

THEOLOGICAL STUDIES (M.T.S.)

Final Project Options

Option A—The supervised revision of a research paper, combined with an "exit interview"

This option has two components, the first to be completed in the penultimate semester of a student's M.T.S. work and the second one to be completed in the final semester.

1) By the end of the fifth week of the student's penultimate semester in the M.T.S. program (typically the second Friday of October in year 2 of the student's matriculation in the program), the student will select a research paper previously written for one of their courses and begin the process of revising, expanding and further developing this paper so that the new version brings out more thoroughly valuable interdisciplinary perspectives upon the topic. For example, the content of a paper that the student wrote for an ethics course would be expanded somewhat to include further scriptural or historical insights. Additional scholarly sources might be identified and applied to improve what the paper achieves, though without adding overly much to the length of the paper (a 20-page paper might be extended in this way to a length of 25 pages, but no more than 30 pages).

The student must obtain permission for the participation in this exercise of the professor for whom the original paper was written (or, for good reasons such as faculty absence from campus due to a sabbatical, a substitute faculty member in the same theological sub-discipline) as well as one other professor in the Theology Department whose work is relevant to the revision process. The student will share the original version of the paper with both professors by the middle of that semester (typically fall of the second year in the M.T.S. program) and consult with both professors on subsequent drafts, culminating in a final version to be shared with both professors by the first day of the final month of that semester (typically December 1). The student then arranges a mutually convenient time for the three to meet for 45 minutes to engage in a colloquy on the content and merits of this revised paper. The oral exercise will explore the interdisciplinary and integrative character of the writing project, in light of the methodologies and standards of both sub-disciplines.

At the end of this meeting, each of the faculty members will submit to the Department a brief (five- to ten-sentence) report on the success of the student performance, including both written and oral components, into a combined score. Each faculty member will independently record a grade of Pass or Fail on this project. If either faculty member records a failing grade, the exercise will be repeated in the following semester, proceeding either with the same paper (presumably with substantial revisions and improvements) or with a different paper entirely and with at least one different professor. Students interested in applying to doctoral programs in theology will come away from this exercise (especially if completed in a timely way, typically by exam week in December) with a promising candidate for a writing sample that may comprise part of an excellent application to a doctoral program.

The Department Chair will oversee this process for M.T.S. students and will maintain records of faculty involvement in these exercises, so that

no faculty member is unduly burdened by overly frequent service in the mentoring and reading of these final projects for M.T.S. projects. The normal maximum for a given faculty member is three such involvements each academic year.

2) M.T.S. students who select Option A and who have successfully completed item 1 described above will complete their degree closure requirement by participating in a 30-minute "exit interview" with two faculty members of their choosing (ideally, the academic advisor and a second professor who has supervised some previous work of the student) in that student's final semester of degree work. The student takes the initiative of inviting these two professors to meet at a mutually convenient time, which must fall before the beginning of the final exam week of the student's final semester in the M.T.S. program.

The faculty members will question the student regarding the overall experience of the degree program, including: 1) describing major areas of learning; 2) identifying any unanticipated outcomes and benefits of the program; and 3) proposing potential areas for improvement in the curriculum or administration of the M.T.S. degree. The student will receive a pass or fail grade from each professor, who will then submit the results to the Theology Department along with a narrative of five to ten sentences summarizing the student's oral reflections on the program.

If either professor submits a failing grade on this oral exercise (presumably because the student applied too little effort in fashioning well-considered responses to the questions asked), a new colloquy must be scheduled (unfortunately, this will probably delay the student's graduation date) with two new professors who will follow the same procedures described above. Students who fail to complete successfully either of these two components of Option A will not be awarded the M.T.S. degree.

Option B—Student reflection paper and "exit interview" based upon it

Both components of this option for a closure exercise occur in the final two months of the M.T.S. student's degree program. Notice that there is no research component within Option B.

1) During the penultimate month of the student's final semester in the M.T.S. program (typically in early April, since most students will graduate in May of their second year), the student will invite two professors in the Theology Department to participate in the closure exercise, which may be completed in either of the final two months of that semester (typically April or early May, but certainly before the beginning of final exams week of that semester). Ideally (but not necessarily) one professor will be the student's academic advisor, and the other professor will have supervised some previous work of the student.

The student will then write a reflection essay of 6 to 8 standard double-spaced pages (1500 to 2000 words) addressing the following lines of inquiry: 1) Describe your major learning goals in this degree program, how well they were met and which components of your study contributed most substantially to this success; 2) Describe any shortcomings of the program as offered and propose how they might be addressed; and 3) Describe how well prepared you feel to advance toward your career goals and especially whether you encountered any unanticipated benefits or areas of enrichment in your academic program at Fordham. The student's reflection essay must be written in smooth standard prose and be presented to the two faculty members at least five days before the agreed-upon colloquy meeting.

2) The student and the two professors will participate in a 45-minute colloquy in which the student responds to lines of inquiry offered by the two professors. The content of the reflection essay is the starting point of the conversation, but the discussion may include further considerations beyond what the student has written. At the conclusion of the colloquy, each of the two faculty members will submit to the department (on an independent basis) a report of a grade (simply pass or fail), and an additional paragraph (on the scale of ten sentences) summarizing the most important insights about the program shared by the student in the reflection essay and during the colloquy meeting.

If a student does not receive a passing grade from even one of the two faculty members, a new panel of two different professors will be appointed (by the Department Chair, in conversation with the student) to supervise the writing of an improved reflection essay and to conduct a new colloquy session. If a student requires a second attempt at this closure exercise, it will most likely delay the expected graduation of that student, so careful preparation of the written essay and the oral component of this closure exercise should be a top priority.