

A Guide to Writing A D.Min. Project Prospectus

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

What is the D.Min. Project?

When you applied to the LPTS doctoral program, one of the essays asked about any idea you may have had at that stage for a “project.” Behind the question lies an assumption that you are participating in this program because you have a desire to continue to grow and develop as a reflective practitioner in ministry, to borrow a phrase from the writer Donald Shön, and that you are aware of needs and opportunities that suggest something you would like to do to enhance your ministry in the context in which you are serving. The answer to the question, “What could I do that would address a need or longing I see in my ministry and in my ministry context that would deepen our participation in the redemptive ministry of God in Christ in the world?”--that is your project. As such, while the idea for your project may be nascent in the beginning of your program, the project itself is a culminating and integrating action, arising from careful reflection on your context, collaborative reflection with peers in ministry, critical theological and biblical reflection on your ministry concern, additional advanced course work, and thoughtful guidance from your faculty adviser.

On another level, your D.Min. project and project report satisfies a graduation requirement of Louisville Seminary and meets a program standard for the Doctor of Ministry degree set by the Association of Theological Schools in North America. (Excerpts related to the D.Min. project taken directly from the ATS standards may be found at the end of this document.) Louisville Seminary conceives this project as a demonstration of your ability to integrate theological and biblical knowledge and skills, research, practice in ministry, pastoral imagination, and advanced skill in practical theological reflection. The project is, in sum, a practical theology project that addresses a need or topic in the practice of Christian ministry in one of its varied forms, including congregational leadership, pastoral care and counseling,

hospital chaplaincy, and ministry in service organizations. As a practical theology project, it is expected to contribute to your continually evolving theology of ministry.

Theologian Edward Farley has argued that all theology is *practical* in that it has to do with recognizing God's gift of salvation and living redemptively in light of this Gospel. Practical theology is critical, theological reflection on the life of faith and the practice of ministry in light of God's ongoing creative and redemptive activity on behalf of all creation. It assumes that God continues to be engaged in God's project of redemption in all the situations of life in which we engage one another and our environment, make decisions and take actions. These situations are also situations in ministry; the intersections where God is working out God's purposes and decisions are made regarding what constitutes faithful response by people of faith engaged in ministry. Farley holds that these situations pose questions for us relevant to the practice of ministry. Such questions include determining the nature and character of the situation, its meaning in light of Gospel, and what response may be made to those questions that is redemptive rather than idolatrous. Practical theology is fundamentally an interpretive process that engages sacred texts, the church's historical traditions, and other sources of understanding the contemporary setting of the situation in light of Gospel, the motivating and guiding source for faithful response.

Your project is a demonstration of practical theology informing your ministry practice and, especially in congregations, that of those you serve, in which you give evidence of advanced knowledge and skills, critically reflective understanding of a theology of ministry, and a developing pastoral imagination.

Because you are engaged in ministry during the course of your D.Min. studies, projects are typically contextually specific. That is, they are related to and arise from ministry in the particular context in which you are serving. That said, while contextual, the project is expected to extend knowledge and skills in the practice of ministry broadly as well as for the one who conceives and implements the project. It is anticipated that a good project will have implications for the practice of ministry in other similar situations and places of ministry. For that reason, the finished and approved work is submitted to and housed in the Seminary library collection and listed on a national database of projects and theses completed for Doctor of Ministry degrees in ATS schools.

What is the Project Prospectus?

Your prospectus is just what the name implies: it is a clear and concise description of:

- the situation or topic in ministry that you intend to address with your project;
- why you have chosen this situation rather than another;
- what expertise or experience you bring to the task;
- an initial interpretation of the issue in light of Scripture and historical theology and contemporary theological expression;
- an initial expectation regarding disciplines you may consult to interpret the context of the situation, including, for example, sociology, ethnology, psychology, educational theory, congregational studies, etc.;
- research methods you expect to use in the process of interpretation and defining the project response;

- a description of the project as you conceive it at this stage (this is your tentative thesis regarding an effective and faithful response to your ministry situation) and outcomes you expect from it;
- demonstrable means of evaluation you will use to determine if your project has achieved your expected outcomes;
- an initial working bibliography of resources you will consult or use.

A “prospectus” anticipates and lays out initial plans regarding what your project is going to be. It looks forward to something still on the drawing board, so to speak. It reflects, however, careful and thorough reflection on the nature and dimensions of the situation in ministry you want to address. While ministry is clearly about discerning and responding constructively to the presence of God, decisions in ministry are by nature complicated. The Prospectus allows you to capture in a relatively few pages your best thinking and imagining about something that matters significantly to your practice of ministry and the lives of those you serve. It invites you to a preliminary investigation and interpretation of some compelling situation in your context calling for your best skills to understand, to interpret to others, and to create and implement a new response with the promise of enhancing your ministry skills and increasing the understanding and practice of faith among those you serve.

Your Prospectus, in limited yet helpful ways, anticipates the report you will write once the project has been fully conceived, carried out, and subjected to your best theological reflection and critique, analysis, and evaluation. Keep in mind, however, *the Prospectus is not the project report*. It *does not* assume all the work needed to complete the project has been carried out. *And under no circumstances can the Project be carried out until the Prospectus has been approved and*

your Advanced Practice Courses completed. The Prospectus *does* assume that you have done enough reflection, interpretation, and research that you are well on the way to paving a clear road toward being ready to carry out the project in your ministry context.

How long should it be?

Your Project Report is expected to be about 70 pages in length, double-spaced, not including appendices and bibliography. Your Prospectus should be 15-20 pages, double-spaced, not including your working bibliography. That will require you to write concisely with a clear, sharp focus on what you want to say that will help you and your reader see and understand clearly what you are planning to do. The most important part of the Prospectus is represented by the first four bullet points on page 3 above. Key to your success is a clear and sharp description of the ministry situation or topic you are addressing, why it is important to you and your context, and what your reading of it theologically is at this stage. Important also is a clear and sharp description of the project you believe will respond appropriately to the situation being interpreted. These should be the heart of your Prospectus and will require the most written space. That is not to denigrate the importance of the other bullet pointed items. They deserve careful attention, too. Yet these are areas that depend heavily on how you conceive both the issue and your response to the issue your project will address and will likely develop as you continue working toward imagining and designing your project.

When should the prospectus be written?

Currently, for those of you in the Advanced Practice track, including those concentrating in Black Church Studies, Seminar IV is devoted to working on a

draft of your Prospectus during the two weeks you are in residence at the Seminary in June of your second year in the program. By the end of that seminar or shortly thereafter, your Prospectus should be ready for submission to the program Director and to your faculty project adviser for review and approval. (More about this below.) Once approved by the Program Director and your faculty adviser, advanced elective courses may be completed and the project begun.

Most of the work getting to that point you may expect to do independently. Relatively little time will be devoted to working on your Prospectus during the first three seminars. That is due in part because Seminar II on Bible and Seminar III on theology need their full seminar sessions to help you develop advanced knowledge and skills that will benefit your biblical and theological interpretation of your ministry situation.

Nevertheless, you should begin to think carefully about the ministry situation you will address at the end of Seminar I, though you may not be clear at that point what kind of project would seem a good response to it. By the time Seminar II begins, the ministry situation may be better defined in your mind and you may have a tentative project beginning to take shape in response. During the time you are on campus for that seminar, the Director will schedule a time for each of you to explore your thoughts about your topic and your project design. A similar conference will be scheduled with you during Seminar III so you will be able to explore further developments of your issue interpretation and project response. At the end of Seminar III, you will be asked to submit to the Director a single page précis of your topic and project, in anticipation of further

development and work during Seminar IV. Your précis will also enable us to choose an appropriate Project Director and faculty adviser for you.

How do I know my Prospectus is approved?

The simple answer is this: the program Director approves all Prospectus submissions. Typically, this may involved one or more drafts before a final draft is approved. If you are in the Pastoral Care and Counseling track, Dr. Loren Townsend, who directs that portion of the program, must approve your Prospectus, as well. If you are concentrating in Black Church Studies, the Director of the Black Church Studies Program, Dr. Lewis Brogdon, must approve your Prospectus. In addition to the Program Director, your Prospectus also needs approval from your Project Director/faculty adviser. Once approved, a copy of your Prospectus is kept on file in the Doctor of Ministry office. The Director and your faculty adviser notify you once your Prospectus is approved.

Remember, this is a *Prospectus*. Once approved, significant changes to the choice of ministry situation or topic or to the general design of the Project cannot be made without the approval of your Project Director/faculty adviser, in consultation with the Director of the program. As you work with your adviser, it is to be expected that some elements and activities anticipated in the Prospectus may change as your work on interpreting the topic or situation advances. That is perfectly acceptable. It is also possible that your ministry or place of ministry may change during the time you are in the program. While such upheaval is nearly always distressing in the first instance, experience suggests it is rarely fatal, if you work carefully and openly with your Project Director and the program Director. Our goal is to help you achieve your academic and

professional goals, and we will work as flexibly as possible to accomplish that with you.

While this brief document may not answer all your questions, it should provide you with a clear understanding of the Prospectus writing task and provide you with the information needed to begin and complete your work, perhaps with a somewhat lessened level of anxiety.

David C. Hester, Director, Doctor of Ministry and Continuing Education
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Appendix A

Doctor of Ministry Degree Standards

The Association of Theological Schools in North America

Louisville Seminary's Doctor of Ministry degree is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the Association of Theological Schools in North America (ATS). As such, we are guided by the standards of those two accrediting bodies and, in the case of the D.Min. Degree, especially the standards of ATS. The excerpt relevant to understanding the D.Min. project is copied below from those standards:

E.2.4 The program shall include the design and completion of a written doctoral- level project that addresses both the nature and the practice of ministry. This final summative project should be of sufficient quality that it contributes to the practice of ministry as judged by professional standards and has the potential for application in other contexts of ministry or presentation in professional forums.

E.2.4.1 The project should demonstrate the candidate's ability to identify a specific theological topic in ministry, organize an effective research model, use appropriate resources, and evaluate the results. It should also reflect the candidate's depth of theological insight in relation to ministry.

E.2.4.2 Upon completion of the doctoral project, there shall be an oral presentation and evaluation. The completed written project, with any supplemental material, should be accessioned in the institution's library.

Appendix B

Program Goals and Student Learning Goals (SLO) for the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Louisville Seminary intends that students in this program:

(1) demonstrate an advanced understanding and integration of ministry in relationship to several theological disciplines and a focused area of study or track (Advanced Practice of Ministry, Interim Ministry, Pastoral Care and Counseling, Black Church Studies)

(2) demonstrate an ability to articulate their comprehensive understanding of ministry, grounded in theory and practice in appreciative and critical correlation

SLO1: Students will demonstrate an advanced (comprehensive, appreciative, and critical) understanding and integration of ministry in relationship to several theological disciplines, including practical theology (Goals 1 and 2).

(3) develop and acquire skills and competencies in advanced theological reflection on the practice of ministry and in methods of research in practical theology that are required for pastoral leadership at its most mature and effective levels

(4) contribute to the understanding and practice of ministry through the completion of the Doctor of Ministry project, conducted in a particular context, and the writing of a formal project report

SLO2: Students will demonstrate skills and competencies in methods of research in practical theology by successfully completing the D.Min. project and presenting an acceptable written report of the project (Goals 3 and 4).

(5) identify areas of personal growth in spiritual awareness and theological and ethical sensitivity, informed by their vocational commitments as people of faith and church leaders to a life in the Spirit, nurtured by participation with others in Christian practices and the work and life of ministry

SLO3: Students will be able to identify areas of personal and vocational growth in spiritual awareness by the development of a personal-professional plan for self-care, spiritual nurture, and lifelong learning (Goal 5).