

Transformation at UDTS

Responding to the changing needs of the church, the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary is in the midst of a transformation designed to make theological education more accessible and affordable for future church leaders.

The first stage of the transformation has included streamlining the Master of Divinity degree. By reducing the number of credits required from 84 to 75, the school has enabled motivated students in both the distance and residential formats to design a path to commencement in as little as three years. The new curriculum keeps the familiar UDTS characteristics of spiritual formation, a required mission sequence, and academic excellence in preparing pastors for leadership in the church, while also offering opportunities to learn about planting churches and other entrepreneurial ministries, as well as developing appropriate leadership skills. With a higher percentage of elective options, each student has the ability to personalize their curriculum to better match their future ministry goals.

Both distance and residential students will benefit from the transformation. Those earning an MDiv in the distance format will no longer be required to complete one-third of their credits (28) during August and January intensives. The curricular changes have combined the new residency requirement of only 15 credits into one August intensive, which will be attended by all students regardless of format. J-Term will now be limited to elective options.

The residential program has an entirely new look as well. This fall all residential courses will use a flipped classroom model, with classes only meeting on Mondays. This will enable commuter students to come to campus from a much greater distance and will eliminate the need for those students to stay on campus overnight. Students can now pursue theological education in residence, while still meeting other occupational and family obligations, without moving to Dubuque. Following the ATS (Association of Theological Schools) definition of residential instruction, each weekly class session will include at least 60% of the instruction in face-to-face class meetings, while the remainder of instruction (40%) will be available in a digital format. In most cases, students will be able to better prepare for class throughout the week by getting a portion of the content of each course by viewing an online lecture, leaving the time in the residential classroom for more effective means of instruction and interaction.

Another significant change to the residential program is the addition of Graduate Assistants. Several residential students will be chosen each year to help with introductory courses in the college, including World View Seminar I. The instructors get the benefit of having masters level students facilitate discussion groups and work with students, while the students will receive a significant benefit that is applied to their tuition and housing expenses. These students will continue to pursue an MDiv degree while also working part-time as a GA. It is anticipated that admission to this program will be highly competitive, but will provide valuable experience and instruction in working with young adults.

While preparing new pastors has always been essential to the mission of UDTS, our calling includes training other types of leaders as well, both lay and ordained. As a result, this

transformation has also included the introduction of a new degree program, the Master of Arts in Mission and Discipleship. With an emphasis on mission and leadership, this new degree will appeal to students who are interested in pursuing a non-ordained Christian vocation, while still placing an important emphasis on ministry and discipleship. Participating in campus ministry, pursuing international mission opportunities, and planting new ministry communities are but a few of the options available to graduates with this degree. It is also for Christians who are interested in learning how to live out their faith in other careers, and includes the option of taking courses in other university programs such as the MBA and MAC. Like the MDiv, the MAMD is available to both distance and residential students.

Another significant benefit of this transformation is a closer relationship between the seminary and college communities. Perhaps the most visible signs of this new era of cooperation is that the Vice President of Academic Affairs of the University, Dr. Mark Ward, will also serve as Dean of the Seminary and that seminary professors will now be part of the larger university faculty council. In addition to the use of graduate assistants in the college, many seminary professors will also be teaching college level courses. Integration of college faculty and staff into the offices in Severance Hall will also enhance communication and cooperation between the theological seminary and the other college programs.

The church is rapidly changing along with the world of theological education, and the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary is committed to meeting the needs of this new era and of the students who have been called to serve our Triune God in the years to come.

- Dr. Richard J. Shaffer Jr., Director of Seminary Programs and Assistant Professor of Ministry, Fall 2016