GENERAL DESCRIPTION

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

Founded in 1890 by John D. Rockefeller, the University of Chicago is a private, coeducational institution located on the South Side of Chicago. Under the leadership of its first president, William Rainey Harper, the University introduced innovations that are now considered commonplace in American colleges and universities: the four-quarter system, extension courses and programs in the liberal arts for adults, the junior college concept, equal opportunities for women in education, and an emphasis on broad humanistic studies for undergraduates. Throughout its history, the University has sought to maintain an atmosphere of free, independent inquiry that is responsive to the needs of communities outside the University itself. Today, the University includes six graduate professional schools (Business, Divinity, Law, Medicine, Public Policy, and Social Service Administration), four graduate divisions (Biological Sciences, Humanities, Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences), the undergraduate College, and the Graham School of General Studies.

A distinguished Semiticist and a member of the Baptist clergy, William Rainey Harper believed that a great research university ought to have as one central occupation the scholarly study of religion, to prepare scholars for careers in teaching and research, and ministers for service to the church. These commitments led him to bring the Morgan Park Seminary of the Baptist Theological Union to Hyde Park, making the Divinity School the first professional school at the University of Chicago.

The Divinity School is located in Swift Hall, on the main quadrangle of the University’s campus and in close proximity to the Divisions of the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Cross-disciplinary work, a long-standing hallmark of the University, is strongly encouraged and in some respects institutionalized: many Divinity School faculty hold joint appointments with other departments in the University, students can and regularly do register for courses outside their specific academic location, and dissertation committees frequently feature coadvisers or readers from other parts of the University.

From its inception, the Divinity School has pursued Harper’s vision of an institution devoted to systematic research and inquiry into the manifold dimensions of religion, seeking to serve both those preparing for careers in teaching and research and those preparing for careers in ministry. The School has served for decades as the largest single institutional educator of faculty members for theological seminaries, departments of theology, and programs in religious studies across the spectrum of educational institutions that comprise American higher education. At the same time, the School is privileged to number among its alumni a long and distinguished list of ministers, and continues this tradition today through a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) curriculum that prepares ministers for a life of service to the public church.
OVERVIEW OF CURRICULUM

The Divinity School offers programs of study leading to the degrees of Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Arts in Religious Studies (A.M.R.S.), Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), and Master of Divinity (M.Div.).

The M.A. program is a two-year foundational program in the academic study of religion for students who wish to acquire the requisite skills to develop a research agenda for doctoral study, or to establish a basis for a career in such related fields as education, publishing, government service, nonprofit work, etc.

The M.A. in Religious Studies (A.M.R.S.) is a concentrated program in the study of religion for those in other professions (e.g., law, medicine, business, journalism, the arts) or those who seek greater knowledge of and sophistication in the study of religion. The degree may be pursued in one year, or over a period of three years, taking one or two courses per quarter, allowing students to balance study with existing professional commitments.

The Ph.D. program is a rigorous program of advanced study and research that prepares students for a lifetime of field-defining scholarship, intellectual leadership and teaching in the academic study of religion.

The M.Div. program is an intensive cohort-based three-year course of study that prepares students for public religious leadership both in traditional ministerial professions and in new and emerging forms of ministry.

The Divinity School also offers dual degree programs with the University’s Irving B. Harris School of Public Policy Studies, Law School, and School of Social Service Administration.

The requirements for each degree offered by the Divinity School are explained in the following section, “Degree Programs and Requirements.”

Students in the A.M.R.S, M.A., and M.Div. programs are required to register for and complete a certain number of courses in order to receive the degree. Students in the Ph.D. program are required to register according to a two-stage residence structure. While not required to complete a total number of courses for the degree, Ph.D. students must maintain sufficient course registration (this may be satisfied through registration in Advanced Study courses) to meet standards for satisfactory academic progress. Ph.D. students should consult the area guidelines for their respective areas of study concerning requirements. Ph.D. students are advised to maintain a substantial course load during their first year or two of doctoral study, in order to both develop their own scholarly capacities and to afford faculty members appropriate opportunities for the assessment of their work.

The Divinity School is organized into three committees and eleven areas of study that support the School’s degree programs:

- Constructive Studies in Religion (Religious Ethics, Philosophy of Religions, Theology)
- Historical Studies in Religion (Bible, History of Christianity, History of Judaism)
- Religion and the Human Sciences (History of Religions, Anthropology and Sociology of Religion, and Religion, Literature, and Visual Culture)
Two areas of study, Islamic Studies and Religions in America, offer courses that may be related across multiple Committees and are therefore not solely associated with only one Committee.

In addition to responsibility for the administration of the curriculum of these areas, the faculty annually offers a small number of courses designed to serve specific program requirements, e.g., the course “Introduction to the Study of Religion” required of all entering M.A., A.M.R.S., and M. Div. students, the sequences “The Public Church” and “Arts of Ministry” for the M.Div. program, and reading courses for Ph.D. examination preparation and dissertation research. According to personal interests and academic specializations, faculty members of the School may teach in one or more of these areas. The faculty members teaching at present in each committee are listed in the section “Committees of the Faculty and Areas of Study.”

The academic year at the University of Chicago is divided into four quarters of approximately three months each, but the Divinity School offers formal courses only in the autumn, winter, and spring quarters. Students normally matriculate in the autumn quarter. Because the Divinity School is one of the academic units of the University of Chicago, its students have available to them, in addition to courses offered in the Divinity School, a wide range of courses in other divisions and schools. The Divinity School encourages all students to make use of these offerings in view of their specific research interests.

In addition to accommodating students in its degree programs, the Divinity School can make arrangements to accommodate senior research fellows and non-degree students. Scholars holding the Ph.D. degree may apply to be in residence as senior fellows in the Martin Marty Center. For more information, contact the Director of the Martin Marty Center. A student pursuing a doctoral degree at a foreign university may apply to be in residence as a non-degree student if that student is sponsored by a Divinity School faculty member. For more information, contact the Dean of Students.

Further information regarding the Divinity School is available at http://divinity.uchicago.edu.

Please note: One of the accrediting bodies for the Divinity School is the American Theological Association (ATS). Students who are concerned that the Divinity School may not be in accord with the guidelines established by the ATS are invited to contact the association at http://www.ats.edu.