
THE DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

Overview

The Doctor of Theology is a three- to five-year program (including writing qualifying exams, dissertation, and completing residency) designed to give a select number of highly qualified Master of Theology (or equivalent) graduates, who have demonstrated the necessary academic abilities, ministry skills, and character qualities, the opportunity to pursue a terminal degree specializing in Bible Exposition, Old Testament, New Testament, or Systematic Theology. The program is based on the study of the original language texts of Scripture and requires an awareness of the entire sweep of historical theology and biblical theology systematically expressed.

The program requires a minimum of twenty-four credit hours of study while in residence, the first of which is the Dissertation Prospectus course (four credit hours). The remaining study load is designed to assist in the research/writing and defense of the dissertation, the full-time load of which is four credit hours per semester. In cases of minor academic deficiency, additional coursework may be assigned (see “Residency Requirements: Coursework” below).

Coursework is not “dumbed-down” to the M.Div. level, nor are doctoral students consigned to a traditional classroom environment. Rather, the delivery mode follows the one-on-one mentoring model, with coursework comprised of directed studies and research seminars.

Objectives

As with the Master of Divinity and the Master of Theology degree programs, the Doctor of Theology program is specifically designed for individuals preparing for those vocations requiring ordination, with special emphasis given to training the next generation of professors to staff seminary and college/university biblical studies faculties.

The purposes of the program include:

- Preparing equippers of pastors for assignments in institutional settings where doctoral-level credentials are a prerequisite
- Providing pastors and equippers of pastors opportunity to further sharpen their exegetical and theological skills beyond their Master of Theology studies
- Equipping pastors who are also inclined toward a calling in theological writing that requires the highest level of exegetical and theological training

To achieve the above purposes, the program is designed to enable the student to:

- Develop an expertise in a specialized area of biblical and theological study through original research
- Expand his breadth of knowledge beyond the scope of his specific discipline and dissertation topic
- Defend ideas and refute error among peers
- Enhance teaching ability
- Demonstrate proficiency in effective writing skills

Design

The program is designed to permit the student to remain in his present location/occupation while completing the qualifying exams and the German language exam. For that reason, the exams are

prerequisite to matriculation. Only after successfully completing these exams would the student need to relocate to begin his residency and to research and write the dissertation. Other programs often require students to relocate at the beginning of their doctoral studies, leaving students in the precarious position of not knowing if they will successfully complete the course work, pass the qualifying exams, or complete the dissertation. In contrast, this program allows students to complete the qualifying and language exams prior to interrupting family life and initiating residency. Then, once begun, residency focuses predominantly on researching, writing, and defending the dissertation—a process that enjoys the benefits of frequent, personal interaction with one’s mentor, unlimited access to the finest library resources, and uninterrupted concentration on research and writing.

Administration

The Director of Doctoral Studies gives oversight to the program. Working closely with each doctoral student’s mentor and the Doctoral Studies Committee (comprised of the Dean, the senior faculty member of each discipline, and the Director of Libraries), the Director of Doctoral Studies oversees the orderly and timely completion of each student’s program.

Degree Nomenclature

While the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) nomenclature has been applied in recent years to terminal degrees offered in biblical and theological studies, The Master’s Seminary remains committed to keeping the purpose of the program central in both curricula content and degree nomenclature. Therefore, given the purpose and nature of the program, the Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) nomenclature is embraced, since it most accurately reflects the need of our constituency and the purpose for offering the degree.

Prerequisites

The program is based on the (post-Master of Divinity) Master of Theology degree, in which approximately twenty-two semester credit hours of course work plus a research thesis are required. Applicants without a Th.M. degree are encouraged to enroll in the Th.M.-Th.D. Track. Maintaining a good standing in this track will allow a student to accelerate his progress by initiating his Th.D. program (primarily involving the taking of qualifying exams and, in some cases, enrolling in the Dissertation Prospectus course) during the final year of his Th.M. studies.

Admission Requirements

The program, as outlined below, involves significant personal interaction between the faculty mentor and the student. Consequently, as a general rule, enrollment is limited to a maximum of two persons per discipline for each full-time faculty holding a terminal degree in that discipline. Permission to initiate application procedures is generally granted upon successful completion of the Master of Theology thesis.

Academic—A recognized Master of Theology degree or its equivalent (consisting of approximately twenty-two semester credit hours of course work), with an acceptable research thesis, provides the academic basis for the program. In addition, a scholastic record that demonstrates superior ability and offers promise of success in studies at the doctoral level is expected. Normally, a grade point average of 3.5 or above in all previous seminary studies is required. When deemed appropriate, Graduate Record Examination (GRE, aptitude section) scores may be required.

Character—In keeping with the purpose of The Master’s Seminary and the qualifications necessary for a minister of Christ (see 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9), the seminary requests references from the applicant’s pastor, former professors, and employers to evaluate his Christian testimony,

spiritual vibrancy, and personal character. Failure in any of these areas after enrollment may constitute adequate grounds for disciplinary action or dismissal from the program.

Doctrinal—Essential agreement with the Statement of Faith of The Master’s Seminary is required of applicants. Failure to disclose any significant doctrinal difference in the application itself will be regarded as a breach of the character requirements noted above.

Experience—In order to expedite and achieve the purposes of the program, applicants must have demonstrated effective teaching and pastoral capabilities prior to admission into the program.

Pre-matriculation Qualifying Exams

The nature of the program specifies that the qualifying exams be successfully completed prior to matriculation. Although some class work may be required in cases where a deficiency in a student’s previous education is noted (see “Residency Requirements: Course Work” below), the completion of the qualifying exams prior to matriculation allows the student to focus primarily on writing the dissertation while in residence. Except for the Oral Interview, each of these exams may be taken off-site. The exams, including guidelines and study questions to assist preparation, are available from the Director of Doctoral Studies.

General Background—A series of five, four-hour exams are given to assess the applicant’s general academic ability in the areas representing his previous seminary studies. Weaknesses discovered in any of these five exams may require additional course work:

- Bible Knowledge
- Old Testament Hebrew and related introductory matters
- New Testament Greek and related introductory matters
- Christian Theology
- Church History

Specialized Background—Covering the applicant’s chosen discipline, this exam is designed to determine his general awareness of the selected field of doctoral study, his current position on certain salient issues relevant to that discipline, and his ability to express himself cogently in writing. Weaknesses noted in this exam would be covered in the Directed Readings exam.

Oral Interview—Upon successful completion of the Specialized Background exam, a personal interview will be arranged with the Doctoral Studies Committee. The interview, along with the application, transcripts and previous examinations, will be the basis for assigning additional course work (if any) due to academic deficiency and for determining the content of the Directed Readings exam. If married, the Committee may request an interview with the applicant’s wife as well.

Directed Readings—A major reading list with study guidelines, based on the weaknesses discovered in the Specialized Background exam and Oral Interview, will be sent to the applicant following the Oral Interview. Once the prescribed readings have been completed, an exam covering them will be given.

German Language—The ability to read significant theological sources in German is deemed vital to research at the doctoral level. Consequently, the seminary offers GR 900 Theological German. This two credit-hour course, designed to prepare the student for the qualifying exam, introduces the vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure and enables the student to read, understand, and translate original sources written in German. The final exam, requiring a minimum passing grade of 86%, functions as a substitute for the German qualifying exam. Because the course is prerequisite, grades do not count toward one’s grade point average.

Academic Adviser

At the time of admission into the program, the doctoral studies committee will assign an adviser to oversee the applicant's qualifying exams and subsequent research and writing. The adviser will assess the student's previous education and review his General Background and Specialized Background exams (cf. "Oral Interview" above), assigning additional course work as deemed necessary. At any time during residency, additional course work may be required of the student by his adviser.

Residency Requirements

Continuous Enrollment—Because the nature of this program does not allow for non-residency or ABD ("All But Dissertation") status, the student is expected to relocate to the area and to personally interact with his adviser on a bi-weekly basis. The program specifically requires that the student enroll for each semester successively (summers excluded) until the first draft has been accepted by his dissertation committee; premature departure will result in termination of the program.

Foreign Language Proficiency—In addition to German, each student must demonstrate the ability to read relevant sources in a second non-biblical foreign language (e.g., French, Modern Hebrew, Latin, or Dutch) as determined by one's dissertation topic. The exam is based on material pertinent to the area of one's dissertation and must show proficiency. The exam is administered by the student's academic adviser and must be completed prior to the start of the student's second year of residence.

Course Work—A student must enroll in a minimum of twenty-four credit hours of study (see "Overview" on page 38) during his academic residency, the first of which would be the Dissertation Prospectus course (four credit hours). These courses, the full-time load of which is four credit hours per semester, are selected in consultation with the adviser, and are designed to assist in the dissertation research. Any course work required due to deficiency would be additional. A grade of B- or higher is required.

Dissertation Prospectus—Each student begins his first semester of residence by enrolling in the Dissertation Prospectus course. This course will allow the student, under the adviser's supervision, to refine the dissertation topic, defend its choice, establish its need, and outline the procedure for its undertaking. An extensive bibliography is also included. The Dissertation Topic Confirmation fee, payable at the time of enrollment in this course, authorizes the librarian to conduct a search of all known writings on the proposed topic and provides the student with significant bibliographic data.

Approval of the prospectus by the adviser and eventual admission to candidacy status does not guarantee acceptance of the proposed dissertation, but merely grants permission to prepare and submit the first draft of the dissertation to the committee for evaluation.

Length of Program—Although the actual length of the program may vary, depending on one's capability and commitment, a three-year residency can usually be expected. The maximum time allowable to complete the program is four years from the date residency is initiated. Only in rare circumstances will this requirement be relaxed, and then the Doctoral Studies Committee must be fully satisfied that there is sufficient justification for an extension. Request for an extension must be made in writing to the Director of Doctoral Studies.

Advanced Standing/Transfer Credit

Students with previous training in the course to be pursued will be required to submit official transcripts upon enrollment. The transcripts will be evaluated and appropriate credit given. Credits

allowed will be recorded on enrollment record and the length of the course shortened proportionately. In addition, the student and the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) will be notified.

Admission to Candidacy Status

Application to Candidacy—Upon successful completion of the additional foreign language requirements, the Dissertation Prospectus course, and any additional course work assigned by the academic adviser due to deficiency (cf. “Qualifying Exams” above), the student may apply for formal admission to candidacy. An application for admission to candidacy status form is available from the Director of Doctoral Studies.

Dissertation Committee—Once admission to candidacy has been approved by the Doctoral Studies Committee, the Director of Doctoral Studies will, in consultation with the academic adviser, select the faculty members who will serve on the student’s dissertation committee. The committee will generally consist of the student’s academic adviser (serving as chair), a second faculty member from the area of specialization, and a faculty member from another discipline or institution. Any unforeseen changes in committee membership will be made by the Director of Doctoral Studies in consultation with the academic adviser.

Dissertation Requirements

Dissertation Research—The dissertation is expected to embody the results of original research and make a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of concentration. In light of the structure and philosophy of the program, the dissertation should evidence a high level of scholarly competence and theological awareness. Special study carrels with computer hookups are available for the exclusive use of doctoral students. The librarian will conduct a search of all known writings on the proposed topic for each student and provide him with significant bibliographic data.

Dissertation Length—An acceptable dissertation, consisting of not less than 250 pages or more than 400 pages of text material, must be submitted to the dissertation committee by the student



prior to breaking residence. While the dissertation must adhere strictly to the length stipulations, approval is based on doctrinal integrity, literary quality, and academic competency.

Dissertation Format—All dissertation drafts must be prepared in conformity with the latest editions of the seminary’s “Guidelines for Papers, Theses, and Dissertations” and Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Where these sources differ, the seminary’s “Guidelines” takes precedence.

Dissertation Deadlines & Acceptance—The first draft of the dissertation is due no later than September 1 of the year prior to anticipated graduation and should be submitted in triplicate, plus one electronic copy as an institutional backup, to the Director of Doctoral Studies for proper tracking. If major revisions are required by the dissertation committee, the student should be prepared to delay graduation by a full year. Final acceptance is predicated upon acceptance of the first draft by the dissertation committee, successful oral defense of the dissertation, and an acceptable final draft.

Dissertation Defense—Once the dissertation committee deems the dissertation draft ready, the student is required to defend the dissertation before his academic adviser (acting as chair) and the dissertation committee. Scheduled no later than February 1 of the year of anticipated graduation, the date and place of the defense are announced to all faculty so that interested members may attend. Two copies of the table of contents with a ten-to-fifteen page annotated outline of the dissertation must be presented to the dissertation chair no later than two weeks prior to the oral defense. Following the defense, the faculty will be given opportunity to make suggestions to the student’s dissertation committee. Subsequently, the dissertation committee and the Director of Doctoral Studies will meet to decide upon one of the following actions:

- Approve the dissertation and its defense, subject to any minor revisions required by the committee
- Delay graduation by rejecting the dissertation and its defense until major revisions are completed under the direction of the academic adviser, necessitating another defense for the following year
- Reject the dissertation and its defense and terminate the student’s program

The chair of the student’s dissertation committee will immediately notify the student of the committee’s decision.

Graduation Specifics

Once approval of the dissertation and its defense has been granted, the student must submit by the first Friday in April the following items:

- An “Application for Graduation”
- An approved original printed copy, three photocopies, and one electronic copy of the dissertation to the Director of Doctoral Studies; each copy must include a one-page single-spaced abstract (Additional personal copies may be submitted for binding.)
- A vitae sheet, written in narrative style and including the date and place of birth, a summary of the candidate’s professional and academic career and degrees earned, publications, memberships, and special honors