



## Master of Arts Final Degree Requirements

The final requirement for the Master of Arts degree provides an opportunity for the student to demonstrate his/her capacity to apply and reflect on the perspectives addressed by the M.A. program. Those perspectives include both scholarly and practical approaches encountered in courses and independent reading, the student's own vocational understanding, and the experience of living in a faith community.

The precise form of the final requirement can vary within certain guidelines. Students should discuss with their advisor which type of final requirement would best suit their needs, desires, and requirements. For example, students wishing to continue their education in a Ph.D. program would most likely choose the thesis option, whereas students who are currently working as church professionals might decide that a ministry project would be most appropriate. The three options are a **final paper** in the form of an interdisciplinary paper/topical essay or an extended case study, **ministry/religious leadership project** or **thesis**.

### Final Paper

The final integrating paper, in acceptable academic form and reflecting a style appropriate to the subject matter, should not exceed 25 pages in length.

The final paper may be developed according to one of the following options for three academic credits.

1. *Interdisciplinary Paper/Topical Essay*: Working with his/her advisor, the student develops a bibliography that includes works drawn from major areas of religious studies represented in the M.A. curriculum. On the basis of that bibliography, the student prepares an essay that critically thinks through, analyzes and reaches conclusions about a topic, issue, or theme agreed upon by the student and advisor, in the area of the student's focused area of study. The paper should exhibit an in-depth examination of the topic from both theoretical and practical perspectives.
2. *Extended Case Study*: Working with his/her advisor, the student develops a bibliography that includes works drawn from major areas of religious studies represented in the M.A. curriculum and that bear upon an interest that the student would like to pursue. On the basis of that interest and bibliography, the student selects or devises a case study and prepares an essay that examines it from diverse perspectives, analyzes it, and reaches conclusions. The student is encouraged to choose a case that will allow him/her to reflect on issues and themes that facilitate integration of the student's program and his/her understanding of ministry or the work of religious communities. The paper should exhibit an in-depth examination of the case from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

Students who choose the Final Paper are required to register for MA-596 (Final Paper) for which they will receive three academic credits. A grade is recorded on the student's transcript after the final oral examination.

### Ministry/Religious Leadership Project

A student who opts for a project in ministry as the final requirement for the M.A. degree is expected to design, implement and evaluate a specific act of ministry such as an educational program, a liturgical event or a work of artistic expression (music, drama, dance, poetry, art, etc.) In all instances, students are expected to explicate the connections between the action project and its underlying theoretical and theological bases. Consequently, the project in ministry also includes a written component and, if appropriate, an audiovisual component in an appropriate form.

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Students who choose the Ministry/Religious Leadership Project are required to register for MA-597 (Final Project) for which they will receive three academic credits. A grade is recorded on the student's transcript after the final oral examination.

## **Thesis**

With the approval of his/her advisor and the Dean, a student who wishes to explore a specific topic in depth may choose to do a thesis for the final M.A. requirement. The thesis option may be attractive to students contemplating further graduate study in religion. M.A. theses, which generally run 65 to 100 pages in length, are bound and placed in the Seminary library.

Students who choose the thesis are required to register for two thesis preparation courses, MA-598 and MA-599, for which they will receive six academic credits. A grade is recorded on the student's transcript after the final oral examination.

## **Procedures for the Final Requirement**

1. Students work closely with a faculty advisor at all stages of the final requirement. (Adjunct faculty may serve as advisors only with permission of the Dean.)
2. Working together, the student and the advisor shape a reading program, determine a project time line and prepare a brief proposal (generally two to three pages plus bibliography) for the final requirement.
3. When the student has finished a complete draft, the advisor must determine whether the project is ready for the final oral examination. This may result in a request for revision.
4. In order to schedule the final oral examination, it is the student's responsibility to contact the Dean's Assistant to begin the process. This process requires a *minimum of three weeks from the date of the first contact with the Dean's Assistant*. In preparation for the first contact, the student must have consulted with his/her advisor and the two need to agree on *three alternative dates* for the final oral examination.
5. After consulting with each other, either the advisor or the student may suggest second readers who have expertise relevant to the student's paper/project/thesis. They will be listed on the "MA Final Oral Examination Checklist" which the student will fill out in the process of scheduling the oral examination. Please note however, final selection of faculty readers is done by the Dean.
6. Two copies of the final written materials are submitted to the Dean's Assistant *no later than two weeks before the oral examination day*. The Dean's Assistant will distribute them to the advisor and the second reader.
7. At the final oral examination the student has an opportunity to respond to questions and observations of the advisor and second reader about the written material, to discuss the significant learning and practical applications of the paper, project, or thesis and to give an integrative accounting of his/her work at Hartford Seminary. The final meeting is usually no longer than one and one-half hours in duration.
8. At the close of the final oral examination the faculty members involved will decide upon a final grade for the work submitted and examined.
9. At the close of the final oral examination the student should immediately proceed to the Dean's office for an exit interview.