

An Overview of I 600: The M.A.T.S. Independent Study

I. Introduction. Among their academic obligations, candidates for the Master of the Arts in Theological Studies degree at Columbia Theological Seminary are required to successfully complete a semester-long independent study with a professor in that student's area of specialization,* the product of which is a single paper on a topic chosen by the student and agreed to by the advisor. This independent study, labeled I 600, ought to be taken late in the student's matriculation, ideally after completing all other courses in that student's area of specialization, and may not be taken before at least three courses in that area of specialization are completed.

II. Description. The purpose of I 600 is for students to demonstrate their competence in doing independent master-level work in a theological discipline. Toward that end, their final papers should reveal at least the following:

- a. *The ability to do in-depth and independent research.* Beyond the practice they receive throughout the curriculum, M.A.T.S. students are given instruction in research methods (including the use of electronic resources) and academic writing as part of I 100: The M.A.T.S. Seminar.
- b. *The ability to critically engage and analyze their research.* The M.A.T.S. is a master-level, academic degree and the ability to do this type of critical analysis is a baseline requirement of its completion. Students should demonstrate the ability to summarize the various arguments their research reveals, to analyze and evaluate those arguments, and to defend the reasons for their evaluative decisions.
- c. *The ability to think constructively and do original work.* By the time they complete the degree, M.A.T.S. students should be able to do more than parrot the arguments of other scholars. They should be able to participate in the academic conversation that surrounds their area of interest, contributing their own voice and perspective to that conversation. This constructive work should flow out of their analytic work.
- d. *The ability to write clearly and carefully.* Papers for I 600 should conform to the rules of grammar and composition expected of master-level work in the humanities. Included in this is the proper use of citations (format to be determined by advisor).

To achieve these four goals, we expect final papers to be between 25 and 35 pages in length (with variations on length determined at the discretion of the advisor). Two copies of the paper will be turned in. One will go to the I 600 advisor, the other to the Director of the M.A.T.S. degree.

III. Advisor Obligations. Advisors will approve topics, may recommend resources, and will meet occasionally with advisees over the course of the semester. The frequency of these meetings is at the discretion of the advisor based on his/her availability and sense of student need. Advisors are not required to meet regularly. Advisors may ask for an early *précis* of work, a bibliography (annotated or otherwise), and any other materials that will be conducive to the student's successful completion of the final paper. Advisors will grade the paper based on its content according to the description above. The Director of the M.A.T.S. degree will function only as a second reader on these papers; he or she will neither grade the paper nor change grades given by I 600 advisors.

IV. Student Obligations. Students must choose a topic worthy of academic pursuit and receive approval to pursue I 600 from advisors in their areas of specialization prior to registering for the course. Toward that end, they must use the seminary's standard "Contract for Independent Study" form, available outside the Registrar's office. They will work independently, check in with their advisors occasionally, work on the project diligently, and complete their papers in a timely manner. They will print two copies and give one to the faculty advisor and the other to the director of the M.A.T.S. degree program.

* There are five possible areas of specialization for M.A.T.S. students. These are Old Testament, New Testament, Theology, Ethics, and Church History.