

Accrediting Standards Architecture



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

Accrediting Standards Architecture

The Degree Program Standards approved by the ATS membership in June 2012 cover the full range of graduate theological degrees that have been approved by the Commission on Accrediting at ATS-accredited schools. The architecture of the standards reflects a tiered organization. The General Institutional Standards form the foundation for the Educational Standard, and interpretation of the individual Degree Program Standards depends upon an understanding of both the General Institutional Standards and the Educational Standard that come before them.

The **General Institutional Standards** (renumbered 1 through 8 in 2012) were approved by the membership at the 2010 Biennial Meeting and focus on issues that are true for all theological schools regardless of the educational programs they offer: purpose, planning, and evaluation; institutional integrity; theological curriculum; library and information resources; faculty; student recruitment, admission, services, and placement; authority and governance; and institutional resources. These standards set forth the expectation that the Educational and Degree Program Standards will be applied on the foundation of a sound institutional context.

The **Educational Standard (ES 1 through 8)** identifies general educational qualities that transcend particular degree program expectations. It describes four primary patterns of theological education delivery—campus-based education, extension education, distance education, and individualized instruction. It also describes expectations related to assessing learning outcomes and educational effectiveness as well as technical issues related to practices such as transfer of credits and credits shared by more than one degree. The ES Standard brings together material that was part of the pre-2010 Standard DS, Standard 10, and Standard M.

The Degree Program Standards (A through J) fall into four categories: **Basic Programs Oriented Toward Ministerial Leadership**, **Basic Programs Oriented Toward General Theological Studies**, **Advanced Programs Oriented Toward Ministerial Leadership**, and **Advanced Programs Primarily Oriented Toward Theological Research and Teaching**. For each degree, the standards address (1) purpose, goals, learning outcomes, and educational assessment; (2) program content; (3) educational resources and learning strategies; and (4) admissions.

**Basic Programs
Oriented Toward
Ministerial Leadership**

- MDiv
- MA in [specialized ministry]
- MCM, MSM, MM in Church Music, MA in Church Music

**Basic Programs
Oriented Toward
General Theological
Studies**

- MA, MA [academic discipline], MTS

**Advanced Programs
Oriented Toward
Ministerial Leadership**

- DMin
- EdD
- Doctor of [specialization] (e.g., DMiss, DEdMin)
- DMA, DCM, SMD

**Advanced Programs
Primarily Oriented
Toward
Theological Research
and Teaching**

- ThM, STM
- PhD, ThD



General Institutional Standards

1	Purpose, planning, and evaluation
2	Institutional integrity
3	Theological curriculum: Learning, teaching, and research
4	Library and information resources
5	Faculty
6	Student recruitment, admission, services, and placement
7	Authority and governance
8	Institutional resources

Degree Program Standards

Basic Programs Oriented Toward Ministerial Leadership

A	Master of Divinity
B	Master of Arts in [specialized ministry] (e.g., MRE, MCE, MPS, etc.)
C	Master of Church Music (MCM) Master of Sacred Music (MSM) Master of Music in Church Music (MM in Church Music) Master of Arts in Church Music (MA in Church Music)

Basic Programs Oriented Toward General Theological Studies

D	Master of Arts (MA) Master of Arts [academic discipline] Master of Theological Studies (MTS)
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Advanced Programs Oriented Toward Ministerial Leadership

E	Doctor of Ministry (DMin)
F	Doctor of Education (EdD)
G	Doctor of [area of specialization] (including the DEdMin and DMiss)
H	Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) Doctor of Church Music (DCM) Doctor of Sacred Music (SMD)

Advanced Programs Primarily Oriented Toward Theological Research and Teaching

I	Master of Theology (ThM) Master of Sacred Theology (STM)
J	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Doctor of Theology (ThD)
ES	Standard M incorporated into Educational Standard