

## Full Statement on Educational Effectiveness

Virginia Theological Seminary is committed to assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in both our Masters and Doctoral degree programs. Through systematic assessment and evaluation, we equip students for transformative leadership, demonstrate student learning against defined outcomes, ensure program quality, and pursue ongoing enhancement of our educational offerings.

### Masters Degree Programs

At Virginia Theological Seminary, we use the following instruments to assess and evaluate student learning in our Masters programs:

- **ATS Questionnaires (ESQ and GSQ):** Entering and Graduating Student Questionnaires administered by the Registrar
- **Course Evaluations:** Electronic evaluation of all courses for student satisfaction and learning outcomes engagement
- **Portfolio Review:** Annual faculty committee reviews of sample portfolios to assess student learning outcomes attainment
- **Field Education Assessment:** Evaluation of ministerial capacity development in contextual placements
- **General Ordination Exam Results:** Performance data on Episcopal Church canonical examinations
- **Placement Rate Tracking:** Graduate employment in ministry positions

### Student Learning Outcomes

VTS Masters programs organize learning around five domains:

- **Religious Heritage:** Knowledge and use of Christian tradition
- **Understanding Cultural Contexts:** Theory-praxis integration and intercultural literacy
- **Ministerial and Public Leadership:** Articulation of faith, justice, congregational leadership, and interfaith dialogue
- **Personal and Spiritual Formation:** Faith enactment, rule of life, theology of ministry, self-knowledge, and community membership
- **Liturgical Formation and Leadership:** Theology of liturgy, liturgical leadership, and liturgical arts

### Placement Rates

VTS maintains consistently strong placement rates, with MDiv graduates averaging over 90% placement in ministry positions:

Program	2020	2021	2022	2023
MDiv	90%	93%	90%	93%
MA	78%	83%	80%	100%

## General Ordination Examination Performance

VTS students consistently perform at or above average on the General Ordination Exams, demonstrating strong competency across all six canonical areas. In recent years, VTS has had the largest cohort from any Episcopal seminary taking the GOE.

Subject Area	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Christian Worship	82%	91%	81%	81%	91%
Holy Scripture	88%	78%	89%	86%	78%
Church History	91%	91%	78%	83%	100%
Christian Theology	71%	87%	89%	94%	74%
Christian Ethics	100%	87%	83%	86%	87%
Practice of Ministry	88%	87%	89%	94%	96%

Notable: In 2024, 65% of VTS students achieved proficiency in all six areas, with VTS ranking third among Episcopal seminaries in overall proficiency rates.

## Student Experience and Satisfaction

Graduating students consistently rate VTS highly effective in developing essential skills for ministry. Data from the Graduating Student Questionnaire shows particularly strong performance in:

- **Biblical Interpretation:** Students rated ability to use and interpret Scripture at 4.6-4.7 out of 5.0 across recent years
- **Theological Thinking:** Ability to think theologically consistently rated 4.4-4.8 out of 5.0
- **Liturgical Leadership:** Ability to conduct worship/liturgy rated 4.4 out of 5.0
- **Global Awareness:** Awareness and appreciation of globalized ministry context rated 4.6 out of 5.0 (2024)

Students identified biblical studies, theology, preaching, and liturgics/worship as the most important areas of study to their intended work, with biblical studies consistently rated 4.7-4.9 out of 5.0 in importance.

## Field Education Effectiveness

Field Education consistently receives strong ratings for developing ministerial capacities. The highest-rated outcomes across 2020-2024 include:

Field Education Outcome	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Greater vocational clarity	4.4	4.8	-	4.5	-
More self-confidence	4.4	4.8	4.4	-	4.8
Better understanding of strengths/weaknesses	4.4	4.8	-	-	-

Greater self-understanding	-	-	-	4.5	-
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## Portfolio Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Annual portfolio reviews demonstrate student mastery of program learning outcomes. Faculty committees review representative sample portfolios from graduating students, assessing sixteen specific learning outcomes across five domains. Recent data shows particularly strong performance in:

### Master of Divinity Strengths (2024 Data)

- Self-Knowledge and Personal Growth: 4.33 out of 5.0
- Knowledge of Tradition: 4.33 out of 5.0
- Liturgical Leadership: 4.33 out of 5.0
- Use of Tradition: 4.00 out of 5.0
- Articulation of Faith: 4.00 out of 5.0
- Liturgical Arts: 4.00 out of 5.0

Over the five-year period 2020-2024, portfolio assessments show sustained strength in foundational areas. Knowledge of Tradition has ranged from 3.25 to 4.75, with recent years showing improvement. Liturgical Leadership has consistently scored 3.25 or higher, with 2024 reaching 4.33. Self-Knowledge and Personal Growth has remained strong throughout (3.50 to 4.33).

### Master of Arts Strengths (2024 Data)

- Use of Tradition: 5.00 out of 5.0
- Promotion of Justice: 5.00 out of 5.0
- Knowledge of Tradition: 4.50 out of 5.0
- Awareness of Cultural Contexts: 4.50 out of 5.0
- Intercultural Literacy: 4.50 out of 5.0
- Interdisciplinary Integration: 4.50 out of 5.0
- Theory and Praxis Integration: 4.50 out of 5.0

MA students demonstrate particular strength in connecting theological resources to justice concerns and integrating theory with practice. The 2024 cohort showed exceptional performance across all learning outcomes.

## Curriculum Coverage of Learning Outcomes

Systematic tracking of student learning outcomes across the curriculum demonstrates comprehensive coverage of program goals. In the 2023-2024 academic year, analysis of 61 courses showed:

- Strong emphasis on foundational knowledge with Knowledge of Tradition (SLO 1.1) addressed in 41 MDiv courses and Use of Tradition (SLO 1.2) in 44 courses
- Robust attention to cultural contexts with 30 courses addressing Theory-Praxis Integration and 34 addressing Cultural/Intercultural Literacy
- Consistent attention to ministerial leadership, with particular strength in Use of Tradition and Knowledge of Tradition

## Doctoral Programs

Virginia Theological Seminary offers Doctor of Ministry (DMin) and Doctor of Educational Ministry (DEdMin) degrees designed to strengthen Christian ministry and leadership through original research and innovative ministry projects. The programs assess student learning through:

- **Portfolio Review:** A comprehensive four-year assessment cycle including case studies, contextual studies, and project thesis proposals
- **Program Learning Objectives Assessment:** Systematic evaluation against six program-wide learning objectives
- **Post-Defense Survey:** Recently adopted to gather comprehensive feedback from graduates on their doctoral experience and program effectiveness

## Program Learning Objectives

VTS doctoral programs are organized around six learning objectives:

- **Theological Foundations:** Sharpen expertise in historical, biblical, and theological foundations of Christian discipleship
- **Transformational Vision:** Identify and articulate aims of Christian ministry for the common good
- **Contextual Interpretation:** Use theological and social scientific disciplines to shape communities of faith in diverse contexts
- **Personal Growth:** Develop enduring habits for effective leadership as a reflective practitioner
- **Analysis of Ministry Practice:** Develop advanced capacities for assessing ministry experience through interdisciplinary tools
- **Leadership Development:** Develop professional skills that foster leadership and committed discipleship in others

## Four-Year Assessment Cycle

The doctoral programs employ a comprehensive four-year assessment cycle that evaluates different aspects of student work each year. Year 3 focuses on full portfolio review, examining student engagement with program learning objectives through multiple artifacts including the First Case Study, student-selected Strongest Case Study, Contextual Study, and Project Thesis Proposal.

## 2024 Year 3 Portfolio Review Results

In Fall 2024, the Doctoral Committee conducted comprehensive portfolio reviews of five students representing both DMin and DEdMin programs, diverse demographics, and a range of academic performance levels. The review assessed student work against program learning objectives using a five-point scale.

## Overall Program Effectiveness

Faculty assessors expressed strong confidence that the doctoral programs are effectively forming Doctors of Ministry. When asked to rate their overall confidence based on portfolio review:

- 87% of assessors rated themselves as "Completely Confident" or "Mostly Confident"
- For 4 of 5 portfolios reviewed, all assessors felt "completely" or "mostly" confident

- No assessor selected "not very confident" or "not confident at all" for any portfolio

### Performance on Program Learning Objectives

Average scores for all six program learning objectives fell in the "Consistently" or "Mostly" range (2.8 to 3.3 on a 4-point scale), demonstrating solid student achievement across all objectives. Particularly strong areas included:

Learning Objective	Average Score	% Exceptionally/Consistently
Theological Foundations	2.8	67%
Transformational Vision (Reflexivity)	3.3	93%
Transformational Vision (Integration)	2.8	60%
Contextual Interpretation (Multiple Disciplines)	3.1	87%
Contextual Interpretation (Methods)	3.1	87%
Personal Growth	3.2	87%
Analysis of Ministry Practice	2.9	67%
Leadership Development	3.1	80%

### Qualitative Assessment Findings

Faculty assessors provided detailed commentary on student work, identifying several areas of strength:

**Critical Engagement with Biblical and Theological Resources.** Assessors noted that students demonstrated strong ability to engage biblical and theological lenses appropriate to their ministerial contexts. Representative comments included: "Students' ability to engage biblical and theological lenses appropriate to their subject and context" and specific examples of "particular strength" in exegetical elements.

**Reflexivity and Contextual Analysis.** Students showed exceptional capacity for reflection on ministry in context. One assessor noted a student "moves seamlessly between reflexivity (reflection on her self-in-context) and sophisticated application of literature and Biblical hermeneutics." This area received the highest scores, with 93% of assessments rating student work as "Exceptionally" or "Consistently" demonstrating reflexivity.

**Interdisciplinary Integration.** Faculty observed students' growing capacity to draw from multiple disciplines. Comments highlighted students who "eagerly draw from a wide range of disciplines and sources (congregational studies, social science/behavioral theory, and biblical studies)" and demonstrated "analytical abilities across disciplines within specific context."

**Leadership Development.** Students demonstrated commitment to practices that support healthy leadership. Assessors noted students' "self-reflection and willingness to be vulnerable," capacity for "reading organizational systems and developing spiritual practices," and ability to foster "leadership in self" that "leads others to committed discipleship."

**Contextual Research Methods.** The Contextual Study artifact consistently demonstrated students' ability to apply variety of methods for reading and interpreting ministry contexts, with 87% of assessments rating this as "Exceptionally" or "Consistently" achieved.

### **Artifact Effectiveness**

Analysis of which artifacts demonstrated specific learning objectives revealed that all four artifacts effectively showed student learning, with the Contextual Study and Project Thesis Proposal demonstrating the widest range of objectives. The First Case Study, completed early in the program, showed fewer learning objectives as expected given students' developmental stage. The student-selected Strongest Case Study showed well-balanced engagement across most objectives, demonstrating students' growth over time.

### **Performance Across Program Tracks**

The assessment found no significant differences in performance between the Ministry Development, Educational Leadership, and Christian Spirituality tracks, nor between DMin and DEdMin students. This consistency demonstrates that the program effectively supports student learning across all tracks and degree types.

### **Conclusion**

Virginia Theological Seminary's commitment to systematic assessment demonstrates that both Masters and Doctoral programs effectively prepare students for transformative ministry leadership. Through multiple assessment instruments and ongoing evaluation, VTS ensures program quality while pursuing continuous enhancement of student learning and ministerial formation.