



THE
SOUTHERN BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

STUDENT MANUAL • RESEARCH DOCTORAL STUDIES

Th.M. Student Manual

2026–2027

PROGRAM

Master of Theology

ACADEMIC YEAR

2026–2027

ADMINISTERED BY

Research Doctoral Studies Office

STATUS

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1 Program Overview

The Research Doctoral Studies (RDS) Office exists to maintain and advance our confessional academic programs that produce high-quality graduates who contribute to the church and the academy. The Master of Theology (Th.M.) degree is a post-M.Div. program designed either as a final advancement of one’s theological education or as strategic preparation for doctoral studies.

Designed for completion in 3 to 5 semesters (with a maximum allowable limit of 6 semesters or 3 years), the Th.M. provides a rigorous, integrated academic environment tailored to advanced research and scholarly writing.

1.1 Concentration Areas

Students matriculating into the Th.M. program choose from four primary academic concentration areas:

- **Biblical Studies:** Focuses on Old Testament, New Testament, and Biblical Theology, requiring foundational competence in biblical languages.
- **Historical and Theological Studies:** Focuses on Church History, Historical Theology, and Systematic Theology.
- **Philosophy and Theological Studies:** Focuses on Christian Philosophy, Worldview, Ethics, and Apologetics.
- **Practical Theology:** Focuses on Preaching, Missions, Evangelism, Church Ministries, and Biblical Counseling.

1.2 Curriculum Requirements (25 Total Credit Hours)

The 25-credit-hour Th.M. curriculum is structured to provide foundational research tools, core graduate coursework, and dedicated capstone project advisement:

Category	Course Number & Title	Credits
Introductory Core	Graduate Research Seminar (81020)	2 hours
	Foundations for Theological Studies (81260)	2 hours
Graduate Coursework	6 Master-Level / Advanced Electives (Up to 2 Ph.D. Seminars permitted)	18 hours
Capstone / Thesis	Supervised Research (44560)	1 hour
	Guided Mentorship / Capstone Writing (81900)	2 hours
Total Program Credit Hours	25 hours	

1.3 Capstone and Thesis

Students must complete a substantial research writing component prior to graduation. Two options exist under faculty advisement:

- **Standard Capstone Project:** An 8,000–15,000 word journal-quality paper, developed either through substantial expansion and revision of a paper previously written during graduate coursework or through an approved new research topic.
- **Master's Thesis:** A 15,000–18,000 word formal master's thesis based on original research, conforming strictly to the SBTS Style Manual. Typically, students complete a capstone project; however, the result of both projects is similar.

Key Capstone Guidelines:

- **Supervisor Selection:** During their second semester (following guidance in course 44560), students submit a completed Research Proposal to secure a faculty supervisor.
- **Submission Deadlines:** The final approved draft must be submitted via the Canvas portal for course 81900 by October 15 for Fall graduation or March 15 for Spring graduation.
- **Defense:** The capstone paper or thesis does not require an oral defense. Acceptance and grading are determined by the faculty supervisor using the RDS Grading Rubric.

2 Academic Policies and Guidelines

2.1 Admissions and Prerequisites

- A qualifying Masters degree.
- For Biblical Studies concentrations, a minimum of 6 hours of Master's-level Greek or 6 hours of Master's-level Hebrew is required.
- International students must meet standard TOEFL score requirements (minimum 95).

2.2 Registration and Matriculation

A student who registers for the first class or seminar is considered to have matriculated. Once matriculated, students must register each semester (Fall and Spring) until graduation or formal withdrawal.

- **Registration Deadline:** Registration must be completed by the first week of the semester. A \$250 late registration fee is assessed for late registrations.
- **Maximum Time Limit:** The maximum allowable time in the Th.M. program is 6 semesters (3 years).

2.3 Program Fees and Continuation Fees

Tuition is based on a set program fee established annually by the Board of Trustees, broken into monthly payments over 18 months following an initial down payment. If a student completes the degree in under 18 months, the remaining balance is due prior to graduation.

Continuation Fee Policy: A Continuation Fee of \$1,000 per semester is assessed for any term enrolled beyond 3 semesters (Semesters 4, 5, and 6).

2.4 Grading Standard and Academic Probation

The minimum passing grade in any Th.M. course or seminar is a "B" (3.0 GPA). Any student who earns a grade lower than "B" (such as B- or lower) will lose credit for that course, be placed on Academic Probation for the subsequent semester, and be subject to an enrollment review by the RDS Director.

2.5 Generative AI and Academic Integrity Policy

Plagiarism is the use or theft of intellectual property without attribution and is both a moral and educational transgression. Students may not employ third-party research consultants or unauthorized research services.

Generative AI Policy: The use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to produce writing of any kind, from initial outlines to final prose, whether verbatim or edited, is prohibited. This includes translating the student's work into English, and applies across all coursework, papers, capstones, and theses. Permitted and guarded uses, including the disclosure requirement, are set out in the RDS Artificial Intelligence Policy.

2.6 Interrupted Status (IS) and Deferrals

- **Interrupted Status:** ThM students are not permitted to go on IS.

- **Military Reserve Duty:** Students called to active duty will be granted an official leave of absence without loss of academic standing upon return within one year of release.

2.7 Independent Study

All independent studies completed during the ThM are considered Master's-level courses. To complete an independent study, please contact the School of Theology or Billy Graham School Administrative staff.

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