THE STM DEGREE

The STM degree is a second-level graduate professional degree for those who wish to pursue a year of more advanced coursework focusing on a particular academic discipline or ministerial and other religious leadership practice. The degree is not normally considered probationary for the doctorate.

The STM has two possible concentrations:

1.1 Disciplinary Concentration

Students focusing on advanced competency in a particular academic discipline of theological study are required to complete a minimum of five 3 or 4 credit courses in that discipline. The student’s advisor has authority to approve the courses considered to be within the discipline in order to allow for maximum breadth and interdisciplinary competence. All STM students are required to pass a written, two-hour comprehensive exam or to write a thesis. The presumed culmination for all students in this concentration is the written comprehensive exam. Students who want to write a thesis must petition to do so using the STM Thesis Petition Form (Appendix A in the STM Handbook). Students must complete this form, which includes the signature of an advisor willing to support the thesis-writing process (note: no advisor is obligated to supervise a thesis). Each student must submit the completed Petition Form, a brief proposal of the topic of the thesis (up to two pages in length), a one-page bibliography, and an academic writing sample (fewer than 20 pages) to the School of Theology Advanced Studies Program Coordinator during the first semester of STM coursework. The deadline for submission of the Petition Form is December 5 for students who matriculate in the Fall Semester, and April 5 for students who matriculate in the Spring Semester. The Program Coordinator will file the request with the thesis advisor and the ASC, once approved by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Students pursuing the thesis option may count it as equivalent to one course (3 or 4 credits) and should register for a directed study with the thesis advisor. The thesis is graded; a minimum grade of B− is required. The thesis must be submitted in approved format.

Further courses may be required for certain disciplines. For example, candidates in biblical studies may be expected to have at least one year of Hebrew or Greek before admission or to include it in their course of study and receive one-half the credit for the number of hours.

The primary learning outcomes of the STM with a Disciplinary Concentration include:

1. advanced competency in one discipline of theological study;
2. a capacity to conduct original research in that area; and
3. growth in one’s capacity for a robust embrace of and engagement with social and theological diversity and one’s capacity to relate across difference.

1.2 Religious Leadership Concentration

Students who wish to focus their degree program toward the aims of ministerial or other religious leadership may undertake a specialization that seeks to cultivate advanced understanding and competence in a particular form of ecclesial ministry (for example, preaching, liturgy and worship, mission and evangelism, social justice, religious education, spiritual formation, etc.) or other forms or religious leadership (for example, urban or multicultural ministry, interfaith leadership, religion and conflict transformation, ecological justice, etc.).
Students pursuing the Religious Leadership Specialization need not concentrate in any one theological discipline, but may instead create a unique plan of study to meet their professional aims. At least five courses 3 or 4 credit courses approved by the student’s advisor make up that plan of study, including up to 6 credits of supervised practica. Practica must be supervised and awarded a grade by an STH faculty member (they may not be taken pass/fail) and they must also have some form of meaningful on-site supervision and accountability (the contextual education office can provide guidance). Learning covenants will be developed well in advance of the start of any such practicum and must be approved the faculty practicum supervisor, faculty advisor (if the practicum faculty supervisor is other than the faculty supervisor), and one of the directors of the contextual education office.

An additional three 3-4 credit courses may be taken as electives. Students pursuing the Religious Leadership Specialization should complete a 25-page “(Ministerial) Religious Leadership” paper, which may be completed as part of a supervised practicum, and as counting toward the grade of that practicum. The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate an advanced understanding of ministerial or religious leadership in a particular area of focus. The paper should outline challenges and opportunities raised by leadership within a particular context and suggest practical strategies for addressing those challenges and seizing those opportunities.

If the Leadership Paper is completed as part of a practicum, the student’s advisor must be one of the evaluators of that paper (in cases where the faculty supervisor for the practicum is not the advisor). If the Leadership Paper is produced by the student as a stand-alone document as a way of completing the requirements of the STM, the student’s faculty advisor will serve as the sole evaluator of that paper.

The primary learning outcomes of the STM in Religious Leadership include:

1. advanced competency in a focused area of ministerial or religious leadership; and
2. growth in one’s capacity for a robust embrace of and engagement with social and theological diversity and one’s capacity to relate across difference.

2 ADMISSIONS

Applicants must hold a first-level graduate degree in theology, religion, or other discipline appropriate for advanced theological study and have a minimum grade point average of 3.0 in that degree. Requests for transfer from one concentration to another is tantamount to a new application and would require:

- a detailed petition justifying the request;
- a signed statement from the potential new advisor consenting to take the student as an advisee.

Admission to the program, when granted, is into the STM curriculum (8 courses). Students in the Disciplinary Specialization who wish to petition to write a thesis instead of taking a written comprehensive exam must petition to do so within the first semester of their program, using the STM Thesis Petition Form (Appendix A). More information on this procedure can be found in this handbook under the heading “Comprehensive Examination and Thesis Requirements.”
3 ACADEMIC REVIEW

The ASC shall undertake an academic review of a student when report of an unsatisfactory course grade lower than B- or other unsatisfactory outcome such as required withdrawal from a course reaches the committee, either through a professor, the academic dean, or through the registrar. No grade lower than B- may be counted toward the STM degree.

Any faculty member may request an academic review of a STM student’s standing by submitting to the ASC a memorandum detailing the grounds for such a request.

In carrying out the academic review of a STM student, the ASC shall

(1) Solicit the perspectives of the advisors, course instructor, and other directly involved faculty on the grade. Questions to consider include the following:
   (a) How important is this course within the student’s plan of study?
   (b) Based on the student’s work in the course, is the student capable of successfully fulfilling the requirements of an STM degree?
   (c) Is the student capable of fulfilling the STM requirements within the allowed timeframe?
   (d) Should the student be continued in the STM program?

(2) Inform the student of the review process and provide them with an opportunity to submit to the ASC any factors or circumstances which they believe should be considered by the committee. The student may solicit faculty to write in their support as well.

After discussion, the ASC shall decide whether to recommend formal academic probation to the Registrar, to terminate the student from the STM program, or to continue the student in the program. A memo shall be sent to the candidate, with copies to the professor, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and the advisor, informing all parties of the ASC’s response and decision.

Two unsatisfactory course grades result in termination of candidacy, except by approved petition to the ASC. In such cases, no academic review is necessary. The ASC, upon being informed of the relevant events, shall notify the student of termination from the program, unless the ASC, within 30 days of the notification or a week prior to its next scheduled meeting, whichever is later, receives and approves a petition from the student to continue in the program, the Registrar shall be informed of the ASC’s action and the student’s candidacy terminated.

4 PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND PROCEDURES

4.1 Coursework

The STM program requires eight semester courses of 3 or 4 credits each. Six of the eight required courses must be taken at Boston University. All courses must be taken at the 800 or 900 level. 700 level courses are not open for credit to STM students.

A maximum of three of the eight semester courses may be fulfilled through directed studies (including one for thesis writing, by approved Thesis Petition).

Students in the STM Disciplinary Concentration may enroll in formal study of any biblical, classical, or ancient Near Eastern languages appropriate to their major for full-credit towards the degree, up to a maximum of 16 credits (the requirement of 800 level or higher courses does not apply in these cases).
4.2 Time Limitations and Requirements

STM students who are registered full-time must complete the degree within two semesters. Credits earned more than ten years before the date the degree is to be conferred may not be applied toward the degree. In all cases, STM students must earn the degree within two years (four semesters) of the semester of matriculation.

4.3 Comprehensive Examination and Thesis Requirements

All STM students in the Disciplinary Concentration are required either to pass a written, two-hour comprehensive exam or to write a thesis. At the discretion of the advisor, candidates for whom English is a second language may be allowed up to one additional hour. The presumed culmination for all admitted STM students in the Disciplinary Concentration is the written comprehensive exam. Two faculty members must read the written comprehensive exam. Exam readers for the STM must minimally have an STM or equivalent. Exam results will be recorded and returned to the students thirty days after taking the exam.

Students in the Disciplinary Concentration who want to write a thesis must petition to do so using the STM Thesis Petition Form (Appendix A). No faculty member is obligated to supervise a thesis. Students must complete the petition form, which includes the signature of an advisor willing to support the thesis-writing process. Each student must submit the completed petition form, a brief proposal of the topic of the thesis (up to two pages in length), a one-page bibliography, and an academic writing sample (fewer than 20 pages) to the Advanced Studies Program Coordinator during the first semester of STM coursework. The deadline for submission of the petition form is December 5th for students who matriculate in the fall semester, and April 5th for students who matriculate in the spring semester. The Thesis Petition will then be forwarded to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for review.

Students choosing the thesis option may count it as equivalent to one course (4 credits) in the major if they register for a directed study with the major advisor. The thesis is graded; a minimum of B- is required. The student must consult with the Advanced Studies Program Coordinator regarding guidelines governing the form in which the dissertation shall be submitted to the Library.

The School of Theology requires that all theses be formatted in accordance with the Research Guide for Writers of Theses and Dissertations and Electronic Submission (http://www.bu.edu/library/files/2011/05/ElectronicGuide2013b.pdf). For areas not covered by that guide, use Kate L. Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, currently in its 7th edition (2007). In cases where Turabian needs to be supplemented, the current edition of The Chicago Manual of Style shall be consulted. For information on graduation deadlines, format review, and thesis submission go to http://www.bu.edu/sth/academics/advanced-studies/graduation-deadlines-for-stm-thd-phd-and-dmin/.

Students in the Religious Leadership Concentration will complete a 25-page “(Ministerial) Religious Leadership” paper, which may be completed as part of a supervised practicum. The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate an advanced understanding of ministerial or religious leadership in a particular area of focus. The paper should outline challenges and opportunities raised by leadership within a particular context and suggest practical strategies for addressing those challenges and seizing those opportunities.
STM Thesis Petition Form  
Boston University School of Theology

Instructions: (1) Complete your portion of the petition and (2) attach a proposal of your thesis topic (two pages in length), (3) a one-page bibliography, and (4) an academic writing sample (fewer than 20 pages in length).

Once you have completed your portion of the petition form and attached these items, take the paperwork to a faculty member for advising approval. Please understand that not every petition will be accepted by the faculty. If you receive a signature from a faculty member agreeing to be your STM Thesis Advisor, you may submit the signed Petition form and your proposal to the Office of Registration and Financial Aid. The deadline for submission of the petition form is December 5th for students who matriculate in the fall semester, and April 5th for students who matriculate in the spring semester. Final review and approval is made by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

Student’s Name _____________________________ BU ID# _____________________

Date of STM Matriculation _______________

Current GPA (if applicable) ______________________

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Student’s Signature __________________________ Date _______________

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Thesis Advisor’s Signature __________________________ Date _______________

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Associate Dean for Academic Affairs __________________________ Date _______________