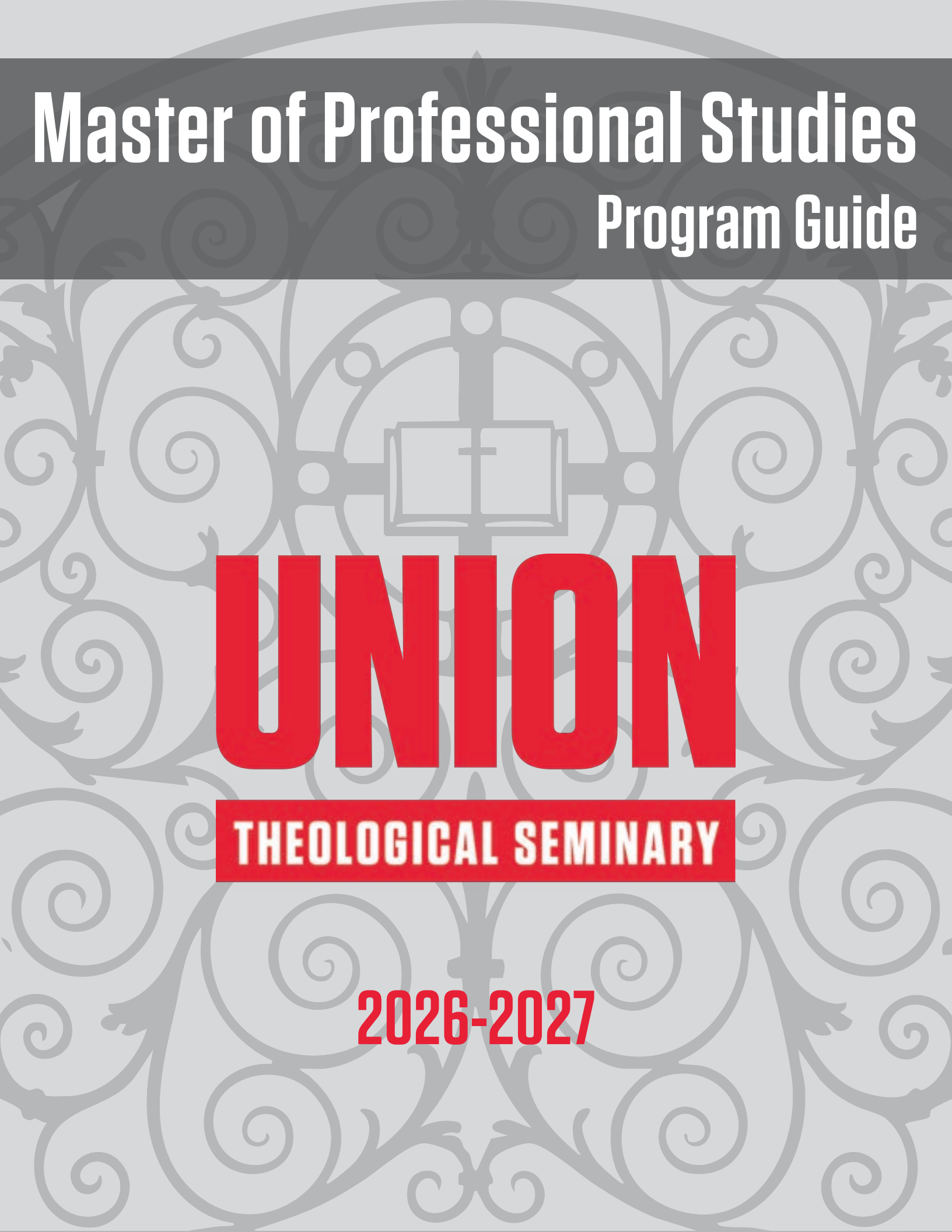


Master of Professional Studies

Program Guide



UNION

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

2026-2027

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MISSION STATEMENT

Progressive theology has long taken shape at Union, where faith and scholarship meet to reimagine the work of justice. Grounded in the Christian tradition and responsive to the needs of God's creation, a Union education prepares its students for committed lives of service to the church, academy, and society. A Union education develops practices of mind and body that foster intellectual and academic excellence, social justice, and compassionate wisdom. Union forms courageous faith leaders who make a difference wherever they serve.

CORE VALUES

Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, founded in 1836, is a historically progressive Christian seminary with increasing commitment to interreligious engagement and spirituality. Our mission is encapsulated by the phrase: "where faith and scholarship meet to reimagine the work of justice." This quest for justice is broad and includes social justice and activism, responsive care for communities and individuals, the pursuit of collective well-being, and of human and planetary flourishing. In particular, exploring the religious and spiritual dimensions of this quest defines our distinctive mission.

These commitments have allowed defining of "core values" that express this mission and guide our teaching and learning. They are what we aim to teach our students:

- To grasp the substance of the Christian tradition and the other primary traditions of students through the study of scripture/sacred texts, theology, history, and tradition-specific practices
- To be in continued dialogue with other religious traditions on those traditions' own terms and to dialogue with the spiritually non-affiliated with respect and care
- To develop the ability to theologically engage the human quest for meaning and spiritual connection
- To develop the capacity for self-reflection as well as the capacity to respond to others in ways that are compassionate and open-hearted
- To develop capacities for critical analysis of the ecological, social, and cultural systems in which persons, communities, and traditions exist, recognizing that spiritual and religious beliefs and practices are expressed in ways determined by conditions of time and place
- To cultivate a theological understanding of the earth and its diverse ecosystems in a manner that fosters an informed commitment to planetary well-being and justice
- To form a secure base for both ethical decision-making and spiritual wisdom in service to the needs of the world
- To educate impassioned, informed, and wise leaders and community members capable of engaging the pressing issues of our day with integrity and courage

Developed and approved by the faculty in academic year 2019-2020

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

The Master of Professional Studies (MPS) is a thirty-six credit professionally-oriented degree offered at Union's northern campuses inside the Sing Sing and Bedford Hills correctional facilities. This degree follows a fixed curriculum of rigorous academic study in theology, ministry, pastoral care, and social justice leadership, equipping graduates to positively impact correctional facility communities and inspire transformative change in society at large. The degree culminates in a capstone project that asks students to apply the theological and theoretical frameworks of the program to identify a problem, define a program or ministry intervention or innovation, and critically articulate its potential to change said problem and contribute to the public good.

New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) began the MPS program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in 1982, and brought it to Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in 2022. Upon the closure of NYTS, Union became the new home for the MPS programs in Fall 2024. MPS students commit themselves to serving their fellow incarcerated individuals both during the program and after graduation. The vast majority of the 600 graduates who have been released from prison are currently employed in the "helping professions" in their communities. Many have gone on to become founders and senior leaders of the most prominent organizations supporting reentry and advocating for criminal legal system reform.

PROGRAM GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

In keeping with the vision of Union's founders that graduates should be equipped by their education to "respond to the claims of the world" with "intellectual and academic excellence, social justice, and compassionate wisdom," Union's curricula for all degree programs intentionally engage disparities in society based on gender, race, class, sexuality, religion and other divisive or marginalizing forces. Studying in this environment is both a strength and a challenge. The goal is to cultivate the ability to respond to these disparities with analytic rigor, historical consciousness, sensitivity to tradition, and equanimity and compassion.

The Master of Professional Studies (MPS) has clearly articulated student learning outcomes appropriate to a graduate theological degree and is consistent with Union's mission and resources. The program goals identified reflect the faculty's general aspirations for student learning. The desired learning outcomes associated with each goal identify the knowledge and skills that students are expected to demonstrate upon successful completion of the program. Graduates should be well equipped to apply their learning in their professional settings.

Goal One: To reflect critically on diverse theological, religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions from an interreligious engagement lens to foster community-building and social change in specific contexts.

Learning Outcomes: Successful completion of coursework in Bible, theology and ethics, and multiple religious traditions.

Goal Two: To develop a leadership capacity to identify, design, and put into practice relevant, inclusive, and restorative models of community and faith community in the prison context and, in the event of release from prison, urban contexts that work toward personal and social transformation.

Learning Outcomes: Successful completion of courses focusing on ministry, leadership, and theological reflection in the public square; demonstration of the integration of this learning in the capstone project.

Goal Three: To cultivate a critical understanding of U.S. carcerality, the prison context, and their intersections with religious and social experiences

Learning Outcomes: Successful completion of *Leadership, Mentorship, and Prison Ministry*, as well as the integration of theoretical and practical learning in a capstone project focused on the prison context.

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

The Master of Professional Studies (MPS) degree requires completion of a minimum of thirty-six credits, which can be completed in one year (Sing Sing) or across eighteen months/three semesters (Bedford Hills).

The program follows a fixed curriculum, with 30 credits of coursework focused on the learning goals of the MPS program and 6 credits of coursework dedicated to the capstone project. The following chart outlines the requirements for the degree:

COURSE REQUIREMENTS	
	Number of Credits
MPS 107 – Foundations of Ministry	3
MPS 108 – Introduction to Theology	3
MPS 109 – Bible and Hermeneutics of Justice	3
MPS 114 – Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and the Marginalized	3
MPS 201 – Leadership, Mentorship, and Prison Ministry	3
MPS 206 – Practice of Ministry	3
MPS 208 – Theories of Justice and Public Leadership	3
MPS 209 – Pastoral Care, Counseling, and the Self	3
MPS 312 – Religious Ethics and Contemporary Social Issues	3
MPS 314 – Theological Reflection, Justice, and the Public Square	3
Capstone Project (MPS 401 and 402)	6
TOTAL CREDITS	36

Capstone Project

The MPS Capstone Project is an integrated theoretical and practical assignment that represents the student's theological and applied knowledge. It is a culminating paper of 30 to 40 pages, which systematically mines the student's own proposals for improving society and/or the carceral realities. The student will analyze, integrate, and evaluate their experience of theological education as it relates to the contemporary practice of prophetic ministry in urban communities and prison contexts with an eye toward anti-incarceration advocacy and social justice leadership practice. The student will identify a problem, define a program or ministry intervention or innovation, and critically articulate its potential to change said problem and contribute to the public good.

Union has a Research Assistant program that hires students from Union's Manhattan campus to assist MPS students with conducting academic research for their capstone projects. The Research Assistants source academic resources for the students' projects, drawing on the wider resources of Union's Burke Library, and meet with MPS students to review those resources and refine their queries for additional research.

ACADEMIC POLICIES

Full information about Union's academic policies can be found in the Academic Catalog, which is available on Union's website: <https://utsnyc.edu/academics/registrar/course-catalog-academic-policies/>.

Grading Scale

In Union's official final grading system, a final grade of *Credit* (CR) indicates successful fulfillment of course and learning objectives. A final grade of *No Credit* (NC) indicates a student did not fulfill the course requirements and learning objectives. In certain cases, two other grades may be issued. *Marginal Credit* (MC) recognizes satisfactory completion of some, but not all, course requirements and learning objectives. The above grading scheme applies to Union courses.

The official grade system is supplemented with written narrative evaluations prepared and submitted by faculty at the conclusion of a course. Narrative evaluations are academic qualitative assessments. They identify the learning objectives and assessment measures of the course, and provide a detailed evaluation of a student's particular strengths and weaknesses in relation to the objectives and measures.

The narrative evaluation is considered unofficial and not delivered as an official transcript by the Registrar's Office. The student may send the narrative evaluation to third parties at their discretion. Course syllabi and grading rubrics contain additional details from faculty on their assessment process, measures, and course expectations.

Alternative Attendance/Early Release Policies

Due to the inherent challenges of holding class in a carceral context, there may be days when class cannot meet, or individual students are unexpectedly unable to attend. The syllabi for each class should state expectations for what to do in this event, with specific details for each class session.

In the event that a student is released midway through the semester, the student may petition the Program Director for permission to complete the semester through alternative attendance arrangements. The Program Director, after consulting with all faculty and the Associate Dean for Academic Administration, will inform the student in writing of the decision. If approved, the notice of the decision will include parameters for making up the missing class sessions, which may involve additional assignments and/or one-on-one meetings with the faculty. Permission to complete the semester is generally only granted when the student is in good academic standing and has attended class for at least half of the semester.

Religious Observance

The Seminary honors observance of religious holidays. If a student's religious holiday observance impacts class attendance or engagement in course components, the student is expected to inform the instructor(s) **at least two weeks in advance** of the class session or assignment due date. A student request to the instructor should state the specific religious observance and the plan to complete any impacted coursework. The request is considered approved when the student receives confirmation from the instructor. In the event that the student and instructor do not reach consensus regarding the plan for missed class/assignment(s), the student may appeal to the Dean/Vice President of Academic Affairs.

ACADEMIC ADVISING AND STUDENT SUPPORT

The program director of the MPS program, Dr. Willie Francois III, serves as the official advisor for all students in the MPS program. In addition to the program advisor, the Assistant Director of Master of Professional Studies Program/Site Coordinator (David Nieves) and all faculty serving in the program are available for consultation and guidance. Students are highly encouraged to reach out to any of the individuals listed above for support with their academic work or the development of their capstone projects.

Disability Services

Students with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations under applicable disability laws, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students who experience disability-related barriers to learning should notify the Assistant Director of Master of Professional Studies Program/Site Coordinator and/or Program Director, who will connect the student with Student Affairs to begin the accommodation process. Student Affairs will work with the student, program staff, and, when needed, the correctional facility to determine and implement appropriate accommodations.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING AND CURRICULAR EFFECTIVENESS

Assessment of student learning at Union is a comprehensive and continuous process that takes place at both the course level and program level (*ATS Standard 2.6*). The purpose of this process is twofold:

1. to provide students with feedback on their progress toward and achievement of personal, course, and program learning goals
2. to provide administration and faculty with a means to continually evaluate program effectiveness so that modifications and improvements to the curriculum can be made

Union creates a personal ePortfolio for each student, which stores evidence of their fulfillment of degree requirements and their learning achievement. The ePortfolio is accessed through Google Drive affiliated with an @utsnyc.edu email account. MPS students who want to gain access to their @utsnyc.edu email account and ePortfolio after coming home can reach out to academics@utsnyc.edu for assistance.

The current assessment plan requires that the following documents be deposited into the ePortfolios over the course of the student's progression through the program. Academic Office staff maintain and update the ePortfolio.

Preliminary Documents

1. Admissions essay – by Academic Office staff
2. Entrance Questionnaire – by Academic Office staff

Registrar's Documents

3. Unofficial transcript with narrative evaluations – by Academic Office

Academic Work

4. At least one assignment **with instructor comments** from each course – by Academic Office; provided by instructors
5. Capstone Project paper – by Academic Office

The above Academic Work documents must be deposited with *this naming convention*:

Last Name First Name Course # Instructor Name Genre/Title

(Example: McFadden Chris NT101 Niang Exegetical Paper/Revelation Paper)

Assessment Surveys and Reports

6. Student Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) – deposited by student one month prior to graduation
7. Final Assessment Report (FAR) prepared by advisor – deposited by Academic Office summer after

Notes on Assessment Process

The assessment process begins with the Entrance Questionnaire (EQ) which includes a benchmark measure of a student's current competencies in the outcomes associated with the program's learning goals. The final assessment process again assesses the goals and learning outcomes at graduation time. The documents deposited in the ePortfolios attest to the student's progress by providing a sample of their work in each class.

Assessment is not a credit-bearing process. The Seminary is required by its accreditation agencies to assess all of its programs.

KEY CONTACTS AT UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Mail may be sent to any of the staff listed below at this address:

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