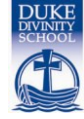




# THESIS PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

DUKE UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY



The D.Min. thesis is expected to be a mature and competent piece of writing, embodying the results of significant research. It must demonstrate the student's ability to contribute to the church's discourse about the ministries and practices of Christian communities.

## THE STATEMENT OF INTEREST

Students are expected to prepare a preliminary statement of interest as the concluding assignment in the Thesis Seminar (that is, at the end of the fifth term).

*The statement of interest should be 4-6 single-spaced pages in length and should include the following:*

- a. A statement of the issue to be addressed.
- b. A statement justifying the topic on the basis of both its significance and its feasibility, including a preliminary review of relevant secondary literature.
- c. A bibliography containing at least fifteen entries that demonstrates the core and range of research materials to be considered.

The instructor of the Thesis Seminar will advise the student as to the likely viability of the proposed research topic. With the approval of the instructor, the statement of interest will be submitted for consideration to the D.Min. Oversight Committee. If the proposal is judged to be in need of refinement or replacement, it will be referred back to the student. Whenever possible, a revised statement of interest will be reconsidered by the D.Min. Committee within three weeks.

Upon approval of the statement of interest, the student will be assigned a faculty supervisor by the D.Min. Committee. Students will be notified of this assignment as quickly as possible. It is the responsibility of the student to initiate contact and to arrange for meetings (e.g., in person, by phone, or through Skype) with the faculty supervisor. A second reader (not ordinarily a co-supervisor) will be assigned by the D.Min. Committee, typically after the thesis proposal has been formally approved. The second reader may be recruited from another institution but is expected to have relevant expertise and to hold a terminal academic degree.

## THE THESIS PROPOSAL

Students prepare a thesis proposal during the final (spring) term of their second academic year. Approved thesis proposals must be submitted to the program director no later than May 15<sup>th</sup> of the following academic year (see below). Students are expected to work closely with their thesis supervisor in preparing the proposal.

*The proposal should be limited to 5–10 single-spaced pages and include the following:*

- a. A tentative title.
- b. A statement of the issue to be addressed.
- c. A statement justifying the topic on the basis of both its significance and its feasibility.
- d. A statement regarding the methodology to be employed.
- e. A brief outline.
- f. A working bibliography.

Once accepted by the supervisor, the thesis proposal and signed proposal approval form will be forwarded to the D.Min. program director, who will either approve the proposal in its present form, require revisions to the proposal, or reject the proposal. Reasons for rejection will vary, so the director in consultation with the D.Min. Oversight Committee will determine the appropriate next step on a case-by-case basis. ***If no proposal is approved by the end of the following academic year (May 15<sup>th</sup>), the student will be withdrawn from the program and awarded a Th.M. degree.***

If a student for any reason should substantially change his/her proposal from the one originally approved, the above steps must be repeated for the new proposal.

## PREPARATION OF THESIS

The writing of a thesis will ordinarily take one to two years. Longer periods require an extension approved in advance by the Associate Dean for Academic Programs.

The final thesis should be 30,000 to 40,000 words in length, including notes and bibliography. (A different thesis length may be approved by the supervisor in cases where it is warranted by both the nature and quality of the project.) For information about the format of the thesis, see the D.Min. Thesis Style Guide.

- Students develop the first draft of the thesis in consultation with their supervisor. It is advisable that individual chapters or portions thereof be submitted in stages to the supervisor for review.
- Students are strongly advised to bring their second reader into the process of review and revision from as early a date as possible.
- Drawing on the recommendations of the supervisor and second reader, a student next revises the first draft of all chapters, preparing a final draft of the thesis.
- The final draft should be submitted by the first day of March of the year in which the student hopes to graduate. Students must give their supervisor and second reader four weeks to review this draft. The supervisor and second reader may decide: a) that the thesis is ready for submission, b) that the thesis requires some minor revisions, or c) that it needs more substantial revision. If substantial revision is required, or if the supervisor and second reader cannot both agree to accept the thesis, the supervisor may suggest that it be looked at in part or in full by one or more additional readers. If revisions are required, the student will make them and then resubmit the thesis. A majority of persons reviewing the thesis must agree to its acceptance before it is submitted to the chair of the D.Min. Oversight Committee.
- When the supervisor and reader(s) decide that a thesis is ready, the student will submit a pdf copy of the thesis to the D.Min. Oversight Committee chair, who will either approve the thesis as is, return it to the student for minor revision, or, if warranted, refer it to the D.Min. Oversight Committee for further consideration. Reasons for such a referral will vary, so the Committee will determine the appropriate next step on a case-by-case basis.
- The supervisor, reader(s), and the Committee chair must sign an original copy of both the Thesis Title signature page and the Thesis Abstract Title signature page. The student will have responsibility for submitting these pages with the final version of the thesis.
- The approval process detailed above must be completed at least three weeks prior to graduation.
- Students are reminded to “Apply to Graduate” through the Office of Academic Formation and Programs by the appropriate deadline in the semester that they intend to complete their thesis.

## **ACADEMIC PROBATION AND REMOVAL FROM THE D.MIN. PROGRAM**

### *Rationale:*

Faculty members are charged with guiding and encouraging students while also upholding high academic standards. Ordinarily, these aims are in concert, but occasionally, when the quality of a student's work falls below expectation, they may appear to conflict. Faculty must then provide a reasonable opportunity for a student to succeed, though not at the expense of violating academic integrity and thereby undermining the school's mission.

The following procedure is meant to provide students with sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their likelihood of success and to provide a means by which students whose work is nevertheless judged to be of insufficient quality may be fairly removed from the D.Min. program.

### *Procedure:*

In the event that a student's work on the thesis is judged by the supervisor and reader(s) to fall below the minimal standard required for successful completion of the program, the following steps will be taken:

- 1) The student will be notified by the supervisor concerning the specific nature of the deficiencies.
- 2) The student will be notified by the Office of Academic Formation and Programs that he/she has entered a probationary period of two months, by the end of which he/she is required to submit revised work to the supervisor and reader(s) that satisfies all concerns.
- 3) If by the end of the probationary period the supervisor and reader(s) judge the revised work to be sufficiently improved to merit the expectation that the student will complete the program successfully, the student will be returned to full status.
  - A) A probationary student who is reinstated to full status must continue to make satisfactory progress toward the completion of the thesis. Reinstatement is no guarantee of successful completion of the degree. A student can be reverted to probationary status if he/she again fails to provide work of satisfactory quality.
- 4) If at the end of the probationary period the supervisor and reader(s) judge the revised work to be insufficiently improved, the student will be removed from the D.Min. program and awarded the Th.M. degree.
  - A) Within thirty days of the sending of notification of removal (and only if the Th.M. degree has not already been officially awarded), the student may appeal this decision in writing to the Associate Dean for Academic Formation and Programs. In such a case, three faculty members, at least one of whom will be a member of the D.Min. Oversight Committee, will be assigned by the Associate Dean to review the thesis pages the student has submitted to date along with the comments of the supervisor and reader(s). A majority of these three faculty members will determine whether to uphold the decision of the supervisor and reader(s) or to overturn the decision and possibly to request that:
    - i) a new supervisor and/or reader be assigned, and/or
    - ii) the student make substantive changes to the thesis within a specified period of

time.

B) The agreement on the part of the supervisor and reader(s) and on the part of the panel of three Duke Divinity School faculty members that a student's work is not of acceptable quality will be considered final.