

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Academic Year 2026 - 2027

The Doctor of Ministry

This degree is an advanced professional degree for religious professionals that deepens students' faith leadership in traditional and innovative ministry settings, including congregational ministry, community ministry, social justice and advocacy ministries, entrepreneurial ministries, chaplaincy, and teaching roles. Coursework and reflection on lived leadership experience provide grounding points for the development of doctoral research and a thesis attentive to lived questions of theology and praxis informed by interdisciplinary resources.

Doctor of Ministry students are also governed by policies and procedures in the Student Handbook.

Core Curriculum Requirements

The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) is a 30-credit hour advanced professional degree that can be completed in three (3) years. It is designed to support and renew the leadership and ministry of religious professionals. Small, tightly woven student cohorts are led by faculty mentors who engage as a community of learners. Students meet once per week for the duration of their program for the first two years. The one exception is the elective course in which students choose from a variety of courses offered through Meadville Lombard or the ACTS Consortium in Spring or Summer of their first year. Students take two classes per semester during their first and second years; classes meet synchronously on alternating weeks. The third year consists of writing and research, and students are enrolled in one class per term. Students are required to attend an annual intercohort retreat. Students must hold a Master of Divinity degree or equivalent and have three years of ministerial experience (ordained or lay) prior to application and matriculation.

Educational Goals

- Generate original research to identify challenges in the practice of ministry, develop a coherent and faithful response, and critically reflect on social justice faith leadership.
- Utilize a variety of theological methods and leadership praxes in engagement with diverse faith settings.
- Grow the practice of ministry through contextual analysis of diverse faith settings and community-engaged research and reflection.
- Develop the skills to support continued personal, vocational, and spiritual growth.

Degree Requirements

The program requires the successful completion of 30 credit hours of coursework and the completion of a DMin Proposal and Project. Students may transfer up to 6 doctoral credits from another institution. Such transfer credit is subject to approval in compliance with the transfer credit policy in the Student Handbook.

DMin Degree Requirements	
Course Title	Credits
Advanced Methods in Leadership & Ministry	3
Spirituality for Social Change	3
Political Theology & Social Ethics	3
Social Justice Leadership	3
Theories of Liberation	3
Research Methods & Ethics	3
Leadership & Ministry Research Colloquy	3
Supervised Thesis Research I	3
Supervised Thesis Research II	3
Elective	3
Total Credits	30

Adult Learning

Learning in the Doctor of Ministry program is built on the conviction that people deepen their wisdom when they engage their lived experience with careful reflection, honest dialogue, and meaningful action. Because DMin students arrive with rich and varied backgrounds in ministry, the learning environment honors the knowledge they already carry while inviting them to stretch into new ways of thinking and leading. This approach reflects a commitment to form leaders who can navigate complexity with integrity and work toward justice in their communities.

Adult learners bring their histories, ministries, and identities to the classroom, and this lived experience becomes a primary text for theological and practical inquiry. Students ground their learning in real contexts—congregations, chaplaincy settings, nonprofits, and community organizations—where the implications of theory are felt every day. Because adults learn best when material connects to their current questions and responsibilities, the program encourages students to name the issues that most directly affect their work. Doing so keeps learning relevant, contextual, and attentive to the relationships and systems that shape ministry.

A central aim of the program is to nurture leaders who can engage the world with moral imagination and a commitment to social justice. Adult learning, in this context, becomes a transformative practice. Students are invited to examine how power operates in their ministry settings, to reflect on their own social location, and to consider how their leadership can contribute to equity and flourishing. The learning process asks students not only to interpret their contexts but also to discern how to act within them in ways that promote dignity, healing, and communal well-being.

Reflective practice is essential for developing the capacity to respond wisely to the complex problems ministers face. Students identify real challenges in their ministries—pastoral, organizational, ethical, or justice-related—and engage them through structured reflection and critical analysis. Reflection becomes

a disciplined practice of pausing, noticing, questioning, and reframing. As students move between action and reflection, they learn to surface assumptions, consider alternative perspectives, and cultivate a more spacious and discerning approach to leadership. This habit forms the backbone of ministry that is both responsive and grounded.

The cohort model is a vital aspect of the DMin experience. Learning in community mirrors the collaborative nature of ministry itself and creates a place where students can offer one another support, challenge, and accountability. A cohort gathers diverse experiences and identities into a shared space, enriching dialogue and broadening each student's understanding of the contexts in which ministry unfolds. Over time, the cohort becomes a community of practice—one that fosters trust, invites honest conversation, and strengthens each student's capacity to lead in ways that are relational, inclusive, and justice-oriented.

Self-directed learning recognizes the agency and wisdom that adult students bring to their studies. Students shape their learning by identifying the questions that matter most to their ministries and by charting a path through the program that aligns with their goals and commitments. Faculty serve as guides and conversation partners, helping students discern resources and frameworks that deepen their inquiry. This approach cultivates the habits of curiosity, self-awareness, and sustained intellectual engagement that leaders need in order to respond faithfully to the changing demands of ministry and social life.

Ultimately, learning in the DMin program is an integrative practice. Students weave together academic study, personal reflection, ministerial experience, and ethical commitment as they navigate their formation as leaders. The program creates space for students to bring the fullness of their experience into conversation with scholarship and with one another. In doing so, it prepares them to lead communities with compassion, courage, and a steadfast commitment to justice.

Program Leadership

The Doctor of Ministry Program is served by the DMin Director, the DMin Committee, and core and affiliate faculty who teach courses and serve as First and Second Readers on projects.

The Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program collaborates with the VPASA, DMin Committee, and core faculty to design details of the program, initiate and administer all aspects of the program, and serve as the primary academic advisor for all DMin students.

The DMin Committee provides oversight for the operation of the Doctor of Ministry degree. Members include the DMin Director, Registrar, and normally two core faculty members. The committee reviews program applications, designs the annual intercohort DMin retreat, reviews and approves project proposals, makes recommendations regarding program policies, monitors student academic progress, collects program assessment artifacts, and aids in program evaluation. The DMin Director convenes the committee during the academic year.

Decisions of the DMin Committee may be appealed to the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs (VPASA). The DMin Committee meets on 2nd Tuesdays during the Fall and Spring semesters. Students must petition the committee regarding curricular and co-curricular exceptions. Petitions must be received by the Director by 1st day of the month during the academic year for consideration.

As detailed in the section “DMin Project Proposal,” each student will identify a First Reader from approved faculty. First Readers assist students as they develop their research proposal and their project. Second Readers are identified in consultation with the First Reader. The First Reader works alongside the student, consulting with the DMin Director and the Second Reader, to facilitate the development of an achievable DMin project and to supervise the writing of the project.

Required Program Components Overview

DMin Retreat

Every year DMin students and faculty gather for an annual, required intercohort retreat. Students may attend the retreat in-person or online. During the retreat, students

- Describe and refine their “why” for the DMin in Social Justice Leadership.
- Develop greater sense of connection across the cohorts.
- Explore and experience curiosity, hospitality, and connection.
- Deepen an understanding of Meadville Lombard resources, including faculty, staff, and Library & Archives, as well as orient to and review program milestones.
- Engage location to support student spiritual, intellectual, & moral development and their community’s spiritual, intellectual, & moral development.

Retreat dates are published on the academic calendar. Students should plan on checking their MLTS email by August 1 for additional details regarding registration and schedule.

Coursework

Coursework in the Doctor of Ministry in Social Justice Leadership provides frameworks that enable students to lead transformative change. Through coursework, students gain the critical tools needed to understand complex systems of oppression and identify actionable pathways toward justice. Certain courses are only open to each cohort while other courses are offered across cohorts of DMin students. Coursework creates a shared foundation for rigorous and reflective ministry and scholarship. By integrating scholarship, lived experience, and ministry context, coursework prepares students to engage their projects and ministries with depth, clarity, and sustained moral imagination.

First Year Review

At the end of a student’s first year of studies, or after three completed courses, students are required to complete a first-year review. The self-evaluation and review includes the opportunity to develop a brief study overview in which the student (a) articulates a research question; (b) identifies a body of research to ground the question; (c) describes their community of praxis; and (d) identifies possible readers. Surveys should be completed at [DMin First Year Review](#).

Project Proposal & IRB Proposal

During the Summer after First Year Review, students are expected to turn their attention to their project proposal. Starting with their brief study overview, students should continue to hone their research question, identify what they wish to learn and community they wish to impact, and discern how they are going to undertake this work. During their second year, students draft their project proposal and ask faculty to serve as First Readers and Second Readers. During this time, students working with human subjects also draft an IRB proposal. Proposals are reviewed by the First Reader before submission to the

appropriate committee. Second Readers may also be consulted. Project proposals are reviewed by the DMin Committee at regularly scheduled meetings and may be submitted to the Chair on the following dates: January 1, February 1, March 1, and April 1. IRB proposals are reviewed by the IRB Committee and must be submitted to the Chair on the following dates: January 1, February 1, March 1, and April 1. Students should expect to hear about their proposal within three weeks after submission.

Research Project

After the DMin Committee and IRB Committee (if required) approves a proposal, students should begin their research and writing. Students are expected to produce a penultimate draft of their project by February 1 of their third year. First Readers and students should agree on how they would like to work together, with attention to meeting frequency as well as writing and review expectations. Students register for Thesis Writing I (Fall) and Thesis Writing II (Spring) in their third year as they write.

Course Sequence and Registration

	Fall	Spring
Year 1	• Methods in Leadership & Ministry* • Political Theology and Social Ethics OR Spirituality for Social Change	• Elective • Theories of Liberation OR Social Justice Leadership
Year 2	• Research Methods & Ethics** • Political Theology and Social Ethics OR Spirituality for Social Change	• Research Colloquy** • Theories of Liberation OR Social Justice Leadership
Year 3	• Supervised Thesis Research I	• Supervised Thesis Research II

*First year students only

**Second year students only

Students will register for their classes through Populi. Information regarding course registration and deadlines is sent by the Registrar before the start of every term. Please be sure to check your MLTS email regularly.

All courses, with the exception of the Elective, are offered on Tuesday evenings from 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm Central via Zoom. DMin MLTS courses meet synchronously on alternating Tuesdays. Updated course offering information is available at <https://meadville.edu/academics/course-offerings/>.

DMin Project Proposal

A project proposal is a critical step in conducting research as a minister-scholar. Proposals become a template for the larger project and provide clarity as students take up a question related to social justice leadership. In their first year, students begin to identify and hone an animating question of ministry. Summer after first year is a pivotal moment of integration and deepening thought. Over the second year, students produce a draft project proposal, a draft IRB proposal (if required), and ask core and select affiliate faculty to serve as First Reader. Second Readers are asked to serve after consultation with the First Reader. Students are expected to hone their project and IRB proposals throughout the Fall and early Winter so that they have an approved project before the end of Spring term.

The following information serves as a framework for students and faculty in order to meet the requirements of the project; to assist students in describing the importance and relevance of their project; to aid faculty as they offer appreciative, critical, and timely feedback and guidance; and to clearly delineate process, expectations, and responsibilities during the proposal process.

Types of Projects and Methodologies

Students are encouraged to consider carefully what type of project they have the capacity to support given context and timeline as well as faculty expertise, and define their method accordingly. Students might offer a theoretical analysis to address a root cause of injustice, hypothesize a theory of change, or implement an intervention and assess its effectiveness; prototype a ministry resource for congregational education and field test it; conduct a mini-ethnographic project, community, or congregational study; or conduct a correlational or historical study and draw out applications and implications related to doing justice as a faith leader. A good DMin project is focused, narrow, and specific to a student's ministry context.

Proposal Development

After First Year Review, students should set aside time to engage in sustaining faith practices, such as journaling, meditation, and prayer, and reflect on their animating question. What do you want to know or see in your ministry? Why this? Students might spend time gathering documents from the previous year, including application answers, assignments from completed coursework, and personal reflections.

Students are encouraged to start to draft a proposal before they feel ready, to narrow and hone the scope of their research, and to review samples of proposals and DMin projects available at <https://library.meadville.edu/thesis/home>.

Proposal Form & Guiding Elements

Students should utilize the Project Proposal Form to draft their project proposal. Questions on the form guide students through the following elements of a proposal:

- Project title
- Problem statement
- Research question
- Hypothesis
- Contextual analysis
- Relevant literature related to your question
- Methodology
- Social location as researcher
- Social justice leadership impact
- Chapter outline
- Timeline to completion
- Working bibliography

Please see appendices for the Project Proposal Form.

Writing Style and Formatting Guidelines

A writing style accessible to both experts in the field as well as non-specialists in theology, religious studies, and professional religious leadership and ministry is expected. Please avoid jargon and overly

technical language. It is expected that submitted proposals will be cogent, effective, and use standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Students should refer to <https://library.meadville.edu/thesis/home> for citation guidelines. Normally, students follow the most recent edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)* in format and reference

Please use 12 pt. Times New Roman in your proposal. Please use 10 pt. Times New Roman in headers and footers.

Submission and Review Process

When the student's first reader is satisfied with the proposal, the student should submit their project proposal to the DMin Director by email and copy their first reader. Projects are accepted January 1, February 1, March 1, and April 1. The first reader may send additional written comments to the DMin Committee in support of the project proposal. Proposals and any received comments will be circulated to the Committee prior to regular meetings (2nd Tuesdays of the month during the academic year). Project proposals are reviewed by the DMin Committee at committee meetings.

Project proposals will be assessed by the DMin committee using the following criteria:

- Does the project proposal articulate a clear statement of the issue in the practice of ministry that is at the center of the project and proposed research?
- Does the project suggest a coherent and responsive theology and praxis to study this issue?
- Does the project have the capacity to critically reflect on the field of faith leadership?
- Does the proposal use and cite significant scholarly and other resources that will support the execution of the project and its analysis?
- Does the proposal articulate a relevant method and hypothesize a leadership praxis that will support the project and faith setting?
- Does the proposal consider social, cultural, institutional, geographic, theological, and socio-economic dimensions of the problem?
- Does the proposal outline how the student will engage the setting in research and reflection?
- Does the project proposal demonstrate the student's capacity and disposition for growth for social justice leadership as a personal, vocational, and spiritual endeavor?

The Committee may accept the proposal, accept the proposal with required revisions, or reject the proposal. Students may submit up to two times. Failure to gain proposal acceptance by the second submission or by the end of Fall of a student's 3rd year will result in academic review. All decisions will be communicated to both the student and their faculty project advisor promptly by Populi email. Students should normally expect to receive a response from the DMin Committee within three weeks of submission.

Working Together: Expectations of First Reader, Second Reader, and Student

The First Reader serves as the primary project advisor, and as such has a dynamic and special role to play in the formation and education of DMin students. The First Reader offers subject matter expertise, insight, encouragement, and guidance as students finalize their project proposal, discern methods requiring IRB, conduct research, write their project, and present their findings. First Readers are drawn from core faculty and select affiliate faculty.

Second Readers are pivotal in the success of the DMin project. Second Readers serve in distinct capacities as reflective scholar-practitioners and as experts in a particular or related aspect of a student's project and focus. Second Readers review the final draft of a project proposal in consultation with the First Reader, provide direction and expertise as requested on germane topics within the project, and read a reasonably complete draft of the full project prior to the public presentation.

Students will identify possible First Readers by the end of their first year in consultation with the DMin Director and may choose to begin an initial conversation with the proposed First Reader prior to their second year. As students prepare their project proposal, it is expected that they will reach out directly to possible First Readers (as well as Second Readers after consultation with First Reader) to determine reader availability and interest as it relates to the scope and focus of the DMin project. DMin students are responsible for initiating contact with a potential First Reader, orienting the potential First Reader to research scope and timeline, and working with the First Reader to identify a suitable Second Reader. Students are also responsible for reaching out to a Second Reader.

It is imperative that the First Reader and student set expectations of each other early and speak with both kindness and candor regarding any challenges. Things to consider include when, how, and whether to receive preliminary chapter drafts; turn-around time on behalf of the First Readers; turn-around time between student revisions; and regular meeting dates and times.

In addition to the regular duties of advising and monitoring student progress through the program, the DMin Director communicates with students and first and second readers regarding proposal deadlines, project deadlines, and public presentation of projects to ensure timely progress toward graduation. Students in their third year should plan on communicating directly with their first reader once a month or with the frequency as decided between student and first reader. During their third year, students enroll in Thesis Writing I (Fall) and Thesis Writing II (Spring) and receive six (6) credits for research and writing.

Institutional Review Board

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee that reviews research involving human participants to ensure it aligns with ethical standards and federal regulations. The IRB protects the rights, welfare, and privacy of participants by evaluating the risks and benefits of proposed studies. For Doctor of Ministry students, the IRB is essential because it provides oversight, guidance, and approval needed to conduct responsible, ethically grounded research with human subjects. All DMin students will learn about IRBs, but only those students who choose to research human subjects for their DMin Project (as defined by federal regulation [45 C.F.R. 46](#)) will be required to apply for and obtain prior IRB approval for their research.

Students submitting an IRB proposal are required to complete training on work with human subjects in the humanities and social sciences. Students should consult <https://library.meadville.edu/irb> and email irb@meadville.edu for further clarification and access to the training.

Students should use the form in IRB Proposal Form available on <https://library.meadville.edu/irb>. Note that students submitting IRB proposals are required to provide detailed information regarding their research populations, consent forms for review, and worded invitations to participate. As such, an IRB proposal is a detailed account of one part of a student's larger research project. It is expected that First

Readers will review an IRB proposal to ensure continuity between the DMin project proposal and the IRB proposal.

To obtain IRB approval, the student must complete the following before beginning their research:

1. The student must notify their first reader and the DMin director of their intention to engage in human subjects research before the spring semester of their second year.
2. Such students will then receive information on how to complete the CITI Program's Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE) Comprehensive certification course. This is an online course that can take up to five hours to complete. Students must complete this course and submit their completion certificate to the IRB chair (irb@meadville.edu) before or with their IRB proposal.
3. The student must plan out in detail every aspect of their research project as it pertains to their human subjects.
4. The student must complete the IRB research proposal form (available at <https://library.meadville.edu/irb/>) and submit it, along with any other required documents noted in the proposal form (such as subject recruitment scripts, survey questions, interview scripts, etc.) to the IRB chair at irb@meadville.edu. As the IRB Chair may directly contact the student should the proposal be incomplete, students are encouraged to make their submissions as soon as possible but no later than April 1.
5. MLTS's IRB will review all proposals during scheduled committee meetings. Students will then be notified whether their proposals were:
 - a. Approved: the IRB found the research to be ethical and the student may begin their research at once, although the IRB might include revisions to the research project that the student must agree to follow.
 - b. Approval pending: the student will be sent detailed instructions of how to provide additional information to the IRB to demonstrate that the research is ethical. The student may not begin their research until they submit this information and get full approval from the IRB.
 - c. Rejected: the IRB found the research could not be revised to meet ethical standards. The student must not engage in this research.

If a DMin student believes that their human subjects research is exempt from IRB approval (as defined by federal regulation [45 C.F.R. 46](#)), that student must nonetheless submit an IRB exemption form ([available at the IRB website](#)) to the IRB Chair at irb@meadville.edu. Students seeking exemptions may not begin their research until they receive written approval from the IRB.

The IRB Committee conducts its business as-needed, but is heavily weighted to meet in the Spring to support 2nd year DMin students and students submitting the MDIV and MAR Student Project Review Form. The committee consists of five members. A list of current member is available at <https://library.meadville.edu/irb/overview>. The IRB Chair schedules meetings in close proximity to DMin proposal review dates in order to support timely progress of students through their studies.

It is recommended that students submit their IRB proposals on the same schedule as they submit their project proposals to ensure timely progress toward research and writing: January 1, February 1, March 1, and April 1.

For questions, forms, or further information about the IRB and ethical research of human subjects, please see <https://library.meadville.edu/irb/> or contact the IRB Chair at irb@meadville.edu.

DMin Project

Researching, writing, and presenting a DMin Project represents a major student milestone. Like ministry, research and writing is an iterative process. After their proposal(s) passes, students must begin to research and write before they feel ready. The project will undergo several iterations that ultimately results in a final project that a student presents to a larger public and finally submits for digital publication.

Required Course Registration

The writing and successful completion of a DMin project is supported programmatically through Supervised Thesis Research I and II. 3rd year students must register for Supervised Thesis Research I and II. The courses are offered Pass/Fail. Normally the DMin Director serves as Instructor of Record and periodically convene students in the writing phase to ensure project progress. Students should plan on writing regularly and working closely with their first reader as they draft their project.

Formatting Requirements and Citation Style

Students preparing their projects should consult the Thesis Writing Guide and especially the page regarding formatting: <https://library.meadville.edu/thesis/writingformat>. Students are required to follow the most recent edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* for citations. Generally, projects are 60 - 75 pages long, double-spaced, in 12 pt. Times New Roman. Inclusive footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, and appendices, projects ought not exceed 100 pages. Longer projects are possible, but not advised. Students should use the DMin Project Template available at <https://library.meadville.edu/thesis/writingformat>.

Toward a Preliminary Draft

Following the timeline from their project proposals and working with their First Reader, students are expected to produce a full preliminary draft by the conclusion of Supervised Thesis Research I (Fall). It is assumed that the student and First Reader are in regular conversation with each other, with First Readers reviewing chapter drafts and offering revisions and comments. Preliminary drafts ought to be typed, legible, properly footnoted, and follow standard academic writing conventions. They need not meet the required stylistic conventions of a final draft or a fully completed project.

A Final Draft

The complete final draft is due to the First Reader by February 1 to be eligible for Spring graduation. The complete final draft ought to have incorporated revisions and modifications from prior preliminary drafts. It should be formatted using the DMin Project Template and use the most recent edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. This draft should include the title page, table of contents, bibliography, and preliminary abstract. This is the first formal draft of a student's DMin Project.

An abstract is a statement summarizing the major argument or important points of a project in no more than 100 words. The abstract should include a succinct statement of the thesis, the method, and the

results of the project. It may also allude to impact or future trajectories of research. Students should write the abstract in third person active voice. The abstract must be approved by the First Reader.

Between February 1 and March 10, the First Reader and student will identify any needful corrections. The First Reader is expected to offer needed corrections by February 15. It is expected that both parties will work diligently so that a student's complete DMin Project can be circulated to the Second Reader by March 10, at the latest.

Public Presentation

A public presentation (sometimes called a "thesis defense" or "oral review") is an essential culminating exercise in the Doctor of Ministry degree. It provides students the opportunity to demonstrate the clarity, rigor, and theological grounding of their applied research before peers, faculty, and ministry leaders. This setting not only affirms the scholar-practitioner's expertise but also invites communal dialogue that strengthens the project's relevance for real-world ministry. Ultimately, the public nature of the presentation underscores the DMin program's commitment to accountable, justice-oriented leadership in faith communities.

The First Reader is responsible for determining a student's readiness for a public presentation and scheduling a public presentation by Zoom. The public presentation consists of the DMin student, First Reader, Second Reader, and invited community members. The First Reader should consult with the Second Reader and DMin student to ascertain a public presentation date and time, and notify the DMin Director of the date, time, and Zoom link. First readers will also invite interested MLTS community members (faculty, staff, and students) through email or weekly bulletin. Students may also share this information with their communities. All public oral reviews must conclude by April 10 for Spring graduation.

The oral review is open to the public and is typically scheduled for an hour. During the oral review, the student is invited to give a ten-minute opening statement that (a) describes their problem in ministry, (b) offers a brief explanation of how they responded, and (c) its impact on their leadership and ministry. Reviewers will conduct a review of the project and its impact on social justice leadership with the student. Fifteen minutes before the end of the hour, the oral review will formally conclude, and the Review Committee will adjourn to a different room to deliberate upon the project using the DMin Project Assessment Rubric. The student and guests will be asked to remain until the Review Committee returns to announce the results of the exam. This is an appropriate time for students to answer questions that community members have regarding the project.

Following the announcement, guests will be dismissed and the student will be invited to meet the Review Committee regarding any remaining changes or corrections to the manuscript or abstract. Following the successful completion of the oral exam, the First Reader will complete the Thesis Approval Sheet, obtain the required signatures, and return to the student for inclusion with the project. First readers will also complete the DMin Project Assessment Rubric and return to the Registrar and DMin Director.

From Final Manuscript to Electronic Publication

Students will make any required revisions noted by First and Second Readers following the public presentation. Once changes or corrections are complete, students will submit their project to Director of Library and Archives for format review. Projects must be submitted by email by April 15. Students are required to prepare the final manuscript according to the Thesis and Project Guide.

Following review by the Director of Library and Archives, students will receive their manuscript in PDF/A format. They will also receive log-in credentials for Melodic, Meadville Lombard's Digital Repository, and a form to complete regarding publication/embargo. Please see detailed instructions for submitting your project at <https://library.meadville.edu/thesis/defending>. Students are required to submit their manuscript to the digital repository by May 1 for Spring graduation.

Review of Deadlines

The final draft of the full manuscript is due to First Readers by February 1 at the latest. First Readers are expected to offer comments on the full draft by February 15. Projects should be circulated to Second Readers by March 10th at the latest. All public presentations must be concluded by April 10. Finalized projects must be submitted by April 15th to the Director of Library and Archives by email for format review. Graduating students must upload their complete project by May 1 to Melodic, the electronic theses and dissertation repository.

DMin Continuation Fee

Students who do not meet thesis deadlines (full draft due Feb 1, final draft to second reader by March 10, public presentation by April 10, project to Librarian by April 15, upload final approved thesis by May 1) will need to take one or more terms of DMin Continuation to complete the thesis.

DMin Continuation carries a fee of \$450 per Fall and Spring term. Students will be in Continuation status and will be charged the Continuation fee each Fall and Spring term until they have successfully presented and submitted their thesis. Students who will not be working on their thesis in a given semester may request a Leave of Absence using the Leave of Absence form (<https://www.meadville.edu/current-students/student-forms/>). The Leave of Absence carries a \$75 fee per Fall and Spring term.

Students in Continuation status who cannot register for a subsequent term due to an outstanding balance will be placed in Inactive status and will lose library access. Students who have been inactive for over one year will be considered by the faculty to have withdrawn from their academic program.

Policy Regarding Timely Completion of Program

Students have ten (10) year from matriculation to complete all program components as articulated in this handbook.

Program Milestones

Year 1 – Fall Semester

1. Inter and intracohort activities: In August, required intercohort retreat in Chicago and online.
2. Courses: Students complete two courses:
 - a. Advanced Methods in Leadership & Ministry and either
 - b. Spirituality for Social Change **or** Political Theology & Social Ethics
3. Project Planning: Think about your project

Year 1 – Spring Semester

1. Inter and intracohort activities: Optional Zoom
2. Courses: Students complete two courses:
 - a. Theories of Liberation **or** Social Justice Leadership
 - b. An elective in either the spring or summer. Please note this elective will be outside the typical Tuesday schedule of classes.
3. Project planning: At the end of a student's first year of studies, or after three completed courses, students complete first year review.
4. Dates: Optional first year review meeting between April 15 – May 1.

Year 1 – Summer Semester

1. Inter and intracohort activities: none
2. Courses: Complete an elective if not completed in the Spring.
3. Project planning: Mindful that your project proposal will be in draft form by the end of the upcoming semester, continue to ponder project ideas.
4. Dates: None

Year 2 – Fall Semester

1. Inter and intracohort activities: In August, required intercohort retreat in Chicago and online.
2. Courses: Students complete two courses:
 - a. Research Methods & Ethics
 - b. Spirituality for Social Change **or** Political Theology & Social Ethics
3. Project planning: Project planning begins in earnest in the Research Methods course. Typically, this is during Fall semester of Year 2. While the Research Methods and Ethics course includes additional material, it also incorporates some initial project planning steps. Specifically, by the end of the semester as part of completing coursework, students will:
 - a. Secure a first and second reader.
 - b. Complete a draft of their project proposal and, if submitting an IRB proposal, a draft of the IRB proposal. We need to define draft.
 - c. If pursuing qualitative research, complete the CITI Training.
4. Dates: none

Year 2 – Winter Break

1. Inter and intracohort activities: none
2. Courses: none
3. Project planning: As learners break for winter, they are tasked with continuing to revise their project proposal and IRB proposal (as required). After the proposal(s) has been approved by their first and second readers, learners submit proposal(s) to the DMin committee.

Year 2 – Spring Semester

1. Inter and intracohort activities: Optional Zoom
2. Courses:
 - a. Leadership & Ministry Research Colloquy
 - b. Theories of Liberation or Social Justice Leadership
3. Project planning: Students are working on their project proposals.
4. Dates: Proposals are accepted by the DMin Committee for review at their monthly meeting and should be emailed to the DMin Director by the following dates: January 1, February 1, March 1,

and April 1. IRB proposals are accepted on the same schedule and can be emailed to irb@meadville.edu.

Year 3 – Summer Break

1. Inter and intracohort activities: none
2. Courses: none
3. Project planning: Student should be writing and communicating with first reader.
4. Dates: none

Year 3 – Fall Semester

1. Inter and intracohort activities: August, required intercohort retreat in Chicago and online
2. Course: Supervised Thesis Research I.
3. Project: Student continues to work closely with first reader.
4. Dates: none

Year 3 – Spring Semester

1. Inter and intracohort activities: Optional Zoom
2. Course: Supervised Thesis Research II.
3. Project: Student continues to write toward completion of project, including revisions.
4. Dates (for May graduation):

February 1	Full draft due to first reader
February 15	Comments from first reader complete
March 10	Draft approved by first reader sent to second reader
April 10	Final date for public presentations
April 15	Projects due to John Dechant for format review
May 1	Students upload final project

Appendices

- DMIN PROJECT PROPOSAL FORM
- DMIN PROJECT PROPOSAL – ASSESSMENT RUBRIC
- CHAPTER GUIDE TO WRITING A DMIN PROJECT
- DMIN THESIS RESEARCH & ORAL EXAM – ASSESSMENT RUBRIC
- DMIN PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

DMIN PROJECT PROPOSAL FORM
MEADVILLE LOMBARD THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

Name:

Date:

First Reader:

Second Reader (include email if external to MLTS):

Instructions: This proposal template contains a series of interconnected questions. Use a writing style accessible to both experts in the field as well as non-specialists in theology, religious studies, and professional religious leadership and ministry is expected. Answer each question in a robust manner. Avoid jargon and overly technical language.

Format: Proposals should be no longer than ten (10) pages using 12 pt. standard font. Word counts provide limits. It is expected that submitted proposals will be cogent, effective, and use standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Students should follow the most recent edition of The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) in format and reference.

1. **TITLE** – Create a title that reflects the topic and scope of your project. Be as specific as possible. (25 words)
2. **MINISTRY CONTEXT** – Briefly describe your leadership/ministry context for the project. What is the specific area, responsibility, activity, or work that you seek to better understand? (500 words)
3. **PROBLEM STATEMENT** – Describe the problem in your leadership/ministry context. How does this problem impact your leadership and why do you care about it from a justice lens? What happens if there is no intervention? Use both your context and any secondary literature to explain the problem and its impact. (500 words)
4. **LITERATURE AND PRACTICE REVIEW** – What have others said about the problem that you are trying to understand? What interventions, solutions, or additional problems have they lifted? (500 words)
5. **RESEARCH STATEMENT**
 - a. **Research Question** – In one or two sentences, state clearly what you are seeing looking to discover or demonstrate. What do you hope to learn to address the problem you describe? You might start with, “I ask...” (250 words)
 - b. **Hypothesis** – What is your working hypothesis? A good working hypothesis is specific and answers the question you lift drawing from your contextualized problem in ministry. You might start with, “I argue that...” (250 words)

- c. **Method and Data** – How will you answer your question? Will you be doing archival research, using existing data sets, conducting research with human subjects through focus group or interview, or collecting assessment or evaluative data? Please cite and explain your theological method drawing from coursework. You might start with, “I will utilize the method of ...” (250 words)

6. ANTICIPATED FINDINGS AND SIGNIFICANCE

- a. **Expected Outcomes** – What results do you expect from your research? (Keeping in mind that actual results may not align with expectations.) (150 words)
 - b. **Applications and Broader Significance** – Why is this project important to other ministers/leaders? (150 words)
-

In addition to answering the above questions, please provide the following:

- **OUTLINE** – Provide a brief chapter outline of the project’s argument. Follow standard formatting for an outline and single space this section.
- **TIMELINE** – Provide a timeline to project completion, including submission of the final draft to your first reader. Complete drafts are due by February 1 of your third year.
- **WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY** – Make a list of your resources using Chicago style. Bibliography entries are single spaced.

DMin PROJECT PROPOSAL – ASSESSMENT RUBRIC
MEADVILLE LOMBARD THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

This form is completed by the DMin Committee as a body when it gathers to review a student’s DMin Project Proposal. Individual committee members ought to review proposals and refer to this rubric as they prepare for committee work. DMin Director is responsible for communicating committee responses and next steps to each student.

Name of Student:

Project Title:

Date:

Area of Assessment	Exceeds Proficiency	Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Basic Competence	Inadequate
Proposal articulates a clear statement of the issue in the practice of ministry.	Issue is compelling, sharply defined, deeply contextualized, and demonstrates nuanced awareness of the ministry setting and stakeholders.	Issue is clearly stated, appropriately scoped, and grounded in the ministry context.	Issue is understandable but may be too broad, too narrow, or insufficiently situated in context.	Issue is vague, underdeveloped, or missing key contextual elements.	Issue is unclear, unrelated to ministry practice, or not identifiable.
Proposal suggests a coherent and responsive theology and praxis to study the issue.	Articulates a well-integrated theological framework that is both contextually responsive and practically grounded, demonstrating advanced constructive thinking.	Provides a clear and coherent theological and practical response appropriate to the issue.	Offers a theological or practical response, but connections are uneven or lack depth.	Provides minimal theological reflection or praxis connection with limited coherence.	Omits theological grounding or presents an inaccurate or incoherent framework.
Proposal suggests the capacity to	Demonstrates sophisticated critical	Shows solid critical reflection on	Provides some reflective insight, but	Reflection is minimal or superficial.	Lacks critical reflection or

critically reflect on the field of faith leadership.	thinking, self-awareness, and integration of leadership theory with ministry experience.	leadership practices and challenges relevant to the issue.	analysis may be descriptive rather than critical.		misinterprets leadership dynamics.
Proposal uses and cites significant and relevant scholarly resources.	Sources are wide-ranging, highly relevant, and integrated with exceptional analytical skill and accurate citation.	Uses appropriate scholarly sources that support the argument and are correctly cited.	Uses some relevant sources but may have gaps, limited depth, or inconsistent citation.	Uses few scholarly resources, with weak relevance or faulty citation practices.	Lacks scholarly sources or misuses them.
Proposal identifies a method and hypothesis.	Method is well-justified, clearly aligned with the research question, and demonstrates advanced methodological reasoning; hypothesis is precise and testable.	Method and hypothesis are clear, appropriate, and adequately explained.	Method or hypothesis is present but underdeveloped, unclear, or insufficiently aligned with the issue.	Method and/or hypothesis is vague, incomplete, or poorly matched to the proposal.	No identifiable method or hypothesis.
Proposal considers social, cultural, institutional, geographic, theological, and/or socio-economic dimensions of the problem.	Demonstrates rich, multi-dimensional awareness of contextual factors and integrates them into the proposal with nuance and clarity.	Identifies and reflects on key contextual dimensions relevant to the issue.	Recognizes some contextual factors but does not fully explore their significance.	Minimal or superficial reference to contextual dynamics.	Ignores or misrepresents contextual dimensions.
Proposal outlines how the student will engage the setting in	Proposes detailed and well-conceived engagement	Outlines appropriate plans for engaging the ministry context	Engagement strategy is plausible but lacks detail or full	Provides only a minimal or unclear plan for engagement.	No engagement strategy is offered.

research and reflection.	strategies that demonstrate deep understanding of the ministry setting and ethical research practice.	in research and reflection.	alignment with the research goals.		
Proposal demonstrates capacity and disposition for growth in social justice leadership.	Demonstrates profound commitment, self-awareness, and readiness for transformative leadership oriented toward social justice.	Shows clear capacity and desire to grow in social justice leadership.	Indicates some awareness or interest but lacks depth or clarity about leadership growth.	Displays minimal awareness of social justice leadership or its demands.	Does not demonstrate capacity, disposition, or understanding of social justice leadership.

Proposal: ___ Passes
 ___ Passes with revisions (required revisions outlined below)
 ___ Does not pass (following second submission)

Comments:

CHAPTER GUIDE TO WRITING A DMIN PROJECT MEADVILLE LOMBARD THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

DMin Projects in Social Justice Leadership may be as short as 60 pages or as long as 100 pages. Typically, projects will be 75-80 pages plus appendices, bibliography, table of contents, and title page. It is helpful to think about the project in manageable sections of 15-18 double-spaced pages, each with their own topic, which build toward a larger argument, thesis, and project. Here are a few pointers to assist.

Chapter 1: Introduction / Problem Statement

What this chapter does:

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry problem your project seeks to address. It explains why the problem matters, where it emerges, and how it impacts your faith community or leadership context. You also outline the purpose of the project, your research questions, goals, and the scope of your work.

Writing tips:

- Start with a compelling narrative, data point, or pastoral scenario to ground the issue.
- Keep the problem statement focused—avoid letting it balloon into multiple problems.
- Clearly define key terms your reader will encounter later.
- Tell reader how you are going to solve your problem, e.g. the method.
- Locate yourself as minister-scholar and your commitments.
- End with a “map” of the remaining chapters so the reader knows what to expect.

Chapter 2: Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

What this chapter does:

This chapter surveys the scholarship, theology, and practical ministry literature that informs your understanding of the issue. It situates your project within existing conversations and shows that you’ve engaged the best thinking available. How have others understood or answered this problem or a related problem? How do you evaluate their work for your context—what do they see and what do they miss?

Writing tips:

- Organize the chapter thematically or source-by-source, depending on the problem.
- Use subheadings to help the reader follow your themes.
- Synthesize rather than summarize—explain how ideas relate, converge, or conflict.
- Maintain a strong connection to your project’s problem to prevent drifting into unrelated research.

Chapters 3-4: Your Research

What this chapter does:

Chapter 3 (and perhaps Chapter 4) describes your research and what you found that will help you to respond to the problem you lifted.

Writing tips:

- Write plainly and concretely.
- If you conducting research with human subjects, put ethical considerations up front: consent, confidentiality, and human dignity matter. Include enough detail so another ministry leader could replicate the project.
- Ensure your methods clearly connect to the research questions and ministry context from Chapter 1.

Chapters 4-5: Conclusions and Implications for Ministry

What this chapter does:

Chapter 4 (or perhaps Chapter 5) is a conclusion. It interprets the meaning of your findings. You reflect theologically and practically on what the project revealed, articulate lessons learned, and propose recommendations for ministry practice. You also address how the project contributes to social justice leadership in your context (e.g. congregational, denominational, community) and imagine future directions for the work.

Writing tips:

- Embrace reflective voice—connect insights to your growth and context.
- Use theology to illuminate practice, not overshadow it.
- Tie conclusions directly back to your research questions and original problem.
- Offer actionable, realistic recommendations tailored to your ministry setting

DMIN THESIS RESEARCH & ORAL EXAM – ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

First readers should complete this rubric after the oral examination and after any additional revisions requiring review by project readers. Please highlight the category and return rubric to Registrar and DMin Director by April 15.

Student:

Oral Examination Date:

First Reader:

Project Title:

Areas of Assessment (orally and/or written)	Exceeds Proficiency	Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Basic Competence	Inadequate
Learning Outcome 1: Students generate original research that identifies a challenge in the practice of ministry, develops a coherent and responsive theology of ministry, and critically reflects on the field of faith leadership.					
Articulates a clear statement of the issue in the practice of ministry that is at the center of the project and research.	Statement demonstrates clarity, creativity, and originality. Statement exhibits keen and beautiful insight.	Statement is clearly worded, concise and focused, presenting an important and timely issue.	Statement coherently presents issue in ministry.	Statement lacks coherence and/or focus or is undeveloped.	Statement is incomprehensible and bears no relevance to issue in ministry.
Develops a coherent and responsive theology of ministry to the study of this issue.	Response is clear, creative, and original. Response exhibits keen, beautiful, and persuasive rationale and account.	Response is clear, concise, and focused, and presents a compelling and persuasive rationale and account.	Response coherently presents a thoughtful and reasonable rationale and account.	Response lacks coherence and a convincing or complete rationale and account.	Response is incomprehensible, absent, or bears no relevance to issue.
Critically reflects on the field of faith leadership	Reflection offers generative and incisive critique and appreciation and makes a needed and actionable contribution to faith leadership.	Reflection offers critique amidst complexity and makes a new contribution to faith leadership.	Reflection offers cogent critique and identifies insights germane to faith leadership.	Reflections lacks coherence, focus, or complete rationale and makes little to no contribution.	Reflection is incomprehensible, absent, or bears no relevance to issue.
Uses and cites significant scholarly and other resources that support the execution of project and its analysis.	Comprehensive and deft use of an appropriate selection of resources for the project.	Skillful use of an appropriate selection of resources for the project.	Use of selection resources.	Use of resources is limited and/or inappropriate.	Fails to draw on appropriate resources.

Areas of Assessment (orally and/or written)	Exceeds Proficiency	Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Basic Competence	Inadequate
Learning Outcome 2: Students will utilize theological methods and leadership praxes appropriate to the project and faith setting.					
Articulates relevant theological methods and leadership praxes that support project and faith setting.	Methods and praxes form a functional ecosystem that supports and fundamentally transforms the project and faith setting.	Methods and praxes are relevant, reachable, clearly articulated and appropriately address the project and faith setting.	Methods and praxes are mostly coherent, relevant, reachable, and appropriately address the project and faith setting.	Methods and praxes lack coherence, and/or are not especially relevant/ reachable, or do not address the project and faith setting.	Lacks appropriate methods and praxes.
Provides a clear rationale for the choice of method and research tools.	Rationale is self-evident and style of writing is beautiful, convincing, and complete.	Rationale is clear, focused, compelling and persuasive.	Rationale is coherent, thoughtful, and reasonable.	Rationale is incoherent, unconvincing, or incomplete.	Rationale is incomprehensible, absent, or bears no relevance to issue.
Learning Outcome 3: Students will grow their practice of ministry through contextual analysis of diverse faith settings and community-engaged research and reflection.					
Understands the depth of ministry context that includes social, cultural, institutional, geographic, theological, and socio-economic dimensions.	Insightful, thorough, incisive, and attentive to the emergent through thick and thoughtful description of all areas.	Thick and thoughtful description of context, includes all relevant areas.	Thick description of context, includes most relevant areas.	Thin or incoherent description of context.	Student unable to describe context.
Articulates how to engage the faith setting in research and reflection.	Insightful, thorough, incisive, and beautifully captures what engagement can and does look like.	Complex, appreciative, and thoughtful reflection and research that articulates and analyzes faith setting.	Appreciative and critical reflection and research related to faith setting.	Thin or incoherent reflection and research related to faith setting.	Student unable to articulate faith setting.
Makes connection between the ministry context, the issue in ministry being examined, and the growth points for practice of ministry.	Original, creative, and innovative connection between context, issue, and growth. "Game-changing."	Clear and compelling connection between context, issue, and growth.	Coherent connection between context, issue, and growth.	Incoherent or irrelevant connection between context, issue, and growth.	Student unable to connect context, issue, and growth.

Areas of Assessment (orally and/or written)	Exceeds Proficiency	Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Basic Competence	Inadequate
Learning Outcome 4: Students will develop the skills to support their continued personal, vocational, and spiritual growth.					
Responds to comments and questions posed by the examiners.	Responds fully and creatively to comments/questions.	Responds fully to comments/questions.	Responds appropriately to comments/questions.	Responses lack coherence and/or depth or show only limited understanding.	Unable to respond appropriately to comments/questions.
Offers recommendations/next steps for further exploration of this issue in ministry.	Recommendations/next steps are innovative, imaginative, thoughtful, and relevant.	Recommendations/next steps are clear, actionable, thoughtful, and relevant.	Recommendations/next steps and thoughtful and appropriate.	Recommendations/next steps are inappropriate and/or lack thoughtfulness.	Unable to think beyond the project as is.
Analyzes how the project goals were achieved or not achieved with reasons for success or failure.	Incisive and self-aware assessment with a comprehensive understanding of the success and/or failure of each aspect of the project.	Skillful assessment with a clear understanding of the success and/or failure of each aspect of the project.	Coherent assessment and some understanding of the success/and or failure of most aspects of the project.	Assessment of the success and/or failure of the project is incoherent or shows limited understanding.	Student unable to assess success and/or failure of project.

Areas of assessment in *italics* will not be used at this time for evaluating student performance but are designed to evaluate whether the program is succeeding in developing those areas.

Result of the oral exam with thesis committee – select one.

Pass With Distinction	Pass	Pass with Stipulations	No Pass
Normally includes one or more “exceeds proficiency” and most or all other areas “proficient”	Normally “Proficient” or “Approaching Proficient” for all areas.	Examiners believe that with substantial revisions as specified, student can achieve “Proficient” or “Approaching Proficient” for all areas.	Normally student does not and/or is not likely to be able to achieve proficient or approaching proficient in all areas.

Comments and/or Stipulations (attach additional sheet if necessary):

Meadville Lombard Theological School
Doctor of Ministry in Social Justice Leadership

Following the completion of a successful oral exam, this Doctor of Ministry project is awarded a

_____ [Pass or Pass with Distinction] by the Project Committee appointed for

_____.

[NAME]

First Reader

[NAME]

Second Reader

Date Approved