

## **Master of Arts Project Preparation Manual**

The MA in Interreligious Studies (MAIRS) is a 36-credit-hour graduate degree that engages students in advanced academic study of the lived reality of religions in public multifaith contexts. It may also serve as a foundation for those pursuing other professional degrees or as a vehicle for the enhancement of one's own faith and understanding. The MAIRS program provides a strong grounding in the foundational concepts and methods of interreligious studies, relations between religions, and the study of lived religious traditions.

This manual describes the elements, mechanics, and procedures for the MA Project required by Hartford Seminary. The student should use the following guideline, which is relevant to and necessary for preparing the Project.

### **PROJECT**

The MAIRS Project is specifically intended for those students who plan to engage in some form of practical community work or ministry, or who plan to continue their studies in the Master of Arts of Chaplaincy. The purposes of the MAIRS Project are:

- 1) to provide the student an opportunity to organize, initiate, or reflect on a program in the life of an agency, community, or congregation, and
- 2) to assist in the development of additional expertise or skills in the student's area of specialization (in either Islamic Studies or Ministerial Studies).

It is important to note that the Project is evaluated based on the learning of the student, not on programmatic success.

### **Types of Projects**

In consultation with their faculty Advisor, students may elect from the following models for their Project:

- 1) **Action/reflection model**-- the presentation of the results growing out of direct engagement within a context of ministry or community activity.
- 2) **Program planning model**--the presentation of program possibilities designed by the candidate for their work.
- 3) **Research model** -- the presentation of empirical testing of a hypothesis with respect to an aspect of ministry or community work.

### **Format of the Project**

Students may select the shape and form of the of the Project presentation, whether digital, oral, in art form or in writing.

### **Supervision of the Project**

Each candidate is guided in this phase of the program by a faculty Advisor. In some cases, a Project Advisor may be appointed who is different than the faculty Advisor, if this will suit the

student's needs. This should be done in consultation with the Academic Dean. The faculty Advisor chairs the panel that will evaluate the Project. Normally, the second reviewer should be a practitioner in the field related to the topic of the Project.

### **Submitting the Proposal**

The faculty Advisor will review the Proposal to determine whether the Project is feasible for the student. If the Proposal is accepted, the student may register for the Project for their final semester. There is no deadline for a Project Proposal. It is governed only by the April 1 or November 1 deadline for submission of the complete review presentation in the year in which the candidate hopes to graduate. In general, students are well-advised to submit the Proposal at least at the beginning of the semester prior to their expected semester of graduation.

### **Planning, Implementing, or Research for a Project**

The student should follow the direction of their faculty Advisor as they plan, implement, or engage in research for their Project.

### **The Submission**

When the Project is complete, the student should submit their Project presentation to their faculty Advisor and to schedule a Review and Defense.

### **Review and Defense (Oral Defense)**

In order to schedule an exam, the student must contact the Academic Dean's Office. This process requires a minimum of three weeks from the date of the first contact. In preparation for the first contact, the student must have consulted with their faculty Advisor and the two need to have agreed on 3 alternative dates for the exam.

After consulting with each other, either the faculty Advisor or the student may suggest second reviewers who have expertise relevant to the student's Project, but selection of faculty reviewers is done finally by the Academic Dean, who will consider these factors: the need for a suitable practitioner and/or faculty expertise. The two members will constitute the student's Oral Defense panel, normally including the faculty Advisor and a practitioner in the field related to the scope of the project.

The panel will meet with the candidate for an oral examination (Oral Exam or Oral Defense) and final adjudication of the Project. The Oral Defense of the Project will take place at an assigned time and will last no more than two hours before the panel of the faculty Advisor and second reviewer. For the Oral Defense, a student should prepare a presentation of the Project, including a brief synopsis of their work, and then be prepared to answer questions from the panel about the Project. The student will be assessed according to the learning outcomes of the program. The faculty Advisor is responsible for reporting the official results of the Thesis and examination to the Registrar on the appropriate degree assessment form.

After the Oral Defense, the panel may:

- approve the Project as submitted, without changes
- approve with minor changes recommended to the student
- approve with substantive changes required before completion
- fail (a student who fails their examination may register for the Project a second time and submit in a subsequent semester. Only two registrations are allowed.)

After the Oral Exam has been passed, the student's name and the title of the Project will be brought before the next Academic Council meeting by the Academic Dean and voted on by all core faculty present. From here it will go to the Seminary Board of Trustees for a vote. It is only with the final vote of the Board of Trustees that the awarding of the degree is approved. Students will also have to fill out the "Application to Graduate" form and submit this to the registrar to be listed by the faculty for a vote.

Due to the various formats of Projects, they will not be submitted for binding in the library.

## **THE TIMELINE**

Master of Arts degrees are conferred on the recipient at graduation in May and December of each year. However, the Project can be submitted and reviewed during the final semester of the student's program. Thus, it is helpful in planning for the Project to begin with the end date and consider the steps in reverse order to establish a candidate's individual calendar. There is only one Commencement ceremony each academic year in May. Degrees are also conferred in December. For the conferral of the degree in May, the complete review presentation of the Project must be submitted by April 1 at the latest. For the conferral of the degree in December, the complete review presentation of the Project must be submitted by November 1 at the latest. A student has up to four years to complete their Project from inception of the program.

While the Project is a 3-credit course, normally to be taken in a student's final semester, for the student to be successful, they should begin planning how their course selection, including electives, can be used to benefit their Project. It is recommended that students use an elective course in their program to contract with their Advisor for a 3-credit hour Independent Study to engage in research and planning on their Project topic prior to the semester in which they register for the Project.

The timeline below is intended to be a **guideline** for a student to succeed in the development and submission of their Project.

Meet with the faculty Advisor each semester. Upon admission to the MAIRS program, students are assigned a faculty Advisor. The student should meet with their faculty Advisor each semester during "Advising Week." It is at this point that a student should explore topics in consultation with their faculty Advisor. This will help in the selection of courses that might address the topic of interest and help in the selection of the topic, style, and format of the Project.

If it is possible in your course schedule, register for a 3-credit-hour Independent Study with the faculty Advisor, or another faculty member as appropriate, as their elective course to engage in research on the Project topic.

Develop a Project Proposal. Normally, after 18 credits of coursework, a student should work with their faculty Advisor to develop a Project Proposal. In consultation with the faculty Advisor, a student should develop a general statement about the purpose, style and format, with a timeline of the Project, and a working bibliography. A student should follow the steps below to put together their Proposal. Normally, the Proposal should be developed after consultation with the faculty Advisor, and if necessary, with the Project Advisor, and prior to the semester they register for the Project.

Register for the Project (to be completed in the last semester). A student will be required to register for the 3-credit Project course, normally in their final semester. The Project is intended to draw many of the learnings from the MAIRS program together. Thus, the Project should not be started too early.

Implement, research, or reflect on the Project.

Develop a final write-up or presentation of the Project.

Submit and Defend the Project. The Project should be submitted by April 1 or November 1 at the latest. After submission, the faculty Advisor will arrange the Oral Defense with a second reviewer. (See Review and Defense, above.)

## THE PROCESS OF THE PROPOSAL

### A. Selection of Subject

The student is expected to take the initiative in selecting the subject area for the Project. The subject is delineated by the student in consultation with the faculty Advisor, with consideration given to the following guidelines:

- 1) Is the subject significant for the student's interests or work? This is a judgment on which the Advisor and the student must concur since the subject should be meaningful to and practical for the student.
- 2) Is the scope of the subject sufficiently limited to allow adequate treatment within the allotted time and abilities of the student?

### B. The Proposal

Once the student and faculty Advisor have agreed concerning the subject and provisional title, the student should prepare a Project Proposal according to the outline below. Consultation with the faculty Advisor in this stage is crucial.

- State the title. Keep the title short and descriptive of the Project with clear terms.
- Give a general statement of the Project. It is from this general statement that the specific formulation of the Project will be derived. Define the area and scope of the study, and indicate the basic proposition, situation, question, or technique that the Project will examine.
- Define the type of project that will be developed or implemented. This involves a precise statement of what the student proposes to do or reflect on.
- Indicate any previous studies relating to the Project. This is often called a "literature review."
- Briefly state the procedures or methods of development of the Project. This is called the Methodology. Describe fully the procedure(s) to be followed in making the Project. This should include a clear explanation of the steps one expects to follow in carrying out the investigation. This is not a preview of conclusions, but a statement of the steps to be used in the various phases of the Project.
- Include a preliminary bibliography of resources.

## SUBMITTING THE FINAL PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT

The presentation or final write-up of the Project is expected to be approximately 20–25 pages long. The students should consult their faculty Advisor as to appropriate format, given the nature of the particular project.

Any written submissions of a Project should abide by the *Guidelines for Writing a Research Paper* (available on the [Student Writing Resources page](#)).