

FAQ

ON THE CURRICULUM REVISION AND SEMESTER CONVERSION



Concordia
Seminary
ST. LOUIS

THE CURRICULUM REVISION

Q: What is the “curriculum revision”?

We are updating the curriculum for Concordia Seminary, St. Louis' Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program, which will take effect in the 2017-18 academic year. Specifically, the courses that are being revised are those currently numbered 100-799 (used by Ministerial Formation and Master of Arts [M.A.] students and to some extent, Master of Sacred Theology [S.T.M.] students.)

Q: Why is the curriculum being revised?

We are developing an updated M.Div. curriculum in response to numerous issues related to emerging needs and opportunities of the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, as well as the learning, spiritual and personal growth priorities for students. The last comprehensive curriculum revision was in 1958, with significant adjustments and additions in 1978 and again in 1995. It is time for a comprehensive look at the structure, sequence and effectiveness of the program. The goal is to make sure that each student's time at the Seminary is as productive and formative as possible, ensuring that students learn all that they need to learn within a fiscally viable structure, and that they are fully prepared to serve in their first calls as Lutheran pastors.

Q: Was the old curriculum ineffective?

Not by any means. The strong biblical and theological foundations of the M.Div. program at Concordia Seminary have always been greatly appreciated by the church and were noted again and again as the faculty heard from graduates, district presidents and laity. The expertise gained over 177 years of teaching biblical truth at Concordia Seminary will continue to be a significant part of the revised curriculum. However, as the curriculum was adjusted by the faculty over the last decades, content began to overlap and it became much more difficult to coordinate courses. We are retaining the fundamentals and adding the elements that will be crucial to our students' future service as pastors. Courses in the Bible, taught on the basis of the original languages, will continue, as will core courses in the creeds and Lutheran Confessions, Lutheran theology, the history of the church and, in particular, the Lutheran church, and courses in teaching, preaching, outreach and pastoral care will remain vital and significant, both in time and content, in the revised curriculum.

Q: How will this affect current students and new students admitted this fall?

We are committed to enabling the timely graduation of current students and those who will be enrolled during the 2016-17 academic year. The academic administration will develop an individualized graduation plan that is mapped to the updated curriculum for each current student based on his or her current intended graduation date. The length of each student's program and his or her costs will remain the same.

Q: How will a student select electives in his or her new academic plan?

When a plan is drafted for a student, he or she will have an opportunity to review the plan. Where there is an opportunity to take an elective, the student will be able to make this selection.

Q: What is the relationship between the updated curriculum and the semester conversion?

The academic calendar will be converted from a quarter to a semester basis for all academic programs, including the M.Div. program, in fall 2017 for the 2017-18 academic year. The updated curriculum and the semester conversion are being implemented together as a matter of practicality. (Note: Please see the corresponding FAQs on the semester conversion.)

Q: What programs and which students will be affected by the curriculum revision?

All M.Div. students will be affected. Courses in the Deaconess Studies and Residential Alternate Route programs and, to some extent, Master of Sacred Theology (S.T.M.), will be conformed to the updated curriculum. No changes are planned at present for the curriculum in other programs. (Note: The Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) curriculum is under a separate review and development process.)

Q: Who was involved in the revision, when did the revision start and what was the process?

Beginning in November 2013, a committee of faculty members began a formal review of the M.Div. curriculum by researching the needs of congregations, students and the shifting American culture. The faculty used a "backward design" process that focused on the core competencies that a student must achieve in order to graduate and then designed courses and experiences to help students meet those outcomes. The faculty's goal was to expand

and solidify the four M.Div. degree program standards recommended by the Association of Theological Schools:

1. Personal and spiritual formation
2. Religious heritage
3. Ministerial and public leadership
4. Cultural context

After progressing through the research and various committee review processes, the updated curriculum was formally approved by the faculty in March 2016. The faculty is now involved in designing and naming the courses collaboratively across departments and constructing the syllabi with a goal of completing this task by August 2016.

Q: Will there be any cost differences?

Thanks to generous donor support and scholarships, the average M.Div. student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis pays about \$3,000 annually for tuition. This is a substantial savings on the published average annual tuition rate of about \$25,000. We have worked diligently over the last several years to make tuition costs low for students, and we are committed to keeping tuition costs low in the future.

Q: What is the “personal and spiritual growth” component of the curriculum?

The faculty added a personal and spiritual growth component to the curriculum that focuses on a student’s personal faith, emotional maturity, moral integrity and public witness. Students will meet weekly in close-knit mentor groups where they can delve more deeply into biblical study and application in a supportive Christian community. The groups will be led by faculty members and will stay the same as the students progress through their studies, fostering deeper relationships among the students as they move from the Seminary into ministry.

Q: What are the main changes to the language acquisition courses?

Despite our historically strong biblical language entrance requirements, many students leave the Seminary still needing to sharpen their skills in working with the biblical text in the original languages. The current system of language competency as a prerequisite often means that students know Hebrew and Greek well as they begin, but time pressures from other courses and the demands of seminary education mean that they will go for long stretches of time without working with them. The updated curriculum will provide greater opportunities to strengthen those skills across the entire

curriculum in an ongoing way and to learn to integrate the use of the biblical languages into the life of a pastor as a biblical theologian.

First, there will be introductory courses in both languages to enable students to achieve basic competence. Then, throughout the remainder of their studies, they will have weekly “language labs” with the faculty that will build their skills in reading the Bible in Hebrew and Greek, in addition to the required and elective exegetical courses. Also, the exegetical faculty will incorporate the use of electronic resources into their teaching. The goal is to have students graduate with the Greek and Hebrew skills that pastors need to “handle the Word of truth rightly” as they head into their first calls.

Q: How will Concordia University System students receive advanced standing?

Concordia University System students who have completed Greek and Hebrew courses at their universities (earning at least a 3.0 grade-point average) will be able to enroll in some advanced sections, such as “The Gospels” and “Church and World” while in the M.Div. program. They also will be able to earn dual credit toward an S.T.M. degree. They will not have to retake the Seminary’s Greek or Hebrew classes, thus saving time and costs.

Q: In addition to the enhancements related to language acquisition, what is another key change of the updated curriculum?

A serving/learning requirement during J-term or summers will place students in congregations for three weeks so they can learn leadership and administration skills in a congregational setting. This hands-on learning opportunity will enhance the residential field education and vicarage components of the program.

Q: Is the Seminary committed to residential pastoral education?

Absolutely. The faculty’s immense investment in this revision is testimony to its commitment to residential pastoral formation for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Although the Seminary has several tracks that lead to first calls as pastors, the Master of Divinity remains by far the largest and the most consequential. A residential program allows students to learn deeply in ways that are not possible in other pedagogical models. Most students will never again have the opportunity to learn from such gifted faculty, or to worship together regularly with their colleagues in chapel. And, the community formed on campus among students and faculty forges strong relationships that will continue to sustain and support them as pastors for years to come.

SEMESTER CONVERSION

Q: What is the “semester conversion”?

We are preparing to convert our academic calendar from a quarter to a semester basis for all academic programs effective in the 2017-18 academic year.

Q: Why are we shifting to semesters?

Using an academic calendar based on semesters will provide opportunities for flexibility in course delivery, including shorter “half semester” courses, full semester courses and a “winterim” for special courses, intensive class sessions and off-campus learning opportunities.

It also will align us with the colleges and universities of the Concordia University System for potential coordination of programs as well as with other St. Louis-area institutions with which we share joint programs of study. Further, it will enable us to improve administrative processes and reduce operating expenses.

Q: Semesters and a revised curriculum do not seem to be related. Are they?

It would not make sense to develop a curriculum in a quarter-hours format and later convert this to semesters. They are related as a matter of practicality and will be implemented together.

Q: When would classes begin and end under the new semester calendar?

We will follow the pattern used by most semester calendars, starting in late August and graduating in mid-May. The proposed calendar will end in the same week as the current schedule; orientation and the first day of class will likely be one week earlier. There will be, however, an extra week without classes during the academic year.

Q: Who will be affected by these changes?

Everyone will be affected by the semester calendar. We cannot use two calendars simultaneously. The courses under revision are those currently numbered 100-799 (used by Ministerial Formation and M.A. students, and to some extent by S.T.M. students). Courses numbered 800-999 (Advanced Studies) will not be changed at this time. We will offer these courses for two semester credit-hours instead of three quarter hours (the same number of classroom minutes).

Q: How will the modular and distance education programs be affected by a semester calendar?

We will establish a course schedule for each program (M.A., S.T.M., Ph.D., D.Min., CHS, EIIT, SMP, SMP to GPC) that enables the courses to fit within semester terms. No changes to the courses themselves are planned at this time, apart from ongoing revision and planning, e.g., EIIT curriculum is also under a separate review and development process.

The SMP program will shift to a residential intensive format for the January winterim, rather than using the distance model (fall, spring and summer will remain as they are now). Current students have been made aware of this change, and suitable accommodation will be made for those unable to come to campus in January 2018 and 2019. New students will be admitted into the new model, which offers only residential intensives in the winterim.

Q: How will current students using the affected courses set up their new academic plans?

We are committed to ensuring that all students achieve timely graduation, whatever their program. The academic administration will develop an individualized graduation plan for each student based on his or her current intended graduation date, mapped to the updated curriculum.

Q: How will registration work?

In the summer of 2017 the Registrar's Office will manually register all students based on their academic plans. This will give us the opportunity to be certain that the system is working properly.

Q: What about self-registration after the transition?

We are planning for self-registration through the end of the 2016-17 academic year, then shifting to an improved registration process. One benefit of the implementation of the updated curriculum will be the elimination of the PowerCampus problems that currently prevent fully automated registration processes.

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