

BIRMINGHAM THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGICAL
STUDIES

STUDENT HANDBOOK

2017 - CURRENT
EDITION

Welcome from BTS

Dear Student:

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ. We are excited that the Lord has prompted you to enroll in the Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS) program at Birmingham Theological Seminary (BTS). I encourage you to take the time to read this MATS Student Handbook thoroughly. You will find that it answers many of the questions you will have as you proceed through this academic program.

We are confident you will be challenged academically in your courses and will also gain practical knowledge for life and ministry. As you dig deeper into the truths of Scripture, I encourage you to diligently and deliberately apply what you learn. Remember, “Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.” (James 2:23-25).

We pray that your studies in the Master of Arts in Theological Studies Program will better equip you to lead God’s Church.

May the Lord use you greatly to advance the Kingdom!

In the Service of the King of Kings,

The Staff of Birmingham Theological Seminary

About This Handbook

This student handbook is intended specifically for students in the Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS) program. It is presented in this format as a convenience to the MATS student, not to replace or supersede the BTS ordinary student handbook (available at www.birminghamseminary.org). Except for policies unique to the MATS program, any conflicts in language will be resolved in favor of the full BTS student handbook.

About the General BTS Website and the MATS Website

The MATS is offered online to students who (1) reside outside the United States and its territories, (2) have earned the BTS Certificate in Christian Ministry (CCM), and (3) satisfy other admission requirements specified in this MATS Handbook. While the CCM is offered in multiple languages, the MATS is available only in English.

MATS students may be interested in learning more about BTS and its other programs from birminghamseminary.org. However, the MATS website (btsmats.org) contains all the information the MATS student needs to apply, make payments, take classes, take exams, submit assignments and complete the MATS. In the event of an apparent conflict between instructions on the MATS website and any other BTS website, the student should follow the MATS website instructions.

Example: The MATS website contains a specific application process and specifies certain student fees for application and enrollment. The main BTS website contains a separate application process intended for students at the BTS campuses located in the United States. The MATS student should follow the application process on the MATS website and pay the fees set forth on that MATS website.

How to Contact Birmingham Theological Seminary

Mailing Address

2200 Briarwood Way
Birmingham, AL 35243
United States of America

Email Address

Contact@bts.education

BTS Master of Arts in Theological Studies Website

btsmats.org

Main Birmingham Theological Seminary Website

bts.education

Statement of Faith

BTS adheres to the following Statement of Faith:

God is one Being existing in three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is Sovereign; the Creator and the Sustainer of all things. God is the Source of and end of all truth.

The Scriptures are the written Word of God; inerrant in their original writings, and the infallible authority by which He directs and governs all our activities.

Jesus Christ is the eternal begotten Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary - truly God - truly Man. Through Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension, He accomplished a decisive victory over sin for His people and established His kingdom among men.

Man was created in the image of God as a rational, moral and spiritual being. Man sinned in Adam and fell with him in his first transgression. Man's fall affected him spiritually, intellectually and physically. He is restored only by the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit and the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord will return in glory and triumph for the final judgment and the consummation of His Kingdom.

All faculty must also agree and adhere to one or more of the following historic creeds:

- Westminster Confession of Faith
- Philadelphia Confession
- London Confession of 1689
- Heidelberg Catechism

Our Mission

Providing sound Biblical and practical theological training to equip leaders for Christ's Church.

BTS is theologically Reformed, evangelistic in focus and committed to the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. The seminary strives for academic excellence, through a program of instruction which is practical and useful for effective ministry.

Our Vision

Producing leaders for Christ's Church who are becoming spiritually mature as evidenced by effective ministry.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Accreditation/Licensure

BTS is accredited by the *Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries* (ARTS). ARTS is an accrediting association comprised of graduate institutions holding to the doctrines of the Reformed faith. Although ARTS imposes a rigorous accreditation process on its member schools, students should be aware that ARTS is not currently recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation or the U. S. Department of Education as an approved accrediting agency.

Birmingham Theological Seminary is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation authorized to grant degrees in the State of Alabama, U.S.A., pursuant to Chapter 46 of Title 16 of the Alabama Code.

Privacy of Student Records

BTS will make reasonable efforts to ensure that information contained in student records is not be released to third parties without the express written consent of the student (including transcripts). However, BTS reserves the right to release such records to its contractors and government agencies as necessary to conduct the ordinary operations of BTS, including tax reporting and financial compilations or audits, or as required by law or court order.

Student Lifestyles

BTS is a religious, non-profit Seminary representing Jesus Christ to the world. The policies of BTS have been and continue to be in submission to

the Word of God. BTS expects its students to conduct themselves in a manner that will not raise questions regarding their Christian testimonies. A Christian lifestyle should reflect the Biblical perspective of integrity and appropriate personal and family relationships, business conduct and moral behavior (1 Corinthians 10:31, Colossians 3:17). Students should be aware that this includes how they utilize such technology as the internet, texting, social networking and blogging. Birmingham Theological Seminary embraces, affirms and teaches the gift of sexuality, divinely designed as an act of intimacy to be embraced only within the bounds of a heterosexual, monogamous, covenantal, conjugal marital relationship. Sexual activity outside of those bounds or advocacy of same is not consistent with the Christian lifestyle BTS expects of students. BTS students are expected to demonstrate a teachable spirit, an ability to share love for others, a willingness to live contentedly under authority and a commitment to follow Matthew 18 principle when an issue arises with fellow students. The BTS Statement of Faith expects all students to maintain a lifestyle based on Biblical standards of moral conduct in which Christ has pre-eminence (Colossians 1:18).

Revisions to the MATS Handbook

Every effort is made to provide accurate and up to date information in this MATS Handbook. Birmingham Theological Seminary reserves the right to change statements in the MATS Handbook concerning, but not limited to, policies, academic offerings, tuition and fees. BTS will make a reasonable effort to alert current students of any changes. However, it is the student's obligation to review this handbook periodically and be aware of its content. Where there is a conflict between versions of the handbook, the most current version takes precedence.

Suspension, Modification or Termination of the MATS

BTS reserves the right, in its sole and absolute discretion, to suspend, modify or terminate the MATS program at any time. In the event BTS elects to terminate the MATS program, MATS students enrolled before the date of termination must complete all MATS work within three years of the termination date to receive the MATS. Failure to complete the work within that deadline shall be treated as a withdrawal from the MATS program by the student. Modifications to the MATS curriculum apply to students who enroll in the MATS after those modifications are made. Modifications to requirements within a particular MATS course apply to all MATS students who have not enrolled in the course or courses affected by the modifications.

The MATS is intended to be delivered entirely via the internet, which may experience extended or even permanent outages in particular regions or across the globe. In the event internet delivery of the MATS is delayed, prevented or complicated for any reason, BTS will attempt to deliver MATS course content using other means. This would likely increase the Seminary's costs for course delivery, which BTS will pass along to the student in the form of increased student fees. In general, any delay or failure in performance of the Seminary's responsibilities toward a student shall be excused in event the delay or failure is caused by an event or circumstance that is not under the control of the Seminary, including fires, floods, explosions, riots, wars, severe weather, sabotage, terrorism, vandalism, criminal activities, computer viruses, internet outages, hacking, accident, governmental acts or governmental restraints.

Student Sabbaticals

Students sometimes find the need to take a break in taking courses due to personal or professional matters. Students who fail to complete at least one MATS course in a two-year period will be considered "inactive" and will be required to submit an updated application and pay the application fee again to continue in the program. In addition, the student must comply with the MATS curriculum and requirements current at the time the student returns to the MATS program.

A student who fails to complete at least one course in a five-year period will be dismissed from the MATS program and must re-apply and re-take any courses previously completed in order to earn the MATS.

Student Usernames, Passwords & Contact Information

Students should not share their username or password with any other person, and should take steps to protect the confidentiality of that information.

Current student contact information is necessary for the staff and faculty at BTS to communicate with the students. It is the responsibility of every student to ensure that BTS has accurate postal address information and a current email address. Students must advise the Seminary office if their postal address or email address changes. Notifications should be sent to distance@bts.education.

Ordination

BTS provides Christ-honoring studies in accordance with its mission statement. BTS does not ordain clergy or attempt to evaluate an individual's personal calling or position in the body of Christ.

Resolution of Conflicts

BTS is a Christian institution and MATS students are professing Christians. BTS and the student believe the Bible commands them to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian church (see Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

Therefore, any claim or dispute arising from or related to the student's relationship to BTS or application to or participation in the MATS program shall be settled by mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation of the Institute for Christian Conciliation.

Unless otherwise agreed by the parties, the mediation and arbitration shall be held in Birmingham, Alabama, U.S.A., or conducted by videoconference via the internet. The arbitrator's decision shall be governed by and interpreted in accordance with the law of Alabama, except to the extent such State's law conflicts with Rule 4 of the ICC Rules and excluding such State's conflict of law principles. Judgment upon an arbitration decision may be entered in any court otherwise having jurisdiction. The parties understand that these methods shall be the sole remedy for any controversy or claim arising out of this agreement and expressly waive their right to file a lawsuit in any civil court against one another for such disputes, except to enforce an arbitration decision.

ADMISSIONS & ACADEMIC MATTERS

Residency Restrictions

BTS offers the MATS only to non-US residents, regardless of citizenship or immigration status. Non-U.S. residents admitted into the MATS program may take courses in the MATS curriculum for academic credit and will, upon satisfactory completion of all required courses, earn a Master of Arts in Theological Studies from BTS. The specific requirements for each course are set forth in the instructions for that course.

MATS students must affirm in their application that they are not residents of the United States of America or its territories in their application. Students who become a US resident after admission and before completion of the MATS may only continue in the program with specific permission from BTS. Students who complete the MATS may not participate in the Seminary's formal graduation ceremony without specific permission.

U.S. residents (regardless of citizenship or immigration status) may **not** take the MATS courses for academic credit at BTS or earn the BTS Master of Arts in Theological Studies. US residents who are US citizens or who satisfy applicable US immigration laws should consider the Seminary's course and degree offerings other than the MATS.

International (non-US) students seeking admission to any of the other academic programs offered by BTS must comply with US immigration law. Additional information on the admissions process for international students is available in the full BTS Student Handbook.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Birmingham Theological Seminary does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, handicap, or national or ethnic origin (except for the residency restrictions noted above) in the administration of its educational and admission policies. BTS does not discriminate on the basis of sex in the educational programs or activities including admission or employment, except in matters relating to ordination, and certain courses (which are not part of the MATS) are restricted to men, as related to the question of ordination.

Enrollment Policy & Admissions Procedures

BTS does not utilize the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the Graduate Record Examination or any other standardized graduate school admission exam. However, BTS does require MATS applicants to take a comprehensive entrance exam (described below).

Individuals may apply to the MATS program at any time, but must meet the admission requirements and be accepted in order to enroll in any MATS courses. Applicants for admission will be notified when a decision has been reached on their application.

Students desiring admission to the MATS program must:

- have earned the CCM
- have and maintain a working email address
- complete and submit the MATS application (form available on the MATS website)
- achieve the required minimum TOEFL score
- submit an acceptable writing sample
- submit evidence that the required Logos software package has been purchased and installed
- have earned a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution or one specifically approved by BTS
- have their bachelor's degree transcript sent to BTS directly from the undergraduate institution
- pay the application fee (\$200.00)
- have three references submitted as indicated on the application
- identify a mentor/proctor and have that person submit the required application
- take and earn a grade of at least 80% on the entrance exam, which covers material contained in the Certificate in Christian Ministry program

Applicants who satisfy all of the above requirements must pay a program enrollment Fee of \$ 400.00 (US) before enrolling in a course.

The MATS is an online degree program and all courses are delivered through a combination of emails and online streaming and downloadable content. It is essential that MATS students have reliable, high quality computer equipment and internet access. Minimum computer system requirements are discussed in the section of this handbook addressing the required Logos Bible Software.

If international transcripts are not in English, an English translation of the transcript is also required. Whenever possible, BTS will evaluate international credentials in-house. For any international credentials BTS determines must be evaluated by an approved outside evaluation agency, BTS will notify the applicant/student accordingly. The applicant/student will be responsible for contacting the outside evaluation agency, as well as any costs incurred.

Applicants for whom English is not their primary language must earn the score indicated below on the TOEFL test. Applicants should register for and take the exam directly from Educational Testing Services

(www.ets.org/toefl) and direct that organization to send the applicant's TOEFL score to Birmingham Theological Seminary (DI Code: 7609).

A score of 575 is required for the written exam, and a score of 230 is required for the computer-based exam. The internet based test score is 90. The TOEFL score may be waived by BTS for the following:

1. Non-native speakers who hold degrees or diplomas from post-secondary institutions in English-speaking countries.
2. Non-native speakers who have successfully completed at least a two-year course of study in which English was the language of instruction.
3. Applicants who transfer from institutions in the United States or Canada whose academic course work received favorable critique relative to its demands and duration.
4. Non-native speakers who have taken the TOEFL test within the past two years.
5. Non-native speakers who have successfully pursued academic work at schools where English was the language of instruction in an English-speaking country for a specified period, generally two years.

Students will be notified in writing of admission decisions. Upon admission, students must pay the MATS program enrollment fee. After admission and payment of the enrollment fee, the student should register for and complete Communication I (PT5527), followed by the remaining nine MATS courses in any order. Tuition for each course is due at the time the student registers for that course.

Students are responsible for purchasing their own textbooks, including the electronic library service specified by BTS in the admission documents. Textbooks should be available for purchase as e-books.

The Master of Arts in Theological Studies Curriculum (40 credits)

- * Communication I (2 credits)
- * Old Testament Independent Study (6 credits)
- * New Testament Independent Study (6 credits)
- * Systematic Theology Independent Study (6 credits)
- * Ethics Independent Study (6 credits)
- * Bible Interpretation Independent Study (6 credits)
- * Introduction to Biblical Counseling (2 credits)
- * Introduction to Apologetics (2 credits)
- * Church History (2 credits)
- * Leadership Development & Deployment (2 credits)

Credit Transfers and Recognition of the MATS

Absent specific approval from BTS: (1) academic credits earned in the MATS program may not be transferred to or applied to any other certificate or degree offered by BTS; (2) academic credits earned in any other BTS certificate or degree program may not be transferred or applied to the MATS; and (3) academic credits earned at any other institution may not be transferred to or applied to the MATS. The credit transfer process and applicable fees are described in the general BTS student handbook.

BTS has no objection to other institutions or organizations accepting academic credits earned in the MATS for transfer or any other purpose. However, BTS makes no representations that the MATS credits are transferrable to any other institution or that the MATS itself will be recognized by any governmental body, agency, denomination, organization or church.

Fees and Tuition

BTS desires to offer the MATS at a reasonable cost and will endeavor to maintain tuition levels specified below. However, BTS may be compelled to increase fees and tuition rates from time to time. Payments shall be made only as directed on the MATS website, unless otherwise specified by BTS.

The MATS application fee is \$200.00 (U.S.) and the program enrollment fee is \$400.00. Tuition for each course in the MATS is \$200.00 plus a \$50 administrative fee, regardless of the number of credit hours awarded for that course. Students are required to pay a \$100.00 graduation fee in order to receive their MATS diploma. Fees and tuition are not refundable under any circumstance.

Applicants may take the MATS entrance exam a maximum of two times. In order to take the exam a second time, the applicant must pay a \$100.00 re-examination fee. A student permitted to re-take a course must pay full tuition for that course again. Students who desire a one-month extension on a course deadline must complete the appropriate form and pay an extension fee of \$50.00.

Required Logos Bible Software

Every MATS student, as a requirement of admission, is required to purchase and install on his or her computer the Logos Bible Software Reformed

Starter (or higher) package. It is highly recommended that the student not purchase this product until after he or she has passed the MATS entrance examination and fulfilled all the other requirements for admission into the MATS program. The Logos software must be purchased directly from Faithlife Corporation at logos.com, and BTS can neither issue refunds nor resolve technical issues students may experience with the software.

The student's Logos Reformed software library will be his or her primary reference source for all research papers in the MATS. In research papers, the student may only cite to resources contained in his or her Logos Reformed software library, the Bible, course textbooks, and any source specifically approved by course professor or BTS.

Additional information on the Logos Bible Software is available at logos.com and a description of the Logos Reformed packages at <https://www.logos.com/compare/reformed>. The BTS student is entitled to a 40% discount. Each student should confirm via Logos.com website or through direct communication with Faithlife Corporation that his or her computer system satisfies the Logos Bible Software system requirements. As of May 2016, those requirements were found at <https://www.logos.com/system-requirements>.

Financial Aid & Scholarships

Because of generous contributions from various churches, foundations, and individuals, BTS is able to keep tuition, fees and other costs to a minimum. Funds are not available for financial aid or scholarships to MATS students.

Mentor Program

Upon admission and prior to enrolling in any courses, the student must identify a mentor and have their mentor complete and submit a mentor agreement. The mentor should be a spiritually mature individual and ideally one who is in spiritual authority over the student. The mentor should meet with the student at least monthly to discuss the student's spiritual growth and questions that may arise regarding courses. The mentor also serves as the proctor for all exams and submits an evaluation of the student at the end of every course. The student's mentor shall also serve as a proctor for exams and submit certifications relating to the exam as requested by BTS.

Course Materials

Syllabi, audio lectures, study guides, quizzes, exams and similar materials on the MATS website have been compiled by BTS for the MATS program.

BTS asks that you request permission before making copies of any materials on the MATS website. Exams may not be shared with anyone other than your proctor or saved in any format after the student receives confirmation that the exam was received by BTS and a grade for that exam. Sharing exams or disclosing the content of exams to any person other than the student's proctor shall be grounds for disciplinary action, including possible dismissal from the MATS program.

Time Limits, Grades & Re-Taking Exams

Students have four months from the date of enrollment in a course to complete all course requirements. Students may obtain a one-month extension of the course completion deadline by submitting the appropriate request to BTS and paying the specified extension request fee. It is the student's responsibility to maintain the appropriate level of internet and email connectivity and unavailability of such is not an excuse for failing to complete a course on time. Upon written request, BTS may choose to award a "W" to a student who encounters significant internet connectivity issues.

Students may not have any outside assistance in taking exams. Exams must be taken without referring to notes, books, Bible or any other written, visual or oral helps. Exams may not be re-taken for any reason.

The seminary has adopted a four point grading scale as follows:

| | | | |
|----|----------|---|--------------------|
| A | 96-100 | = | 4.0 Quality Points |
| A- | 90-95 | = | 3.5 Quality Points |
| B | 85-89 | = | 3.0 Quality Points |
| B- | 80-84 | = | 2.5 Quality Points |
| C | 75-79 | = | 2.0 Quality Points |
| F | Below 75 | = | 0.0 Quality Points |

Grade Point Averages (GPA)

Quality points will be computed for each course by multiplying the number of quality points designated for a grade, by the number of course hours. For example, the student takes a two-hour course and receives a "B," which equals 3 quality points for each hour. Because it was a 2 hour course, this equals 6 quality points. The student's GPA is obtained by dividing the total quality points by the number of course hours.

All Seminary students are required to maintain an overall cumulative grade point average of 2.0 or better. A student whose overall average is below 2.0 (or “C”) is considered to be on academic probation. If, upon completion of the next two courses following academic probation status, the student has not raised his or her GPA to at least 2.0, the student will be dismissed from the MATS program for academic reasons. A student who is dismissed from the MATS program for failure to maintain the minimum required GPA may be re-admitted at the absolute discretion of BTS and upon such conditions as BTS establishes for that student.

Withdrawal Policy & Re-Taking Courses

Students may withdraw from a course without penalty any time before taking any of the exams required in that course. After receiving the first of the exams required in a course, the student must complete the course in its entirety. If a student finds it necessary to withdraw from a course during the permitted withdrawal period, the student must submit a withdrawal request form to the Registrar. Authorized withdrawals will be listed on the student transcript as a “W” and will not affect the student's GPA. Unauthorized withdrawals will result in the student receiving a failing grade in the course.

Students who receive a failing grade in a course may take that course a second time with permission from BTS. Such students should submit a new enrollment form for the course along with their written request for permission to re-take the course and the required payment. In no event will a student be allowed to take a MATS course more than twice. Failure of a MATS course twice will result in the student being dismissed from the MATS program for academic reasons.

Student Code of Ethics

***Academic Integrity**

BTS assumes that all of its students desire to pursue all academic work with honesty and scholarly integrity. Breaches of academic honesty and integrity are infringements of the mutual faith and trust essential to the academic enterprise and are contrary to the student's profession of faith in Christ.

Activities that have the effect or intention of interfering with education, pursuit of knowledge, or fair evaluation of a student's performance are prohibited. Examples of activities include, but are not limited to, the following definitions:

- Misrepresentation of Academic Records – Misrepresenting or tampering with or attempting to tamper with any portion of a student’s transcripts or academic record, either before or after coming to BTS. *Examples: forging a Registration Form or a grade report; tampering with computer records, etc.*
- Facilitating Academic Dishonesty – Knowingly helping or attempting to help another violate any provision of this code. *Example: working together on an exam.*
- Unfair Advantage - Attempting to gain unauthorized advantage over fellow students in an academic exercise. *Examples: gaining or providing unauthorized access to examination materials (either past or present); obstructing or interfering with another student’s efforts in an academic exercise; etc.*
- Computer Crimes - Damaging or modifying computer programs without permission. *Examples: piracy of copyright-protected software; hacking; constructing viruses; knowingly introducing viruses into a system; copying programs and data belonging to others, and so on.*
- Plagiarism - Using the work of others without giving full and proper credit to its source. *Examples: verbatim copying without acknowledgement; rewriting the work of others and presenting it as if it is your own, etc.*

Those students whose work definitively can be shown to breach academic honesty or scholarly integrity will face academic investigation. Sanctions will be imposed, ranging from grade reduction to dismissal from the MATS program.

Writing Policy

BTS uses the Turabian style of formatting as a standard for all research papers, for all classes. All papers should be double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, and prepared in accordance with the instructions contained in the course syllabus. Grading criteria for research papers can be found in the general BTS student handbook and a sample research paper can be found on the main BTS website.

Completion

Upon completion of all requirements in the MATS and receipt of the graduation application and graduation fee, BTS will mail the student a Master of Arts in Theological Studies diploma to the student address on file.

It is the student's responsibility to provide an address to which BTS can mail the MATS diploma. If BTS is unable to mail the diploma, then it will be held until such time as the student provides a working address.

Extraordinary mailing costs will be passed along to the student and must be paid before the diploma will be mailed. Graduates may not pick up the MATS diploma directly from BTS without specific permission. BTS will not mail the MATS diploma to a US address.

The responsibility for meeting the requirements for the MATS rests with the individual student. If all requirements are not completed, the MATS will not be awarded.

BTS Official Transcripts

Before a student can receive an official transcript from BTS the transcript fee must be paid.

Official Copy:

A written request must be submitted on the transcript request form available online at the BTS website. There is a fee of \$20 for each official MATS transcript requested. **Official transcripts are not sent to the student, but may only be sent to a third party.**

Student Copy:

Students are able to obtain an "unofficial" record of their academic work directly from BTS at no charge.