

Guidelines for the M.T.S. Synthesis Essay

The capstone integrative document of the Master of Theological Studies Program at PSR is the M.T.S. Synthesis Essay. The essay is used as a learning tool, to assist you in integrating the various aspects of your theological education prior to graduation, and as an assessment tool, as evidence of the extent to which you have achieved the goals of the degree program, and the extent to which PSR has met the goals it has set out for teaching and learning in the M.T.S. program.

Your Synthesis Essay should in some significant part reflect the goals of the program. In your essay you should be prepared to:

- 1) Engage in theological reflection, analysis, and critical thinking about a contemporary issue related to your Area of Interest.
- 2) Draw upon at least 2 areas of theological study (bible, history, theology, or ethics). You will be integrating and bringing these areas into creative and critical inter-play with one another
- 3) Demonstrate knowledge and competency in your area of interest
- 4) Show evidence of your understanding of the importance of social location by explaining how differing contexts impact one's understanding of the text, issue, or topic under discussion.

While it is not as long as an M.A. thesis, and does not involve the sort of original scholarly research characteristic of an M.A. thesis, the M.T.S. Synthesis Essay is nonetheless a piece of academic writing. While personal reflection may be relevant in situating the source of your interest in the topic, or the contextual factors that shape the way you ask it, the essay is designed to be an academic exercise using the standards of argument and publicly accessible reasoning that characterize a typical research paper. While it should meet the design requirements discussed below, the essay may build on a research paper you have written or are writing for a course in your degree program.

The Synthesis Essay is 10-15 pages long, and prepared in consultation with your advisor. In the essay you will identify a problem, issue, or topic related to your Area of Interest. The issue/problem should be described clearly and set in its context (social, religious, etc.). The essay should then address this issue by drawing on two of the foundational disciplines (Biblical Studies, Historical Studies, Theology, and Ethics) studied in the program. Usually the Area of Interest is quite broad (i.e. Religion and Psychology; Feminism and Religion, Religious Pluralism; Social Justice; Religion and the Arts). The issue, problem, or topic identified in the synthesis essay must necessarily be much narrower than the Area of Interest, so that you may successfully address it within the recommended 10-15 pages.

So for example, a student interested in ecological justice might focus the essay on the relationship of eco-feminism to the Christian faith in a way that makes appropriate use of religious and theological resources. Such a student might wish to draw on her exposure to Biblical Studies, exploring biblical themes that support or contribute negatively to an ethic of environmental justice. In this case, the student is demonstrating that she has acquired exegetical, historical-critical, and hermeneutical skills appropriate for someone who has obtained a degree in theological studies. Further, she might draw on her exposure to the discipline of theology, identifying eco-feminist strands in a work or works of Christian feminist theology. In so doing, she is demonstrating both critical theological and contextual reflection skills and also actual theological knowledge of thinkers and texts encountered as part of her theological education.

The above example is only illustrative, as there is considerable freedom in the design and content of the essay; the M.T.S. Synthesis Essay is intended to give you an opportunity to integrate creatively your theological education by bringing this education to bear on a question that has motivated your theological education or engaged you throughout your exploration of your particular area of interest. At the same time you will be demonstrating newly acquired standard critical skills and knowledge from at least two theological disciplines. You may find it helpful to consult with your advisor and perhaps other faculty members as you prepare your essay.

You must register in your last semester for the M.T.S. Synthesis Essay course, M.T.S.-5020-01. You may choose to take the course for either 0.0 or 1.5 credits. The course is intended to requirement your time and attention for the M.T.S. Synthesis Essay in the first half of your final semester. In order to graduate in May, you must submit your essay to your advisor by April 15th. The essay is graded by your advisor on a Pass/Fail basis. If after you submit your essay to your advisor, the essay needs revisions, you must revise it and resubmit it to your advisor until they approve it by signing the essay. A copy of your final essay signed by your advisor is due to the Assistant Dean by the last day of the semester. Once the Assistant Dean receives this signed copy, your grade for M.T.S. 5020 will be recorded as "Pass". If the signed copy is not received by the last day of the semester, the grade will be recorded as "Fail" and PSR will not be able to confer your degree.

Pacific School of Religion
Master of Theological Studies
M.T.S. Synthesis Essay Assessment Rubric

Student Name: _____

Grad Yr: _____

Area of Interest: _____

Evaluation standards of M.T.S. Synthesis Essay	Further description particular to essay	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable
Issue/problem is identified and described clearly related to area of interest	Issue/Problem:				
Issue/problem is addressed by drawing on at least two theological disciplines:	Discipline 1: _____				
	Discipline 2: _____				
Integration of these disciplines into creative and critical inter-play with one other		i	ii	iii	iv
Demonstrates critical theological reflection skills; ability to think and analyze theologically		v	vi	vii	viii
Demonstrates contextual reflection skills		ix	x	xi	xii
Particularized competency in an area of interest/discipline		xiii	xiv	xv	xvi

Integration of at least two theological disciplines

ⁱ Able to integrate and synthesize information and make connections across two or more theological disciplines to address a special topic, issue, or question logically, clearly, and in ways that show not only understanding but also respect for each discipline's own integrity

ⁱⁱ Able to integrate and synthesize information and make connections across two or more theological disciplines to address a special topic, issue, or question in ways, but shows a few misconceptions and/or omissions in doing so

ⁱⁱⁱ Able to integrate and synthesize information and make connections across two theological disciplines to address a special topic, issue, or question, but shows signs of significant misconceptions and/or omissions

^{iv} Unable to integrate and synthesize information and make connections across two theological disciplines to address a special topic, issue, or question

Theological thinking, analysis, reflection

^v Able to refer to, evaluate, and use relevant resources from each of the above disciplines critically, consistently, and responsibly

^{vi} Able to refer to, evaluate, and use resources from at least the above the disciplines critically and responsibly but not consistently

^{vii} Able to refer to and use resources from some of the theological disciplines, but without good evaluation and/or careful consideration of relevance

^{viii} Unable to refer to, evaluate, and/or use resources from each of the theological disciplines

Contextual Reflection & Appropriation

^{ix} Able to explain and illustrate critically and carefully how contexts under consideration are different and what importance those differences make in understanding and/or dealing with a text, a situation, and/or an issue

^x Able to explain and illustrate critically and carefully how contexts under consideration are different, but struggles to articulate and demonstrate what importance those differences make in understanding and/or dealing with a text, a situation, and/or an issue

^{xi} Able to explain and illustrate how contexts are different if they are obvious, but unable to articulate and demonstrate what importance those differences make in understanding and/or dealing with a text, a situation, and/or an issue

^{xii} Unaware that there are various contexts

Competence in a Discipline or Area of Interest

^{xiii} Able to critically and clearly explain, address, and illustrate a topic or an issue within her or his particular area of interest not only with relevant disciplinary resources but also in their own words

^{xiv} Able to explain, address, and illustrate a topic or an issue within her or his particular area of interest with relevant disciplinary resources but not consistently in their own words

^{xv} Struggles to explain, address, and illustrate a topic or an issue within her or his particular area of interest (including the reference to and use of relevant disciplinary resources)

^{xvi} Unable to explain, address, and illustrate a topic or an issue within her or his particular area of interest