

6. Academic Policies

Christendom College is committed to promoting academic freedom. It recognizes the right of students to the Truth, and to receive instruction in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church. The Graduate School recognizes and defends each faculty member's freedom and right to teach the Catholic Faith without fear of reprisal. Professors and students enjoy the freedom to explore and research and thereby develop their own insights into Catholic doctrine in accord with the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. Legitimate pluralism, consistent with fidelity to both the ordinary and extraordinary Magisterium, strengthens the bonds of unity, and honest dialogue is most welcome at the Graduate School.

Students are bound by the academic policies and degree requirements of the Graduate School Bulletin in effect at the time of their first registering as a matriculating student fully admitted to the program. A student who returns to the Graduate School after an absence of more than one semester will be bound by the requirements in force when he or she returns. Academic policies apply equally to classroom and online students, except where noted.

6.1. Admissions

Admission to the Christendom Graduate School is open to all properly qualified persons who desire to develop their knowledge of authentic Catholic teaching in explicit communion with the Holy See and with the principles of renewal in ecclesiastical studies given to the Church by the Second Vatican Council. A prior education in theology is not required, although students are expected to know the teachings of the Catholic Faith as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Students without prior formal theological education are required to complete the prerequisite course (THEO 590, Introduction to Theology) at the beginning of their studies. The application process is the same for on-campus and distance students. Christendom College does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, handicap, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admission policies, and other school-administered programs.

6.1.1. Application requirements

Applicants for admission to the Christendom Graduate School must present evidence of their ability to do graduate work in theology. A baccalaureate degree (B.A. or B.S) or the equivalent—in any field—is required before any graduate credit can be awarded. Thus, a baccalaureate degree is required in order for an applicant to begin pursuit of the Master of Arts and/or the Advanced Apostolic Catechetical Diploma. However, such a degree is not required for pursuit of the Basic Apostolic Catechetical Diploma or for the certificates, as these certifications can be completed without the conferral of graduate credit. As the Graduate School has rolling admissions, there is no application deadline. Applicants for the Master of Arts and/or Apostolic Catechetical Diploma should send the following materials to the Christendom Graduate School (Attn: Mary Castano) at 134 Christendom Drive, Front Royal, VA 22630:

- Completed application form (obtainable online at <https://graduate.christendom.edu/admissions/>).
- A statement of purpose (approx. 150 words) explaining the reasons for enrolling in the program.
- At least two (2) letters of recommendation, preferably one from a pastor or priest who knows the applicant, and another from a former professor or from a supervisor with whom the applicant has worked.
- Official transcripts of all post-secondary academic work.
- \$100.00 application fee (made payable to Christendom College).

6.1.2. Casual Students

Casual (non-degree-seeking) and certificate students have a simplified admission process consisting of an information form only. They must fill out and submit the application form but do not need to submit letters of

recommendation nor the application fee. However, they must submit evidence of a bachelor's degree (in the form of an official transcript) if they wish to receive graduate credit for their courses for transfer to another institution. A student may register for courses as a casual student while completing the application for admission to the MA program, and all credits earned as a casual student can apply towards the degree, upon admission. A student may be admitted on probation if the Admissions Committee is not satisfied of his or her ability to do graduate work in theology. The probationary period is two semesters, and the student must earn a GPA of 3.0 to be fully admitted. Audit students are welcome at Christendom on a space-available basis; they need not apply for admission, but may simply register for courses.

6.1.3. Transfer Credits

Students who wish to have their previous graduate work in theology or philosophy considered for transfer to Christendom must make this request of the Dean of the Graduate School and provide official transcripts of such graduate work. They may also be required to supply course syllabi or catalog course descriptions establishing that the courses correspond to Christendom courses and are of an academic quality sufficient for graduate work. No more than twenty graduate credits may be transferred. Credits earned more than ten years before matriculation at NDGS may not be accepted. Academic credit is not granted for life experience, for course work done on a non-credit basis, nor for independent study outside of a university or seminary.

6.1.4. Deferral and Reinstatement

Any student who is accepted to the Christendom Graduate School may choose to defer his or her enrollment for any reason. If the student enrolls in courses within three years of his initial acceptance, he or she does not need to reapply for admission. After three years, the student will need to reapply.

Degree-seeking students may pause the pursuit of their degree at any time. If a student takes a break of no more than two consecutive years, he or she may be automatically reinstated to active student status.

Students who have paused their course of study—for no more than five consecutive years—due to military service will be automatically entitled to reinstatement in their degree program without the need to reapply. A student who is leaving his or her course of study due to military service should submit a notice of departure in writing to the Dean of the Graduate School. He or she should also submit a written notice of intent to return to the Christendom Graduate School no later than three years after the completion of the period of military service. There may be some exceptions to these time frames under the Higher Education Opportunity Act.

Any degree-seeking student who pauses his or her course of study for more than two consecutive years must meet with the Academic Dean to determine whether extended absence from the program has been detrimental to his or her ability to complete the degree, and whether there are any courses that need to be repeated. Students returning from military service will be provided with one-on-one academic advising in order to determine what the next steps are for completing their degree. If a particular course of study is no longer available or suitable for the student, these circumstances will be addressed as well.

6.2. Taking Courses

6.2.1. Add/Drop/Change of Courses, Cancellations

During the first two weeks of the fall and spring semesters and the first week of the summer semester, students may register for, or add, a course for credit by completing the *Add/Drop/Change Form* and submitting it to the registrar. No for-credit student will be admitted to a classroom course after this period, although students may

register for online courses within the first half of the semester. If a student wishes to change his or her status from audit to credit after this period, he or she must obtain permission from the professor before submitting the form.

If a student withdraws from a course within this period, no record of the course will appear on the transcript. If a student withdraws from a course after this period, a grade of “W” will be given for the course. A student who wishes to withdraw from a course (or to change to “audit” status) must notify the registrar in writing, either by submitting the *Add/Drop/Change Form* or by emailing the registrar. Failure to notify the registrar in writing of one’s intention to withdraw may result in a recorded grade of F. When applicable, the appropriate refund will be issued (or credited to the student’s outstanding balance) according to the schedule indicated below under “financial policies.”

The Graduate School reserves the right to cancel a course at any time due to insufficient enrollment, as determined by the Dean of the Graduate School. If inclement weather necessitates the canceling of classes, the announcement is made on the Graduate School home page <https://graduate.christendom.edu> by 2 PM the day of class.

6.2.2. Class Attendance

Students are expected to attend all lectures for each course in which they are enrolled. For online students, this means attentively watching all course lecture videos in their entirety and participating in any other mandatory online sessions the professor may require (including, but not limited to live video conferencing, discussion threads, and online journal entries or essay posts). Penalties for absences or tardiness (including online non-participation) are assigned by the professor. Unauthorized absences in excess of 9 contact hours may result in the grade of F. Students are expected to be prompt and to dress and conduct themselves in a manner appropriate for pursuing higher studies in theology.

Students may use voice recorders or laptop computers in class only for the purpose of note-taking and study by students; publication beyond the class is forbidden.

Full-time students are those who are enrolled in at least three courses (nine credits) in a fall or spring semester and two courses (six credits) in a summer term.

6.2.3. Research and Writing

Research is a necessary and essential part of the learning process at the Christendom Graduate School. A research paper is normally required in every course, although professors may adapt this requirement to the particular needs of the course. The approximate length for a research paper is not more than twenty, nor less than twelve pages in length (typed with double spacing). Basic Diploma students are not required to write papers in any course, and they should notify the professor of their Basic Diploma status at the beginning of the semester. Normally papers follow the Turabian format outlined in Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, latest edition (University of Chicago Press), although professors may allow other formats. Students are expected to complete and submit all required research papers prior to the end of the semester unless they have been granted an extension.

6.2.4. Directed Studies Courses

Directed studies courses may be permitted by the Dean of the Graduate School for special research of interest to a student, provided the student has demonstrated his or her ability to do independent graduate-level research. A

directed studies course is not permitted merely for the convenience of the student or because the student has failed to register for the course when it was available. A student who wishes to apply for a directed studies course must first seek permission from the Dean, and subsequently may ask an individual professor to direct him in such a course. Students must also submit a Directed Studies Application Form to the Dean. This form is available in the Student Resources section of the Graduate School website. Students must pay an additional fee for an independent study course, and are advised that such a course normally requires at least 90 hours of work.

6.2.5. Course Extension

If for a grave reason a student is unable to complete the requirements for a course by the end of the semester, he or she may apply *in writing* to the professor for an extension, either by filling out the *Course Extension Request* form or by emailing the professor. If the professor approves the request, he or she will submit a temporary grade of “incomplete” and the student will have an extended period in which to submit the remaining work, as determined by the professor; however, the deadline may not extend beyond July 31 for the spring term, October 31 for the summer term, or March 31 for the fall term. Extensions/incompletes are granted at the discretion of the professor, and only for grave reasons such as illness, military service, unexpected job-related or family obligations or other serious incapacity. However, because of the intensity of the six-week summer residential courses, full-time summer students (registered for at least 6 hours) may automatically have the extension without having to establish a grave reason: they may have until October 31 to submit any research paper, project, or written assignment other than an exam.

For online courses, the extension permission is intended for research papers and essay final exams, not for regular weekly course work such as viewing videos, taking quizzes and submitting weekly assignments. Professors cannot be expected to continue monitoring the online classroom or to grade weekly assignments after the regular course period is over, and we cannot guarantee access to the online classroom after the end of the academic term.

6.2.6. Course Reactivation

If a student (after having been granted an extension) fails to submit the required work by the extension deadline, the only way he or she may complete the course (to avoid having to re-register for and re-take the course) is to fill out the *Course Reactivation Request* form and submit it to the Registrar along with the \$300 course reactivation fee. If the Dean of the Graduate School approves the request, the Registrar will then reactivate the course and notify the professor that he or she may accept the remaining required course work. A student may reactivate each incomplete course only once, and only within a year of the original due date (the end of the academic term in which the course was taken) by which time all course requirements must be submitted; otherwise, the student must re-take the course if he or she wants credit for it.

6.2.7. Grading

The range of grades, with the corresponding explanations and grade points, is as follows:

Grade	Meaning	G.P.A.
A	Excellent	4.00
A-	Very good	3.65

B+	Good, above average	3.35
B	Good, satisfactory	3.00
B-	Fair, below average	2.65
C+	Poor	2.35
C	Low pass	2.00
F	Failing	0.00
W	Withdrew	No credit
I	Incomplete	No credit

During pursuit of the Master of Arts degree, the Apostolic Catechetical Diploma, and all certificates, students are required to consistently maintain a B (3.0) average in order to remain in good standing. Students with more than two incomplete courses may be refused permission to register for an upcoming academic term.

Grade appeals. Academic grade appeals are not handled under the formal complaint and grievance policy detailed in §7.3 below. A student who wishes to appeal a grade should first appeal directly to his or her professor. If the matter is not resolved by direct appeal to the professor, the student may have recourse to the Dean of the Graduate School. Appeals to the Dean of the Graduate School should be made in writing. In the event that the Dean of the Graduate School is the professor of the course in which the disputed grade occurred, and the matter is not resolved by direct appeal to the Dean, the student should appeal to the Dean of Students.

6.2.8. Academic Counseling and Academic Probation

The Dean of the Graduate School normally interviews each student upon matriculation to discuss his or her plan of study, although this “interview” is often conducted via telephone or email with distance students. Each student is assigned an academic advisor from among the faculty, depending on his or her concentration. Students may seek academic advice or counseling at any time from the Dean, the student’s advisor, or any available faculty member. Online students have the same easy access to academic advisement, to the Graduate School administrative staff, and to their professors as on-campus students have: they may call or email the Graduate School faculty and staff at any time and expect a prompt response.

Any student whose GPA falls below 3.0 must seek academic counseling from the Dean. A student who receives a grade of F on any exam or in course is strongly encouraged to seek academic counseling from the professor, and perhaps also from his or her academic advisor and/or the Dean.

A student is on probation if his or her Grade Point Average (GPA) falls below 3.0. He or she is permitted to register for one more academic term in order to raise his or her GPA to or above 3.0. Failure to do so may result in the necessity of withdrawing completely from Christendom. Students are permitted to retake courses in order to improve their grades, and the second grade received will replace the previous grade. A student who is admitted to the Graduate School on probation has two probationary academic terms in which to maintain a GPA of 3.0 in order to be fully admitted to the MA program.

6.2.9. Student Records

Student records are private and are available only to authorized members of the faculty or administration who need to see them. Christendom College's policy complies with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (Buckley Amendment).

The Graduate School protects student records through Populi, a secure third-party Learning Management System (LMS), and through secure on-site storage of student files.

Only relevant Graduate School administrators with the appropriate permissions can access a student's personal information in the secure LMS, which uses 256-bit SSL-encrypted connections. Permissions are assigned to members of staff on an as-needed basis only. On the user end, a student's personal information is accessed using two-factor authentication (unless the student personally requests single-factor authentication) and a school-assigned username. The LMS performs daily backups and uses servers that are stored in an SSAE 16 Type II compliant data center that is physically secured behind a battery of compartmentalized security zones with biometric access controls. Additional security in the event of a catastrophe is provided by redundant security, power supply, and infrastructure protections. More details about our LMS provider's security protocols can be found [online](#).

Documents which exist in hard copy are stored in a student's file, which is protected under lock and key on campus at the Graduate School. To protect active student files in the event of a catastrophe, the files are stored in a locked, fire-resistant drawer in the file room in the basement of the Graduate School. The file room itself is protected by lock and key, and is opened only when the room needs to be accessed. The file room is protected externally from water damage and file cabinets are elevated off the floor and spaced from the exterior walls to protect their contents in the event that normal water protections fail, such as in a catastrophic flooding situation. Finally, the Graduate School entrance itself is locked outside of normal business hours to prevent unauthorized access at times when the appropriate Graduate School administrators are not present.

Unless a student requests in writing that direct information be held private, the Graduate School may release the following direct information to any authorized person on request: name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, and dates of attendance. Authorized persons include prospective employers verifying applications, and officials performing security clearance checks. The student who wishes such information to be private must notify the Dean of the Graduate School in writing. Student academic transcripts are released only on the direct request of the student.

The Graduate School publishes a directory of faculty, staff, and students and their contact information, and distributes this directory within the Graduate School. Any student who wishes to have his or her information withheld may notify the Dean within the first week of the academic term.

6.2.10. Contingency Plans

If due to a catastrophe or persistent infrastructure failure it becomes impossible for the Graduate School to offer or continue offering in the normal format a course for which a student has registered, reasonable efforts will be made to deliver equivalent instruction to the student by means of an independent study format, using any appropriate combination of in-person meetings, video conference, email, and/or telephonic communications. If workarounds fail and it proves impossible for the Graduate School to deliver instruction, the student's tuition will be refunded, as indicated in our financial policies (detailed below).

6.3. Completing your MA, Diploma or Certificate

6.3.1. Degree Requirements for the MA

The total number of graduate credits required for the Master of Arts in Theological Studies degree is 42, not counting any prerequisite or language courses. This includes 24 credits of core requirements (eight, 3-credit courses), 12 credits of concentration requirements, and either 6 credits of electives or a 6-credit MA thesis (see 6.3.2. below). Students may take courses online or on campus in any combination. The degree requirements are identical for on-campus and distance students. No more than 20 credits earned elsewhere are accepted in transfer. Candidates for the MA degree must maintain a “B” (3.0) average, and must pass the comprehensive examination. The requirements for the Advanced Apostolic Catechetical Diploma are identical to those for the MA (evangelization and catechesis concentration) except that the comprehensive exam is not required for the diploma.

At the Christendom Graduate School, course credit is normally assigned based on classroom lecture hours. Standard three-credit courses meet for a total of 30 lecture hours, not including exams, reading and writing assignments, and student research (estimated at 8 hours per week for a 15-week term, or 20 hours per week for a 6-week summer term). Accordingly, two-credit courses meet for a total of 20 hours of lecture (with approximately five hours of independent work per week for a 15-week term or approximately 18 hours per week for a 4-week summer VCI term). Since courses delivered in online format utilize video recordings of the same lectures as our on-campus courses, the number of lecture hours required of the student are the same in both formats. Therefore, online courses are assigned the same number of credits as their on-campus counterparts.

6.3.2. The MA Thesis

Students may write a master’s thesis, worth six graduate credits, in lieu of two elective courses. The thesis option is recommended for those students who are planning to pursue more advanced graduate work, especially doctoral studies. Students who wish to write a thesis must apply for the dean’s permission. A matriculating MA student may apply to write a thesis only after completing seven courses (21 hours) towards his or her degree, and having demonstrated excellent research and writing abilities. The thesis must be an original piece of research, not shorter than 50 nor longer than 100 pages, typed with double spacing. The required format is Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (latest edition). The thesis must be completed and successfully defended within two years of approval for the project.

The student initiates the thesis process by seeking the permission of the dean at least one year before he or she expects to graduate. He or she may then contact a member of the faculty who is able and willing to direct the student’s thesis, and with his or her assistance decides upon a general thesis topic. The student then submits to the Dean an MA Thesis Application Form (available in the Student Resources section of the Graduate School website), together with a formal thesis proposal. The thesis proposal comprises an abstract, outline and bibliography. Students should seek detailed advice on the proposal from their advisors. Upon approval from the Dean, the student pays tuition equivalent to two (2) three-credit courses.

The student must submit the final draft of the thesis to the thesis director at least two months prior to the planned defense of the thesis. At this time, the student notifies the Dean, who arranges for additional readers and for the defense of the thesis at a mutually-convenient time. The student provides final copies of his or her thesis to the Dean and the faculty readers at least two weeks before the scheduled defense.

The thesis defense lasts approximately one hour: the student provides a twenty-minute oral presentation of the thesis, and then responds to questions from the committee members. The grade is determined by the director and readers and is based on the research, the thesis itself, and the defense. For an exceptional performance on the thesis and defense, a student may earn a distinction on his or her thesis. The student must provide the library with a bound copy of his or her thesis before graduation.

6.3.3. The Comprehensive Examination

The Comprehensive Exam is required of all students seeking the Master of Arts in Theological Studies degree. The purpose of this exam is to verify a student's ability to integrate knowledge gained from classes, readings, and research. In the comprehensive exam, the student is expected to demonstrate in-depth theological knowledge commensurate with a Master of Arts degree. The answers should reflect knowledge gained from the core curriculum, the required courses of the student's concentration, and the Christendom Graduate School Bibliography. The student must demonstrate a solid grasp of the Roman Catholic Tradition and an ability to analyze and synthesize theological knowledge.

The comprehensive exam is normally held three times a year, in October, February, and July. Both written and oral portions of the comprehensive examination must be taken on campus, even by distance students. The written portion is taken first, in two, two-hour periods on the same day, and the student writes a total of seven essays in this time. The oral portion is taken on a later day, usually within a week, and lasts thirty minutes. For the written portion of the comprehensive exam, each question is graded by at least two professors *pass* or *fail*. For the oral portion, the Dean of the Graduate School forms a committee of at least three professors who examine the student particularly in the area of concentration; the committee will grade the oral exam *pass* or *fail*. Then the examining panel renders a final grade of *pass* or *fail* for the exam as a whole. For an exceptional performance, a grade of "pass with distinction" may be granted.

If a student does not pass the comprehensive exam on the first try, he or she may re-take the entire exam at a later session. Students are limited to one retake unless a special appeal has been granted by the Dean of the Graduate School. In the rare event of an extreme medical disability which makes travel to the Graduate School impossible, the student who needs to take the comprehensive exam may petition the Dean of the Graduate School and the Vice President of Academic Affairs to request permission to have the exam conducted and proctored in a location that is accessible to the student. Such exceptional permission is not guaranteed, subject to feasibility, and determined on a case-by-case basis.

A student may take the comprehensive exam when he or she has successfully completed all the required courses for his or her degree, both core and concentration requirements; he or she need not have completed all electives or his or her master's thesis. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the registrar that he or she is approaching the completion of his or her coursework; this should be done in writing/email at least six months before the possible date of the comprehensive exam. Failure to do so may result in the student being unable to take the comprehensive exam when planned and in delayed graduation. Students register for the comprehensive examination by filling out the Comprehensive Exam Registration Form (available in the Student Resources section of the Graduate School website) and submitting it, along with the fee, to the registrar at least two months before the scheduled date of the comps exam.

6.3.4. Graduation Honors

Students who have performed exceptionally well in their courses may be granted honors at their graduation. Students with a cumulative GPA of 3.7 or above will be recognized with the honor of *Cum laude*. Students with

a cumulative GPA of 3.8 or above will be recognized with the honor of *Magna cum laude*. Students with a cumulative GPA of 3.9 or above will be recognized with the honor of *Summa cum laude*.

6.3.5. Commencement Exercises

The commencement exercises for the Christendom Graduate School are held on the Saturday following the end of on-campus summer courses, in late July or early August. These exercises are held at the Front Royal campus, starting with a Baccalaureate Mass in Christ the King Chapel, followed by the conferral of degrees, and ending with a reception or luncheon for faculty, graduates, and their families and guests. All graduands are expected to attend graduation, but distance students and others for whom this is impossible may be excused by the Dean. Degrees are not conferred at any other time of the year; however, students who complete degree requirements at a different time of year may be provided with a transcript and letter showing they have completed the degree. It is the responsibility of the graduand to apply for graduation by April 30. He or she does this by filling out the Graduation Order Form and submitting it with the required fees to the Registrar. The graduand must do this whether or not he or she is attending the commencement exercises; failure to do so may delay his or her graduation until the following year.