



8. Master of Theology Thesis

Purpose

The thesis is the capstone learning experience for the Master of Theology program. The purpose of the final project is to verify that the student has achieved the intended learning outcomes of the program and is able to implement what has been learned in the form of postgraduate academic research. Since the Master of Theology is an academic rather than a professional degree, the final project is intended to be applicable, directly or indirectly, to continuing studies in a terminal degree program.

Objectives

The objectives of the thesis are (1) to define a topic of study in the form of a question or problem within the field of program specialization, (2) to demonstrate conversant knowledge of relevant literature and argumentation, (3) to propose a solution to the question or problem, and (4) produce a persuasive argument in support of the solution through the use compelling evidence.

Topic

The curriculum of the Master of Theology focuses on one of three areas of specialization: Old Testament, New Testament, or Theology. The thesis will be dedicated to the research of a topic within the specialization and display the development of skills learned in the seminar and mentorship learning experiences.

Oversight

The Director of the ThM program will appoint a reading committee of VBTS faculty to provide oversight of the ThM thesis. The committee will consist of a thesis advisor, assistant reader, and form advisor. The primary faculty member of the discipline will serve as thesis advisor. The role of the thesis advisor is to provide the student with direction throughout the writing process leading to a completed thesis which demonstrates achievement of the ThM program learning outcomes. The role of the faculty reader is to complement the thesis advisor by providing a second opinion concerning the strength of evidence and coherence of argumentation presented in the thesis. The form advisor assists the thesis advisor by ensuring that the thesis meets the required presentation standard. The thesis advisor may also request the services of an accomplished scholar from another institution as specialist reader. The role of the outside reader is to provide the committee and the student with the value of an additional perspective.

Progress

Failure to meet any of the appointed deadlines may, at the discretion of the reading committee, result in (1) placing the student in a one-semester course continuation, or (2) course failure. Progress through the thesis is measured as the student advances through 4 phases:

Phase 1—Prospectus

The purpose of the *Seminar in Advanced Theological Research Methods* is to guide the student through the development of the thesis prospectus. The prospectus will provide justification for the topic and will include (1) an introduction to a research problem as situated within the context of the discipline, (2) a summarization of the current state of scholarship concerning the problem, (3) an introduction to relevant literature, and (4) conclude with a definitive thesis statement.

Phase 2—Thesis 1 Seminar

The Thesis 1 seminar entails research and composition leading to completion of the majority of the first draft of the thesis. Phase 1 includes the following steps:

Step 1—Conversion of Prospectus to Introduction. (5-7 pages, Sept 7).

Step 2—First draft of chapter 1 (15-25 pages, Oct 15)

Step 3—First draft of chapter 2 (15-25 pages, Nov 15)

Step 4—First draft of chapter 3 (15-25 pages, Dec 15)

Phase 3—Thesis 2 Seminar

The Thesis 2 seminar entails research and composition leading to completion of the first and second drafts of the thesis. Phase 2 includes the following steps:

Step 5—First Draft of chapter 4 (Feb 15) in conjunction with entire rough draft (including front and back matter).

Step 6—Committee Review and Response (March 1)

Step 7—Revised and Corrected Second Draft (Apr 1)

Step 8—Form Clearance (April 7)

Phase 4—Thesis Defense and Committee Affirmation

Step 9—Thesis Defense (Apr 15). The student will provide an oral present and defend the argument of the thesis before a group of faculty, students, and guests invited by the thesis advisor.

Step 10—Final Thesis Revisions (Apr 22)

Step 11—Signatures of the Reading Committee (April 29)

Form

The thesis will be prepared according to the standards of the latest edition of Turabian, and the interpretation of Turabian as provided in the VBTS Guidelines for Paper, Theses, and Final Projects. The member of the reading committee serving as form advisor must provide

final clearance of the thesis. Theses that do not receive form clearance from the form advisor will not be admitted to the thesis defense. The length of the thesis, excluding front and back matter, will be between 80-120 pages.

Printing and Binding

The librarian will assist the student in securing the services of a printer and binder. The appropriate fee will cover the expense of printing and binding two copies; additional copies may be procured at the student's expense. The first copy will be archived in the seminary library; the second will to the student. The student will also submit an electronic copy to the seminary librarian in pdf format.