

Fall 2023 Curricular Refresh

Frequently Asked Questions Communications Update #1

Wednesday, April 19, 2023

Key Information:

- The Curricular Refresh goes into effect in September 2023
- Current students will be able to stay with their current program OR choose to move—you have free will to elect in this matter.
- Students starting in Fall 2023 will start with the Fall 2023 curriculum refresh.
- The window to choose to move or stay will be May 15-31
- If you do not make a selection, you will automatically stay (Classic Rush: “If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice.”)

Additional KEY Recommendations:

- **If having an MDiv concentration is important to you, stay in your current program (there will not be MDiv concentrations in the refresh).**
- **Academic MAs, If you do not ever want to come to campus, stay in your current program.**
- **If any of the above apply to you and you are happy in your current program, you do not have to read any further!**
- **Selection Dates May 15-31, 2023**
 - Nobody is forced to move
 - If you do not submit a selection you will stay in your current program
 - All selections are final as of 5:00 pm (central) on May 31, 2023.

Fall 2023 Curricular Refresh opportunities that will be provided for you to learn more about this transition:

- Help Sessions: Every Thursday from Noon-1 pm in person and online
- Weekly Updates via Email and Luther Announcements
- Webinars in early May pertinent to each Refresh degree program
- Degree Exploration Tool
- Student Web Page in MyLutherNet for easy access
- As needed: One on One Help Sessions by Appointment with Point Person from each degree area
- Who do I contact for additional help? Advising@luthersem.edu

Why the Curriculum Refresh? And Why Now?

A new curriculum was implemented in 2013. It was evaluated in 2016 and “refreshed” at that point. The 2023 Fall Curricular Refresh is in response to the following:

1. Assessing student learning and evaluating courses
2. Addressing financial sustainability for MA and MDiv degrees as directed by the Board of Directors
3. Integrating Learnings from experiments, including the MDivX Pilot Project
4. Attending to Luther Seminary’s Mission and Strategic Plan

Why will the required number of courses be reduced?

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) recently reduced the minimum number of credits required for both an MDiv and an MA degree. Most other seminaries and divinity schools have already reduced the required number of courses.

How does the refresh make the degrees more financially sustainable?

The change reduces the scholarships needed to fund each MDiv student by 18%. Even more importantly, it should save students money by decreasing the length of “dwell time” in seminary.

How does the refresh fit the mission of the seminary?

The strategic plan sets the goal of strengthening the degree programs because our core mission still includes educating pastors, deacons, and other professional leaders. But theological education is experiencing significant shifts—including declining enrollment and higher costs. The refresh responds to these shifts and strengthens the degrees.

What learnings influenced the refresh?

We listened to students, the church, and learned from current experiments. Student learning in every course is assessed and the data interpreted. An extensive set of student surveys from the last four years also informed the process. Ongoing listening to graduates and other church leaders played an important role. In addition, learning from experiments such as the MDivX pilot project were gathered.

What values informed the refresh?

The primary values that informed the refresh were student learning and wellbeing and the needs of the local church. We asked church leaders, "What does the world need from the church today?" We explored ways we could make the interests and needs of students primary.

What was the planning process?

In December 2021, the president commissioned an MDivX Learnings Team, which gathered learnings and held public hearings to the end of May 2022. Beginning in June 2022, a mixed group of faculty and staff began meeting to explore possibilities. We also met with church leaders such as pastors, bishops, and leaders of other seminaries. Throughout fall semester 2022 and into spring of 2023, the faculty discerned together and refined the proposed refresh.

How were student needs and experiences heard?

Student voices and agency were present through the assessment data from every student in every course that is taught at Luther, from a large set of student surveys over the last four years, from a representative set of graduating-student exit interviews, and from listening to former students.

When will the refresh take effect?

The refresh will take effect the fall semester of 2023.

Can current students stay in the old curriculum? Can they switch to the new curriculum?

Yes and yes. The academic catalog under which a student starts is a covenant. If current students wish to remain in the current curriculum they may do so. If current students want to switch, they may choose that option. *The choice is up to students.* As Martin Luther wrote, "Humankind has a free will, but it is free to milk cows and build houses, and choose curricular refreshes, and nothing more."

Will my Jubilee Scholarship change?

No. The jubilee scholarship and the conditions that inform the scholarship will not change.

When will we know the details of the “pending” areas in the infographics?

We are waiting on two key dates to complete the refresh. The final details of the MDiv refresh will be approved at the April 26 faculty meeting. The entire MA refresh will be approved at the May 5 Board of Directors meeting. Information from each of those meetings will be included in future updates.