

The Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Development Assessment Plan

Purpose of the Program

The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) is an advanced degree for ministry professionals interested in deepening one's theological understanding of and practical skills for ministry. Oriented toward enhancing ministerial leadership, the Bexley Seabury DMin in Congregational Development builds upon the student's experience in ministry, bringing together theoretical and analytical insights, peer learning, skills development, as well as the research and writing of a thesis that contributes new knowledge and integration for the practice of ministry

Bexley Seabury Seminary offers the DMin in Congregational Development for students who want to further develop technical and adaptive leadership skills for vital, dynamic and diverse congregations and faith communities. Our students have the opportunity to learn, stretch, challenge themselves and others, and emerge at the end of three years with exceptional skills in leadership and deeper theological grounding for innovative and effective congregational/organizational ministry.

Students study with and learn from the faculty at Bexley Seabury, expert practitioners in fields related to congregational development, and peers. To integrate theory and practice, our DMin program includes collaborative study in small groups, lecture and discussion, online reflection throughout the year with a core group, case studies, a congregational study, and a thesis.

Bexley Seabury's DMin in Congregational Development encourages students to reflect theologically on the nature of the church, understand the challenges and opportunities facing today's faith communities, analyze congregations and their contexts, practice effective community organizing and strategizing, and develop a learning community with others who are asking similar questions.

Admission Requirements

Persons wishing to enroll in the Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Development program must meet the following requirements:

- An MDiv degree (or its equivalent) from an accredited theological school
- At least 3-years of experience in ministry following the MDiv degree
- Evidence of desire to increase level of effectiveness in congregational leadership and development
- Evidence of the capacity to engage in advanced theological study and practical reflection.

Course Work

This program requires a minimum of three years and no more than six years to complete. Coursework is offered primarily in one-week intensive sessions in Chicago in January and June. The degree requires completion of 28 academic course credits.

Required Courses (3 academic credits unless otherwise noted)

- Reimagining Congregations in Mission
- Organizational Systems
- Community Organizing for Missional Living
- Diversity and Context
- Non-Profit Leadership
- Making Mission Possible in Tough Times
- Research Methods (1 credit)
- Congregational Study (1 credit)
- Thesis Proposal Practicum (2 credits)

Each student is required to take two 3-credit elective courses which may be online, an intensive, a directed study, or a doctoral-level transfer course taken at another accredited school.

The following requirements are intended to help students to develop their research, writing, and analytical skills and proficiencies, and to support them in their process of moving toward and successfully completing their final thesis in a timely manner.

- **Online Core Group**

Students in each cohort (defined by the June term in which they begin course work) participate in an on-line core group throughout their course work, with expert practitioner supervision (non- credit). The purpose of this group is to develop a learning group for theological and practical reflection; to engage in conversation around and inquiry into contemporary concerns in ministry; to explore in greater depth the religious congregation as a social institution; to deepen as a community of learning.

- **Critical Incident Report**

This assignment is the focus of the core group in the fall of the first year of course work. It provides an opportunity for self-reflection on the student's ministry that is then shared with the core group. Naming this ministry event a "critical incident" encourages the student to allow the fullest latitude in recalling an event which, in whatever way it is important, seems to typify their recent experience in ministry and/or raises key concerns that they may have about ministry. In addition to the critical incident report, reflection papers on relevant readings may be shared on-line with the core group members.

- **Congregational Study**

The Congregational Study is an independent study that takes place within the student's local congregation/ministry setting. Students discuss and support each other in this work during their Core Group sessions during the Fall of Year 1. This project enables students to apply their learning from their first-year, and lays the foundation for their remaining work. The Congregational Study report, expected to be submitted by the end of December of their first year, counts for one-credit. The study is meant to be synthetic and creative, a resource for the student to engage an intentional study of the congregation's life and ministry to envision and strategize steps toward a fruitful future. This assignment will help the student answer key questions of Practical

Theology identified in the first year Research Methods course. The completed study should be 20-25 page bibliography and supporting materials included as addenda.

Although named “Congregational Study,” the methodology for this assignment is useful in the study of settings other than a local congregation such as prisons, hospitals, schools, social service agencies, and denominational offices and structures.

- **Thesis Project and Oral Review (6 Credits)**

The Doctor of Ministry thesis project is the culmination of the course of study in congregational development and should contribute new knowledge to the understanding and practice of ministry. Students work with a Thesis Director and Thesis Reader, in addition to a writing coach, to author a 75 page paper, (plus bibliography and supporting documents as addenda) that articulates a cogent analysis and defense of their findings using the research methods of practical theology to bear on their primary research question.

Program Goals and Outcomes

The Bexley Seabury curriculum will enable DMin students to meet the following goals and our graduates will be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes (proficiencies) in accord with ATS Degree Program Standards for the Doctor of Ministry [References in brackets are to sections in Standard E].

Advanced understanding of nature and purposes of ministry [E.1.2.1]

Goal 1. To develop a theologically informed, contextually grounded, and integrated understanding of the nature, purposes, theories, and practices of ministry in the specialized area of Congregational Leadership and Development.

Outcomes:

1.1 Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the dynamics, contexts, and organizational structures of a religious congregation in relation to the diverse communities they represent, and in which they are embedded.

1.2. Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of contemporary perspectives in ecclesiology, missiology, and the meaning of missional leadership and ministry in context.

Competencies in pastoral analysis and ministerial skills as reflective practitioners and leaders [E.1.2.1]

Goal 2. To develop sociocultural, analytical, diagnostic, and entrepreneurial competencies and organizational leadership skills within congregational contexts.

Outcomes:

2.1. Demonstrates the ability to facilitate discernment of congregational identity, to define and implement missional goals, and to respond creatively to missional opportunities within and beyond the church by employing methods of organizational, social, cultural, and contextual analysis,

2.2. Demonstrates skill in conducting ethnographic study, systems analysis, community organizing and development.

2.3 Demonstrates skill in leading congregations through times of challenge and change.

Growth in spiritual maturity and ethical professional standards [E.1.2.1]

Goal 3. To develop and appropriate a personal and professional ethic in keeping with sound organizational principles, high ethical standards, and mature conduct in the leadership and development of vital and healthy congregations and communities.

Outcomes:

3.1 Demonstrates the ability to subject leadership theories and congregational leadership practices to theological and ethical reflection and critique.

3.2 Demonstrates a critical awareness of one's own social location, culture, preconceptions, and biases and a sense of self that is informed by one's own cultural narrative.

New knowledge about the practice of ministry [E.1.2.1]

Goal 4. To design, implement and evaluate a research project that integrates theological, ecclesial, cultural and pastoral perspectives and contributes new knowledge and understanding to the practice of ministry for congregational and faith based community leaders.

Outcome

4.1. Demonstrates the ability to identify a relevant topic significant to faith community leadership and development, and to develop an effective research model, using appropriate resources.

4.2 Demonstrates the ability to analyze and evaluate the research results and to articulate successfully one's conclusions; and to contribute original theological and practical knowledge to the field.

Assessment of Individual Student Learning and Overall Program Effectiveness

Assessment of student learning and progress is a continuous, integrated and integral part of the DMin program, from the beginning of the program to completion.

Individual Student Learning

Each students will have an individual Portfolio that includes direct (performance-based) and indirect (perception-based) evidence of their learning and progress through the stages and requirements of the program. The Portfolios will contain the following documents:

Direct evidence of student learning and progress (performance based)

- Admissions essay (benchmark) and current *curriculum vitae*
- Assessment artifacts (selected from course work)
- Congregational Study
- Approved Thesis Proposal (and Human Subjects Research Protocol, if applicable)
- Final Thesis Evaluation
- Yearly Transcript

Indirect Evidence of student learning and progress (perception based)

8. Student's Initial Self-Assessment
9. Students Follow up Self-Assessment at Candidacy

Throughout the program, Portfolios are periodically updated and reviewed in accordance with an outcome and evidence based assessment process that will yield direct, indirect, quantitative, and qualitative data.

This process begins prior to the first residency with the deposit into the student's Portfolio of their *curriculum vitae* and application essay. The Program Director reviews these documents in preparation for meeting with the student during the first residency. During orientation, students will complete an Initial Self-Assessment Survey *vis a vis* the program goals and articulate any additional goals they may have for their learning. Once reviewed with the Director, these documents will become part of the student's Portfolio.

For each course, an assignment that targets outcomes indicated in the curriculum map is designated. These artifacts are deposited into the students' individual portfolios, together with a curricular-level outcome-oriented "Universal Rubric" that is used to score those artifacts. The URs provide direct evidence-based, quantitative data that is aggregated for purposes of program-level assessment.

Upon completion of all coursework, including electives, the student is eligible for candidacy with an approved thesis proposal. The thesis proposal will be reviewed, in consultation with the student as needed, and approved by the Faculty Advisor, Program Director, and the Academic Dean. The approved thesis proposal will be added to the student's Portfolio. At candidacy, the student will complete a Follow-up Self-Assessment *vis a vis* the program goals and any personal learning goals they had set previously.

After the approval of the thesis proposal the Thesis Director will monitor the student's progress towards completion of the thesis project, and thus the degree. If the Thesis Director becomes aware of any impediments to timely and satisfactory completion of the project, the Program Director must be notified. In response, the Program Director may consult with the thesis director and/or student to determine additional steps as necessary.

The Final Thesis Evaluation will be the summative review of the student's progress towards Program Goals and Learning Outcomes and will be shared with the student and become part of the student's Portfolio.

Assessment of Program Effectiveness

When the assessment data regarding individual student learning is aggregated, it will serve to provide direct and indirect evidence upon which the program as a whole may be assessed. The Program Director will assist the Assessment Coordinator in the preparation of qualitative and quantitative data reports regarding collective student achievement of and/or progress toward the learning outcomes. This data is then reviewed by the Faculty and recommendations are made for appropriate program changes.

In addition, advancement through the stages of the program can itself provide a measure of program effectiveness. The Program Director will assist the Assessment Coordinator with the compilation of statistics relative to the number/percentage of students who have completed each stage of the program and the amount of time that they take, especially relative to completion of course work, granting of candidacy, and completion and successful review of the Thesis Project. Withdrawals will be tracked, as well.

The number of students reporting, in their Graduate Student Questionnaires, achievement of learning goals and satisfaction with institutional resources likewise provides an important indirect measure of program effectiveness.

Finally, an Alumni/ae Questionnaire distributed three years post-graduation, will provide another practical criterion to the seminary's assessment of the DMin program.

Closing the Loop

The Assessment Coordinator's data reports will be analyzed and by the Faculty as a whole, and recommendations for modifications in the curriculum and/or assessment process will be considered annually. Portfolio reviews by the faculty will also be conducted at least every three years. On average, comprehensive program reviews will take place at least every six years.