

MASTER OF THEOLOGY DEGREE  
PROGRAM

HANDBOOK

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## INTRODUCTION

The contents of this Handbook supplement the *Academic Catalog* by providing information that is particular to the Master of Theology degree program. Electronic copies of the *Catalog* and Handbook shall be provided to each Th.M. student as part of orientation to the degree program, and to any inquirer or applicant upon request.

Th.M. students are strongly encouraged to read this Handbook and related sections of the *Academic Catalog* at least once each semester, and are required to comply with all of the academic, administrative, and financial policies, protocols, and requirements contained therein. Unfamiliarity with and/or misunderstanding concerning any of the items and provisions in the *Catalog* or Handbook shall not constitute grounds for exceptions to them.

All students studying in the Th.M. degree program must comply with the administrative provisions of the *Academic Catalog* and Handbook edition in force during each current academic year of their enrollment, which year begins on July 1 of each calendar year and continues until the last day of June the following calendar year. Through the Committee on Academic Programs or appropriate Academic Deans, Union Presbyterian Seminary reserves the right, in accordance with sound academic and administrative practices as well as accrediting standards, to interpret, apply, administer, update, emend, and correct the contents of the *Catalog* and Handbook, and to deny or to approve exceptions to any matters stated herein.

Questions and comments related to the *Academic Catalog* or Handbook or to how it may be improved are most welcome, and may be directed to the following persons:

*Academic Catalog:*

Kenneth J. McFayden, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Academic Dean, Richmond;  
Professor of Ministry and Leadership Development  
[kmcfayden@upsem.edu](mailto:kmcfayden@upsem.edu)

Th.M. Handbook:

Christine Luckritz Marquis, Director of Master of Theology Program; Associate Professor of Church History  
[cluckritzmarquis@upsem.edu](mailto:cluckritzmarquis@upsem.edu)

## **THE MISSION OF UNION PREBYTERIAN SEMINARY**

### **Mission**

Union Presbyterian Seminary (UPSem) equips people in the ways of Jesus to witness, teach, and live into the movement of God's Reign through their ministry in the church and world—a sacred vocation that requires deep learning, commitment to service, and an ability to read cultures and circumstances in the light of the rich resources of Scripture and theological tradition.

### **Core Values**

We believe that Jesus is God in the flesh, the Son of that One whom he called Father. His life, ministry, death and resurrection have transformed the world. As the risen and living Lord, Jesus has called us to bear witness to and participate in the Spirit's transformative presence in the world.

We provide, using the best available technology, innovative and effective programs of theological education, grounded in the Reformed theological tradition, that inspire and empower learners for bold service to God's Reign in the world through individual, congregational, and community ministries.

We nurture increasingly diverse and inclusive learning communities for service in the world.

We serve as a theological resource for church and society in partnership with other institutions, organizations, and faith communities.

### **ACCREDITATION**

Union Presbyterian Seminary is accredited by The Association of Theological Schools (<https://www.ats.edu>) and The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges ([www.sacscoc.org/](http://www.sacscoc.org/)) to award degrees at the master's and doctoral levels.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE MASTER OF THEOLOGY DEGREE PROGRAM**

The primary purpose of the Master of Theology (Th.M.) degree program is to offer advanced theological study for leaders in the global church, and to provide appropriate preparation for study in a Doctor of Philosophy degree program. The Th.M. is only offered on the Richmond campus.

The Th.M. program allows considerable latitude for students to pursue individual courses of theological study and research in Biblical Studies, History, Theology, Ethics, Christian Education, and/or in Pastoral Theology under faculty supervision at a post-Master's level. Students in this degree program often focus on a burning question. With passion for a topic, they utilize courses, directed studies, and a thesis or summative project to engage this question vigorously. For some, the question seeks depth within a particular field of study. For others, the question calls for focus that is interdisciplinary.

The degree is designed and intended to be completed in one academic year. The broad requirement for the degree is that within one academic year each student must successfully complete, with prior approval of all credits by her or his Th.M. advisor, 24 credit hours, included among and counted toward which hours shall be a Th.M. thesis or summative project (hereafter SP). Concentrations are not recorded or tracked in the official record. The degree is awarded as a Master of Theology without further specification. Applicants to the Th.M. program are encouraged to contact the faculty Chair of their academic area of interest for further and more specific information.

### **Program Goals**

Three distinct but interrelated program goals, with intended student learning outcomes, have shaped the requirements for this degree program.

**Goal 1: Students will demonstrate advanced comprehension of their area of specialization in the context of general theological study, which competence shall include an understanding of the nature and content of the chosen theological sub-discipline and knowledge of the textual resources with which all researchers in this area of study ought to be familiar.**

Outcome 1.1: All graduating Th.M. students will demonstrate at least an acceptable level of comprehension (beyond the M.Div. level, as described by the attached rubric) of the nature and content of a chosen theological sub-discipline through the completion of a Th.M. thesis or equivalent summative project.

Outcome 1.2: All graduating Th.M. students will demonstrate at least an acceptable level of knowledge (beyond the M.Div. level, as described by the attached rubric) of the textual resources with which all researchers in their area of study ought to be familiar.

**Goal 2: Students will demonstrate advanced (beyond MDiv level) comprehension of the scholarly methods used in the area of their academic concentration.**

Outcome 2.1: All graduating Th.M. students will demonstrate at least an acceptable level of comprehension (beyond the M.Div. level, as described by the attached rubric) of the scholarly methods used in their area of academic concentration through the completion of a Th.M. thesis or equivalent summative project that requires competent use of those methods.

**Goal 3: Students will demonstrate an ability to engage in advanced (beyond MDiv level) reflection and discourse regarding one or more major scholarly issues under discussion in their area of academic concentration.**

Outcome 3.1: All graduating Th.M. students will demonstrate an ability (as described by the attached rubric) to engage in advanced reflection and discourse regarding one or more major scholarly issues under discussion in their area of academic concentration through the completion of a Th.M. thesis or equivalent summative project that requires original research.

### **Admission**

Applicants for admission to the Master of Theology program must hold a bachelor's degree, or its equivalent, from a college or university accredited by one of the nationally recognized regional accrediting agencies or the international equivalent, and must have received a master's degree in an appropriate discipline from a seminary or university accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada or its international equivalent.

Each academic department reads and evaluates the Th.M. applications to its fields of study, determines its recommendations for and against admission, and forwards recommendations for admission to the faculty Committee on Academic Programs, which takes a final decision on all Th.M. admission recommendations. As is the case in all admission's deliberations for all applications to study at Union Presbyterian Seminary, only the decision for or against admission is communicated to the applicant and to any other third parties authorized by the applicant. All deliberations and discussions and documents involved in admission decisions, for or against, are confidential and executive session.

Admitted students may defer enrollment from one fall to the next fall with the permission of the department that admitted them. Deferments are for one year only. All enrollments in the Th.M. program must begin in a fall Richmond term. Enrollment in the program may not commence at any other time or term. Students who do not enroll after deferment must reapply to the program. An applicant who is not admitted or is wait-listed and subsequently not admitted may request admission again after two academic years. A completely new application, along with all supporting documentation, will be required.

Applications for admission are available on our website at [www.upsem.edu/admissions-aid/apply-now/](http://www.upsem.edu/admissions-aid/apply-now/). For assistance, call the Office of Admissions at (804) 278-4221, or e-mail [admissions@upsem.edu](mailto:admissions@upsem.edu). Requirements for application to the Th.M. program may be found in the "Admissions" section of the *Academic Catalog*.

The seminary welcomes and seriously considers applications for admission from all qualified applicants. UPSem does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or any other status protected by federal, state, or local law applicable to a religious educational institution.

### **Advising**

Students will upon enrollment in the Th.M. be assigned a Th.M. advisor by the department that recommended the student's admission.

### **Residency and Time Requirements**

The Th.M. program ordinarily takes one academic year to complete. During that time, students are expected to be in residence on the Richmond campus.

Although a Th.M. student must normally satisfy all degree requirements within a single academic year, special circumstances may warrant the granting of a one-year extension.

Requests for extensions beyond a first year of Th.M. study must be submitted in writing to the Director of the Master of Theology program by March 1 of the student's first Th.M. year, with a copy to the student's advisor. Extensions are approved only if appropriate academic progress, as determined by the Committee on Academic Programs, has been made. Th.M. students who receive permission from the Committee on Academic Programs to extend their program are assessed a continuation fee due in full at the beginning of the one-year extension. The extension fee for Th.M. students who extend study past one nine-month academic year is \$1,500 per term. Extensions beyond a first, one-year extension require the support of the advisor and his or her academic department, and of the Committee on Academic Programs and the majority vote of the full faculty in executive session.

### **Learning Cohorts**

The Th.M. program is shaped to emphasize the importance of peer engagement in learning cohorts for the duration of the program. Learning cohorts are defined by the group of students entering the program at the same time.

### **Summary of Academic Requirements for the Th.M. Degree**

The specific design of each Th.M. student's program will be determined in consultation with their designated faculty advisor, who will, unless determined otherwise by the faculty advisor's department, serve as advisor of the student's Th.M. thesis or SP. All Th.M. students will successfully complete 24 credit hours, including a Th.M. thesis or SP, field exam, and an oral exam based on their thesis or their SP.

Th.M. students will ordinarily take 12 (or 9) hours in the Fall term, 9 (or 12) hours in the Spring term, and 3 hours in the May term, which are attained by successful completion of the field exam. The Fall term must include Th.M. Seminar I in addition to other 400-level courses and possibly a directed study. The Spring term includes the completion of additional 400-level course requirements and possibly a directed study, as well as the completion of thesis (a three-hour colloquy will be held toward the end of the Spring term in which students will present an overview of their work to their Th.M. peers and the collective group of Th.M. advisors). The May term includes the completion of the requirement of a major field exam (3 hours total).

### **Th.M. Degree Curriculum**

Five categories of academic work are distinguished in designing individual programs.

#### *Th.M. Seminar I* (in Fall term, INT 4XX)

This interdisciplinary colloquium explores the question of how we know and various aspects of beginning a quest for knowledge and wisdom, in connection with major fields of study and specialized topics being pursued by seminar participants and supported by students' advisors. Specific attention will be given to how these quests are imagined and shaped by various theological disciplines and the "ultimate questions" raised. 3 credit hours.

*Elective courses* designed as advanced electives for basic-degree credit and also open to enrollment by Th.M. students. Instructors will establish modified or additional requirements for Th.M. candidates and publish these in the course syllabi. Any courses at the designation of 400 qualify in this category. 3 credit hours per elective course.

*Directed Th.M. studies* designed by the student and faculty member. Apart from Thesis research, Th.M. students may register for no more than one directed study in any academic term, unless they obtain permission from the Academic Dean. Generally, 3 credit hours per directed study.

*Thesis or Summative Project.* 6 credit hours.

*Field and Oral Exams.* 3 credit hours

A table of the Th.M. curriculum is provided in Appendix 2.

### **Thesis/Summative Project**

In their applications to the program, most Th.M. students will have identified areas of special interest, in relation to which they expect to complete a Th.M. thesis or SP. Faculty advisors will be assigned by the relevant department at the beginning of the fall term based on the interest areas of the students. It is important for each student, in consultation with his or her faculty advisor, and with other members of the faculty as appropriate, to clarify the scope and focus of the thesis or project during the first half of the academic year. **Please see Appendix 1 for submission deadlines related to the Thesis/SP and Exams.**

All SP's and theses will conform to academic conventions of format and style, and will be submitted in English in rough and final drafts. Students may contact the library for information on binding of completed theses or projects at the student's expense.

### **Passing Grades**

Work in any course or unit of directed study that is evaluated below the letter grade of B- shall not be counted toward fulfillment of the hours required for the degree. Thesis or SP grades and oral examination grades below the letter grade of B- or Pass shall not be counted toward fulfillment of the degree. Please see the appended grading rubric (Appendix 3) for assessment of Thesis or SP.

Failure to meet the deadlines in Appendix 1 or to receive passing grades on the thesis or SP and on the oral examination will ordinarily result in dismissal from the Th.M. program. Any exceptions require approval by the academic department of the student's advisor.

### **Additional Requirements for Graduation**

The faculty considers three factors before recommending a student to the board of trustees for a degree or other recognition at graduation: 1) the course of study pursued, 2) the quality of work done, and 3) the quality of life manifested. In the usual language of the Reformed tradition, that quality of life should be "becoming to a minister of the gospel."

### **Degree Program Support Resources**

The *Academic Catalog* and seminary website identify a comprehensive list of support services for Th.M. students, with contact information offered for various offices and personnel. Identified here are two particular resources upon which Th.M. students will depend.

#### *Library Resources*

Union Presbyterian Seminary has a world-class theological library with service locations in Richmond and Charlotte, a collection of nearly 400,000 physical items plus access to over 40 research databases on or off campus. Approximately 76,000 full-text ebooks are accessible through a traditional library catalog, with tens of thousands more through database subscriptions



and an online discovery service. Library support services include reference assistance (both on-site and remote), course-integrated research instruction and interlibrary loan.

### *Technology Resources*

Courses are linked to the Seminary's Blackboard system, which provides digital access to course materials, reserve readings, peer interactions, and an online grade book. Faculty regularly use educational technologies in courses with the support of the Seminary's Information Technology staff, who provide students with access to the institution's computer network and offer support when students need assistance navigating technology-based systems. The library's Digital Learning Lab also provides technology-related support for students and faculty. Students have access to the Internet via wireless connections in the library, academic buildings, student meeting areas, and student residence areas. Students also have access to computer workstations and audiovisual equipment in the library and selected classrooms.

### **Tuition, Fees, and Financial Aid**

Tuition is charged for a Th.M. student's first year of study. Th.M. tuition for the 2020-2021 academic year is \$15,000. Ordinarily, this cost is covered by institutional financial aid. All other costs are born by the student. Students who fail to meet their financial obligations are not in good standing and ordinarily will be dismissed from the degree program at the end of the term during which they failed to meet these obligations. Grades, transcripts, and other services of the school will not be made available until the Business Office reports that all financial obligations have been met.

Failure to comply with academic and financial policies and deadlines in the Th.M. degree program results in automatic loss of good-standing and in the posting of non-compliance dates and reasons to the student's transcript. Loss of good-standing, unless resolved in a timely manner, may lead to dismissal from the degree program and from Union Presbyterian Seminary.

## **ACADEMIC PROCEDURES AND REGULATIONS**

Th.M. students should familiarize with the academic procedures and regulations included in the *Academic Catalog*. Each year, the *Catalog* is updated and is posted to the seminary website.

(<https://www.upsem.edu/academics/academic-catalog-handbook/>). In reviewing the *Catalog*, students will find information pertaining to the following areas:

Academic Calendars, including dates of registration and deadlines for drop, add, and withdrawal  
Rosters of Faculty Members, Administrative Officers and Staff, and Trustees

Attendance Policy

Registration and Late Fees

Drop, Add, and Withdrawal

Extensions within the Term

Extensions beyond the Term

Failing Grades

Appeal of Grades

Leave Time

Policies Concerning Students with Learning Disabilities

Policies Concerning Students with Physical Disabilities

Academic Records

## **ADDITIONAL POLICIES**

Additional policies are found in the Policies and Procedures Booklet, available on the seminary's intranet site, accessible through the **MYUNION** tab on the seminary webpage. Th.M. students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following policies:

Acceptable Use of Technology

Alcoholic Beverage Policy

Community Grievance and Discipline Policy

Copyright Ownership

Firearms Policy

Inclement Weather and School Closing Policy

Learning Disabilities

Plagiarism Policy

Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures

Smoking Policy

Social Media Policy

Statement and Guidelines on Language for Diversity & Inclusion

Substance Abuse Prevention Policy

## **APPENDIX 1: Schedule of Required Th.M. Dates and Deadlines**

### April 16:

Deadline for submission of draft of Th.M. thesis or SP by student to her or his Th.M. advisor. (Individual students and their advisor are required to determine realistic schedules for completion of Th.M. thesis or SP within institutional deadlines)

### April 16:

Deadline for designation by department of a second reader for the thesis or SP

### April 27:

Deadline for submission of final and complete draft of Th.M. thesis or SP by student to Th.M. advisor. This draft must in the advisor's judgment constitute in content and in form a thesis or SP of acceptable Th.M. extent, depth, and quality.

### May 7:

Deadline for successful completion of field exam and an oral examination based on the student's thesis or SP. The student's advisor and a second reader, appointed by the advisor's department, will conduct an oral examination on the area of the SP or thesis and the student's primary research specialization in the Th.M. program. The advisor will report the results of this oral exam Pass/Fail to the Director of the Master of Theology program by no later than 8 days prior to the student's anticipated graduation. Both examiners must vote Pass for the examination to be successful. There is no appeal if both examiners vote Fail. An appeal of a split vote, if an appeal is lodged, would be made to the advisor's full department.

**APPENDIX 2: Table of Th.M. Curriculum Requirements**

<b>Fall</b>	<b>Spring</b>	<b>May</b>
Th.M. Seminar I (3)	Thesis/SP (6)	Field&Oral Exams (3)
Elective/DS (3)	Elective/DS (3)	
Elective/DS (3)	Elective/DS (3)	
Elective/DS (3)*		
<b>12 hours total</b>	<b>9 hours total</b>	<b>3 hours total</b>

\*This elective/DS may instead be taken in the Spring term.

### APPENDIX 3: Th.M. Program Assessment - Thesis/Project Rubric

Student # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Score</b>
Category	Exemplary	Good	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Failure	
<b>Comprehension of Sub-Discipline</b>	Demonstrates thorough comprehension (beyond the MDiv level) of the nature and content of the chosen sub-discipline.	Demonstrates good comprehension (beyond the MDiv level) of the nature and content of the chosen sub-discipline.	Demonstrates acceptable comprehension (beyond the MDiv level) of the nature and content of the chosen sub-discipline.	Demonstrates only superficial comprehension (at or below the MDiv level) of the nature and content of the chosen sub-discipline.	Is unable to demonstrate comprehension of the nature and content of the chosen sub-discipline.	
<b>Knowledge of Key Textual Resources</b>	Demonstrates thorough knowledge (beyond the MDiv level) of the textual resources with which all researchers in this area of study ought to be familiar.	Demonstrates good knowledge (beyond the MDiv level) of the textual resources with which all researchers in this area of study ought to be familiar.	Demonstrates acceptable knowledge (beyond the MDiv level) of the textual resources with which all researchers in this area of study ought to be familiar.	Demonstrates only superficial knowledge (at or below the MDiv level) of the textual resources with which all researchers in this area of study ought to be familiar.	Is unable to demonstrate knowledge of the textual resources with which all researchers in this area of study ought to be familiar.	
<b>Use of Scholarly Methods</b>	Demonstrates thorough comprehension and use of scholarly methods appropriate to the area of concentration (beyond the MDiv level).	Demonstrates good comprehension and use of scholarly methods appropriate to the area of concentration (beyond the MDiv level).	Demonstrates acceptable comprehension and use of scholarly methods appropriate to the area of concentration (beyond the MDiv level).	Demonstrates only superficial comprehension and use of scholarly methods appropriate to the area of concentration (at or below the MDiv level).	Is unable to demonstrate comprehension and use of scholarly methods appropriate to the area of concentration.	
<b>Ability to Engage in Advanced Reflection and Discourse</b>	Demonstrates exceptional ability to engage in advanced reflection and discourse through the completion of original research (beyond the MDiv level).	Demonstrates good ability to engage in advanced reflection and discourse through the completion of original research (beyond the MDiv level).	Demonstrates acceptable ability to engage in advanced reflection and discourse through the completion of original research (beyond the MDiv level).	Demonstrates only slight ability to engage in advanced reflection and discourse through the completion of original research (at or below the MDiv level).	Is unable to engage in advanced reflection and discourse through the completion of original research.	