AGST Alliance

MTh (Theology)

Postgraduate Diploma in Theology

Program Handbook

www.agstalliance.org

Welcome to your AGST Alliance program!

This handbook provides specific details of our **Master of Theology (Theology)** and **Postgraduate Diploma in Theology programs.**

Please ensure you also read carefully the general guidelines, *Information for Students* – the information there complements what you read here.

If there is further information you would like to see included in this handbook, please let us know, so that it can be of maximum value for you and your peers in your study program – as well as future participants.

In the Kingdom's ventures.

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AGST Alliance Dean

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> *Wherever you see this icon in these guidelines, it has a hyperlink to a relevant page of our AGST Alliance website, www.agstalliance.org. Ensure that you are on-line, and double-click on the icon. For example, a double-click on this one should take you to the AGST Alliance homepage. Try it and see!*

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Introducing…

Master of Theology (Theology)
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Program objectives

AGST Alliance's **Master of Theology (Theology)** program is designed to produce graduates who can present Christian truth in churches, theological seminaries and Christian organisations in ways that are dynamically appropriate for Asian contexts. As they are trained to think theologically and contextually, so they will be able to more effectively serve God's Kingdom and Church in Asia.

Those who wish to complete the coursework for the MTh(Theology) program but not the thesis/major papers may be awarded a **Postgraduate Diploma in Theology.**

The Postgraduate Diploma in Theology is awarded to students who have completed the MTh(Theol) coursework.

Thus, the Postgrad. Dip. Theol. is a credible qualification, giving recognition for achieving at the MTh level. Students who received the Postgrad. Dip. Theol because they have not completed the MTh(Theol) thesis should not feel that they have a 'lesser' qualification or have failed to come up to an acceptable MTh standard. It is 'simply' an incomplete MTh(Theol).

Our AGST Alliance programs are validated by the Asia theological Association (ATA). The ATA guidelines for the purpose and nature of Master of Theology programs are these:

> Programs granting the Master of Theology degree are designed primarily to qualify graduates to function as seminary lecturers, principal leaders or ministers. As a graduate level program, it requires the student to develop research methods for analysing and evaluating issues. Normally, the attainment of analytic and evaluational skills will be demonstrated through the completion of a thesis. (*Manual for Accreditation,* ATA, 2013, p. 35-36).

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Program components

To achieve the objectives of the MTh(Theol) program the following components are built in:

• Modules	18 credits
• Thesis Writing and Research ✓ *(Part 1: 2-credit Theology & Research module)* ✓ *(Part 2: 2-credit completed formal proposal)*	4 credits
• Thesis (Alternatively: 2 major 4-credit papers)	8 credits
	————
TOTAL	30 credits
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The learning hours for each module is in the range of 150-210 hours. The workload for one credit is estimated at 50-70 hours. This is an estimate of all the learning activity engaged in: e.g. pre-campus reading and preparation, on-campus sessions participation, post-campus reading and assignment preparation, etc. The relatively wide range of hours reflects the challenges for many of our students studying in English.

1. Modules
Participants complete 6 modules for 18 credits. Each module has a value of 3 credits.

Three-credit modules span about four months. Each module involves pre-campus preparation, a 5-day intensive on-campus session, and post-campus assignment activities.

 See the range of module topics in the MTh(Theol) program.

Students may request to complete one guided self-study module in place of a taught module. Participants

2. Thesis writing and Research
Students are also required to complete a two-part thesis writing and research component.
Part 1: Theology and Research module, that includes pre-campus preparation, a five-day intensive on-campus session, and post campus activities. (2 credits)
Part 2: The other two credits will be awarded upon successful completion of the formal proposal for the thesis. .

3. Thesis/major papers
The thesis is designed to show that you are able to competently focus and integrate aspects of the program with your interests and planned vocation within the Asian context. It will demonstrate your ability to process course content and move beyond it. Details of the thesis are available in a separate set of guidelines.

Your thesis requires at least 6-8 months' work after you complete the modules. But you will not be alone – an assigned supervisor will journey with you through the process.

Planning for the thesis is encouraged after you have a sense of the broad panorama of the program, so that later you can focus on a more specific area for your thesis research. The

topic/scope of your thesis will be decided in consultation with the Theology Programs Director. The length of the thesis is a maximum of 30,000 words (including footnotes but excluding the reference list/bibliography and appendices).

An alternative to the thesis is to research and write two major (4 credit) papers. The expectations of the quality of your work will be similar to those for the thesis. The topic/focus of at least one of the two papers should arise from your own unique context.

This option should not be chosen by participants who plan to proceed with higher-level studies at a later date. Consult with the Theology Programs Director to help your decision-making.

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Program practical details

The FAQs on our website cover many of the practical details of this program. We'll review the major ones here.

1. Module dates

See the dates of the coursework modules on our AGST Alliance website.

2. Location of on-campus sessions

The on-campus sessions of the modules are usually conducted on campuses of AGST Alliance consortium member institutions in Malaysia/Singapore/Thailand.

The decision about which campus/location is used is determined by:
- The geographical spread of the module participants. More participants from one country may mean more modules taught on campuses in that country.
- The preference of the person facilitating the module (= the lecturer).
- The need to share module hosting.

Note: Participants need to budget for the cost of travel and living expenses for the on-campus sessions. Budget airlines help ease the travel costs. We will suggest possibilities for accommodation, but participants are responsible for making the specific arrangements.

3. Participation

The MTh(Theol)/Postgrad. Dip. Theol. is a 'semi cohort program': While you may enter the program at any module, if you intend to complete the program you are advised to go through the modules consecutively. In this way, you will be with a core group of participants, and able to share your experiences and challenges with others who become friends and colleagues to network with after the program.

If you miss some of the on-campus sessions of a module for genuine reasons, you may be given some directed studies to take the place of the missed elements of the module. But if you miss all the on-campus sessions, you are unlikely to be allowed to complete the module. You will need to discuss this with the module facilitator in the first instance.

4. Program marker points

All participants enter the MTh(Theol) program on a **two-module probation period**. Continuation is contingent on adequate attendance at the modules and satisfactory completion of the assessable work.

There will be a **pre-thesis review,** after you complete the coursework, to confirm that you may proceed with the thesis phase. If your module grades are not sufficiently high, you may be encouraged to complete the MTh(Theol) by means of the two 4-credit papers rather than the full thesis.

In the thesis phase, your formal **thesis proposal** is a further program marker. Your proposal must be approved by your program committee in order to continue your thesis research.

5. Program duration and completion

MTh(Theol): The maximum duration for completing the MTh(Theol) is five years. This allows participants time to take some modules of their choice and still have adequate time to complete their thesis/major papers.

Postgrad. Dip. Theol.: The maximum duration for the Postgrad. Dip. Theol. is four years from the date of the first module completed by a participant.

If MTh(Theol) participants complete the modules satisfactorily, but don't finish the thesis/ major papers within the required time they will be awarded a Postgrad. Dip. Theol.

> **Note again: The Postgraduate Diploma in Theology** is awarded to students who have completed the MTh(Theol) coursework. Thus, it is a credible qualification, giving recognition for achieving at the MTh level. Students who received the Postgrad. Dip. Theol because they have not completed the MTh(Theol) thesis should not feel that they have a 'lesser' qualification or have failed to come up to an acceptable MTh standard. It is 'simply' an incomplete MTh(Theol).

6. Time commitment

You need to ensure that you are able to give adequate time to the course. This means not just blocking out time to attend the 5-day intensive on-campus sessions, but also to allocate significant time for pre- and post-campus study and assignment writing.

If you plan to attend the modules consecutively, this is equivalent to at least 50% of a typical full-time seminary program load.

Good time management is essential. You will need to restructure your work/ministry load and responsibilities for the duration of the program.
- Some participants have **study leave** provisions in their church/organisation.
- Others arrange to **cut down their work/ministry load.**
- Others take **unpaid leave**.

We strongly encourage you to use the *Student Support Framework Memorandum of Understanding* so that the major stakeholders in your program – your family, ministry organisation/seminary and/or local church leaders – are informed and committed to help you complete the program well.

7. Transfer to PhD(Theol) program

As they progress through the MTh(Theol), some participants realise they would like to move into our PhD(Theol). This is possible.

If you complete the MTh(Theol) modules with sufficiently high grades, you may request to proceed into the PhD(Theol) program without completing the MTh(Theol) thesis/major papers.

If you later withdraw from the PhD(Theol), you will need to request permission to complete the requirements for an MTh(Theol) – otherwise you will be awarded a Postgrad. Dip. Theol.

Moving from the MTh(Theol) to the PhD(Theol) will involve additional program fees.

Participants in the MTh(Theol) who wish to transfer to the PhD(Theol) will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Discuss the possibility with the Theology Programs Director in the first instance.

8. Cross-credit of courses

Students may request to cross-credit courses completed at the appropriate academic level at other accredited institutions.

A maximum of 9 credits of coursework from other accredited institutions may replace AGST Alliance modules. Cross-credited courses need to be at the appropriate academic level and fit the focus of our AGST Alliance MTh(Theol).

Note that if you request to complete a guided self-study module, a maximum of 6 credits may be cross-credited from another institution.

9. Finance matters

 Details about fees and the payment schedule are found in *Information for Students* and on our website

Note that you will need to factor other significant costs into your program, beyond the program fees – for travel, accommodation, resources, etc. (See 'Other costs' in the Fees page on our website.)

We regret that no scholarship money is directly available from AGST Alliance. However, we actively support student applications to trusts/foundations for financial assistance.

10. Immigration and visa issues

It is essential that you check carefully about immigration regulations ***well in advance*** of the on-campus sessions of modules being conducted in a country other than your own. ***This is your responsibility.***

Usually, when you travel to another country from your own to attend the module on-campus sessions, a social visit pass is adequate. (You are officially attending a short training program.)

AGST Alliance is able to provide official letters if required for immigration purposes.

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Expectations of MTh level study

Remember that the context of the MTh(Theol) program is primarily the Church – in Asia and beyond. While it is easy to see your program as an exercise to acquire an academic qualification, it is important that you sense your stewardship of the resources and abilities which God has given you to be able to move through it.

Your study, within an evangelical Christian institution, is founded on an understanding of knowledge that is more than academic. In the Bible, acquiring and exercising wisdom involves a combination of faith, reason and action. It requires

- right belief and committed trust in the living God ("the fear of the LORD is the first principle of wisdom"),
- creative and humble use of the rationality God has granted to humans made in his own image, and
- appropriate living in the world to reflect God's calling and participate in God's mission.

With these perspectives in mind, it is expected that your study will be *confessional*, *rational* and *missional:* an expression of what it means to "love the LORD your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength."[1]

On this foundation, what academic level specifically is expected for your AGST Alliance program?

Like all Master of Theology programs, this is a second theological degree (whether the first theological degree was a bachelors' or masters' degree), and so the academic expectations are naturally higher than for your first theological degree.

Sound academic work takes into account both globalisation and contextualisation. A global perspective sets expectations in widely agreed terms. A contextual perspective seeks to apply the criteria of the expectations justly, taking into account particular cultural settings, availability of resources and schooling experiences.

In generally agreed global terms, the MTh(Theol) is pitched at a level which reflects your ability to demonstrate these skills:

- Understand what is 'going on' in a topic, not just 'what happened' (= 'getting beneath the surface').
- Read, summarise and discuss quality texts and research which has been carried out up to a doctoral level.
- Critically evaluate alternative viewpoints, from the basis of an understanding of fundamental issues relating to the topic and the use of primary sources.
- Cope with contradictory and hostile interpretations.
- Formulate and express a defensible viewpoint on topics that have been researched.
- Make evaluative judgments with a high degree of confidence.
- Formulate questions of importance in a topic.
- Efficiently identify significant quality texts relating to the topic area and use them critically.
- Make full and efficient use of library facilities, as well as electronic and internet resources.
- Present written material in an appropriate format and following a recognised style guide.
- Write in a way in which points made can be logically defended.[2]

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[1] This section from 'Your study…' has been adapted from The Beirut Benchmarks, developed in the ICETE Doctoral Consultation, Beirut, Lebanon, March 2010.
[2] This list is adapted from John Roxborogh, http://www.roxborogh.com/Research/doctorates.htm.

Applying these skills more specifically to your MTh program, a level of critical analysis is expected, assessed especially against these three elements:
1. A reasonable quality and range of sources (primary and/or secondary) is used, and there is interaction with the sources and/or various ideas evidenced by the sources, which is done with understanding and thoughtfulness.
2. Assignments make an argument with a logical line and with reasonable complexity.
3. Application is made to life and ministry which is thoughtful, just and useful.

If this seems to be a daunting list, don't despair! These are skills we will help you acquire and sharpen, as you bring diligence and discipline to the learning process. And don't hesitate to seek help early to cope with the academic expectations!

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Assessment and grading scale

Typically, six main areas are considered when work is assessed for higher education programs such as those offered in AGST Alliance's Master of Theology programs:

1. *Evidence of knowledge and understanding of the subject and/or texts*
To what extent does the assignment demonstrate breadth of knowledge, coverage of the topic, depth of understanding of issues, accuracy of information?

2. *Evidence of reading and use of other appropriate resources*
To what extent does the assignment show appropriate use of relevant, well-chosen and both classic and up-to-date literature and/or other source material, and an appropriate and accurate method of referencing?

3. *Quality of critical analysis and interpretation*
To what extent does the assignment demonstrate the ability to identify and analyse underlying issues, problems and questions and relate these to one another; to evaluate arguments and the evidence for them and examine their implications; to identify and to evaluate different perspectives?

4. *Quality of argument and structure (planning) of the assignment*
To what extent does the assignment answer the question in a dear and direct way; form a coherent argument; develop in a logical and convincing way, relating the introduction to the conclusion?

5. *Evidence of critical reflection, personal or ministerial application*
To what extent does the assignment demonstrate critical reflection on evaluation of personal and/or ministerial practice?

6. *Quality of communication skills and presentation*
To what extent does the assignment reflect appropriate standards and academic conventions in relation to the mode of presentation, including clarity of expression, spelling, grammar and syntax, referencing and bibliography?

[These categories and following criteria have been adapted from R. Ackroyd and D. Major, Shaping the tools: Study Skills in Theology, *London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1999.]*

Notice above the recurring phrase 'to what extent'. It is the extent to which the assessment criteria are demonstrated that determines the grade awarded. Thus, the grading scale for most of the components in our AGST Alliance MTh programs – with the assessment criteria for each of these six areas – is shown on the following page.

Grade	Criteria
High Distinction (HD)	Excellent quality – indicating… 1. excellent coverage of the topic; accurate in detail offering sophisticated, even original insights; excellent use of examples to demonstrate understanding; clear understanding of complex ideas and issues. 2. extensively researched in breadth and/or depth and accurately referenced. 3. imaginative, insightful, original, creative interpretations; impressive level of critical analysis and evaluation. 4. a persuasive, authoritative coherent argument supported throughout by evidence, ability to show limitations of approaches; systematic and cogent structure. 5. evidence of sophisticated, critical reflection and evaluation of personal and/or professional ministerial practice. 6. written with flair and panache; fluent and confident; lucidly expressed and accurate in spelling and grammar.
Distinction (D)	Very good quality – indicating… 1. high level of coverage of the topic; accurate in detail with some originality and innovative insights; good use of examples to demonstrate understanding; clear understanding of complex ideas and issues. 2. widely researched in breadth and/or depth and accurately referenced. 3. insightful and creative interpretations; high level of critical analysis and evaluation. 4. a persuasive, coherent argument supported throughout by evidence, some ability to show limitations of approaches; systematic and cogent structure. 5. evidence of a high level of critical reflection and evaluation of personal and/or professional ministerial practice. 6. fluent and confident; lucidly expressed and accurate in spelling and grammar.
Credit (C)	Good quality – indicating… 1. topic is covered in depth; detail is accurate throughout; independence of thought; good identification and understanding of complex ideas and issues. 2. well researched and referenced. 3. perceptive, thoughtful interpretations; good level of critical analysis and evaluation; systematic analysis of source material. 4. presence of a cogent argument, supported throughout by evidence; the work is well structured. 5. evidence of critical reflection, understanding and evaluation of personal and/or professional ministerial practice. 6. lucidly expressed and accurate in spelling and grammar.
Pass (P)	Satisfactory quality – indicating… 1. most relevant issues are covered with reasonable understanding; adequate knowledge is demonstrated; most central issues are identified. 2. reasonable range of reading, sources not always explicit; not all referencing may be accurate. 3. material from a variety of sources is drawn together in interesting ways; development of analysis may not be consistent, giving way to description. 4. demonstrates the ability to construct an argument and present supporting evidence; links between introduction and conclusion are made. 5. some attempt is made to reflect critically and evaluate; reference is made to personal and/or professional/ministerial practice. 6. clearly written; there may be occasional errors in spelling and grammar.
Borderline Pass (BP)	Of doubtful quality for a pass, but there are just enough strengths to allow a pass grade to be awarded rather than Fail.
Fail (F)	Unsatisfactory quality – indicating… • *Either* the work is unsatisfactory, deficient and/or insufficient in many respects, relating to both mastery of content and expression; • *Or* work is not submitted, is excessively late, or has been produced by cheating.

Incomplete (I)	*[Distinguished from a Fail]* Work is not completed/submitted

For the purposes of comparison, this grading scale may be compared with other frequently used grading scales. Note that these are comparisons are approximate:

AGST Alliance Grade	Common descriptor	Percentage equivalent	Letter equivalent	Grade point equivalent
High Distinction	Excellent	85% +	A	4.0
Distinction	Very good	75-84%	B+/A-	3.6
Credit	Good	65-74%	B/B+	3.2
Pass	Satisfactory	50-64%	C+/B-	2.6
Borderline pass	Marginal	40-50%	C-/C	2.0 – 2.3
Fail	Unsatisfactory	Below 40%	F	< 2.0

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