

Master of Arts Thesis Preparation Manual

The MA in Interreligious Studies (MAIRS) is a 36-credit-hour graduate degree that engages students in advanced academic study of the lived reality of religions in public multifaith contexts. It may also serve as a foundation for those pursuing other professional degrees or as a vehicle for the enhancement of one's own faith and understanding. The MAIRS program provides a strong grounding in the foundational concepts and methods of interreligious studies, relations between religions, and the study of lived religious traditions.

This manual describes the elements, mechanics, and procedures for the MA Thesis required by Hartford Seminary. The final deposit of the Thesis to the Seminary Academic Advisor will not be accepted unless it conforms to the standards outlined below. The student should also use the following document, which is relevant to and necessary for preparing the Thesis:

Guidelines for Writing a Research Paper (available on the [Student Writing Resources page](#)).

THESIS

The Thesis is a major research paper through which the student demonstrates the ability to engage in significant scholarship. It is to embody the results of original research and to substantiate a specific view, based upon the student's focus of studies. The topic of the Thesis must be related to their specialization, and touch upon an aspect of interreligious studies or religious pluralism that has been encountered by the student in the MAIRS program.

A typical thesis is around 60-80 pages in length (exclusive of bibliography), but the number of pages alone is not a sufficient measure of adequate scope. It needs to be long enough to provide the specificity and depth appropriate to the study, and short enough to maintain the requisite focus.

Supervision of the Thesis

Each candidate is guided in this phase of the program by a faculty Advisor. In some cases, a final requirement Advisor may be appointed who is different than the faculty Advisor, if this will suit the needs of the student's research. This should be done in consultation with the Academic Dean. The faculty Advisor chairs the panel that will evaluate the thesis. A second reader will be appointed, normally a seminary faculty member.

The student is to take the initiative in arranging meetings with the faculty Advisor. This will ensure that the student has prepared for and been engaged in adequate consultation at those stages which are especially important in the development of the thesis.

Submitting the Proposal

The faculty Advisor will review the Proposal and may request a meeting(s) with the student as part of this review. If the Proposal is accepted, the student may register for the Thesis for their final semester. There is no deadline for the Thesis Proposal. It is governed only by the April 1 or November 1 deadline for submission of the complete review copy in the year in which the

candidate hopes to graduate. In general, students are well-advised to submit the Proposal at least at the beginning of the semester prior to their expected semester of graduation.

Drafts

The number and nature of preliminary drafts of the Thesis will depend upon a combination of the faculty Advisor's expectations, the student's capacities, and the nature of the topic. In some cases, submission of material chapter by chapter may be requested; in others, it may be appropriate to develop a series of complete drafts at varying levels of refinement. The student should follow the direction of their faculty Advisor. It will be helpful at this stage to have previewed the requirements of style and presentation which apply to the final version of the Thesis document.

The Submission Copy

This is the complete Thesis document, including abstract, title page, table of contents, chapters, and bibliography. It is prepared according to the style and formatting requirements and standards as outlined in the Seminary's "Hartford Seminary General Guidelines for a Research Paper" and "M.A. Thesis Manual" before the exam occurs. (See "MECHANICS OF THE THESIS," below). One complete copy should be submitted to both the faculty Advisor and the Academic Dean's office prior to the oral examination.

Review and Defense (Oral Exam)

In order to schedule an exam, the student must contact the Academic Dean's Office. This process requires a minimum of three weeks from the date of the first contact. In preparation for the first contact, the student must have consulted with their faculty Advisor and the two need to have agreed on 3 alternative dates for the exam.

After consulting with each other, either the faculty Advisor or the student may suggest second readers who have expertise relevant to the student's paper, but selection of faculty readers is done finally by the Academic Dean, who will consider these factors: an equitable distribution of exam workload among faculty, faculty availability, and expertise. The two faculty members will constitute the student's Oral Defense panel.

When approved by the faculty Advisor, the final draft is normally submitted electronically to the faculty Advisor and to the Academic Dean's office. A second reader will be arranged, normally another faculty member. The panel will meet with the candidate for an oral examination (Oral Exam or Oral Defense) and final adjudication of the thesis. The Oral Defense of the Thesis will take place at an assigned time and will last no more than two hours before the panel of the faculty Advisor and second reader. The student will be assessed according to the learning outcomes of the program. The faculty Advisor is responsible for reporting the official results of the Thesis and examination to the Registrar on the appropriate degree assessment form.

For the Oral Defense, a student should prepare a brief oral synopsis of their work, and then be prepared to answer questions from the panel about the Thesis. A student may have their Thesis and other materials with them during the Oral Exam.

After the Oral Defense, the Panel may:

- approve the Thesis document as submitted, without changes
- approve with minor typographical corrections required
- approve with substantive revisions

- fail (a student who fails their examination may register for the Thesis a second time and submit in a subsequent semester. Only two registrations are allowed.)

Revisions

If the Oral Defense panel has determined that the student needs to make revisions to their Thesis, the student must complete the revisions and submit the revised Thesis to the faculty Advisor or panel as soon as possible. If revisions are to be substantive (matters of organization or argument, or even a large number of typographical errors), the student will be asked to submit a second revised review copy.

After the Oral Exam has been passed, the student's name and the title of the Thesis will be brought before the next Academic Council meeting by the Academic Dean and voted on by all core faculty present. From here it will go to the Seminary Board of Trustees for a vote. It is only with the final vote of the Board of Trustees that the awarding of the degree is approved. Students will also have to submit the "Application to Graduate" form and submit this to the registrar to be listed by the faculty for a vote.

Finally, the student is responsible for contacting the library in order to submit a copy of the Thesis to the library. The student may not graduate until their Thesis is deposited and accepted by the library staff. The student will not be able to walk in graduation or receive their diploma until all revisions are approved and the final deposit of the Thesis has been made.

THE TIMELINE

Master of Arts degrees are conferred on the recipient at graduation in May and December of each year. However, the Thesis can be submitted and reviewed during the final semester of the student's program. Thus, it is helpful in planning for the Thesis to begin with the end date and consider the steps in reverse order to establish a candidate's individual calendar. There is only one Commencement ceremony each academic year in May. Degrees are also conferred in December. For the award of the degree in May, the complete review copy of the Thesis must be submitted by April 1 at the latest. For the conferral of the degree in December, the complete review copy of the Thesis must be submitted by November 1 at the latest. A student has up to four years to complete their thesis from inception of the program.

The timeline below is intended to be a **guideline** for a student to succeed in the development and submission of their Thesis.

While the Thesis is a 3-credit course, normally to be taken in a student's final semester, for the student to be successful, they should begin planning how their course selection, including electives, can be used to benefit their thesis research. It is recommended that students use an elective course in their program to contract with their Advisor for a 3-credit hour Independent Study to engage in research on the Thesis topic prior to the semester in which they register for the Thesis.

Meet with the faculty Advisor each semester. Upon admission to the MAIRS program, students are assigned a faculty Advisor. The student should meet with their faculty Advisor each semester during "Advising Week." It is at this point that a student should explore topics in consultation with their faculty Advisor. This will help in the selection of courses that might address the topic of interest and help in the selection of the scope and methodology of the Thesis.

If it is possible in your course schedule, register for a 3-credit-hour Independent Study with the faculty Advisor, or another faculty member as appropriate, as their elective course to engage in research on the Thesis topic.

Attend the Thesis Orientation Workshop. This workshop will be held each October and April. A student should attend the workshop in the semester prior to the one they anticipate registering for their thesis. At this workshop, the writing process is discussed in detail and students are able to engage in a guided brainstorming of ideas. This workshop also introduces each student to the Writing Consultant who can serve as a guide through the thesis process. Attendance is highly recommended.

Develop a Thesis Proposal. Normally, after 18 credits of coursework, a student should work with their faculty Advisor to develop a Thesis Proposal. For this meeting, be prepared to outline the general ideas for research and main argument. In consultation with the faculty Advisor, a student should develop a Thesis question(s), statement, working outline, and a working bibliography. A student should follow the steps below to put together their Proposal. A well-constructed Proposal becomes the firm foundation for a successful thesis-writing process. Normally, the Proposal should be developed after the workshop and prior to the semester they register for the Thesis.

Register for the Thesis (to be completed in the last semester). A student will be required to register for the 3-credit thesis course, normally in their final semester. The Thesis is intended to draw many of the learnings from the MAIRS program together. Thus, the Thesis should not be taken too early.

Submit First Draft of the Thesis. Under supervision of the faculty Advisor, the student will submit chapters or a complete draft of the Thesis. A complete draft should be completed no later than one month prior to submission.

Edit the Thesis. In consultation with the faculty Advisor, and, if desired, the Writing Consultant, the student will engage in an editing process that will help them move their thesis from the first version to a version that is ready for the defense. This process will usually involve helping the student to tighten up their writing and scholarly arguments in order to clarify their ideas.

Submit and Defend the Thesis. The thesis should be submitted by April 1 or November 1 at the latest. After submission, the faculty Advisor will arrange the Oral Defense with a second reader. (See Review and Defense, above.)

Revise and Submit Final Copy of the Thesis. After the defense, the student will make any minor or major revisions indicated by their panel. The student must submit all revisions at the direction of their faculty Advisor and have a final copy submitted and accepted by the library prior to graduation.

THE PROCESS OF THE PROPOSAL

A. Selection of Subject

The student is expected to take the initiative in selecting the subject area for the Thesis. The subject is delineated by the student in consultation with the faculty Advisor, with consideration given to the following guidelines:

- 1] Is the subject significant? This is a judgment on which the Advisor and the student must concur since the subject should be meaningful to the student.
- 2] Is the scope of the subject sufficiently limited to allow adequate treatment within the allotted time and with the facilities at the student's command?

B. The Proposal

Once the student and faculty Advisor have agreed concerning the subject and provisional title, the student should prepare a Thesis Proposal according to the outline below. Consultation with the faculty Advisor in this stage is crucial.

- State the title. Keep the title short and descriptive of the Thesis with clear terms.
- Give a general statement of the Thesis. It is from this general statement that the specific formulation of the Thesis will be derived. Define the area and scope of the study, and indicate the basic proposition, situation, question, or technique that the Thesis will examine.
- Define the formulation and limitation of the Thesis. This involves a precise statement of what the student proposes to do. State clearly the desired goal or outcome of the Thesis.
- Indicate previous studies relating to the Thesis. This is often called a “literature review.” For the MA Thesis, the student shall present a brief description of only those studies that have bearing on the proposed investigation. This description should contain a general statement of what earlier studies in the areas of the general problem that remain unexplored, or which have been inadequately explored.
- Briefly state the procedures or method of investigation. This is called the Methodology. Describe fully the procedure(s) to be followed in making the study. This should include a clear explanation of the steps one expects to follow in carrying out the investigation. This is not a preview of conclusions, but a statement of the steps to be used in the various phases of the Thesis.
- Include a tentative outline of the Thesis. This should show at least the larger sections, such as chapters and major subdivisions. It should indicate how one intends to articulate the work and should reflect careful preliminary investigation and planning. The student should expect to revise the draft proposal several times under the guidance of the faculty Advisor before it is developed into the final form. The time spent is worthwhile because the Proposal will be used as the yardstick by which the student develops the Thesis.
- Include a preliminary bibliography.

PUTTING THE THESIS TOGETHER

A template for the final formatting of the Thesis can be found on the Writing Resources webpage.

Typically, the thesis consists of three parts:

- I. The preliminaries (*should appear in this order*)
 - title page
 - certificate page
 - abstract
 - dedication (*optional*)
 - epigraph (*optional*)
 - acknowledgments (*optional*)
 - table of contents
 - list of tables (*optional*)
 - preface (*optional*)
- II. The text
 - the body of your paper (*Introduction—if there is one - and chapters*)
- III. The reference materials (*should appear in this order*)
 - appendix (*or appendices*)
 - bibliography

I. The Preliminaries

Important note: All preliminary pages are to be numbered consecutively in lower case roman numerals, beginning with “ii” on the first page to follow the certificate page. The title page is considered “i,” but the number is not to appear on that page. The certificate page is the only page that is not counted or numbered.

TITLE PAGE (*see attached sample*)

1. The title appears in all capital letters and each line of it is centered.
2. The author’s name is to be in upper and lower case, with no indication of academic or other titles.

CERTIFICATE PAGE (*see attached sample*)

1. The certificate page will contain the signatures of all examiners. A student must prepare this page by using the sample page at the end of these guidelines as the model.

ABSTRACT

1. The abstract should be no less than 200 words, no more than 350 words. It is an overview of the Thesis topic, argument, and conclusions.
2. The abstract should be double-spaced.
3. The title ABSTRACT should appear in all capital letters, 2 inches down from the top edge of the paper, and centered left to right. The text begins on the fourth line below this heading.

DEDICATION (*optional*)

1. The dedication is to be brief, centered on the page left to right, slightly above the center vertically, and single-spaced. No heading is necessary.

EPIGRAPH (*optional*)

1. The epigraph is a quotation from another author that summarizes a central element of your thesis, or gets the reader thinking in a direction conducive to appreciating your project. The source of the quotation is not footnoted but given directly below the quotation and aligned to end at the right margin. Citation information here is limited to the author's name and the title of the work. There is no heading for this page, and it is single-spaced.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (*optional*)

1. This page begins with the heading ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, which should appear in all capital letters, 2 inches down from the top edge of the paper, and centered left to right. The text begins on the fourth line below this heading and is double-spaced.
2. This page may include expression of gratitude to individuals, authors, or organizations for assistance offered or permission granted in the work of the Thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS (*see attached sample*)

1. The heading TABLE OF CONTENTS should appear in all capital letters, 2 inches down from the top edge of the paper, and centered left to right. The listing of the contents begins on the fourth line below this heading and at the left margin.
2. If the table of contents continues to subsequent pages, these pages should have *no* heading or continuation notice.
3. All contents in the paper following the table of contents are to be listed.
4. Place page numbers opposite the *last* line of each entry in the table of contents, with last digit of the page numbers aligned flush right. Connect entries to page numbers with a line of ellipses (. . .).
5. Include only major divisions (chapter titles) and first-order subheadings (see below, under "SUBDIVISIONS").

LIST OF TABLES (*optional*)

1. The heading LIST OF TABLES should appear in all capital letters, 2 inches down from the top edge of the paper, and centered left to right. Listing of contents begins on the fourth line below this heading.
2. Captions are to be listed exactly as they appear in the body of the paper.
3. Place page numbers opposite the *last* line of each entry in the LIST OF TABLES, with last digit of the page numbers aligned flush right. Connect entries to page numbers with a line of ellipses (. . .).

PREFACE (*optional*)

1. If the student determines that a preface is necessary, it should be *brief*. Limit it to commenting on interest in the Thesis, or the issue that motivated the Thesis, or on a unique method employed that is central to the overall Thesis.
2. The heading PREFACE should appear in all capital letters, 2 inches down from the top edge of the paper, and centered left to right. The text begins on the fourth line below this heading and should be double-spaced.

II. The Text

Important note: All text pages (the “text” begins with the INTRODUCTION, or, if there is no INTRODUCTION, with CHAPTER ONE) are to be numbered consecutively beginning with “1” on the first page to follow the preliminaries. These page numbers are to be placed, without punctuation marks, in the upper right-hand corner 1 inch from the right edge of the paper and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch from the top edge of the paper.

MAJOR DIVISIONS

1. The Introduction (*if there is one*), Chapters, and Conclusion are referred to as “major divisions.”
2. Each major division must begin on a new page. Headings for major divisions are to appear in all capital letters, 2 inches down from the top edge of the paper, and centered left to right. The text begins on the fourth line below the last line of this heading and should be double-spaced.
3. The heading for a major division consists of a chapter designation on the first centered line, and the descriptive title on the second centered line (and subsequent line(s) if it is a long title). The heading may be either single- or double-spaced.
4. Within the chapters, you must choose a style that distinguishes *each* level of subdivision and use it *consistently* throughout the paper. Ways to distinguish levels include location of the subdivision title (flush left, indented, centered), italicization, underlining, bolding, all capital letters.
5. *Never* divide one subdivision from another by beginning a new page, unless the preceding subdivision ends very close to the bottom of the page. At most, insert a triple-space between the last line of one subdivision and the title of the following subdivision.

For the INTRODUCTION and CONCLUSION, do not include a numbered chapter designation. Simply use INTRODUCTION or CONCLUSION as the heading.

Here is an example of a chapter with subdivisions.

CHAPTER I

THE RITE OF MARRIAGE IN THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

A. *A Short History of St. Gregory’s Parish in Springfield* (first-order subdivision)

1. **The First Wave** (second-order subdivision)

a. A Cohesive Community (third-order subdivision)

2. **The Second Wave** (second-order subdivision)

b. Points of Stress in Current Practice of the Rite (first-order subdivision)

3. **Language Barriers** (second-order subdivision)

FOOTNOTES

1. Footnotes are required for theses. The reason for this is that the theses may be archived and footnotes allow a paper to be read without the necessity of jumping to the end of the film or disk to locate the references.
2. See *Hartford Seminary General Guidelines for a Research Paper* for instructions and samples on the formatting of notes. If this document does not include an example of the kind of resource being cited, refer to either Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers*, or *The Chicago Manual of Style*, the standard upon which she relies.
3. An M.A. thesis that does not observe the citation style prescribed by these style guides will be returned to the student for corrections.
4. Individual entries are single-spaced, with double-spacing between the entries.

III. The Reference Materials

Important note: All reference pages (appendix and bibliography) are to be numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals, *in continuation* with the numbering used in the "text." If, for example, the final page of your last chapter is "110," the first reference page which follows will be numbered "111." These page numbers are to be placed, without punctuation marks, in the upper right-hand corner 1 inch from the right edge of the paper and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch from the top edge of the paper.

APPENDIX (or Appendices)

1. It is common for M.A. theses to have at least one APPENDIX. Materials appropriate for appendices include tables, questionnaires, survey results, etc.
2. It is recommended that the first page of each appendix offer a listing of what it includes.
3. Remember to preserve margins (left=1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, right=1 inch, top and bottom=1 inch) in assembling the materials included in the appendix.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The BIBLIOGRAPHY is the *last* item that should appear in the Thesis, *without exceptions*.

1. The heading BIBLIOGRAPHY should appear in all capital letters, 2 inches down from the top edge of the paper, and centered left to right. The listing of references begins on the fourth line below this heading and at the left margin. See *Hartford Seminary General Guidelines for a Research Paper* for instructions and samples on the formatting of entries. If this document does not include an example of the kind of resource being cited, refer to either Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers*, or *The Chicago Manual of Style*, the standard upon which she relies.
2. An M.A. thesis that does not observe the citation style prescribed by these style guides will be returned to the student for corrections.
3. Individual entries are single-spaced, with double-spacing between the entries.

MECHANICS OF THE THESIS

MARGINS

1. Margins should be:
 Left: 1 ½ inches Right: 1 inch
 Top: 1 inch Bottom: 1 inch
2. These margins must be observed throughout the paper, including the Preliminary pages, the Text, and the Reference Materials. It is advised that students observe these margins beginning as early as possible, because altering margins can sometimes wreak havoc with pagination and footnotes.
3. The reason for the wide left margin is that the final deposit copy will be bound, and approximately ½ inch of paper is required in the binding process.
4. Anticipate these margins when assembling your appendix, as well. Sometimes it is necessary to use a copier to reduce the size of the image in order to preserve the necessary margins. If the margins are less than those specified above, part of the image may be lost in the binding.

THE FINAL COPY

1. The final copy of the Thesis is made to the Seminary Academic Advisor *after* the Final Oral Examination has been passed and the advisor and all readers have signed off. In most cases there are at least minor revisions that will be necessary after the Exam.
2. Students should be in contact with the library to be guided in the process for submitting either a hard bound copy or an electronic version.

SAMPLE PAGES FOLLOW:

1. Title page
2. Certificate page
3. Table of contents

THESIS TITLE CENTERED

IN CAPITAL LETTERS

by

Alice K. Jones

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree
at Hartford Seminary

May 2021*

Thesis Advisor: Professor Name

*insert month and year of final approval of thesis

Harford Seminary
Hartford, Connecticut
USA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

M.A. THESIS

This is to certify that the M.A. thesis of

Your Name

has been approved by the Examining Committee as satisfying the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts degree for the Month, Year graduation.

Thesis committee: _____
Professor Name, Thesis Advisor

Professor Name, Second Reader

All page headings
are 2" from top edge

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