

# Fall 2023 Curricular Refresh

## Frequently Asked Questions Communications Update #2

Wednesday, April 26, 2023

### Key Information:

This week we are focusing on **residential requirements** and **contextual requirements**.

#### 1. Residential Requirements

- a. MDiv - a minimum of 8 residential courses
- b. MAs -
  - i. a minimum of 3 RFS courses for Systematic Theology, History of Christianity, and Justice and Reconciliation of their 14 credits.
  - ii. a minimum of 4 RFS courses for Bible of their 14 credits.
  - iii. a minimum of 6 RFS courses for Children, Youth, and Family Ministry, Leadership in Innovation and Ministry, and Christian Ministry of their 14 credits and
  - iv. a minimum of 6 RFS courses for Lutheran Ministries of their 16 credits.

#### 2. Contextual Requirements

- a. For the general MDiv (non-ELCA students)
  - i. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) or
  - ii. FE0523 - Systems and Leading Change (1.0 credit course)
- b. For ELCA students -
  - i. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and
  - ii. 1 year of full-time Internship

3. [Infographics](#) have been updated to include this information.

4. **Promised Courses** - [Promised Courses - AY23-24](#)

5. **Pathways** - Pathways have been developed for new students. We will share them with you, please use them as they are helpful.

- a. [MDiv Pathways](#)
- b. [MA Pathways](#)

**Look for next week's update to include:** more information about CPE and elective equivalencies.

- Who do I contact for additional help? [Advising@luthersem.edu](mailto:Advising@luthersem.edu)

## **Below are questions raised during Help Sessions:**

### **What are the minimum residential requirements for each program?**

Within the curricular refresh, students will meet the minimum residential requirements by taking a certain number of RFS courses. Each degree program will have a minimum number of required RFS courses, but students may take as many RFS courses as they wish.

- MDiv - a minimum of 8 RFS courses
- MAs -
  - a minimum of 3 RFS courses for Systematic Theology, History of Christianity, and Justice and Reconciliation of their 14 credits.
  - a minimum of 4 RFS courses for Bible of their 14 credits.
  - a minimum of 6 RFS courses for Children, Youth, and Family Ministry, Leadership in Innovation and Ministry, and Christian Ministry of their 14 credits and
  - a minimum of 6 RFS courses for Lutheran Ministries of their 16 credits.

### **Are there specific classes that in the future will only be offered in an RFS format?**

Yes. Beginning Fall 2023 the following courses will only be offered in an RFS format within the curricular refresh.

- Christian Public Leader
- Thinking Theologically and Confessing Publicly
- Leading Christian Communities in Mission
- Public Worship
- Foundations of Preaching ( or in person)
- Some courses within particular concentrations

### **How will we know how our courses apply in the refreshed curriculum?**

There will be a tool in MyLutherNet called Degree Exploration that will allow students to see how the courses they have taken would transfer into the refreshed curriculum. This tool will include all elective options and any additional equivalency courses for students transferring into the refreshed curriculum.

### **When will the Degree Exploration tool be available? Will we have access to it before we have to decide?**

The Degree Exploration tool will be available in next week's student email, so you will have access to this tool before you have to decide.

**What counts as a residential credit in the current curriculum?** If we were caught in the snowstorm during the RFS, for example, and unable to attend in-person classes, does that course still count?

In the current curriculum in-person, Intensives, and RFS courses count as meeting the residential requirement. Intensives or RFS sessions that moved online because of weather (or illness or COVID adaptations) will be counted as fulfilling residential requirements.

### **How do we know how many residential courses we have?**

Residential/Intensive courses ending in 01 and RFS courses ending in 33 count as residential. *(To find out how many residential courses you have, go MyLutherNet (log in) > My Degree tab, scroll down to the Course History section, and click on View Course History and count the number of courses you have with course codes 01 or 33.)*

### **How do electives work?**

There are two kinds of electives: *open* electives and *core* electives. Open electives can be any elective course. Core electives give students a set of courses within a particular area of study (such as History of Christianity, Preaching, etc.).

### **In the refresh, do electives work differently in different programs?**

Yes. In the refreshed MDiv there will only be core electives. MA programs will have either 2 or 4 open electives.

### **How will electives work in the refreshed MDiv program?**

The current MDiv curriculum has 10 *open* electives. Students can choose those courses **and** at least 1 must be in: Systematic Theology, 1 in Leadership for Mission, and 1 must meet the Cultural Context requirement. Within the curricular refresh, the MDiv curriculum has 8 *core* electives. The areas are: Preaching, Systematic Theology, Ethics, Church History, Bible, Leadership for Mission, Cultural Context, and a Cross-Divisional course. Students must also have 1 course that meets the Cultural Context requirement.

### **How will electives work in the refreshed MA programs?**

The current MA curriculum has 4 *open* electives for all MA concentrations, and the number of *core* electives vary by concentration. Within the curricular refresh, the MA in Lutheran Ministries has 4 *open* electives and all other MA programs have 2 *open* electives. *Core* electives vary by concentration.

### **Is financial support available for students to travel to RFS?**

No, Luther Seminary does not provide financial support for traveling to RFS sessions. Students are encouraged to inquire with their synod and/or church partners about supporting them in this way.

### **What are the new codes for Fall? Can these codes be clarified for students?**

Course numbers will not change for fall, but course coding related to modality and RFS/extended sessions is changing. An [infographic](#) and additional information about course scheduling changes are posted in the Registration tab in MyLutherNet. In June, before fall registration, we will offer webinars and help sessions for students.

### **How do my requirements for candidacy come into play with my MA program?**

There is increased interest in students entering candidacy to become a deacon within the ELCA. To better serve these students, we refreshed the MA in Lutheran Studies to the MA in Lutheran Ministries. This MA was designed to meet the candidacy and contextual needs of students in candidacy to become a deacon or chaplain. The MA in Lutheran Ministries changed the contextual requirements and remained at 16 courses so that students could have four open electives to focus on the ministry area of their choice.

## **Frequently Asked Questions Communications Update #1**

(published **Apr 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 or 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](mailto: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.