

PROGRAM FOCUS REQUIREMENT MASTER OF DIVINITY DEGREE

The M.Div. requirements mandate that certain courses shall be taken in the first half of the program, but considerable liberty in course selection is introduced for the second half when students choose courses with a program focus in mind. Information about options available for the program focus is given below.

Program Focus Requirements

The “program focus” of the M.Div. degree will permit the student to choose an area for concentrated study or to organize his/her studies with particular professional requirements in mind.

During the Second Year (or its equivalent, if one is attending part-time), the student selects a program focus from among options that have been approved by the Faculty, or the student and a faculty advisor together design a special individualized focus around some organizing principle or idea. In any case, every student is to report his or her choice of focus to the Registrar no later than the end of the Second Year.

A coherent integrated study plan and, of course, the availability of appropriate curricular and library resources shall be hallmarks of an individual proposal, which is to be agreed upon by a faculty advisor and approved by the academic dean.

Program foci can be seen to divide along lines of professional preparation for a particular vocation, on the one hand, and deeper study in a particular academic discipline on the other.

A focus can also—and in its ideal form, probably will—combine thorough vocational preparation with rigorous intellectual engagement of a particular academic discipline.

For example, the pastoral ministry and theology focus will seek to insure the student has studied an array of subjects intended to strengthen a professional career, but can also go deeper into scholarly issues of a particular academic subject.

It is hoped that the student’s choice of focus, and the direction he or she takes that focus, will reflect and contribute to the student’s ongoing intellectual and personal development at Union.

Program Focus Advisors & Advisement

The faculty member who serves as advisor for a student’s program focus will normally be a faculty member who teaches in the subject area of the focus. For many students, this may indicate a change in faculty advisors in the Second Year. Advisement “templates” are intended to help students and faculty members think about program focus. Information and guidance is given below for the major foci in:

- pastoral ministry and theology
- ministry and social work
- Bible – either Old Testament or New Testament
- historical studies and church history
- theology
- theology and the arts
- psychiatry and religion
- Christian social ethics
- religious and theological education of adults
- ecumenical theology and interfaith studies
- preaching and worship
- church and society
- the interdisciplinary focus.

The interdisciplinary focus can be flexible enough to accommodate generalists as well as specialists; that is, a program focus can include courses spread across several departments of the curriculum.

Minimum Points Required For Program Focus

At least 15 points (normally five courses) of the student’s elective work for the degree are to be related to the program focus. It is to be noted that 15 points are simply the minimum. Additional courses taken simply as electives for the degree can also contribute to the student’s focus. Or a student may want to use those electives to develop a specialization, in addition to the major program focus.

For some foci, a thesis or senior project, and in one case CPE, is strongly suggested in addition to the 15-point minimum.

Recorded On Transcript

Upon graduation, the student’s major program focus will be recorded on his/her official transcript.

I. Pastoral Ministry & Theology Focus

This focus is intended especially for the student who is preparing for a career in Christian ministry as pastor of a church or as the leader in some other manner of a faith community. It entails specialized engagement of several subject areas of the curriculum that will build upon knowledge achieved through the core requirements of the degree. Besides the core requirements the Pastoral Ministry focus strongly recommends

- an additional course in biblical exegesis
- an additional course in preaching

- an additional course in liturgy and public worship
- an additional course in pastoral counseling
- an additional course in religious education.

Students in this Ministry Focus will be encouraged to take both semesters of the Systematic Theology introductions (ST 103 and ST 104), even though, strictly speaking, only one of these courses is required for the degree.

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) comes strongly recommended as an additional elective for ministry students.

Some training in church administration comes strongly recommended as an additional elective in this Focus

In addition, the student will want to take care from the beginning of his/her program to follow the study plans and course requirements set forth by the ordaining authorities of his/her church.

Union Theological Seminary does not ordain persons to ministry, but it intends, insofar as possible, to make studies available to students that will adequately prepare them for the ordination examinations and requirements of their denominations. A course in the polity of one's church, for example, while not listed in the template for this Focus would obviously be a course to be taken. Students are well advised to become thoroughly familiar with the ordination requirements and processes of their denominations. Attending seminary (in and of itself) is only part of the preparation for ordination expected by most churches. This information from judicatory authorities of the student's denomination will be invaluable in planning the student's entire program of study.

For students who are members of particular communions, cross registration for some courses at other seminaries may become a useful element of their program planning.

II. Ministry & Social Work

For M.Div. students who are also candidates for the M.S. in Social Work in the dual-degrees program with Columbia University, the Program Focus requirement is satisfied by the student's studies at the School of Social Work and the integrative seminar at Union.

III. Bible

Students who choose the Bible focus will normally take a combination of courses in Old and New Testament, although students who take the bulk of their courses in OT or NT may specifically elect to have their concentration designated as such. The Bible focus strongly recommends

- two terms of Biblical Hebrew or Biblical Greek
- three additional courses in Bible (OT, NT, BX and/or BS).

- a thesis or senior project related to Bible on a topic agreed upon with an advisor in the Bible Field.

IV. Historical Studies & Church History

Students choosing to focus in historical studies and church history will work in two areas

- major work (earning 9 points in courses approved by the faculty advisor) and a
- minor focus in church history (completing 6 points in two courses approved by the advisor)
- a thesis or senior project on a subject related to the major focus is to be prepared in the senior year;
- students of the Early Church focus will take a course in biblical exegesis as part of the 9 "major" points;
- students with the major focus of the Reformation and Early Modern, and Modern Christianity and other historical studies will have a similar expectation of taking a relevant course outside the Field.

V. Theology

The student whose focus is theology will select, with the approval of the program faculty advisor,

- four courses in Systematic Theology (in addition to the ST course required for the degree)
- one related course in another department or field of the curriculum
- a thesis on a subject related to the major focus is to be prepared in the senior year.

VI. Theology & The Arts

Students who choose Theology and the Arts as their Program Focus are expected to be knowledgeable beforehand about the arts, and proficient in some art form (music, visual art, dance, etc) prior to beginning the M.Div. degree. The Theology & the Arts focus strongly recommends

- in worship and the arts, ritual performance and criticism, and
- additional courses specifically approved for the Focus by faculty advisor;
- a senior project or thesis related to the major focus is to be prepared in the senior year.

VII. Psychiatry & Religion

The program focus in Psychiatry and Religion strongly recommends that the student study

- PS 204 and PS 209 - theories of depth psychology and human development
- PS 310 - depth psychology and theology
- another PS course that can be related to the studies of the focus,

- complete a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in excess of the 15 points required for the focus, and
- prepare a thesis related to the major focus in the senior year, or take two additional elective courses that support the focus.

Students declaring Psychiatry & Religion as their focus must take the foundational courses - PS 204, PS 209, and PS 310 - for full credit, not R credit.

VIII. Christian Social Ethics

The program focus in Christian Social Ethics strongly recommends that the student study

- a foundational course in Christian Ethics
- two advanced level courses in Christian ethics and social justice studies
- two additional courses in the theological and ethics field as approved by the faculty advisor;
- a thesis on a subject related to the major focus is to be prepared in the senior year.

IX. Religious & Theological Education of Adults

This program focus is directed toward those who anticipate that teaching adults will constitute a major aspect of their ministry. Given Union's location and commitments, it includes inter-religious learning as a fundamental dimension of the focus. This focus strongly recommends

- a course on teaching (such as "Practices of Teaching")
- a course on philosophy of education
- a course on curriculum theory or on theories of religious education (such as "Educating in Faith")
- at least one course involving inter-religious dialogue, such as those jointly taught with members of the faculty of Jewish Theological Seminary or the course "Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations"
- a thesis or senior project related to the focus.

X. Interreligious Engagement

Students with a program focus in interreligious engagement are strongly recommended to take

- one tradition-specific course (ex., Introduction to Islam)
- one comparison course (ex., Buddhist-Christian Dialogue)
- one theory and methods course (ex. Comparative Theology, Theology of Religions)
- at least one semester-long interreligious field placement (ex. an interfaith organization, a multireligious institution, or placement in a tradition other than one's own, etc.)
- one additional IE course, a course in a related field, or a second semester of IE field placement

XI. Preaching & Worship

Students whose program focus is preaching and worship are strongly recommended to complete

- CW 101
- one advanced course in Preaching
- one advanced course in Worship
- one additional advanced course in Preaching or Worship
- an additional course in another department of the curriculum that is relevant to the focus
- a thesis or senior project in the senior year related to the focus material.

XII. Church & Society

In this Focus, students will study churches as social institutions and religion from sociological perspectives in at least five courses, including

- courses on im/migration of peoples and of twentieth-century immigration to the United States
- a Church and Society course on method
- a thesis or senior project in the senior year related to the focus material.

XIII. The Interdisciplinary Program Focus

The Interdisciplinary Focus is intended to support M.Div. students in broadly approaching their studies and vocational goals. It allows students to cluster their 15 points of courses around either

- an issue, problem, or movement that deploys the perspectives and tools of multiple disciplines and fields (for example: Black theology, feminisms and feminist theologies; eco-justice; poverty), or
- the histories, practices, challenges and concerns of ministry with a specific community in mind, again informed by multiple disciplines (for example: Black church ministry; Latina/o ministry; ministry in the gay community; ministries with immigrants, people in prisons, and so forth).

A faculty member must approve the student's plan for an interdisciplinary focus and agree to serve as the program advisor.

In the interdisciplinary focus, the student is required to prepare a thesis or other project (for six points of credit) in the senior year that demonstrates how the multiple disciplines and fields have been brought together.

