The Nature of the Project

The goal of the Th.M. thesis is to provide students with an opportunity to conclude their course of study with by synthesizing and focusing their intellectual interest under the discipline of a substantial written paper. This paper may build upon and elaborate work done in a previous paper in the program or may probe in the direction of future academic study (e.g., a possible dissertation topic). The thesis can therefore: 1) focus on a specific text, figure, or question within a field; 2) integrate two or more disciplines with respect to a particular topic; or 3) apply a certain theoretical perspective to an issue or problem in the church or society.

Students can elect the thesis option only with the permission of the Th.M. director, who can, alternatively, recommend that a student who is not prepared to write a thesis take a comprehensive exam in order to complete the program in a timely manner. The thesis should be well researched, clearly written, and represent a significant act of intellectual engagement. It would normally be 12,000 to 20,000 words (50-75 pages), although some projects will necessitate greater length. Artistic projects may be proposed in place of a traditional research paper. However, an artistic project must still include a written description of the theoretical basis for the creative work the student does in another medium. This written description will normally take the same form as the traditional Th.M. thesis and be at least 10,000 words (40 pages) in length.

Procedures for Writing the Thesis

The Th.M. thesis must be written within the context of a directed study. Normally, the thesis is written in the student’s final semester of enrollment. If the thesis is written using work from another course, the expectation is that the thesis will exceed the requirements for the course paper, both in terms of its quality of engagement and its length.

In addition to receiving permission from the Th.M. director to proceed with the thesis option, students must secure written permission from a faculty member to supervise the thesis. The thesis supervisor must be regular rank or adjunct Divinity School faculty, or, where warranted and approved by the ThM Director and by the Associate Dean of Academic Formation and Programs, a member of Duke University’s Department of Religious Studies. Students are also required to seek out a second reader for the thesis.

Students must submit to the Office of Academic Formation and Programs a one-page thesis proposal (a form is available on the Divinity website) that includes the thesis title and a brief description of the topic. This proposal must be submitted no later than October 15 (for a thesis to be completed in the fall) or February 15 (for a thesis to be completed in the spring) and must be signed by the thesis supervisor, the second reader (if applicable), and the Th.M. director.

It is expected that the student will work closely with the faculty thesis supervisor in order to shape the paper’s precise topic, coordinate the necessary research, and reach agreement about the paper’s exact length, format, and style (e.g., Turabian, Chicago, Society of Biblical Literature, etc.).

While the thesis itself does not need to have a letter grade, a grade will need to be assigned by the thesis supervisor for the directed study. In this context, the responsibility for determining a letter grade lies solely with the instructor of the directed study, and the grade does not, on its own, signal approval of the paper as a thesis.
Submitting a Final Draft of the Thesis

Students should submit a full draft of their thesis to their thesis supervisor and second reader no later than two weeks prior to the first day of reading week in the semester in which the student will graduate. For the summer term, the due date for the full draft is July 26. A final draft of the thesis will be due to the thesis supervisor no later than noon on the first day of the final reading week in the semester which the student will graduate. For the summer term, the due date for the final draft of the thesis is August 9. The thesis should be accompanied by a cover page (sample available on the Divinity website) that includes space for the signatures of the thesis supervisor, the second reader, and the Th.M. director. Except in those cases where the director is also a reader, the director’s signature indicates only that the thesis has been completed and accepted. Students should submit the thesis by emailing the final version to the thesis supervisor and second reader and copying the Th.M. director and the Director of Academic Formation and Programs. A thesis supervisor may request that the student also submit a hard copy of the thesis.

After receiving the thesis, the thesis supervisor and the second reader should communicate approval or rejection of the thesis to the Th.M. director, who will then communicate the results to the Office of Academic Formation and Programs. It is also acceptable for the thesis supervisor to notify the Office of Academic Formation and Programs directly of approval or rejection of the thesis, who will then verify approval or rejection with the Th.M. director. If the thesis is approved, the Th.M. director will submit a copy of the signed cover page to the Office of Academic Formation and Programs.

The faculty thesis supervisor is responsible for providing a written evaluation of the thesis to the student. Especially in light of the fact that many Th.M. students hope to pursue further academic work, thesis supervisors are encouraged to supply ample comments when they review a thesis. Second readers should also seek to provide student thesis writers with analytical comments on their work.

Oral Defense

Each student will schedule an oral defense with her or his thesis supervisor and second reader, normally to be held within one week after the final draft of the thesis has been submitted. The defense will normally last one hour and provides an opportunity for discussion and feedback regarding the thesis as well as guidance for developing the student’s research in the future.

Submission to the Library

After the final draft of the thesis has been approved, the candidate will have a final opportunity to make corrections. Students wishing to submit their theses to Duke University’s digital archive should:

1) Read the information at: http://gradschool.duke.edu/academics/theses/copyright.php

2) Print, fill out and sign the permission form, which allows us to electronically archive it in the Duke University Archives, and deliver the completed form to the divinity registrar.

3) After final corrections have been made, the Divinity Registrar will authorize submission of your thesis to Proquest. You may use this link to submit the thesis: http://www.etdadmin.com/divinity.duke.