

**BOSTON
COLLEGE**

**SCHOOL OF
THEOLOGY
& MINISTRY**

**LICENTIATE IN
SACRED THEOLOGY**

Licentiate in Sacred Theology

These guidelines are intended to assist students in understanding the features of the Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL) program at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (STM). As a guide to the policies and expectations for the STL, this information will be helpful to prospective applicants, as well as to matriculated students making progress toward completing the degree. Regarding interpretation of these policies, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and the STL Program Director are the proper arbiters.

1. What is the STL?

The STL is an advanced ecclesiastical degree that the STM offers by virtue of its status as an ecclesiastical faculty; it does so in accordance with the provisions of *Sapientia Christiana*. The STL is a “second cycle” degree: it follows the first level Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree (STB), the B.D., or the M.Div and is a prerequisite for the “third cycle”, the Doctor of Sacred Theology. The STL enables students to deepen their theological background in order to equip themselves for service in official capacities within dioceses and religious communities. The degree prepares students to teach theology in major seminaries, diocesan schools, and other institutions of higher learning. Through the thesis component, the degree also helps students to expand their skills in the methods of theological research and writing; these skills are crucial for doctoral work.

2. What is the focus of this degree?

The Licentiate focuses on the traditional theological disciplines as represented under the following areas: **1) Biblical Studies; 2) Systematic, Historical, and Liturgical Theology; 3) Moral Theology; and 4) Church History.** Students usually enter the program with one of these areas in mind; students are encouraged to identify their special research interests as early as possible in the course of their studies (e.g., within Moral Theology, identifying social ethics as a research focus; within Systematics, focusing on Christology, or even more specifically on the theme of Christ as liberator). Students, in collaboration with their advisor, should choose their courses carefully in order to broaden their competence in a specific theological area and to develop the advanced theological expertise required for writing the thesis that is a major component of the STL. There are no area distribution requirements for coursework.

3. What are the requirements for admission?

Students must follow the admissions procedures outlined on the school’s website (<http://www.bc.edu/schools/stm/acadprog/degree/stl.html>). **International students must meet minimum TOEFL scores for English proficiency before they can be admitted to the program.** Applications are normally due February 15 and students will receive letters of acceptance by April for matriculation in September. A prerequisite for the degree is the STB or MDiv with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 or higher. The admissions committee will review the application (including transcripts, a statement of research interests and three letters of

recommendation) for evidence of superior academic performance and potential to complete a significant research project. Priests or candidates for ordination are required to have the permission and support of their sponsoring bishop or religious superior. **Potential students are strongly advised to note the areas listed in #2 above; these indicate the only fields of study in which it is possible to complete the STL within the STM.**

4. What are the degree requirements?

Sometimes called “the biennium,” the STL normally requires two years, or four semesters, for its completion. At least two of these four semesters must be spent in residence at the STM. Students may not take more than ten semesters to complete the program, including the thesis. With the approval of the academic advisor, each Licentiate student must register every semester.

The formal degree requirements are as follows:

A) The completion of at least eight three-credit courses (24 semester hours of credit)

1. **Of these eight courses, at least four must be taken with members of the ecclesiastical faculty within the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.** N.B.: Courses taken with other departments of Boston College (DREPM within STM and the Theology Dept. within GSAS) do not meet this requirement. The remaining four courses can be taken with members of DREPM within STM, with the Theology Dept. within GSAS at Boston College, or in the Boston Theological Institute (BTI), the consortium of nine theological schools with which the STM shares cross-registration privileges. The BTI comprises Harvard Divinity School, Episcopal Divinity School, Boston College Theology Department, Boston University, Andover Newton Theological School, St. John’s Seminary, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.
- 2.. At least half of the eight courses must be in a student’s chosen field of concentration. The courses chosen must be advanced-level courses and seminars, not courses that are introductory in nature.
3. With the approval of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, a maximum of two of these eight courses (i.e., six credits) may be transferred credits from previous work at the STM or at another institution, provided that they have not already been applied to a degree. Course for which credit is sought must have been completed at the graduate level. It is not possible to transfer credit for two-unit courses, even if done at the graduate level.
4. **Students must write a major paper (20 pages or more, complete with footnotes and a bibliography) in at least four courses.** Students must earn a grade of B or better for these papers to meet the STL’s requirements. ***At least two of these papers must be done with members of the ecclesiastical faculty.*** Special arrangements to meet this requirement may need to be made with course instructors whose courses do not ordinarily require such long papers.
5. Students wishing to pursue topics that are not addressed in STM or BTI courses may

approach a faculty member and request a reading course or tutorial. Such student-initiated courses, which typically are allowed only in the second and/or third semesters of the program, require the permission of the program director and should be taken only when supported by good reasons.

6. In coursework, students must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or above.
7. Language courses may be taken to fulfill the language requirement, but may not be applied to the required courses for the STL. The exception to this regulation is that a maximum of two specialized language courses (at the intermediate level or higher) relevant to those students focusing on the study of Scripture may be included in the eight required courses (in this circumstance, the conditions of A1, A2, and A3 above still apply).
8. Other courses that are not ordinarily applied toward the eight required STL courses include preaching and ministerial practica.
9. Students may audit courses beyond those required to complete the STL degree. Audit courses are charged at one-half the credit rate and are not eligible for financial aid. Some STL students who expect to teach introductory courses in the near future use the opportunity to audit introductory-level courses at STM and work with the professor on a tutorial basis to develop their skills, bibliographical resources, and even syllabi for future courses in their field.

B) Demonstration of proficiency in two languages for research purposes.

1. One of these should be Latin, unless Greek or Hebrew is appropriate because of a student's research interests.
2. The second language should be a modern language, besides English, in which theology is commonly written.
- 3) Students may establish their language competency in four ways:
 - a) successful completion of a translation examination at the STM;
 - b) successful completion of an intermediate-level course while at the STM (these are offered through the STM and through the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Boston College as well as through several BTI schools, both as summer courses and during semesters);
 - c) producing certification (such as by way of transcript notation) that such a language course has been successfully completed elsewhere within the last five years; or
 - d) demonstrating that the language in question is one's native language.

Students must successfully demonstrate proficiency in their ancient and modern languages before their thesis proposal will be approved.

C) Participation in the monthly Licentiate Colloquium. The colloquium provides members of the STL cohort an opportunity to socialize – refreshments are included – and develop collegiality, as well as to discuss issues relevant to the program, and to hear and respond to presentations from fellow Licentiate students. The colloquium is held three times each semester; participation is an integral component of the STL program, so

attendance is required.

- D) Writing a thesis between 85 and 100 pages, end-matter included. The thesis is written in English unless both professors on the student's thesis committee approve of the use of another language. The layout of the thesis must follow standard academic guidelines (including double-spacing of text, 1-inch margins, and 12-point font). The thesis counts for nine credits; the student must register for the thesis at the start of the semester or semesters during which the thesis is written. See the paragraphs below for further description of the process of completing a thesis.

5. How does one complete the STL thesis?

Each student works with a thesis committee that consists of two faculty members, who act as co-mentors; these mentors are typically members of the ecclesiastical faculty. If a student wishes to choose a faculty member outside the ecclesiastical faculty, then the second co-mentor must be a member of the ecclesiastical faculty. The composition of each thesis committee must be approved by the STL program director.

Each student, in conversation with a mentor, then writes a thesis proposal, the deadline for which is in late November (for those who anticipate a May graduation in the following calendar year). The purpose of this document is to put forth a succinct thesis statement, to explain why this particular line of research is being undertaken, to outline the intended sequence of chapters, and to provide an initial working bibliography of books and articles that will be consulted. The text of the proposal is not to exceed 10 pages, including the bibliography (a sample proposal is available from the director). Once the two co-mentors approve the proposal, they signal their approval to the student and return to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs a form signifying their acceptance of the thesis proposal. Thesis proposals will only be approved after a student has demonstrated proficiency in an ancient or modern language (see Section 4/B3 of this guide).

Students must work closely with their mentors, submitting work regularly in order to receive the feedback vital to the refinement of the evolving thesis. The final version of the thesis is to be submitted early in April. When the two co-mentors agree that the thesis is satisfactorily completed, they will schedule a time for a one-hour oral exam on the thesis. For this exam, the student prepares a brief opening statement and then responds to questions from the co-mentors.

At the end of the examination, the two faculty members deliberate over the candidate's performance. They sign and complete the evaluation form, which indicates the candidate's result on a Pass/Fail basis.

After successful completion of the exam, the candidate corrects any errors (typographical or otherwise) that are noted during the exam. The student then submits the thesis online to the University's library system (www.bc.edu/libraries/help/howdoi/etd.html). The text of the final version of the thesis constitutes a public document, and so must be completed in accord with one of the standard American guides to usage and format, such as the *Chicago Manual of Style* or *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (compiled by Kate L. Turabian). Students with questions about proper formatting should consult copies of previous theses kept in the library archives.

6. What does a typical STL program look like?

Students move through this degree program in a variety of ways, but the timeline has two constraints: 1) four semesters is the normal time spent in the program; students will typically receive their degree at Commencement in May of the second year after they matriculate; and 2) students may not take more than ten semesters to complete the program.

Upon beginning the program, most students take three courses in each of their first two semesters. An especially well-prepared student may elect to take four courses per semester. Those working toward English proficiency are often best-advised to attempt no more than two courses in their first semester. Those with a free summer after the first year often use the time to address any remaining language requirement. The third semester is spent completing coursework and preparing the thesis proposal. In order to be registered as a full-time student, those in their third semester who have fewer than 9-credit hours to complete should register for TM888, a special designation that maintains full-time status. The fourth and final semester is spent writing the thesis. Students are strongly advised to pay close attention to the STM Academic Calendar for due dates for both thesis proposals and thesis submission in order that all requirements for May graduation can be met expeditiously. Students with other pressing commitments may need to pursue the degree on a slower or even part-time basis, but the schedule sketched above has worked for a majority of our students in recent years.

7. Which people are most important to completing this degree?

- A) **You!** Each student is the primary architect of his or her own program. Developing one's skills as a "self-starter" is an integral goal and benefit of this program. Many graduates share the reflection that, for perhaps the first time in their academic careers, their decisions regarding courses, advisors, research interests, and thesis co-mentors were integral to their academic progress during the Licentiate at the STM.
- B) **The Program Director.** The Director abides by the motto popularized by John Courtney Murray, S.J. regarding the principle of religious liberty and proper church-state relations: "As much freedom as possible, as much restraint as necessary." The STL Program Director seeks to honor the free choices of students, but also understands liberty as properly ordered freedom, directed toward appropriate ends. During orientation, the Program Director will meet with incoming STL students as a group and then individually. For many, the Program Director will serve as the initial academic advisor, assisting them in the selection of courses, etc. Even after students have chosen other advisors, the Program Director encourages STL students to visit during regularly posted office hours as needed to monitor progress and plan for the completion of program requirements.
- C) **The Thesis Committee.** Students will naturally gravitate to professors whose work matches the students' fields of interest. By the end of the second semester of residency, students are expected to have chosen an academic advisor who will likely serve as mentor for their thesis. As noted above, the expectation of the program is that the two co-mentors will typically be chosen from members of the ecclesiastical faculty. ***The constitution of the***

thesis committee must be approved by the Program Director.

- D) **The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.** The Associate Dean maintains the official records regarding the completion of degree requirements. There is a paper form corresponding to each requirement; these must be signed by the proper personnel (often your advisor) and submitted by certain dates specified in the STM's academic calendar. Familiarize yourself with the forms for thesis proposal approval and thesis completion, among others. It is wise for students to keep a "paper trail" that consists of copies of forms submitted or letters from the Associate Dean or Program Director that authorize exceptional courses of action.
- E) **TM731 Writing and Research for Theology and Ministry.** As the STL is a writing-intensive degree, students may find that they benefit greatly from assistance with further developing their writing skills. In particular, students whose primary language is not English are required to register for the three-credit TM 731 in their first semester.

8. What will help me to succeed?

- A) On the STM website, check for important dates, such as deadlines for registration, add/drop period, applications for proposed summer credits, and thesis proposals.
- B) Communicate frequently with your academic advisor and/or thesis mentors. Ensuring that you have a clear understanding of expectations and timelines is crucial to progress in "self-starter" degrees such as the STL. It is also important to respect the time and professional commitments of the faculty with whom you work. If you appropriately gauge and adhere to their preferences for meeting arrangements and modes of communication, they will cooperate with you in the maximal way for mutual benefit.