

MASTER OF THEOLOGY DEGREE PROGRAM

HANDBOOK

July 1, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
The Mission of Union Presbyterian Seminary	4
Mission	4
Context for Mission	4
Accreditation	4
An Overview of the Master of Theology Degree Program	5
Program Goals	5-6
Admission	6
Advising	6
Residency and Time Requirements	6-7
Learning Cohorts	7
Summary of Academic Requirements for the Th.M. Degree	7
Th.M. Degree Curriculum	7-8
Thesis/Summative Project	8
Passing Grades	8
Additional Requirements for Graduation	8
Degree Program Support Resources	8-9
Tuition, Fees, and Financial Aid	9
Academic Procedures and Regulations	10
Additional Policies	10
Appendices	11-13

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 the Academic Dean, 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:

Daniel J. Ott, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Academic Dean; Professor of Theology
daniel.ott@upsem.edu

Th.M. Handbook:

Christine Luckritz Marquis, Interim Director of Master of Theology Program (Fall 2025);
Associate Professor of Church History
christine.luckritzmarquis@upsem.edu

Samuel L. Adams, Director of Master of Theology Program; Mary Jane and John F. McNair
Chair of Biblical Studies
samuel.adams@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.

Context for Mission

Union Presbyterian Seminary participates in God's New Creation, the liberation, wholeness, and flourishing that God reveals in Jesus Christ and intends for all.

"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?" –Isaiah 43:19

As witnesses to this New Creation, we are called to respond to a suffering world struggling to address multiple interlocking crises, from epidemic violence to systemic oppression to the climate emergency.

Steeped in Christian traditions, equipped to innovate for changing contexts, and in discernment of where the Spirit of God is already at work, we form leaders who will nurture in people an unquenchable longing for—and prepare them to work toward—a more just, faithful, and compassionate church and world.

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/) 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, 30 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 program Director and 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 ordinarily hold a bachelor's degree or its equivalent from a four-year college or university accredited by one of the nationally recognized regional accrediting agencies or the international equivalent. Applicants without such a bachelor's degree or its equivalent may be considered for admission based on their performance in a qualifying master's degree program, the rigor of that degree program, and the overall quality of their application, with special attention to their previous research skill training. Applicants must have received a master's degree in an appropriate discipline from a seminary or university accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or its international equivalent. Applications for admission into the Th.M. program are evaluated by the appropriate faculty departments.

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/. For assistance, call the Office of Admissions at (804) 278-4221, or e-mail

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. During their coursework, students in consultation with their advisor will select a second reader. The thesis or SP will be evaluated by the advisor and second reader. All Th.M. students will successfully complete 30 credit hours, including a Th.M. thesis or SP, required courses, a year-long colloquium, and a Portfolio constructed in conversation with faculty advisor and second reader. Students, in consultation with their advisor, will select a second reader by no later than March 15. The advisor will inform their department of the designated second reader.

Th.M. students will ordinarily take 13 hours in the Fall term, 13 hours in the Spring term, and 4

hours in the May term. The Fall term must include the Th.M. Research Methods Seminar, a foundational directed study, the Fall colloquium, and two additional 400-level elective courses. The Spring term includes the Th.M. Seminar, the Spring colloquium, an additional 400-level elective course or directed study, a 3-hour writing course for work on the thesis or SP, and a 3-hour course for the completion of the Portfolio. The May term includes another 3-hour writing course for the completion of the thesis or SP and May colloquium.

Th.M. Degree Curriculum

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

THM400: Research Methods Seminar (3 hours)

This course expands each student's ability to imagine, research, and refine their research project. Students leave this seminar with a more focused thesis, research plan, and several annotated bibliographic entries. The content of this work is formulated toward the final thesis and in conversation with each student's thesis advisor. Special training with Library staff in resources is part of the course curriculum.

Directed Study: Foundations (3 hours)

Led by a student's advisor or a second reader, this Directed Study focuses on foundational readings needed for a student's thesis as well as any central readings for a student's given disciplinary focus (or foci, if doing interdisciplinary work). Such a course may focus on reading central texts or may be focused translation work.

THM401: Seminar (3 hours)

This interdisciplinary seminar explores one or more contemporary issues in relation to the disciplines from which students are researching. The course teaches students how to ask questions from their disciplinary location in conversation with colleagues with differing disciplinary backgrounds. By the end of the course, students should be able to discuss their thesis/project in a way that non-specialist and specialist alike would understand.

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.

Thesis or Summative Project. 6 credit hours. 3 hours in the Spring term and 3 hours in the May term.

Year-long Colloquium (3 credit hours total; P/F graded courses).

THM405a (Fall): With a focus on shared vocational exploration, students use a shared media (book, video, etc.) to discuss how they are thinking through where they feel called to serve. 1 credit hour.

THM405b (Spring): Students workshop their draft chapters with one another. 1 credit hour.

THM405c (May): Each student formally presents their thesis/project to the seminary community. The student's faculty advisor and second reader, and the larger audience, will engage the student with questions. As the student will have already received a grade for the thesis or SP at the end of Spring term, these questions do not constitute an oral defense. 1 credit hour.

THM450: Portfolio (3 hours)

Students construct a portfolio of materials that reflect their broader learning with their chosen discipline(s). This will vary depending on the student's vocational goals. For example, Ph.D. bound students may wish to construct a syllabus or annotated reading list. Others may construct teaching plans or tools to share their learning with a community or congregation.

Other Directed Th.M. studies as necessary 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.

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. **Final versions of theses and SPs are submitted to the Th.M. Director as well as the faculty advisor and second reader.**

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 Portfolio 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. Only the Fall, Spring, and May Colloquia are graded with Pass/Fail criteria.

Failure to meet the deadlines in Appendix 1 or to receive passing grades on the thesis or SP and Portfolio 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 2025-2026 academic year is \$15,000. Th.M. students are eligible for financial aid to be applied to tuition. 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

Statement and Guidelines on Language for Diversity & Inclusion

Plagiarism Policy

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

Auditing Courses

Community Grievance and Discipline Policy

Copyright Ownership

Firearms Policy

Housing Procedures

Inclement Weather and School Closing Policy

Learning Disabilities

Pet Policy

Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures

Smoking Policy

Social Media Policy

Student Wage and Employment Guidelines

Substance Abuse Prevention Policy

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

March 16:

Deadline for designation by department of a second reader for the thesis or SP. Please report who the second reader is to the Th.M. Director.

April 1:

Deadline for successful completion of Portfolio.

April 1:

A complete draft of two chapters would be due by end of Spring term for 3 credit hours in Spring to Th.M advisor and second reader.

May 1:

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

May 15:

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 and second reader's judgment constitute in content and in form a thesis or SP of acceptable Th.M. extent, depth, and quality.

APPENDIX 2: Table of Th.M. Curriculum Requirements

FALL	SPRING	MAY
Research Methods (3 hours)	Seminar (3 hours)	Thesis/SP (3 hours)
Directed Study (3 hours)	Thesis/SP (3 hours)	ThM Colloquium (1 hour)
ThM Colloquium (1 hour)	Portfolio (3 hours)	
Elective (3 hours)	ThM Colloquium (1 hour)	
Elective (3 hours)	Elective (3 hours)	
13 hours	13 hours	4 hours

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

Student # _____

Evaluator _____

	4	3	2	1	0	Score
Category	Exemplary	Good	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Failure	
Comprehension of Sub-Discipline	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.	
Knowledge of Key Textual Resources	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.	
Use of Scholarly Methods	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.	
Ability to Engage in Advanced Reflection and Discourse	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.	