The DMin thesis is expected to be a polished theological analysis of a question or issue pertinent to the student’s area of ministry. The thesis is not expected to be a piece of original research based on the use of social science research methods but an analysis of already collected data informed by the classical theological disciplines (e.g. Bible, theology, church history) and insight derived from the student’s years of experience in ministry. It must demonstrate the student’s ability to contribute to the church’s discourse about the ministries and practices of Christian communities.

**DMin Statement of Interest and Thesis timeline**

Composing the Statement of Interest (SOI) is the first step in writing the DMin thesis. The purpose of the SOI is to give the DMin director a sketch of the student’s initial research interests.

The SOI should be between 400-500 words (not including bibliography). It has three parts.

1. The SOI should state the general question or problem that the student would like to explore in the thesis. For example: how a robust theology of realized eschatology might shape a congregation’s ministry to the poor of their community. Or: how leadership roles of laywomen have changed in the years since women have been ordained. This question or problem should then be followed by an account of why this is an area of interest or potentially important for the student’s ministry.

2. The SOI should specify the approach or angle the thesis will take in its exploration of the general question. Example: the thesis will examine the realized eschatologies of the Gospel of John, Gregory of Nyssa, and Dorothy Day to provide a model for thinking about our ministry among the poor. Another example: the thesis will compare the changing roles of the United Methodist Women in local congregations and conferences in the Southeastern Jurisdiction and those in the Northeastern Jurisdiction. The SOI’s description of this approach should be informed by research in the secondary scholarship on the topic. It also should explain why this approach might be a fruitful angle and why it will help address concerns important to the student’s ministry.

3. The SOI should have a bibliography of no fewer than 5 references (books and articles, preferably from scholarly publications).

Due Dates: A draft of the SOI should be sent for review to the DMin Thesis Tutor by the last Monday in October of the cohort’s second year. Once the SOI is approved by the DMin Thesis Tutor, a final copy of the SOI should be submitted electronically to the DMin Program Coordinator, Ashley Lunn by the last Monday in November.

By late December, the student should be working to secure a first and second reader for their thesis. Primary responsibility for securing the reader is the student’s. However, students can work in consultation with the DMin Director and the Program Coordinator if they need help securing a first reader. The first reader must be a Duke Divinity faculty member, while the second reader can be someone who has a background in the subject matter of the thesis. It is not necessary for the first reader to have a background in the subject matter of the thesis. First and second readers will need to be cleared by the DMin director before the student can start working on their DMin Proposal.
DMIN Thesis Timeline

1. Communicate with first reader to establish a timeline and expectations for completing the thesis.
2. Establish a communication plan (e.g. one time a month) by phone, Skype, FaceTime, etc. with the first reader to ensure clear expectations and communication through the thesis writing period.
3. Complete the thesis proposal by end of spring term (second year) with the input of the first reader. The student and first reader can move this deadline as appropriate based on their work together. Only the first reader needs to approve the thesis proposal.
4. Determine the semester in which the student plans to graduate and establish a writing and revising schedule based on the dates outlined in the “graduation deadlines by semester” document found on the Forms and Paradigms section of the DDS website. For a May graduate, the deadline to submit the final draft of the thesis to the first reader is the first Friday in March. Therefore, the timeline for writing and editing should extend backward for at least 6 months. Assistance from the program’s dedicated writing tutor, as well as the Center for Writing and Academic Support, is available on a limited basis. Please contact the Director of the Center to request help from the DMin thesis tutor.
5. Submit the final draft of the thesis to the first and second reader by the deadline for the semester in which the student plans to graduate.
6. Make revisions as needed with the input of both the first and second reader.

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 DMin Director and the Academic 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 first reader 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 DMin Thesis Style Guide.

- Students develop a proposal in conjunction with their first reader. The proposal should further expand the three sections of the SOI. The proposal is intended to be an agreement about the content of the thesis between the student and the first reader; therefore, each first reader will provide structure and expectations for the proposal. Students should work to complete the proposal by the beginning of the summer after their second year.
- Students develop the first draft of the thesis in consultation with their readers. It is advisable that individual chapters or portions thereof be submitted in stages to the readers 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 first reader 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 Friday of March of the year in which the student hopes to graduate. Students must give their first reader and second reader four weeks to review this draft. The first reader 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 first reader and second reader cannot both agree to accept the thesis, the first reader 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 DMin Oversight Committee.

- When the reader(s) decide that a thesis is ready, the student will submit a pdf copy of the thesis to the DMin Program Coordinator, who will submit the final copy to the DMin Director. The DMin Director will either approve the thesis as is, return it to the student for minor revision, or, if warranted, refer it to the DMin 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 reader(s) and the DMin Director 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 DukeHub by the appropriate deadline in the semester that they intend to complete their thesis.

ACADEMIC PROBATION AND REMOVAL FROM THE DMIN 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 DMin program.

Procedure:

In the event that a student’s work on the thesis is judged by the 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 first reader 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 reader(s) that satisfies all concerns.

3) If by the end of the probationary period the 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 reader(s) judge the revised work to be insufficiently improved, the student will be removed from the DMin program and awarded the ThM degree.

A) Within thirty days of the sending of notification of removal (and only if the ThM 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 DMin 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 reader(s). A majority of these three faculty members will determine whether to uphold the decision of the reader(s) or to overturn the decision and possibly to request that:

i) a new first reader and/or second reader be assigned, and/or

ii) the student make substantive changes to the thesis within a specified period of time.

The agreement on the part of the 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.