

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

NO. BHE 24-48

DATE: June 11, 2024

**APPROVAL OF DEGREE GRANTING AUTHORITY FOR GORDON-CONWELL
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY FOR THE DEGREE PROGRAM DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(PH.D.) IN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES**

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the application of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to award the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Theological Studies.

Provided that the Seminary will prepare and submit a report on its progress in establishing the program at the conclusion of academic year 2024-2025, in a form and manner to be prescribed by Department of Higher Education staff.

ACTION: Motion approved and advanced to the full BHE by the Executive Committee on 6/3/2024; and adopted by the BHE on 6/11/2024.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 69, Section 30 et seq.

Contact: Cynthia Brown, Associate Commissioner for Regulatory and Veterans' Affairs

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Theological Studies

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS or Seminary) is a private, non-profit institution located in Hamilton, MA, which is accredited by the New England Commission on Higher Education (NECHE or Commission) and by specialty accreditors the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). GCTS requests Board of Higher Education (BHE) authorization to offer the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Theological Studies.

The Seminary was created in 1969 through the merger of Conwell School of Theology (originally a part of Temple University in Philadelphia, PA) with Gordon Divinity School. The vision for the newly-formed Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary was to "establish within a strong evangelical framework, an independent, interdenominational seminary whose constituents are united in the belief that the Bible is the infallible, authoritative Word of God...consecrated to educating men and women in all facets of gospel outreach."

Currently, GCTS offers a number of graduate programs, including Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS); Master of Arts in Christian Ministry; Master of Arts in Global Leadership; Master of Arts in Counseling; Master of Divinity; Master of Theology (Th.M.); and a Doctor of Ministry, as well as several graduate certificates.

NECHE issued a public Notation to GCTS in September 2019 because the Commission found that the institution's accreditation could be in jeopardy if current conditions continued or worsened with respect to the Commission's standard on Institutional Resources. The Notation was removed in April 2021. Pursuant to BHE policy, institutions must be accredited without sanction for six consecutive years to be able to avail themselves of the expedited review process. AAC 14-35. The Department has therefore determined that because the Seminary was accredited with sanction by NECHE until 2021 the Seminary is not currently able to use the Expedited Program Review process to seek approval for the proposed program. Accordingly, GCTS followed the full program review process in presenting the current application.

INTENT AND MISSION

GCTS reports that the proposed program is consistent with its mission: *"To advance Christ's Kingdom in every sphere of life by equipping Church leaders to think theologically, engage globally and live biblically."* A specific goal of the Seminary is *"To maintain academic excellence in the highest tradition of Christian scholarship in the teaching of the biblical, historical and theological disciplines."* Advanced education in theological studies is well-aligned with the Seminary's overall institutional mission.

The purpose of the proposed Ph.D. in Theological Studies “is to prepare Christian leaders from around the globe to conduct rigorous scholarship and to teach at key seminaries worldwide, while cultivating spiritual depth and personal integrity.” GCTS is well-known for its emphasis on global outreach and engagement. The program aspires to attract international students in particular by means of a majority-funded Ph.D. evangelical theology program, offering what the Seminary characterizes as a “biblically orthodox alternative to the more mainline programs offered at heavily endowed institutions.”

GCTS reports that the initiative to consider a Ph.D. program was launched by President Scott Sunquist, who arrived at the institution in 2019. President Sunquist formed a Strategic Planning Committee in May 2020, which prepared the institution’s current Strategic Plan that included the goal of designing a Ph.D. program. The Board of Trustees (BOT) approved the Strategic Plan in October of 2021. The President then appointed a Ph.D. Committee, including founding Program Director Adonis Vidu, Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Theology. The Committee formulated the program proposal, which was approved by the faculty Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) in September 2022, and by the entire faculty in October 2022. In February 2023, the BOT’s Academic/Student Affairs Committee (ASAC) approved the program.

NEED AND DEMAND

The program focuses on what it characterizes as the “global nature of the changing landscape of Christian engagement [which] demands: 1) cogent, anchored and well-trained indigenous leadership; and 2) that such leaders, especially those who arise from developing nations, be able to undertake a program at minimal cost.” The program further cited that the *international* need for this degree is robust.

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) gathers data on graduate program enrollments and degrees awarded. Its most recent report covers the years 2011 – 2021. This report showed an increase in graduate enrollment overall, with first-time enrollment increases driven by the 94.5 percent increase in international graduate students in Fall 2021, rebounding from the 37.4 percent decrease in Fall of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

The program also offered data regarding specific needs for teachers in philosophy and religion, increasing by about 33 percent nationwide, with further annual increases of almost five percent annually over the next few years.²

In this context, GCTS plans to offer international leaders an opportunity to pursue a high-quality doctoral program from “a recognized orthodox institution” with the intent of making the program widely accessible by means of donor-supported financial aid.

¹ See <https://cgsnet.org/data-insights/admissions-enrollment-and-comple7on/graduateenrollment-and-degrees-2/>

² See <https://www.recruiter.com/careers/postsecondary-philosophy-and-religioneachers/outlook/#:~:text=Vacancies%20for%20this%20career%20have,new%20jobs%20filled%20by%202029.>

OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED PROGRAM

Admission

Admissions requirements for the proposed Ph.D. program are:

- A Master of Divinity or equivalent (the Ph.D. Committee will consider the “or equivalent” requirement on a student-to-student basis), with a grade point average of 3.7 (on the U.S. scale) or higher; Th.M. desired;
- Three references (two academic, one pastoral);
- Applicant interview with the Ph.D. committee;
- Facility in research languages, including biblical languages, to be determined by the Ph.D. committee on the basis of the proposed area of research;
- Commitment to residency requirement: two years (four semesters) required onsite or until passing the comprehensive examination;
- Sample of academic writing (Th.M. thesis or sample research paper);
- Research proposal, detailing the area of study, an argument about the need for research on the specific topic, and a reflection of the suitability of GCTS’s doctoral faculty to offer supervision in this topic;
- Commitment to completing Current Student Surveys and Graduating Student Surveys;
- Commitment to participation in professional societies (membership and conferences) and to the submission of an article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal by the end of the first year of the dissertation phase;
- Non-refundable application fee of \$100.

Note that applicants who are non- native English speakers must submit official Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam results, with a minimum internet-based total score of 90, including a score of 23 in the writing section.

Applicants who are promising but cannot demonstrate that they meet all of the requisite academic requirements for embarking on doctoral research, even if they have two master’s degrees, may be offered admission to one of the Seminary’s Th.M. programs and depending upon their success in that program, could be reconsidered for admission to the Ph.D. program.

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM ENROLLMENT: Ph.D. in Theological Studies

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
New Full Time	6	8	9	10

Continuing Full Time	0	5	12	19
New Part Time	0	0	0	0
Continuing Part Time	0	0	0	0
Totals	6	13	21	29

Program Curriculum

The proposed Ph.D. program will require completion of 73 credits of advanced coursework; demonstration of language competency; demonstration of competence in teaching and formation of students; passing comprehensive examinations; researching and writing a dissertation that demonstrates original and scholarly work; and successful oral defense of the dissertation. In keeping with the Seminary's stated mission, the proposed program will initially offer concentrations in Theology and Ethics and a Concentration in Mission and World Christianity. See Attachment A for the required program curriculum.

The proposed program expects that students will have or develop the ability to facilitate original research and writing in languages germane to his or her specialization. The research languages are determined by the doctoral committee on the basis of the proposed research project and are communicated to the student together with the offer of admission. Typically, students will need to demonstrate reading proficiency in two languages. Students will need to fulfil the language requirement by the end of the second summer of enrollment, prior to the comprehensive examination.

Students will develop competence in teaching and forming students by providing assistance to seminary faculty in their teaching and related responsibilities.

Pre-residency requirement: An asynchronous online course on Research Methods is required prior to commencing residency. Students will also be expected to work on their competency in languages.

Two-year Residency Requirement: Students will remain in residence at the Hamilton, MA campus for two years or until they pass their comprehensive exams.

Research and dissertation: Dissertation Work: After the comprehensive exams, the student continues to work with the doctoral advisor for a maximum duration of two years and is enrolled in either the Dissertation writing course **or** Church History / World Mission. The dissertation defense must be scheduled no later than eight years after the start of the program. Beyond the eighth semester, or year four, the student is not enrolled in any course or formal supervision.

Program retention: An important feature of the proposed program's design is its attention to student support. The program seeks to graduate 75 to 80 percent of its students, which would

be significantly higher than the average 36 to 50 percent graduation rate across a range of doctoral program types.³

The application cited that GCTS performed its own research review which indicated that doctoral program retention is much higher if students are required to have their dissertation proposal approved before taking any required general exams. The proposed program will require that students take their comprehensive examination only *after* the student's dissertation proposal has been accepted. In addition, the student's proposal will be accepted only if they have already completed a few chapters of the work. The Seminary also states that retention is improved when doctoral work in community, which the proposed program's residential model supports. Finally, they found that retention is higher when students are mentored by faculty. The proposed program's design supports advisor mentoring from the beginning of a student's matriculation.

RESOURCES AND BUDGET

Budget

Tuition and fees for the program are as follows:

Tuition: \$22,500 Years 1 and 2; \$5,000 Years 3 and 4
Fees: \$ 520
Books: \$ 1,500

Total cost Years 1 and 2: \$24,520

Total cost Years 3 and 4: \$ 7,020

Years 5 – 8 (if needed): Students will pay a Continuation Fee of \$1,000 per year, and will pay a Student Services and Technology Fee, which will vary.

Faculty and Administration

The proposed program makes use of current full-time faculty. The Program Director is an existing faculty member who will receive a stipend for administrative duties associated with the program. The Seminary projects that there will be no part-time faculty hired during the first five years of the program. A new part-time position of Assistant Director will be created and staffed to provide administrative capacity.

Facilities, Library and Technology

³ See ex.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/ar7cles/PMC6355122/#:~:text=AVri7on%20rates%20for%20Doctor%20of,rang e%20from%2036%20%E2%80%93%2051%25>.

Students in the proposed program will be taking courses online as well as being in residency for two years of their program at the Seminary's Hamilton, Massachusetts campus. Facilities are up to date and sufficient for the program's needs. Technology access as well as media services are provided through one department and include support for individual account access, network infrastructure, classroom technology, and support of student, faculty and staff technological needs. Information literacy support at the time of the application was provided by professional library staff on a by request basis. The proposed program application stated that the primary responsibility for information literacy would rest with doctoral program faculty.

GCTS's library collections support the training of theological students from an evangelical perspective, with special attention given to the evangelical tradition, especially in New England. The collections in all Gordon-Conwell libraries number approximately a quarter million items (books, bound periodicals, microforms). Library resources and services are also available through the Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium (BTIC), which provides access to resources at eight departments or schools of theology in greater Boston and New England.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Upon completion of the Ph.D. in Theological Studies, graduates will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of scripture, biblical theology and principles of exegesis in the context of the contemporary pluralism of global interpretations, to be assessed by comprehensive exams.
2. Demonstrate expert knowledge of the literature of his or her field of concentration, including the most significant global contributions, to be measured by dissertation evaluation.
3. Demonstrate competence to teach effectively in the context of higher education, utilizing a wide range of approaches, including in-person and online delivery systems; measured by annual review of mentor.
4. Competently engage in original research and writing that advances theological understanding for the academy and for respective communities of faith; measured by dissertation evaluation and annual review by mentor.
5. Demonstrate Christian maturity evidenced in moral clarity and upright character (human formation) in conjunction with demonstrable spiritual aptitude and devotion (spiritual formation).

Assessment Process

Program leadership and faculty plan to evaluate both the program as a whole and each of its specific student learning outcomes will be annually evaluated. The results of this assessment will be discussed by faculty and the PhD committee and used to implement needed improvements for student learning and formation.

Evaluating Program Outcomes includes the following:

- Review of scholarly publishing by both teaching faculty and students. Faculty must demonstrate commitment to and record of an active scholarly work in the form of academic conference participation, publication in peer-reviewed journals and academic publishing houses.
- Student evaluations of Advisors/Mentors and surveys about general program effectiveness.
- Exit interviews and Graduating Student Surveys.
- Tracking professional placement and conducting Alumni Student Surveys.
- Curricular mapping, noting how degree-level outcomes are addressed in the required curriculum.

Evaluating Student Outcomes

During the annual review by a mentor, the mentor will be assessing:

- Course completion and grades
- Balance of personal, ecclesial, scholarly work and study based upon observations and feedback from other instructors and faculty colleagues
- Clarification of thesis proposal: A candidate's ability to articulate key elements in his/her field of study and how his or her research advances study in that field
- Growth in the knowledge of the topic as measured by coursework grade(s)
- Fulfilment of duties in teaching assistance: duties include (but are not limited to) grading exams and papers, moderating discussions
- Completion of requirements for tutorial (advising) meetings
- Command of required languages, measured by the ability to read and interpret research material in the foreign language, and/or progress towards certification in the language

Through comprehensive exams students will demonstrate competency in:

- Writing ability
- Logical and argument construction
- Support – biblical literacy, systematic coherence, primary sources, secondary sources, etc.

EXTERNAL REVIEW AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

The proposed program application was reviewed by a Visiting Committee (VC) composed of two members: Kevin L. Hester, Ph.D., Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Dean of the School of Theology, Welch College and Divinity School; and Lalsangkima Pachuau, Ph.D., Dean of Advanced Research Programs and Beeson Professor of Christian Mission, Asbury Theological Seminary.

Department staff supported the committee and provided contact with GCTS to facilitate the review process. The VC obtained information from the applications and documents provided by the institution, from the GCTS website, and from meetings with GCTS administration, faculty, and staff. The required site visit was held virtually, on March 6 and 8, 2024.

The Committee submitted its report on March 21, 2024, which staff conveyed to the Seminary for its response on the same date. The Seminary responded on May 1, 2024.

Overall, the Committee found that the program fit the Seminary's mission, met the review standards, and would prepare its graduating students well. Specifically, the VC "believes Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has developed a program that is in concert with expected norms in the discipline and that the institution's application and interviews with administration, faculty, and staff document sufficient institutional capacity to implement the proposed degree."

The Committee made two recommendations in the interest of improving the proposed program and ensuring it met the Board's standards, one regarding program-level assessment, and one about the provision of appropriately credentialed library staff. A summary of the VC's recommendations and the institution's responses is provided in Attachment D.

Staff found the institution's response to the recommendations satisfactory and will ask for an update on meeting them as part of any report that may be required by the Board in approving this motion.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The institution posted for public comment on April 3, 2024; the public comment period ended on April 24, 2024. No comments were received.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

After a thorough evaluation of all documentation submitted, staff is satisfied that the proposal of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to award the **Ph.D. in Theological Studies** degree meets the Board of Higher Education requirements outlined in 610 CMR 2.07 and 2.08 in the Degree-Granting Regulations for Independent Institutions of Higher Education. Staff recommends that the Board approve this application by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to award this degree subject to the reporting requirement included in the motion.

ATTACHMENT A: Curriculum Outline

Ph.D. in Theological Studies

<i>Course Number</i>	Course Title	Credit Hours
CT1100	Research Methods	3
OT1100	Themes in Old Testament Theology	3
NT1100	Themes in New Testament Theology	3
NT/OT/TH110	Theological Hermeneutics	3
EM1105	Pedagogy Practicum	3
CT1110	Doctoral Colloquium	4
CT1101	Tutorial	12
	SubTotal # Core Credits Required	31
ET/TH1160	Dissertation Writing	24
CH/WM1160	Dissertation Writing	24
TH1101	Advanced Seminar in Theology	3
CH/TH1101	Advanced Seminar in Patristics	3
MC/SF1102	Narrative and Spirituality	3
ET/TH1101	Advanced Seminar in Theological Ethics	3
EV/WM1101	Advanced Seminar in Missiology	3
CH/WM1101	Advanced Seminar in Mission History	3
TH/WM1101	Advanced Seminar in World Christianity	3
IS/WM1101	Advanced Seminar in Intercultural Studies	3
	BTIC course	3
	BTIC course	3
	SubTotal # Additional Required and Elective Credits	42
<i>Curriculum Summary</i>		
Total number of courses required for the degree		19
Total credit hours required for degree		73
<i>Prerequisite, Concentration, Dissertation or Other Requirements:</i>		
Please note the Pedagogy Practicum, Doctoral Colloquium and Tutorial requirements, as part of the core.		
For the “Theology and Ethics” concentration, the following courses will be selected from the Elective Course list: ET/TH1160, TH1101, CH/TH1101, MC/SF1102, ET/TH1101, and two additional courses offered through the Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium.		
For the “Mission and World Christianity” concentration: CH/WM1160, EV/WM1101, CH/WM1101, TH/WM1101, IS/WM1101, and two additional courses offered through the Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium (BTIC).		

ATTACHMENT B: Budget

Ph.D. in Theological Studies

	<i>Annual Expenses Per Year of Enrollment</i>				
<i>Cost Categories</i>	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Full Time Faculty (<i>Salary</i>)	\$99,000	\$111,900	\$125,200	\$138,200	\$152,100
Part Time Faculty (<i>Salary</i>)	-	-	-	-	-
Staff (<i>Salary</i>)	35,000	36,100	37,200	38,300	39,400
Fringe (inclusive of all staff, faculty, etc.)	10,900	11,200	11,500	11,900	12,200
General Administrative Costs	8,000	9,700	10,900	11,800	13,800
Instructional Materials, Library Acquisitions	5,000	6,000	6,500	7,000	7,500
Facilities/Space/Equipment	4,000	4,500	5,000	5,500	6,000
Field & Clinical Resources	19,000	36,500	44,000	49,000	62,000
Marketing	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	7,500
Other (Specify)	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	\$186,900	\$221,900	\$246,300	\$267,700	\$300,500

	Annual Revenue Per Year of Enrollment				
Revenue Sources	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Tuition	135,000	301,300	407,100	499,500	550,400
Fees	3,100	7,000	9,000	10,400	11,400
Grants	(221,500)	(509,100)	(658,000)	(719,600)	(765,200)
Other: Housing	72,000	163,100	213,800	236,000	243,000
Other: Fundraising	221,500	509,100	658,000	719,600	765,200
Subtotal	210,100	471,400	629,900	745,900	804,800
Total Profit/Loss	\$23,200	\$249,500	\$383,600	\$478,200	\$504,300

Cost Categories

Full Time Faculty (Salary): Existing full-Time faculty will be supporting this program.

Part Time Faculty (Salary): None anticipated during the first five years of the program.

Staff (Salary): A part-time Assistant Director will be hired to coordinate and handle administrative functions for the program at a starting salary of \$35,000.

Fringe (inclusive of all staff, faculty, etc.): The Assistant Director's fringe benefits are expected to be an additional 31 percent of their base salary.

General Administrative Costs, Instructional Materials, Library Acquisitions, and Facilities/Space/Equipment: General Administrative Costs, Instructional Materials, Library Acquisitions, and Facilities/Space/Equipment are estimated to total 10% of personnel and program costs.

Field & Clinical Resources: Includes funding for students in their first two years to attend at least one academic conference each year. In addition, it covers the cost of guest speakers and funding for an annual spiritual retreat.

Revenue Categories

Tuition: Tuition will start at \$22,500 per year for the first two years and will start at \$5,000 per year for subsequent years, after the first two years of residency.

Fees: Basic fees will follow the Masters-level Service Fee and Technology Fee at \$260 per term.

Grants: It is the Seminary's plan to provide international students scholarships to fully cover their tuition, fees, housing, health insurance (individual rate), and taxes on non-educational scholarship amounts. It is also the Seminary's plan to provide domestic students a tuition scholarship of approximately \$10,000 per year during years one and two.

Fundraising: It is the Seminary's goal to raise enough funds to fully fund both international students' and domestic students' scholarships.

ATTACHMENT C: Faculty

Ph.D. in Theological Studies

Name	Degree and Field	Title
Adonis Vidu	Ph.D. in Theological Studies	Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Theology and Program Director
Gwenfair Walters Adams	Ph.D. in Medieval Ecclesiastical History	Professor of Church History and Spiritual Formation
Donald Fairbain	Ph.D. in Patristics	Robert E. Cooley Professor of Early Christianity
Todd Johnson	Ph.D. in International Development	Eva B. and Paul E. Toms Distinguished Professor of Mission and Global Christianity
Autumn Ridenour	Ph.D. in Theological Ethics	Mockler Associate Professor of Christian Ethics
Scott Sunquist	Ph.D. in Mission, Ecumenics and History of Religions	President and Professor of Missiology
Kevin Xiyi Yao	Doctor of Theology	Professor of World Christianity and Asian Studies

ATTACHMENT D: Recommendations of the GCTS Visiting Committee and Institutional Responses

Standard 1: Mission, Planning, and Evaluation

Recommendation: The Visiting Committee recommends the development of a robust process of program-level assessment that includes institutionally-identified measurable goals and means of assessment for the purpose of program improvement.

Institutional response: In the institutional response to the VC report, the Program Director provided detailed information regarding assessment protocols, including various evaluation forms, a document summarizing the assessment process, and a list of benchmarks to be utilized by the program. The documentation shows that the program has planned for multiple points and types of assessment, plans to use the information gathered for program improvement, and has established benchmarks and goals applicable both to the program and to outcomes such as graduation rates and employment.

Standard 9: Library and Information Resources

Recommendation: The VC recommends that the institution provide appropriately credentialed library staff with the administrative capacity and authority to ensure appropriate oversight and implementation of institutional policies related to learning resources and information literacy services.

Institutional response: The institutional response stated that the Seminary had already been engaged in the process of hiring a new Senior Library Director position. The Director will have the authority and capacity to provide the leadership and direction that the VC envisioned in making its recommendation. Further, as of May 2024, the library team includes three Master of Library Science (MLS) credentialed librarians and three library assistants. One of the librarians had acquired new technical expertise in instructional design, with an ability to implement additional institutional resources in information literacy. The library team will also have representatives participating in governance and the administrative organization of the Seminary, to influence continued development of the staff and institutional resources necessary to ensure GCTS doctoral students have full access to the resources needed to succeed in the proposed Ph.D. program.