



The New STVU Master of Divinity Curriculum

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why did STVU make this change?

A: Curriculum renewal is an ongoing part of higher education. In maintaining our position as well as reinforcing our commitment to providing high quality graduate theological education, STVU embarked on renewing the curriculum to reflect the best scholarship in graduate theological education and to deepen our signature approach to graduate theological education. Our 2017 Association of Theological Schools (ATS) Self-Study highlighted the need for curricular renewal informed by the question:

“Does the curriculum address the theological, philosophical, and practical issues and needs facing students and religious organizations which we seek to serve as a teaching and learning graduate school?”

As with all areas of higher education, theological education is changing dramatically. With dramatic changes in church and society, critical responses by scholars are needed to ensure that theological programs are relevant, responsive, and appropriately rigorous to meet the needs of a changing society. At STVU, we are committed to providing students with the very best theological programs informed by outstanding scholarship and a commitment to equipping students for transformative ministry in response to the message of the Gospel.

STVU faculty worked collaboratively throughout the 2017-2018 academic year to address our curricular renewal efforts informed by the question:

“What do STVU students need – curricular and co-curricular – to operate as effective ministers and religious leaders in their communities in liberating people and transforming society?”

STVU faculty reviewed and assessed curriculum renewal efforts at peer and aspirant ATS institutions in addition to taking into account best practices in graduate theological education. Curriculum renewal efforts at STVU also reflect more instructional flexibility and opportunities for students to explore their ministry gifts and interests through more elective course offerings, a renewed emphasis on STVU's signature curricular commitment to African American heritage and connection to the freedoms of its Baptist traditions and ecumenical spirit, and creation of a new rhythm in the life of the school that includes time for students to participate in co-curricular offerings, more intentional periods of communal gathering, and real time for Sabbath during the school year.

Q: How will students experience the changes in the curriculum?

A: The new M.Div. curriculum is effective for newly enrolled students as of the fall of 2018, however all students have the option to enroll in the new program. *Returning students remain under the pre-Fall 2018 catalog and its degree program requirements.*

In keeping with our curricular renewal efforts and in support of our strategy to deepen the intellectual profile of STVU, new and returning students will experience a changed academic calendar from a ten-week, four quarter academic calendar to a five semester academic calendar. The new calendar features opportunities for students to reflect on courses between terms, take advantage of unique intensive seminar opportunities, integrate the study of languages in their graduate theological program, and take full advantage of the graduate consortia arrangements in which STVU participates. Indeed, STVU's change to semesters is in keeping with the academic calendars of all of our Richmond Theological Consortium and Washington Theological Consortium partners.

In the fall of 2018, the academic calendar will feature five terms – Fall, January Term, Spring, Maymester, and Summer. Graduate courses will continue to be in block seminar format and meet once a week. Course meeting times are Monday through Saturday as follows: M-F: 8:30am-11:00am; 1:00pm-3:30pm; 4:00pm-6:30pm; 7pm – 9:30pm; S: 8:30-11:00; 1:00-3:30pm. Chapel will be held on Saturdays at 11:00am during the academic term.

Q: As a returning student how do I opt in to the new curriculum?

A: Returning students should first consult with their faculty advisor concerning their academic program and progress. Once a decision is made to change to the new curriculum, a student will work with her/his faculty advisor to develop a plan for the completion of the program. The student will also notify her/his faculty advisor and Denise Coleman, Director of Graduate Enrollment Services, of the desire to change to the new curriculum in writing.

Q: If I continue in the pre-Fall 2018 M.Div. curriculum, will all of the courses be available for me to complete the program?

A: Yes. STVU will offer all classes students need to complete their degree program. STVU is committed to ensuring that students have all necessary course offerings needed to complete their program in a timely manner. During this first year of implementation, STVU will also add select courses to our course offering schedule as needed for students to complete the degree program. In addition, STVU will also approve certain curriculum adjustments which meet the stated program outcomes. For instance, after students may take *CH 651: History of the Black Church* in place of *CH 641: History of Religion in the US*. In all, STVU remains steadfast in its commitment to offering all students a high quality graduate theological program that is grounded in our rich history and tradition and responsive to the changing dynamics of ministry and society in our time.