be granted by the Dean, in consultation with the appropriate faculty. Additional extensions are extremely unusual, and all extensions are subject to the willingness of the advisor to continue to work with the student.

Special Reading Courses

No more than six of the credits required for your degree may be SRC credits.

Summer Session Credits

Up to nine units of summer session credit may be applied to the M.T.S.

Required GPA

Satisfactory completion of the M.T.S. requires the completion of the necessary courses with the overall GPA of 3.0 (B) or higher. In particular, students must maintain a GPA of 3.0 in Foundational Courses and 3.3 in Area of Interest courses.

Letter Grade vs. Pass/Fail

Required foundational M.T.S. courses and Area of Interest courses must be taken for a letter grade. General electives may be taken for pass/fail if the course allows it. However, if a student anticipates additional graduate work, it is not advisable to take academic courses pass/fail.

MILESTONES OF THE M.T.S. DEGREE

In addition to the 48 credits specified for the degree, M.T.S. students must also complete a set of milestones, non-course requirements for graduation that are due at specific points of a program:

- **Entrance Report** in the first semester,
- **Final Report** in the last semester, and
- **Synthesis Essay** in the last semester

These milestones are used by the Office of Academic Affairs for assessment of the school's academic programs, and for assessing individual student

progress. After a student has left the program, milestones are retained for a limited time in the Office of Academic Affairs then destroyed.

Your advisor plays an important role in these required "milestones" of the M.T.S. as they must sign off on each before they are submitted to the Assistant Dean for Academic Programs. You are accountable to your advisor for satisfactory completion of these requirements.

Entrance Report

During the first semester of the M.T.S. degree program, you must submit an Entrance Report (4-5 pages) detailing and clarifying your learning goals for the program. The Report is reviewed by your advisor, who may indicate necessary revisions. The final, signed Report is submitted to the Assistant Dean for Academic Programs no later than the end of your first semester.

Final Report

During the last semester, you will write a Final Report (3-4 pages), assessing whether and to what degree the learning goals articulated in the Entrance Report have been accomplished. The Final Report, signed by your advisor, must be submitted to the Assistant Dean for Academic Programs by April 30.

Synthesis Essay

The M.T.S. Synthesis Essay (10-15 pages) is completed in the final semester of your program, in consultation with your advisor. In this essay, you will identify a problem, issue, or topic related to your Area of Interest. The essay should address this issue by drawing on two of the foundational disciplines studied in the program. Guidelines for this essay are available in the appendix of this manual, in front of the Office of Academic Affairs, and on the M.T.S. web page.

You must register in your last semester for the M.T.S. Synthesis Essay course (MTS-5020-01). You may choose to take the course for either 0.0 units or 1.5 units, depending if you need the credits. The course is intended to require your time and attention in the first half of your final semester. In order to graduate in May, you must submit your essay to your advisor by April 15. The essay is graded by your faculty advisor on a Pass/Fail only basis. If the essay is graded as "Fail" you will need to revise it and resubmit it to your advisor for re-grading shortly thereafter. The final signed version of your MTS Synthesis Essay must then be submitted to the Assistant Dean for Academic Programs by the last day of the semester.

In some cases usually related to a change of program or transfer that leads to advanced standing in the program, requirements for one or more milestones

may be waived or modified with the approval of the Assistant Dean for Academic Programs.

M.T.S PROGRAM CHANGE INFORMATION

Changing Degree Programs

If you discover that you are not in the degree program that is most appropriate to your vocational needs, you do have the opportunity to apply to change programs. However, you must apply to change before the completion of the 24th credit. If you wish to change to the M.Div, you will need to work with the Field Education office in your first year to set up a placement for the second year.

To apply for admission to a degree program, meet the priority deadline for the semester you wish to begin the program:

for the MDiv: February 1 for Fall and
November 1 for Spring;
for the MA: February 15 for Fall and
September 30 for Spring.

To be admitted to the degree program, you must have completed at least nine credits before you apply and be registered for at least nine more credits. All credit earned in the M.T.S. program may be applied to any PSR masters degree within the policies and standards of the new degree program if and when a student is regularly admitted to that program (within the time-lapse limits of that program). For details about procedures for a change of program and the admission requirements for degree programs, contact the Admissions Office and ask for *Procedures for Change of Program* form. Please note that students applying to the GTU Common MA program at PSR must complete the GTU Application.

A FINAL WORD

It is the sincere intention and desire of the faculty and staff of PSR that you complete your degree program successfully. We want to offer you assistance to make it not merely a means to an end, but an experience you will remember positively and complete efficiently. You will learn that we cannot anticipate all your questions, but we encourage you to ask any that arise. We would like to know if there are ways in which this handbook could be more helpful to you. Any comments, suggestions or questions would be very much appreciated.

We wish you a productive stay at PSR.

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 Synthesis Essay course, MTS-5020-01. 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.

CONTINUE ON TO PART II ONLINE

Part II covers the following topics you are required to read as part of your program manual:

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