

MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Graduates of theological schools of recognized standing who have obtained the B.D. or M.Div. degree may be admitted to a program of studies leading to the Master of Sacred Theology (S.T.M.) degree. YDS also offers a specialized S.T.M. track, the S.T.M. for Ministry Professionals, described below.

TRADITIONAL S.T.M.

The work for the S.T.M. degree may be regarded as a fourth year of preparation for the Christian ministry. It may be used for advanced training in a specialized form of Christian service such as a college or university ministry; chaplaincy in industry, institutions, or the armed services; urban or inner-city ministry; ecumenical or interfaith leadership; the directing of continuing education; international missions; or ministry with LGBTQ youth, refugees, or the elderly. The S.T.M. program may also be used as a year of specialized work in one of the theological disciplines or as preparation for doctoral studies. The schedule of courses may involve offerings in other schools or departments of the university.

Each candidate is required to plan, submit for approval, and pursue an integrated program designed to serve one of the purposes stated above, and a minimum of three-fourths of the courses taken must be related to a designated field of concentration. However, candidates who use the program as a general preparation for ministry may request a waiver of the normal requirements that there be a specific area of concentration and that the written project be related to this field.

A candidate for the S.T.M. degree must complete the equivalent of at least twenty-four credit hours of graduate study beyond the B.D., M.Div., or equivalent degree. A thesis, major paper in a regular course, or other acceptable project in the selected field of study is required.

YDS M.Div. students accepted into the S.T.M. degree program and in need of financial aid will need to submit a new financial aid application. A new award will be calculated that is not based on previous scholarship aid received at YDS. Federal loan programs will be available, provided that Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) is maintained.

The work for the degree may be undertaken in one year, or distributed over two, three, or four years; it must be completed within four years after matriculation. In the case of students who wish to extend their studies, nine credit hours is the minimum course load that can be regarded as a full-time program of study. Normally no work taken prior to matriculation will be counted toward the degree, nor will credit be transferred from other schools unless approval to count a course to be taken elsewhere has been given in advance. Students will not receive financial aid for course work beyond the requirements. International students are permitted to take three terms to complete their S.T.M. degree.

S.T.M. FOR MINISTRY PROFESSIONALS TRACK

The S.T.M. for Ministry Professionals track (suspended for 2024–2025) is designed for individuals with at least three years of experience in professional ministry. This track, as distinct from the rest of the S.T.M. program, requires only one term in residency. Students begin the degree program with a fall term in residence, accumulating twelve to fifteen credits. The remaining credits toward the degree are completed by way of weeklong, intensive three-credit courses, offered in January, March, and June; one-credit transformational leadership courses (maximum of three courses); and an independent, faculty-advised project, thesis, or extended paper in the candidate's area of concentration, which is required of all S.T.M. candidates. This track does not offer financial aid. Except as noted, all general S.T.M. policies above are applicable to the S.T.M. for Ministry Professionals track.

THESIS, PROJECT, AND EXTENDED PAPER OPTIONS

An independent thesis, a project in the candidate's area of concentration, or an extended paper is required for the S.T.M. degree. Candidates who choose to write theses or pursue projects must register for one or two terms of REL 3999, S.T.M. Thesis or Project, three credit hours per term. Projects are restricted to programs focusing on some aspect of ministerial practice. Extended papers are written in conjunction with the regular requirements for courses credited toward the S.T.M. degree. A thesis, project, or extended paper must demonstrate independent research and critical inquiry.

Thesis/Project

Students planning to pursue a thesis or project must first identify two readers, one of whom acts as the thesis/project adviser—normally, though not always, the student's academic adviser. The readers must be appropriate to the chosen topic and must be willing and able to work with and guide the student as the process evolves. The first reader is a Yale faculty member, including part-time and visiting faculty with permission of the S.T.M. program director. The second reader is usually a Yale faculty member but also can be external to Yale with permission of the S.T.M. program director.

The student must submit a completed S.T.M. Thesis/Project Proposal form no later than the end of the first week of the term in which the thesis or project is to be initiated. Students are encouraged to submit the form at the end of the term prior to the term in which they hope to begin the project. The submission must include a one-page proposal describing the thesis or project; the signatures of the first reader, second reader, and the student's academic adviser if the adviser is not one of the readers; and specification of what must be handed in as evidence of progress by the Monday of week five. If the first reader is not a full-time member of the Divinity faculty, the proposal must also include a statement of support from a full-time member.

The S.T.M. program director will review the application and, if there are solid grounds for confidence in the student's ability to complete the work successfully, will authorize the thesis or project. Students who have not obtained approval prior to the start of the term in which the thesis or project will be initiated are advised to register for another class in the event that their proposal is not approved.

By the Monday of the fifth week of classes in which the thesis/project begins, the agreed-upon evidence of progress (e.g., outline, draft, annotated bibliography, specified number of pages, etc.) must be submitted to the first reader. If the first reader is not able to confirm substantial progress and a solid expectation that the student can be expected to submit satisfactory work by the end of the term, the first reader must indicate this by submitting an Academic Caution Notice to the student, academic dean, and registrar. A student who receives an Academic Caution Notice may drop the course or petition to convert the thesis or project to a reading course. This petition requires support of the first reader and is made by written request to the Professional Studies Committee. Normally, a full draft is due to the first reader some weeks prior to final submission, as agreed upon by both parties.

The thesis is due on the final day of the term as noted on the academic calendar. First and second readers will confer on the grade prior to grade submission by the first reader and will complete and submit to the registrar's office a reader's report describing the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis. If both readers judge a thesis or project to be distinguished or of exceptional quality, such distinction will be recorded on the candidate's transcript.

The length of manuscripts submitted to satisfy the S.T.M. thesis or project requirement will vary, depending on the subject matter. In conceptual fields, a one-term thesis or project report will normally be 50–60 pages long; a two-term thesis or project report, 100–120 pages. In text-based fields, shorter theses may be more appropriate.

After an S.T.M. thesis has been approved by the first and second readers, and prior to 5 p.m., May 8, 2025, a candidate must provide a correct copy to be archived by the Divinity Library. This copy must be provided to the registrar's office in electronic (PDF) form along with a completed archiving agreement form. It must have a title page, be free of typographical errors, and employ an acceptable literary style, including standard forms for references. (Recommended manuals include the *MLA Handbook*; *The Chicago Manual of Style*; Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*; and *The SBL Handbook of Style for Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines*.) In order to fulfill the library's mission to collect, describe, and preserve intellectual content created by and within the school, students are strongly encouraged to provide a thesis abstract of less than 300 words along with the thesis copy.

Extended Paper

An extended paper is written in conjunction with regular requirements for a course in which a candidate is currently enrolled or which the candidate has previously completed. The length of an extended paper should normally exceed the usual requirement for a term paper by one-third to one-half. Only the instructor of the course will evaluate the manuscript submitted, and the only grade recorded will be the grade for the course. As a rule, extended papers will not be deposited in the Divinity Library, although an instructor may recommend the submission of a paper of exceptional quality. The final decision on this matter will involve the judgments of a second reader and the director of S.T.M. studies.