

Diploma and Degree Programs

Our Theological commitments:

In our diversity and with humility we affirm that...

- God loves the world.
- God’s love is realized among us in mercy, compassion, and justice.
- We realize our humanity through participating with God in labouring for a just and sustainable world.

Our Educational Objective:

- To learn to love, intelligently and faithfully, the world God loves.

Our Curricular Goals:

As interpreter in the context of diverse faith communities, in a religiously and culturally plural world, we seek...

- To provide a context for life long learning at the intersection of the religious and the secular.
- To deepen our capacity to engage God’s intentions for the world, through critical engagement with contemporary culture and the texts and traditions of the Christian faith.
- To prepare persons for learned leadership, in and for the church and world of the 21st century.

Features of the Curriculum

- An initial group of Core Courses that provide an opportunity to explore roots of Christian tradition and to reflect on Christian identity and vocation in contemporary contexts
- An opportunity to continue studies in theology, building upon the Core Courses to achieve completion in a diploma or degree program
- An opportunity to study theology in an interdisciplinary context
- Small class size and high quality faculty who are committed to caring for the individual learning needs of students
- Flexibility in program design allowing students optimum adult education opportunities

Expanded Opportunities for Learning at VST

At VST, we strive to be responsive to the diverse needs of full, part-time and distance learners. Expanded opportunities for completing course requirements through a variety of different for M.A.T.S. makes academic planning more flexible to suit each student’s unique situation better. In addition to the regular 12-week Fall and Spring terms, VST offers intensives in a two-week January Interterm and summer intensives in July, as well as over a series of weekends throughout each term.

Structure of the Academic Year

Summer Term	Fall Term	Jan. Interterm	Spring Term
May – Aug.	Sept. – Dec.		
Courses in Intensive and weekend format only	12-week courses	Intensives during first 2 weeks of January	January – April
VST Summer School	Week-end workshops and courses		12-week courses
Native Ministries Consortium Summer School			Week-end workshops and courses



Educational Values

Five educational values guide VST's curriculum:

Interpretation

Christian tradition is a story told through texts of ancient communities and the living witness of believers throughout many generations. These texts include Scripture and the creeds and teaching of tradition as well as contemporary debate and the life stories of student and teacher alike. Interpretation is an ongoing dialogue between these generations and the contexts in which their faith in God found expression. In each area of the curriculum, students learn to interpret the resources of Christian tradition as they explore the questions and challenges that arise in the church and world today.

Spiritual Formation

Students who engage in this interpretive conversation find their own beliefs and commitments challenged and affirmed. The curriculum provides an opportunity for students to explore their spirituality and interpret the spiritual traditions of the faith.

Communication

The ability to articulate what we believe and who we are called to be as an expression of our trust in God is an essential part of Christian leadership. The curriculum asks students to develop their own expression of their faith and their interpretation of Christian tradition in order to communicate clearly as leaders in the church and in society. Through papers and projects, in discussions and class presentations, in teaching, preaching, leading worship and care-giving, students engage a wide range of opportunities to express their understanding and commitment.

Participation

Christian discipleship is nourished in faith communities and in turn enriches the life of those communities. Models for ministry and mission are tested at bedsides, in prisons, on the streets or in unexpected conversations every day. Students bring experience from their participation in the life of local churches and from other settings in which they have lived and worked. Critical reflection in context is a significant dimension of interdisciplinary learning at VST.

Integration

Each of the values mentioned informs the others, challenging students and teachers alike to integrate the insight and the understanding that emerge in different areas of the curriculum. Students wrestle with their personal convictions in dialogue with the views of those from other traditions in order to clarify and deepen the ways in which they integrate their learning.

Areas of Study

VST's academic program includes a number of areas of study: Biblical Studies, Historical Studies, Theological Studies and studies in the practice of Public and Pastoral Leadership.

Biblical Studies

The study of the Bible is always contextual. We are predisposed by our social and political climate, as well as by tradition and experience, to interpret the Bible in certain ways. The task of becoming a critical and disciplined interpreter of scripture entails becoming aware of the ways in which what we bring to the study of Scripture from our cultural background affects us as we try to make sense of what we read in the Bible. However we conceive of the authority of the Bible, we do so knowing that for good or ill we bring to our reading of the Bible interpretive principles that reflect our own contemporary concerns, interests and world-views.

A critical and disciplined interpretation of the Bible is in essence a negotiation among: the text in its contexts and original settings, the interpreter in his or her contemporary context, and the interpretations of others in other times and locations. Amongst the many ways to negotiate meaning with biblical texts are the tools of exegesis. Exegesis is a critical task that seeks to be as self-conscious as possible as to what one brings to the reading of a text and seeks to allow the text as far as possible to be itself on its own terms. Exegesis invites a reading of the Bible that is sensitive to its diversity – literary, theological, political, ideological. To do this, we use the critical tools that biblical scholarship has bequeathed to us for a better understanding of the text, such as historical and sociological study and other methods like textual, redaction, canonical and form criticism, post-structuralist, post-colonial, deconstructive, etc. approaches.

The study of the Bible at VST requires that all students acquire certain knowledge and skills in order to appropriate the meaning of biblical materials in

contemporary proclamation or application. To that end, VST offers courses that build competencies in critical and disciplined interpretation, including introductory courses and courses in exegetical skills and in particular biblical books and themes. Details of these courses and the competencies associated with them are outlined in individual course syllabi.

Major Exegetical Paper - Master of Divinity and Master of Divinity (Honours) with concentration in Biblical Studies, and M.A.T.S. students with a concentration in Biblical Studies are required to complete a major exegesis paper as a part of their program. In addition to the Core Courses in each testament (HB500 and 600, NT500 and 501), the exegesis requirement is normally met by: 1) taking BIBL500 Biblical Language Tools for Exegesis (3 credit hours) or a basic Hebrew or Greek course (6 credit hours), 2) taking a Hebrew Bible or New Testament upper level exegesis course that uses the respective language and 3) producing a major exegetical paper that meets the criteria of the Biblical Division. Note: Students must also complete one additional upper level biblical course in the testament not chosen for the exegetical paper.

Students who elect to do their Major Exegesis Paper in New Testament will write it in NT600 (John). Students who elect to do their Major Exegesis Paper in Hebrew Bible will write it within an upper level Hebrew Bible exegesis course (the courses will be clearly designated each year). The purpose of the major exegetical paper is

for students, reflecting on their own social location as readers and interpreters of the Bible, to demonstrate exegetical ability by considering a selected passage with particular attention to its social and historical background, its literary structure and narrative context, its textual and grammatical properties, its history of interpretation, its theology and ideology and its meaning in our contemporary context. Full details of the paper requirement will be given in class.

Historical Studies

A VST education exposes the learner to a solid grounding in the discipline of historical study. Set against the backdrop of an appreciation for the diversity inherent in historiography, students grapple with key themes in the Christian story. Through the reading of text and context, the learner is invited to engage both the story lived then and the story lived now. The acquisition of critical skills in historical interpretation and analysis accompany this journey as partner and intended outcome.

Theological Studies

Theology takes contemporary culture and the implications of the postmodern spirit as the locus from which we begin our studies. In theological studies, particular attention is paid to the need to think Christianity at the interstices of multiple cultural philosophies, critical interventions, especially of Christianity's colonial past, and diverse



contexts. Working with the wisdom contributions of historical theologies, engaged biblical reflection and critical theories with which to analyze present cultural experience, theological reflection serves as the basis for not only spiritual, communal and liturgical practices, but also as the basis of all public and pastoral leadership functions.

Among the theological disciplines, the study of Christian ethics seeks to further the student's understanding of the major elements of moral life and to explore ways to use the Bible and Christian tradition faithfully in making moral decisions. Given that religious pluralism is for us a local as well as a global reality, an understanding of religious diversity, world religions and different articulations of secularisms is encouraged. The goal of this integrative understanding and critical reflection is to become more able and charitable interpreters of Christianity's path of love within the contemporary world.

Public and Pastoral Leadership (PPL)

The learning opportunities in this area of the curriculum are designed to cultivate capacity for leadership in both



pastoral and public contexts. Developing competence in the practice of public and pastoral leadership depends on an understanding of the Bible, theology and the history of the church, and on an ability to interpret the resources of these disciplines appropriately in different situations. Reflection and integration of theological, cultural and experiential learning takes place both in the classroom and in supervised field sites where students develop expertise in the practice of ministerial and public leadership.

Public and Pastoral Leadership competencies are specific to the following disciplines:

Denominational Studies

PPL studies provide a context for students, particularly but not exclusively in the Master of Divinity degree program, to develop critical knowledge of a denomination's history and culture, practices of worship and faith formation, understanding of mission and governance, and a capacity to articulate and implement that knowledge in contextually appropriate ways.

Educational Ministries

In offering courses that examine the theories and practices of approaches to Christian Education and faith formation in the contemporary global and multi-cultural context, the PPL program ensures that students are able to use a variety of teaching methodologies in both small and large group settings as well as identifying appropriate resources.

Homiletics

The study of Homiletics seeks to develop in the student an understanding of the role and purpose of preaching in ministry, particularly as it relates to the authority of Scripture and the role of the preacher in the student's own tradition. Various issues in communication are explored and models examined to enable the student both to prepare sermons that will engage responsibly the biblical text, the congregation and the social and pastoral contexts, and to analyze and evaluate preaching, his or her own and that of others.

Liturgical Studies

Foundational courses in Liturgical Studies build the student's familiarity with the historical and theological development of the western liturgical tradition and its more significant denominational expressions. With this foundation in place, advanced Liturgical Studies courses

help the student to formulate a personal theology of liturgical and sacramental praxis and to participate actively in sacramental preparation, liturgical planning, worship leadership and worship music, in the student's own denomination and ecumenically.

Pastoral Theology and Integrative Theological Field Education

Courses in this field of study use praxis (action-reflection) models and approaches to read the living texts of a diverse and intercultural church and society. First year courses combine classroom and on-site learning experiences to offer students the theory and tools required to read the living texts of self and others, congregations and communities. Second and third year courses offer students opportunities in both supervised field placement sites and the classroom, to acquire and engage leadership skills as they explore and reflect on the social, cultural and theological realities of leadership in public and pastoral contexts.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation courses aim to aid the student in understanding the nature of spirituality by creating a familiarity with a variety of resources from Christian and other traditions for the nurture and development of spiritual life. Attention is also given to the small group experience as a resource for the nurture of spirituality.

Ministry Position Paper

All M.Div students are required to write a Ministry Position Paper, normally in the Fall term of their final year of studies. The completed paper will be approximately 5,000 to 6,000 words, and will be discussed with an interviewing team of 3 people. The Ministry Position Paper is designed to evaluate the following competencies:

- the ability to articulate your own theological position for ministry in the framework of the principal issues involved in missiology, ecclesiology and theology of ministry;
- the ability to connect the missiology, ecclesiology and the understanding of the authority of Scripture characteristic of your tradition with your theology of ministry; and
- the ability to reflect on these doctrines as they bear on the contemporary practice of ministry.

- The following questions summarize the criteria the School expects the evaluators to use in determining whether the Position Paper and the presentation have been successfully completed:
- Does the theology of mission and ministry expressed in the paper and the presentation stand within and reflect faithfully the tradition of interpreting and serving the gospel within which the student stands?
- Does the theology of mission and ministry expressed in the paper and the presentation reflect a perceptive analysis of the strengths and challenges facing the church in the context the student is expected to serve?
- Does the theology of mission and ministry expressed in the paper and the presentation reflect clearly and accurately the student's discernment of her/his own gifts and abilities and her/his own needs?
- Does the theology of mission and ministry expressed in the paper and the presentation reflect an adequate position for the student to begin ministry in her/his own ecclesial tradition?

Educational Objectives

Any curriculum has two sources for setting objectives. One of these is institutional, the other pedagogical. The institutional objectives are set by the degree-granting body and are subject to certain strictures. In VST's case, there are standards and guidelines set not only by our own perceptions of what constitutes exceptional theological education, but also by expectations of our supporting denominations as well as those of The Association of Theological Schools, the School's accrediting body.

Competence within Courses

VST provides a credit hour course-based framework within which intellectual and practical competence is pursued.

In each course, VST sets standards for the competencies students are expected to achieve. These are outlined in the course syllabi.

Evaluation

VST places a high priority on meaningful evaluation of student work, and the School's pedagogical philosophy is reflected in its evaluation mechanisms. Students are



given extensive feedback on their work within courses as well as a designation signifying the level of quality they have achieved. Evaluation takes place all term in the context of courses. There are also major evaluation periods in December and April of each academic year.

Progress in Learning

People learn in different ways and at different rates. Faculty at VST aim to teach using a variety of methods in recognition of this fact. As well, a student may study part time and may work with the School to adapt courses and programs to his or her own interests within the limits of the program's requirements. The curriculum seeks to foster self-discipline and initiative in students. It is a student's responsibility to see that his or her program conforms to academic and denominational requirements.

Academic Regulations and Policies

For a full statement of VST academic regulations and policies see the Supplementary Calendar.

Course Evaluations

Competency in a course is evaluated through:

- Attendance (at least 80% attendance is required)
- Class participation and small-group work
- Papers
- Oral and written examinations
- Class presentations

VST has a historical commitment to narrative evaluation as the primary means of communicating meaningful evaluation. All narrative evaluations will be given both to the student, and kept in the student's evaluation dossier – maintained by the office of Academic Records.

Grading Policy at VST

Beginning in Summer 2010, course evaluations at VST will combine a letter grade system with a competence model of assessment.

Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) or NAPP (Not Approved) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. No number or letter grades or weights of assignments are calculated for assignments. One re-write is allowed on any assignment which is INC or NAPP within a course. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write. The policy on appeals of a NAPP on a course assignment remains as stated in the Supplementary Calendar.

The final grade for a course is reported both as a letter grade and as a narrative evaluation on the basis of a student's overall fulfillment of the competencies and expectations of the course, which are stated in the course syllabus. No number grades are assigned. On a student's transcript, no points are assigned to letter grades and no grade point average is calculated. Both the final letter grade and narrative evaluation will be given to the student by the professor, as well as reported to the Registrar, and kept in the student's permanent academic record.

Final grade designations are: A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-; NAPP and APP [as specified for particular program elements (see below)]. Competency for VST graduate courses is defined as B- or better.

No re-writes are allowed to improve a letter grade given as a final grade for a course.

For a course for which the student has not fulfilled the competencies and expectations of the course a grade of NAPP will be assigned. Students who receive NAPP in a course will be required to re-take the course if it is a required course, or substitute another elective course if it is an elective. Students have the right to appeal a final grade received in a course if there are discrepancies between the evaluations on assignments and the final grade.

Attendance policy remains as stated in the Supplementary Calendar.

The following will receive only APP or NAPP final grades, with a narrative evaluation: Theological Field Education units, Clinical Pastoral Education units, internships, the Native Ministries Program (although an individual student can request a letter grade), and particular courses by agreement of Faculty Council.

Community Life and Mentor Groups

VST tends the work of community and spiritual formation in many ways. It is the case that theological education is a deeply personal undertaking. However, it is also the case that we make our sojourn in the company of others. Faith and maturity contribute to competence in ministry as well as knowledge and skills. Praying together, eating together, and playing together are an integral part of the School. In close cooperation with the denomination from which a student comes, the community at VST seeks to be a centre for creative growth in the love and service of God.

As one of the ways to tend community life and spiritual formation, all students are invited to participate in a faculty-student mentor group. These groups meet once every-other-week, and each group will formulate the structure and focus of its particular life.

Cross-registration at Regent College, St. Mark's College and UBC

Many of the courses offered at Regent or St. Mark's College can be taken for VST credit. VST students register and pay for the courses at VST rates and must acquire a cross-registration form from the Registrar's office to be signed by the Registrar at Regent or St. Mark's. For course listings see their websites (www.regent-college.edu or www.stmarkscollege.ca). Certain courses in the Classical, Near Eastern and Religious Studies department at UBC may also be available for transfer in your VST program.

Official Language for Papers

Papers may be submitted for evaluation in either of Canada's two official languages, English and French.

Student Responsibilities

Responsibility for course selection to fulfill program and degree requirements rests with the student. The Registrar and all faculty members are available to give advice and guidance. It is the student's responsibility, however, to read and understand the academic policies and procedures as set out in this Calendar and in the Supplementary Calendar and in the course descriptions and syllabi. Additional information about regulations and deadlines will be posted outside the Registrar's office during the term.

Privacy

VST complies with all privacy laws. Personal information about students is handled confidentially and in the spirit of the provincial legislation. Please feel free to contact the Director of Human Resources for additional information or to present any concerns or questions.

Additional Policies and Procedures for Registered VST Students

The VST website and the Supplementary Calendar/ Student Handbook contain the most current versions of VST's policies and procedures. Please refer to the VST website or the Supplementary Calendar/ Student Handbook for more extensive information. Students are responsible for knowing and abiding by the policies and procedures in these documents.

