

**Boston University School of Theology**  
**MicroMasters in Religious Leadership Innovation Grant**  
**Project Summary**

***Introduction***

Boston University School of Theology (STH) is partnering with Boston University's Digital Learning Initiative to offer a four course "MicroMasters" in Religious Leadership as an innovative way of delivering theological education focused on some of the most lively and urgent issues facing religious leaders in our time: ethical leadership, financial leadership, conflict transformation, and leadership in multifaith contexts. We will provide the four courses in the form of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC's) free to anyone around the world through the EdX platform, but with a fee for those who wish to certify their completion of the courses. Those who excel can use the courses to transfer into an STH degree program and finish out that degree residually.

The four courses we have selected for the MicroMasters emphasize signature strengths of the School of Theology: (1) Ethical Leadership: Character, Civility, and Community, taught by Prof. Walter Fluker, (2) Faith and Finance (a course already funded by the Lilly Endowment's Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers initiative), taught by Prof. Bryan Stone (3) Religion and Conflict Transformation, taught by Prof. Tom Porter and Prof. Judith Oleson, and (4) Interfaith Leadership, led by Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore and co-instructors from non-Christian faiths yet to be determined. The Ethical Leadership MOOC has already been created and was rolled out last summer, with more than 6,000 students globally enrolling in the course, and 95 persons paying for the verified certification of completion.

"Faith and Finance" by Prof. Stone is currently in the last phase of construction and will begin in September. The other two courses will be rolled out in the two following years. While the MicroMasters we are proposing is a coherent stand-alone credential in religious leadership, we are enthusiastic about the possibilities of increasing an admissions pipeline through the program and through the innovative credential the courses provide.

***The MicroMasters***

In 2015, edX, an online nonprofit started by Harvard and MIT, began offering MicroMasters programs as a bridge between job candidates with only a bachelors degree and companies seeking to hire persons with more advanced degrees and expertise. The MicroMasters is a professional and academic credential for online learners from anywhere in the world. MIT was the first to provide a MicroMasters in Supply Chain Management. The MicroMasters programs allow persons who are uncertain about whether they have the time or money to invest in a graduate degree to take courses online as a way of testing the water, gaining a credential, or exploring a subject. Those who excel and who pass proctored exams, earn the credential, and can then apply for an accelerated, on campus, master's degree program and finish out the degree residually. As of September 2016, 13 universities have launched 18 such programs through EdX.

***Launching the Program at STH***

In the last two years, STH has begun offering online courses in the context of our new Doctor of Ministry program with great success. The numbers are positive and the quality of instruction is superb, aided as we are by Boston University's Metropolitan College and the Office of Distance Education, who have been delivering online education for many years now. The Boston University "Digital Learning Initiative" (DLI) was created "to address challenges and harness opportunities associated with the transformation of the higher education landscape brought forth by digital learning technologies" (DLI website). One of its activities is serving as liaison with the edX platform, and they are providing STH with all the resources we need for web

development, course design training, and project supervision and implementation. The team at DLI has already been working with Prof. Fluker and Prof. Stone in the design of their courses, and they are superb in leading instructors to re-think pedagogy in terms of a “backward design” that moves from clearly envisioned learning outcomes to the kinds of activities and assessments designed to produce and measure those outcomes. We have tremendous resources at BU that are being leveraged as part of this project.

### ***Challenges***

Development of the MOOC’s require a great deal of faculty time and investment at the level of design. Most of our STH faculty have not taught online courses before, so there is a steep learning curve here. Fortunately, we have great resources in the University, and the funding from ATS will provide support for the time, coordination, assistance from a graduate assistant, and help with promoting and advertising the courses and the MicroMasters.

### ***Program Outcomes***

The first and primary outcome we seek through this program is the innovative and creative delivery of theological education to persons seeking growth in their capacity for providing religious leadership. The persons we especially have in mind are those who might not otherwise imagine themselves entering graduate school for a full degree program, yet who are open to exploring a more accessible and focused credential such as the “MicroMasters.” A secondary but important outcome is related to recruitment. The experience of other higher education institutions who have experimented with MicroMasters programs through EdX teaches us that this innovative “reverse” approach to recruitment – taking classes first, then seeking admission – taps into a robust market that could well serve to grow our residential degree programs at the School of Theology.