



BIRMINGHAM THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

STUDENT HANDBOOK

2025 – Current

Updated March 2026

2100 Briarwood Way, Birmingham, Alabama 35243

birminghamtheologicalseminary.org

Welcome from the President

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ. I am so excited that you have decided to pursue your studies at Birmingham Theological Seminary. I think you will find that the BTS family is one which will support, encourage, challenge, and edify you as you pursue your calling in the Lord. Remember, this is your journey! We are grateful to be a trusted guide and partner on your road of service to our King.

I encourage you to take some time to read this Student Handbook. Here you will find information on the history, mission, and educational distinctives of BTS, in addition to our student and general academic policies. We truly believe our focus on ministerial training—by the church and for the church—lends a clear distinctive to the programs at BTS.

While we strive to bring great service to you as a student during this time, our greatest resource is our faculty. Whether they teach in the live, residential classroom or on video conference, we are recruiting a world-class faculty of pastor/professors and ministry-rich teachers who are committed to training a different generation of leaders. Do not hesitate to lean on them, talk to them, build relationships with them, and communicate with them! That is why they are here. The years of experience they bring to the classroom are truly extraordinary. I pray you will benefit from their wisdom!

I am confident that you will find BTS to be not only approachable, but also challenging. Although we are working to make quality reformed theological education flexible, approachable, attainable, and affordable, we are not compromising the standards of graduate and post-graduate studies. I encourage you to learn academically, but also to take the time to apply what you are learning to your area of ministry and service. Doing so will enrich your experience here one hundred-fold!

Remember what James tells us: *“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.”* (James 2:23–25).

All of us are here at BTS because of you. Our desire is that God would raise up this generation and the next to lead His church and His people forward to expand His Kingdom in His name. We are grateful you have chosen Birmingham Theological Seminary for your training.

Godspeed,

Harry L. Reeder, IV “Ike”

President

Birmingham Theological Seminary

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Introduction to BTS

Our Rich History

Birmingham Theological Seminary (BTS) was founded as a reformed multi-denominational seminary in Birmingham, Alabama in 1972. Two men, Dr. Frank Barker, Pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church, and Dr. Bill Hay, Pastor of Edgewood Presbyterian Church, saw the need for men and women to be trained for full-time Christian service to enrich their personal lives, increase their knowledge of the things of the Lord, and for men to be better equipped to teach, preach, and witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. These men also saw the need to enable those who felt God’s call to study for Christian work to do so on a part-time basis if obligations would not allow them to study full-time. Students could have the option to work full-time and to attend classes in the evenings and weekends.

BTS was initially known as the “Birmingham Extension Seminary for Theological Education,” often referred to as “BES.” BES began offering classes in the fall of 1972 at the Edgewood Presbyterian Church located in Homewood. As members of Edgewood Presbyterian Church departed to found Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA), led by Dr. Bill Hay, BTS became associated with Briarwood Presbyterian and Covenant Presbyterian as originating churches (1975). The seminary began with two degrees, Master of Divinity and Master of Religious Education. Six classes were offered, with 52 students enrolled: 17 M.Div., 14 M.R.E., and 21 audits. It was the original expectation that eventually BES would become the extension of a major seminary. However, in 1980, the name of the seminary was changed to “Birmingham Theological Seminary,” and BTS has continued to operate as a separate institution since that time.

During its more than 50-year history, more than 4,000 students have taken courses and over 400 students have been awarded master’s and doctoral level degrees. In the 2024–25 school year alone, BTS served over 600 unique students through a variety of delivery systems. BTS offers courses in various locations around the state of Alabama and in foreign countries such as New Zealand, Uganda, and India, with developing partnerships in Germany, by distance education and through relationships with other seminaries. In addition, BTS successfully launched new reformed seminaries in New Zealand and Uganda and, through our partnership with Thirdmill Ministries, currently enrolls over 40,000 students in a free online Certificate program.

We are privileged to enjoy a wonderfully diverse group of students and professors and hope to continue serving Birmingham, Alabama, America, and the world with quality, affordable, reformed theological education until our Lord returns.

Mission, Vision, and Values of Birmingham Theological Seminary

Mission: BTS is committed to making faithful theological education accessible to learners everywhere, equipping leaders for Christ’s church.

Vision: BTS strives to be the premier seminary for quality, sound, affordable theological education that extends to learners in diverse environments for kingdom impact on their communities through service to the local church.

Institutional Purpose: BTS is committed to making faithful theological education accessible to learners everywhere, equipping leaders for Christ’s church. We offer multiple graduate and postgraduate programs, both locally and online, to bring value to the church and the surrounding community. We serve individuals and churches by training future and current pastors, counselors, and lay leaders—both domestically and internationally. We are an historic, reformed seminary committed to Biblical inerrancy, infallibility, and authority and hold ecclesiastical recognition from multiple Protestant denominations. BTS utilizes Pastor/Professors to bring focused academic and theological training with practical application, designed to develop vocational and volunteer leaders in the church. **BTS is a multi-site seminary** that provides resources to students on a full-time and part-time basis. BTS believes education is a service that should be extended as far as reasonably possible to help the church grow spiritually and to bring kingdom impact to local communities with the good news of salvation through Christ alone.

BTS Institutional Values

Primary Values:

- **Gospel-Centered:** built on scripture, Trinitarian, redemptive and restorative
- **Academic:** maintain strong/clear academic standards
- **Pastoral:** equipping Christians to serve in the local church
- **Biblical Diversity:** multi-generational, men and women, multi-ethnic
- **Confessional:** guided by the major Protestant confessions
- **Flexible:** meet students where they are to guide them where God leads
- **Affordable:** making seminary financially viable
- **Service:** provide excellence in serving students, the local church, communities

Operational Values:

- **Lean Operations:** grow only when necessary
- **Shared Spaces:** partnering with the local church, utilize existing space
- **Pastor/Professors:** bring wisdom and experience to the classroom

Educational Values:

- **Academic:** maintain strong/clear academic standards
- **Pastoral Theology:** Pastor’s experience is a significant part of the education
- **Practical Application:** God’s word applied to everyday life
- **Leadership:** BTS education should impact, inspire, and train students for leadership

Aspirational Values:

- **Biblical Diversity:** multi-generational, men and women, multi-ethnic
- **Multi-generational:** classrooms with young enthusiasm and aged wisdom
- **Academic:** grow academic credibility
- **Pastoral:** train more pastors
- **Extendable:** develop better delivery systems
- **Outcomes-oriented:** track the impact of the degree programs from students/alumni

Operational Objectives

1. Keep BTS at \$100 per credit hour for graduate studies
2. Develop BTS champions that support education as discipleship
3. Grow the student body of BTS with appropriate student candidates (theological, academic, spiritual, volitional)
4. Maintain academic standards and consistency in academic outcomes
5. Expand the reach of BTS to National and Global circles
6. Develop optimal operating systems that keep BTS lean, efficient, and helpful

Student Learning Outcomes

1. **Scripture:** Students will articulate the truth of Scripture and Scripture as truth effectively, developing a love for the whole counsel of God as the Word of God.
2. **Reformed Theology:** Students will be able to engage and reproduce the primary and essential elements of Reformed Theology relative to the Five Solas.
3. **Local Church:** Students will be engaged in applied ministry projects in the local church.
4. **Wisdom:** Students will grow in character; increasing in their demonstration of wisdom and its fruits.
5. **Discipleship:** Students will be able to understand and articulate the nature and importance of discipleship—both ordinary (means of grace) and extraordinary (biblical counseling).
6. **Communication:** Students will grow in the efficacy of their communication (articulation, teaching/speaking, and preaching—respective to various departments) both in content knowledge and rhetorical strategies.
7. **Worldview:** Students will demonstrate a growing ability to apply God’s word to all spheres of life, evidenced through class discussion and other assigned assessments.
8. **Leadership:** Students will grow in their understanding of godly leadership and ability to lead others in service of the local church.

Accreditation

BTS is a charter member of the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS). ARTS achieved recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in 2024. CHEA is a nongovernmental accrediting organization that provides recognition to over 200 accrediting bodies across the United States. BTS has been accredited by ARTS for over 20 years and is currently undergoing its reaccreditation review during the 2025–2026 school year.

As an accrediting agency, ARTS is recognized by CHEA for the following scope of accreditation: ARTS Commission on Accreditation accredits United States-based institutions and other locations as determined by the Commission on Accreditation, which offer baccalaureate and/or graduate degrees in fields aimed at preparing students for Christian service and ministry through biblical and theological studies of Reformed traditions.

BTS also holds special agreements and/or articulation agreements with a number of other seminaries (Reformed Theological Seminary, Covenant Theological Seminary, Southern Seminary, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, etc.) that recognize BTS classes and degree programs.

While BTS appreciates deeply our accredited relationship with ARTS, at BTS, we believe the best “accreditation” we can have is the deeply respected relationship we have with multiple orthodox denominations that consider a BTS degree as suitable to ordination and pastoral ministry. What higher praise can be given, then that the church believes that what we are doing is worthy of training someone to serve and lead the Bride of Christ?

BTS is also exploring dual accreditation with the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) and ACSI program accreditation for the Master of Education program, as part of a long-term multi-accreditation strategy.

As a religious institution offering exclusively religious education, BTS operates under a religious institution exemption granted by the Alabama Higher Education Commission pursuant to Alabama law. BTS does not offer programs leading to state or federal professional licensure, and does not participate in federal student financial aid programs. All instruction originates from the Birmingham, Alabama campus through BTS’s distance education framework. Students residing in other states who enroll in BTS distance education are participating in religious education originating from Alabama. BTS’s programs, institutional structure, and delivery model are consistent with the criteria commonly associated with religious institution exemptions recognized by most states. Prospective distance education students are encouraged to review BTS’s institutional disclosures and to determine whether a religious degree from an Alabama-based theological institution meets their personal, denominational, professional, or academic objectives.

Theological Commitments

General Theological Commitments

BTS is a multi-denominational reformed seminary. We hold to the following faith distinctives, giving us an orthodox, reformed, covenantal, and confessional direction:

- God is sovereign over all of his creation in all ways and at all times.
- The Bible is the only infallible, inerrant, sufficient standard of faith and practice and, while it does not contain answers to every question regarding God’s creation, it does contain all that is needed for repentance and salvation unto God. The worldview crafted on the sufficiency of scripture can give the believer the appropriate grid and framework to interpret common grace insights and general revelation.
- The broadly accepted five principles of the Reformation are a categorical encapsulation of the work of God unto the salvation of the elect and may be broadly applied in many different denominations (*sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, soli Deo gloria*).
- That God is covenantal and works his relationship with his creation and his people through a series of covenants, fulfilled in the New Covenant of the Covenant of Grace.
- The fundamental creeds and confessions of the early church encapsulate the fundamental principles of orthodox Christianity (Creeds found in scripture, the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedonian Creed, and the Athanasian Creed).
- While containing some differences in doctrinal interpretation, the listed confessions of the Reformation broadly agree on salvation, the Trinity, God’s relationship to his creation, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the church and the sacraments, and the moral obligations for the Christian in sanctification. All faculty at BTS must attest to one of these confessions: the Westminster Confession and Standards, the London Confession of 1689 or Philadelphia Confession of 1742, the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism), or the First and Second Helvetic Confessions.

Statement of Faith (Faculty and Board Members)

BTS adheres to the following General Statement of Faith:

God is one Being existing in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is Sovereign, the Creator and the Sustainer of all things. God is the Source of and end of all truth.

The Scriptures are the written Word of God; inerrant in their original writings, and the infallible authority by which He directs and governs all our activities.

Jesus Christ is the eternal begotten Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary—truly God—truly Man. Through Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension, He accomplished a decisive victory over sin for His people and established His kingdom among men.

Man (Humankind) was created in the image of God as a rational, moral, and spiritual being. Man sinned in Adam and fell with him in his first transgression. Man’s fall affected him spiritually, intellectually, and physically. He is restored only by the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit and the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord will return in glory and triumph for the final judgment and the consummation of His Kingdom.

All members of faculty, coordinators and Board members must also agree and adhere to one or more of the following historic creeds:

- Westminster Confession of Faith and Standards
- Three Forms of Unity
- London Confession of 1689 or the Philadelphia Confession of 1742
- First and Second Helvetic Confessions

In addition, our faculty must agree to follow the parameters—educationally, theologically, and ecclesiastically—outlined in our Faculty Handbook. A copy of the Faculty Handbook is available online via the BTS website or at the seminary office’s request. BTS’s positions on theological issues align with the Presbyterian Church in America (founded 1973) and are represented by their study papers and committees. Theological position papers are available upon request from the Chief Academic Officer.

BTS and the PCA

The Master of Divinity curriculum has been specifically designed to fulfill the requirements of the uniform curriculum of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and has been approved by the Theological Education Committee of the PCA General Assembly (1978). Thus, Master of Divinity graduates of BTS are eligible for ordination in any presbytery of the PCA. BTS graduates have been ordained in the PCA since as early as 1980.

Other denominations recognize the Uniform Curriculum of the PCA as one of the most comprehensive in ministerial education. Students who are not in the PCA and pursuing ordination in other denominations may make course substitutions as appropriate (polity, confessional survey of systematic theology, etc.) with approval of the Academic Affairs team.

The PCA has adopted an internship program which must be completed prior to ordination in addition to the Master of Divinity degree. The PCA requires either a one-year internship with a three-year degree or a two-year internship with a two-year degree. BTS is structured to accommodate this additional requirement.

Birmingham Theological Seminary is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and a Board-Directed Ministry of Briarwood Presbyterian Church. BTS answers directly to a Board of Directors, which reports in accountability to the Session of Briarwood Presbyterian Church for theological, fiscal, ethical, and operational accountability. BTS is able to grant degrees in the State of Alabama pursuant to Chapter 46 of Title 16 of the Alabama Code.

BTS and Ordination

BTS holds itself responsible for providing Christ-honoring studies in accordance with our mission and purpose statement. BTS does not ordain clergy or attempt to evaluate an individual’s personal calling or position in the body of Christ. Ordination is handled by local churches and their denominations.

General Information

General Informational Email Address: Admin@bts.education

Mailing Address: 2100 Briarwood Way, Attention Birmingham Theological Seminary, Birmingham, AL 35243

Office Hours

Monday – Thursday: 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM

Friday: 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Several BTS team members work remotely. We highly recommend communicating via email to set up meeting times either in person or via video conference.

BTS Annual Holiday Schedule

New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Spring Break (Briarwood Global Missions Conference), Easter Break (Wed–Fri), Memorial Day, Juneteenth Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Fall Break (Briarwood National Missions Conference), Thanksgiving (Wed–Fri), Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year’s Eve.

Spring Break and Fall Break: BTS Spring Break occurs the week of the Briarwood Presbyterian Church Global Missions Conference in February and the BTS Fall Break occurs during the week of the Briarwood Presbyterian Church National Missions Conference annually. No classes will meet that week, whether they are on-site classes or online classes. We encourage students and faculty to utilize the Fall and Spring Breaks to rest and to move ahead with class requirements.

Semester Launches:

- Fall Semester always starts the Tuesday after Labor Day
- Spring Semester always starts the Tuesday after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Summer Semester always starts the Tuesday after Memorial Day

Academic Programs Overview

Birmingham Theological Seminary designs its curricular architecture around a Five-Tier program structure. This framework creates pathways to success for every student, from lay leaders seeking foundational theological knowledge to scholars preparing for advanced academic work. The same course may serve multiple programs simultaneously, while each program configuration is tailored to what that particular student needs for faithfulness and effectiveness in their calling.

For complete program details, course descriptions, and degree checklists, students should consult the BTS Course Catalog, available on the website or from the Registrar's office at registrar@bts.education. Dedicated program handbooks are available for the MEd, ThM, and DMin programs.

Tier 1 – Learning and Advanced Certificates

Learning Certificates (4 courses / 8 credit hours) and Advanced Certificates (15 courses / 30 credit hours) provide foundational theological education for lay leaders, church volunteers, and those exploring seminary studies.

Tier 2 – Professional Master's Degrees

Master of Biblical Studies, Master of Apologetics, and Master of Education (MEd). These programs equip students for professional service in ministry, education, and apologetics contexts.

Tier 3 – Academic MA Degrees

MA in Pastoral Leadership, MA in Biblical Counseling, and MA in Public Theology. These are more academically rigorous programs (60+ credit hours) for students pursuing advanced study in a specific theological discipline.

Tier 4 – Master of Divinity (102 credit hours)

The MDiv is BTS's flagship ordination-preparation degree, with an Ordination Track and concentrations in Biblical Counseling, Public Theology, Biblical Languages, and Chaplaincy.

Tier 5 – Post-Graduate Programs

Master of Theology (ThM) and Doctor of Ministry (DMin). The ThM currently offers a Systematic Theology track, with plans to add a Reformed Historical and Presbyterian History track and a Biblical Studies track (with concentrations in Languages and Exegesis or Biblical and Covenant Theology) in 2027–28. The DMin offers six concentrations.

BTS Operational Team

Executive Team

President: Mr. Ike Reeder — Ike@bts.education

Chief Academic Officer: Mr. Justin Richardson — Justin@bts.education

Chief of Staff: Dr. Jay Haley — Jay@bts.education

Chief Admissions and Communications Officer: Mr. Dave Latham — David@bts.education

Vice President of Development: Mr. Jason Jacobs — jason.jacobs@bts.education

Directors

VP Emeritus, Director of Prison Initiative and International Partnerships: Dr. Thad James, Jr. — Thad@bts.education

Director of Distance Education and Technology: Mr. Brandon Robbins — Brandon@bts.education

Director of Chaplaincy Programs: Dr. Pete Sniffin — sniffin@bts.education

Director of Research and Writing: Dr. Pat Sanders — pat.sanders@bts.education

Director of Postgraduate Studies and Huntsville Campus Coordinator (effective June 1, 2026): Dr. Roy McDaniel — roymcd@bts.education

Administrative Team

Registrar: Mrs. Norma Thompson — norma@bts.education

Communications Coordinator: Mrs. Emily Hayes — emily@bts.education

Admissions and Development Coordinator: Mrs. Irene Hayes — irene@bts.education

Billing/Bookkeeping: Mrs. Lauren George — Finance@bts.education

Office and Academic Administrator: Dr. Deb Quenelle — Deb@bts.education

Office Assistant Registrar and Afternoon Receptionist: Mrs. Pam Barker — pam@bts.education

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Is BTS accredited?

BTS is accredited by the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS), which is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a nongovernmental accrediting organization that provides recognition to over 200 accrediting bodies. See the Accreditation section under Introduction to BTS for more information.

BTS degrees are designed to prepare individuals to work in nonprofit and church-based contexts. In most situations, the state generally does not make determinations regarding degree validity for religious and nonprofit vocations. Students should understand that earning a degree does not guarantee employment in any field. The applicability of a BTS degree in any specific employment context is at the discretion of the degree holder and potential employers.

How much does it cost?

BTS costs \$100 per credit hour for graduate studies and \$200 per credit hour for doctoral studies. Students can audit graduate classes for \$100 per class (\$50 per credit hour). Auditing a doctoral class is \$300 and requires approval from the Director of Postgraduate Studies. Some classes are not available for auditing at the discretion of the Chief Academic Officer. There is a \$50 application fee for graduate programs and a \$100 application fee for doctoral programs. Certificate program applications are free. Students are assessed an annual student services fee of \$150 (effective September 2026–27) and, starting in January 2027, a \$50 library resources fee covering access to Perlego with over 1,500,000 book titles. The Perlego library covers over 80% of required texts for all BTS classes.

What if I just want to sit in a class for fun?

BTS welcomes audit students in classes, except in some specific instances where classes require a prerequisite or classes that are gender restricted (i.e., Ministry of the Word 1 and Ministry of the Word 2, which are restricted to men preparing for ordination). Some classes are locked by prerequisite; for example, Biblical Counseling: Gender and Sexuality requires two prerequisite classes taken for credit. BTS now offers Reformed Preaching, an academic study of the doctrine of preaching that surveys preaching from biblical sermons through modern sermons and analyzes the doctrine of preaching. This course is designed specifically for lay people in the church who want to learn more about what preaching is. Audit fees are \$100 for graduate classes and \$300 for doctoral classes. Professors' primary responsibilities are to credit-seeking students and will, at times, need to direct audit students to curb questions or comments so they can focus on the credit students.

Does BTS have a library?

BTS has an onsite library and students who have paid their annual student services fee have access to the LOGOS Remote Library with over 3,000 volumes and journals. Birmingham or Alabama-based students also have access to the Samford University on-site and online library. BTS encourages distance-based students to take their BTS student identification card to their local college or university library and request a reciprocated

relationship with BTS. The Chief Academic Officer can help facilitate that request. Starting in January 2027, all BTS students will also have access to the Perlego Theology and Research Library. BTS is also working to add the ATLA Religion Database for extensive journal collections.

Is there a student lifestyle contract?

Because BTS is a non-residential school, we do not have a specific lifestyle contract students must sign for admittance, other than affirmation of their commitment to Christ and the upkeep of their Christian testimony. There are, however, instances beyond the general student academic code of conduct where the school might request the student take a leave of absence or that might result in expulsion (e.g., plagiarism, cheating, etc.). If the student exhibits a significant moral failing or is living in a condition of unrepentant sin, the academic committee will follow up with the student to determine the appropriate discipline.

How many degrees does BTS offer?

BTS offers programs across five tiers, from Learning Certificates to doctoral programs. These include Learning and Advanced Certificates (Tier 1), Professional Master’s degrees such as the Master of Biblical Studies, Master of Apologetics, and Master of Education (Tier 2), Academic MA degrees in Pastoral Leadership, Biblical Counseling, and Public Theology (Tier 3), the Master of Divinity with multiple concentrations (Tier 4), and the Master of Theology and Doctor of Ministry at the post-graduate level (Tier 5). The ThM currently offers a Systematic Theology track, with plans to add a Reformed Historical and Presbyterian History track and a Biblical Studies track in 2027–28. See the Academic Programs Overview section for more details, and consult the Course Catalog for complete program information.

Do other seminaries recognize BTS as a legitimate school?

Yes. BTS has long been recognized by seminaries in the broader reformed community. BTS graduates have gone on to PhD programs and Doctor of Ministry programs at other seminaries. BTS’s CHEA-recognized accreditation through ARTS further strengthens this recognition.

Can I transfer my credits from BTS to another seminary?

The first thing that is important to recognize about transfer credits is that no school is required to accept transfer credits from any other school, even if they share accreditation from the same body. Every school can make their own decisions about what constitutes transferable credits, regardless of shared accreditation. BTS does have special relationships or memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with multiple seminaries and has routinely partnered with other seminaries for transferable credits. However, we always encourage students to discuss transferable credits with the desired seminary before taking classes at BTS, if their ultimate intention is to transfer to another school.

Does BTS award scholarships?

Yes, BTS has multiple scholarships. BTS offers scholarships for financial aid; there are no other options for financial aid. BTS does not accept federal loans or federal funding in any capacity.

Most scholarships are taken from the Barker/Hay Scholarship Fund, named after our founders: Dr. Frank Barker and Dr. Bill Hay. To receive a general scholarship, a student must be taking two or more classes and can receive a 50% tuition reduction. Scholarships are awarded at the beginning of the school year (August), and students must have a completed application on file to qualify.

Scholarships for pastoral studies students are funded by the endowment for the Reeder Center for Pastoral Studies. The seminary can award up to 10 annual Reeder Center Scholarships, which are full scholarships. Eligible programs include the MA in Pastoral Leadership, Master of Divinity, or Doctor of Ministry. Recipients must take three or more classes per semester (DMin students are eligible taking their normal one class per semester), maintain a 3.0 GPA, and work at the Reeder Center (onsite or remotely) on the developing transcript database of Harry Reeder's forty-plus years of sermons. For more information, visit www.reedercenter.org.

Other scholarship situations are at the discretion of the President of the seminary.

Can international students attend BTS?

International students can attend BTS with no special consideration as distance-based students utilizing our correspondence and video conference programs. However, to be a residential student, international students must be SEVIS-approved students with an F1 visa and must be residential in Birmingham, AL. BTS is a SEVIS-approved, F1 visa-certified school. BTS submits the application through SEVIS for visas to be processed but does not process the visas directly. Please see our section on International Students for more information.

Can I attend BTS as a part-time student?

Yes. BTS is designed specifically to cater to part-time students. Most classes are offered in the evenings, early mornings, in intensives, or in modified intensives on Saturdays. BTS also has a growing number of full-time students who attend as well.

Can I attend BTS as a full-time student?

Yes. While designed primarily for part-time students, BTS has a growing number of full-time students. While BTS does not offer permanent student housing, we do believe that the low cost of student tuition is helpful for students seeking residential education and Birmingham is competitively affordable for residency when compared to other residential seminary options.

Does BTS offer Distance Education or Video Conferencing options?

Yes, BTS offers over 30 traditional correspondence courses that students can utilize for their degree programs. In addition, BTS offers a full video conference class schedule every semester using Zoom as its primary delivery platform. Classes may be taken synchronously (live) or, with professor permission, asynchronously via class recordings. BTS also offers intensive course formats. Students can utilize these different delivery systems at any time in their seminary journey, as there are no requirements that students complete their degree in one delivery system or another.

Can I be ordained by BTS?

No. BTS does not offer ordination. We believe ordination is the responsibility of the church, locally or in its governing bodies.

Admissions and Enrollment Policies

Open Enrollment Policy

BTS operates as an Open Enrollment institution. This means students can take classes at BTS (as an audit or a credit student) without applying to the institution. We require all students who have not applied to a specific program to give us their name, email address, and highest level of education. Students may take up to four classes without applying for a program before being required to formally apply to a certificate or graduate program. BTS highly recommends that students take the Introduction to Theological Research and Writing class within their first two to three classes. After four classes, students are required to take Introduction to Theological Research and Writing in order to continue.

BTS does not utilize the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the Graduate Record Examination, or any other standardized test as a measure for admission. Any qualified applicant may enroll in courses and/or degree programs; however, the applicant must meet the academic, admissions, and financial requirements.

When to Apply and Enroll

BTS operates on a rolling or continuous enrollment system for distance education. Live, in-person classes enroll at the beginning of each fall, spring, and summer semester. Distance education courses generally launch on the first and the fifteenth of the month, with the exception of Introduction to Theological Research and Writing, which launches only on the first of the month.

BTS awards scholarships only at the beginning of the school year (August). Students must have a completed application on file to qualify for a potential scholarship. Students may apply to BTS at any time, but scholarship awards take place in August.

The Doctoral program launches every fall, the weekend after Labor Day. Early acceptance applications are due by May 1; students with a complete application by May 1 will receive a scholarship decision by June 1. DMin scholarships are not automatic and must be applied for. General applications are required by July 1, which opens another scholarship window in the larger scholarship pool. Late applications are accepted until August 1 with an additional \$50 application fee.

Application Process

Application to Certificate Programs

Students may apply to a Learning Certificate program (four classes / 8 hours) or an Advanced Certificate program (15 classes / 30 hours) at any time during the school year (Fall, Spring, or Summer). Certificate program applications are free. All applications are available online and begin by filling out the “Start Your Journey” form on the BTS website.

Application to Graduate and Postgraduate Degree Programs

Application to degreed programs (graduate and postgraduate degrees) is similar to the application to the Certificate Programs but requires more information, including transcripts and reference forms. Graduate degree applications require a \$50 fee and postgraduate degree applications require a \$100 fee. If a student completes a certificate program and decides to enroll in a full graduate program, they must submit a full graduate application and pay the graduate application fee. All applications are available online and begin by filling out the “Start Your Journey” form on the BTS website.

Admission to Degree Program Requirements

General admission requirements are as follows:

- Statement of faith and Christian testimony
- Information regarding highest level of education attained (bachelor’s preferable for graduate school, graduate degree for postgraduate programs)
- Personal references (academic and spiritual)
- Transcripts showing prior educational experience
- Conversation with either the Admissions Coordinator or the Chief Admissions and Communications Officer. If necessary, the Admissions Officer will recommend an interview with the Chief Academic Officer or the President.

Prerequisite requirements for degree-seeking students vary according to degree level. Certificate applicants must have a high school diploma or have completed the General Educational Development (GED) test. Applicants for a master’s level program must have an earned bachelor’s degree from an approved school. Applicants to doctoral programs must have a master’s degree from an approved school with at least 60 hours of study, in addition to ministry experience. Additionally, more specific prerequisites may apply to individual programs. Applicants should refer to the degree listings in the catalog for further information.

As many as 10 percent (10%) of the students in master’s level degree programs may be admitted without possession of the baccalaureate degree or its equivalent. See the Non-Traditional Student Policy section below for more information.

Readmittance to BTS

Students sometimes find the need to take a break in completing courses due to personal or professional matters. If a student returns to complete a degree with BTS and has not taken classes in a two-year period, the student may return to the seminary but must submit an updated application and complete an interview. New references are not required except in cases deemed appropriate by the Admissions Team. In addition, upon readmission, BTS will conduct a degree audit. If the degree program has changed, the student will be required to reenter under the new degree program checklist. Students who have completed a substantial portion of their degree program may request a waiver from this requirement. After three years, a full new application will be required. Initial applications are kept on file for two years.

Non-Terminal Degree Continuation / Degree Vacating

Students who have been awarded the BTS Master of Biblical Studies or Master of Apologetics degree may continue their studies in pursuit of a “higher” degree, such as a Master of Arts or Master of Divinity degree. Because academic credit may not be applied toward two different degrees, the student, upon earning the “higher” degree, vacates the lower degree and all rights associated with that degree once attaining the higher degree. This degree vacating policy does not apply to the Master of Education, as there is no degree to which the MEd rolls up.

Transcripts

The student is responsible for obtaining their own transcripts for admissions information. All transcripts should be sent to the Registrar’s office at Birmingham Theological Seminary, 2100 Briarwood Way, Attention Birmingham Theological Seminary, Birmingham, AL 35243. In order for the application process to be complete, the transcripts must be official transcripts from the originating institution. Official transcripts are required within 30 days of applying. Copies or student-issued transcripts may be used during the enrollment process for preliminary evaluation; however, they are not considered official.

To be considered official, transcripts must be sent to BTS via one of the following methods: (1) The educational institution sends the official transcript directly to BTS via postal mail or electronically, or (2) The educational institution sends the official transcript to the student in a sealed envelope, and the student sends the sealed envelope to BTS. If the seal is broken before arriving at BTS, the transcript will not be considered official.

International Transcripts

If international transcripts are not in English, an English translation is required. Whenever possible, BTS will evaluate international credentials in-house. For any international credentials that BTS determines must be evaluated by an approved outside evaluation agency, BTS will notify the applicant/student accordingly. The applicant/student will be responsible for contacting the outside evaluation agency, as well as any costs incurred.

Transfer Students

Students who wish to transfer from other graduate institutions should apply for admission in the usual way, submitting with their application and required admission documents an official transcript of their graduate work. A request for transfer credit should be accompanied by a catalog containing the course descriptions from the previous institution. The credits must be of a comparable graduate level and the courses must apply to the BTS curriculum, in addition to theological alignment.

Transfer credit will be given the grade of “TR.” Students are required to pay a posting fee of \$30 per transfer credit hour, up to \$500. Bachelor/undergraduate courses cannot be transferred as graduate courses. Credits are not given for “Life” or ministry experience. Course work completed and used to earn a bachelor’s or master’s degree cannot be used toward earning another degree.

Because BTS operates on two-credit-hour courses, any additional credit from a three-hour course may be applied toward electives. One-hour credit courses from other institutions can be combined with other one-hour credit courses to constitute two-hour credit courses for transfer.

Transfer of Credits to BTS

For students that would like to transfer credits from other graduate schools to BTS, the following information should be taken into consideration: theological compatibility of the originating school and BTS; amount of course work required in the originating school; BTS classes that have a unique approach to certain theological subjects or that have been constructed to meet very particular requirements; and only classes with earned credit at an “A” or “B” grade level can transfer. BTS will take up to 30% of courses in transfer to a degree program, except in extraordinary cases. BTS may require capstone projects to demonstrate course mastery if the course has significant theological content that needs validation of alignment with BTS Theological Distinctives or course objectives. Degree checklists are supervised by the Admissions Department but are completed by the Academic Affairs team.

International Students

BTS is authorized under Federal law to enroll nonimmigrant alien students. 8 C.F.R. §214.3(j): International students seeking admission to BTS should complete all admissions requirements listed in the admission procedures and complete the forms found on the website, or by contacting Dr. Thad James, Director of Prison Initiative and International Partnerships, at Thad@bts.education.

All international students who intend to attend classes in the U.S. must apply for admission to Birmingham Theological Seminary. The admission process must be 100% complete prior to the issuance of Form I-20 and before the applicant is eligible for enrollment. SEVIS-approved students must reside in Birmingham, AL and must take a full-time load of classes (four classes per semester).

Non-Traditional Student Policy

Students without an undergraduate degree may apply for admission to the BTS Certificate programs. These students must possess the knowledge, academic skills, and abilities generally associated with persons who hold an undergraduate degree. Admission will be restricted to persons with life experience that have prepared them for theological study at the graduate level. The student must complete 10 credit hours (outlined below) with an A/B average (3.0 GPA). This portion is a “one strike” policy. If the student receives a C in any of these first five classes, they can retake it one time to attempt an A/B. If they are unable to get an A/B in the class, they may continue in the program working towards an Advanced Certificate Degree. If they can maintain a 3.0 GPA, then the probationary student may apply for admission into a graduate degree program. To remain in the graduate degree program after the probationary period, the student must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 for the first 30 hours of credit work. If they drop below 3.0 during this time, they will have a semester to regain the 3.0 GPA, or they may transfer back to an Advanced Certificate program. A 3.0 GPA does not need to be

maintained after successfully completing 30 hours of study (although normal academic probation policies will always apply to all students in all programs).

Acceptance into the BTS program as a non-traditional student is based on three fundamental requirements, assessed in conjunction with the applicant and potentially the applicant's referents:

1. BTS will assess the individual in question to determine whether pursuit of an undergraduate degree (associate degree or a bachelor's degree) is in the best interest of the applicant.
2. BTS will assess individual need for undergraduate education as regards career path, family, and the biblical imperative to provide for those with immediate dependencies.
3. BTS will assess the individual in question's use of their time, talents, and resources in relationship to education cost, job needs, and family needs.

After assessment, there are three significant elements of which non-traditional candidates need to be aware:

1. The student must complete a probationary 10 hours of study consisting of the following classes in the following order: (a) Introduction to Theological Research and Writing, (b) Bible Interpretation (Hermeneutics), (c) Introduction to Covenant Theology, (d) Westminster Confession of Faith, (e) the student may choose their final class.
2. BTS can only admit 10% of its student body as non-traditional students. If that number is currently reached, the student may pursue the Certificate track while on a waiting list for application to the graduate program.
3. Priority is given to students in pastoral studies. BTS is first an institute that trains men for pastoral ministry and our non-traditional acceptances must reflect that prioritization.

Fee and Tuition Schedule

Standard Fees:

Certificate Application Fee: Free

Graduate Application Fee: \$50

Doctoral Application Fee: \$100

Student Services Fee: \$150 (Annual, effective September 2026–27)

Library Resources Fee: \$50 (effective January 2027)

Tuition Charges:

Graduate Credit: \$100.00 per credit hour

Graduate Audit: \$50.00 per credit hour (\$100.00 per class)

Postgraduate Credit: \$200.00 per credit hour

Doctoral Audit: \$300.00 per class (requires approval of the Director of Postgraduate Studies)

Doctoral Program Additional Fees:

Outside Reader Fee for Dissertation: \$400.00

One-Time Fees Not Covered by Student Services Fee:

Transfer Credit/Posting Fees: \$30 per transfer hour, up to \$500

Biblical Counseling Internship Fee: \$100.00

Returned Check Fees: \$35.00

Graduation Fee (required of all graduates): \$200.00

Duplicate or Replacement Diploma: \$30.00

Tuition cost is assessed on a semester credit hour basis. Tuition pays for academic services including curriculum development and review, processing of student materials, admissions activities, processing and permanent retention of student records, faculty advisors and graders, lecture royalties, and student materials. BTS tuition is privileged to operate at less than one-fifth the national average for seminary tuition.

All student tuition payments are due in total prior to the end of the second week of class, or the student will be dropped from the class. There are no exceptions. Students may set up a payment plan for the semester, but that must be arranged within the first two weeks of classes.

Third Party Financial Sources

Whether or not the entire amount or a portion of the tuition/fees amount shown on the Registration is to be paid by the third-party source, the person signing the Registration is responsible for fulfilling the financial obligations of the Registration. Payments made by a third party to cover tuition or fees of a particular student are not considered charitable contributions to BTS by the IRS, as they are payments for services rendered to the student.

Returned Check Policy

Checks returned for non-payment to BTS will carry a surcharge of \$35.00 that will be billed to the student's account along with the amount of the check. Students demonstrating repeated irresponsibility in this area will be subject to having their program of study interrupted and to being dismissed as a student.

Financial Aid / Scholarships

BTS offers scholarships as the sole form of financial aid. BTS does not accept federal loans or federal funding in any capacity. Due to generous contributions from various churches, foundations, and individuals, BTS can keep tuition, fees, and other costs to a minimum. Current tuition is approximately one-fifth of other institutions.

To receive a general scholarship from the Barker/Hay Scholarship Fund, a student must be taking two or more classes and can receive a 50% tuition reduction. Scholarships are awarded at the beginning of the school year (August), and students must have a completed application on file to qualify.

Reeder Center Scholarships are full scholarships funded by the endowment for the Reeder Center for Pastoral Studies. Up to 10 are awarded annually. Eligible programs include the MA in Pastoral Leadership, Master of Divinity, or Doctor of Ministry. Recipients must take three or more classes per semester (DMin students are eligible taking their normal one class per semester), maintain a 3.0 GPA, and work at the Reeder Center on the developing transcript database. Visit www.reedercenter.org for more information.

Other scholarship situations are at the discretion of the President of the seminary.

General Student Account Information

Students have full access to their accounts through the Blackbaud student portal. If the student needs help with Blackbaud, we encourage them to contact the Registrar via email at registrar@bts.education. Students must provide proof of identification to receive information about their financial account.

Delinquent Accounts: A delinquent account is one with overdue charges. Students with delinquent accounts may not register for future courses, process drop/add or degree changes, receive extensions, or charge materials. Students may also lose the privilege to have their lessons graded. When the account is brought to current status, these privileges are regained.

Non-Discriminatory Policy

Birmingham Theological Seminary admits students of any race, color, sex, age, disability, national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the institution. BTS does not discriminate on the basis of these characteristics in its educational programs or activities, including admission or employment.

BTS is a religious institution and claims applicable exemptions under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, consistent with its confessional commitments and theological convictions.

In accordance with the historic Reformed confessional position—consistent with the Presbyterian Church in America and other confessional Reformed denominations with which BTS holds ecclesiastical recognition—BTS biblically restricts the ordained office to men. Certain courses directly related to the preparation of men for ordination, such as Ministry of the Word 1 and Ministry of the Word 2, are restricted accordingly. This restriction does not limit women’s access to any other program, course, or activity at BTS.

BTS will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with disabilities. Students requiring accommodations are encouraged to contact the Chief Academic Officer.

Academic Information

Academic Advising

Formal Academic Advising is conducted by the Registrar, Director of Distance Education and Technology, and the Chief Academic Officer. For doctoral students, the Director of Postgraduate Studies (effective June 2026) is also available. All are available to students to review degree programs, course options, or to plan out upcoming classes and modes of education for student efficiency in degree completion.

BTS professors are primarily adjunct faculty. While they can provide ministerial and educational guidance, for upcoming semester information it is most efficient to contact the Chief Academic Officer and the Registrar. Students should verify upcoming courses with the Registrar's office concerning upcoming semester plans that result from discussions with professors.

Academic Calendar

BTS operates on a Fall, Spring, and Summer calendar year. Fall is the start of a new school year, which concludes the following August. A full slate of classes is offered in each semester. The Summer semester is organized along intensive and video conference classes because of the amount of travel students undertake during that semester. In addition, BTS also operates a Winter Intensive term (Jan term) which will include all intensive courses offered in December and January. These classes are published by November 1 for student registration. BTS also operates a May term window, offering multiple intensives during that month that are counted to the Summer term.

Any distance education student registering for a class after the halfway point of a semester is registered in the following semester. All DE students who register for a class after July 1 are registered for that class for the following school year.

Academic Catalog

The Academic Catalog contains a list of all degree programs and their course checklists at BTS, as well as brief course descriptions. It is available on the BTS website or by contacting the Registrar's office at registrar@bts.education.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to demonstrate punctuality and attend all class sessions. Any absences should be communicated to the professor and/or seminary office beforehand. In the absence of professor approval, a student will be permitted three absences per semester in a course. If a student misses more than three classes without giving warning to their professor, they will be dropped one letter grade. Tardiness may be recorded and three unexcused tardies will be counted as one unexcused absence. Further unexcused absences exceeding the allowance may result in the student being dropped from the course with an "F" grade.

Course Registration, Withdrawal, and Drop/Add

Registration Procedures

About two months before each semester begins, the schedule is posted on the BTS website. One month prior to the beginning of each semester, the semester's course schedule and registration form will be published in the BTS Newsletter, which is emailed to all students and BTS alumni. Pre-registration is strongly encouraged to ensure materials are available the first night of class.

All forms are online. The transmission of electronic documents or email constitutes a legal signature. Existing students may easily register using their student portal in Blackbaud. New students who do not yet have a Blackbaud student login may complete a registration form online. Students may register for a distance education course via email or the DE registration form online.

Class Payment

BTS accepts cash, checks, and most credit cards. All student tuition payments are due in total prior to the end of the second week of class, or the student will be dropped from the class. There are no exceptions. Students may set up a payment plan for the semester, but that must be arranged within the first two weeks of classes. No student may register for a class after the second week of the semester.

Dropping/Adding a Course

Students may drop and/or add courses until the end of the second week of the semester but only if they have paid their annual student services fee of \$150. A dropped class does not appear on your student resume or degree checklist. Students may also add a new course in the first two weeks of the semester at no extra charge.

Withdrawal Policy

If a student finds it necessary to withdraw from a class, he/she must submit a withdrawal request form (available online). If the student simply discontinues attending class after the first week without submitting a withdrawal request form, the student will be liable for the entire tuition charge and will receive a failing grade (WF = Withdraw Failing).

If the student drops the course during the first two weeks, they may receive a full refund or apply those funds to another class or a future class. The class will not appear on their transcript. After the first two weeks, a withdrawal will appear on the transcript as a W (Withdrawn) and no refund will be issued.

A course may be changed from "credit" to "audit" at any time through the end of the fourth week of the semester. No credit for tuition or refund will be made if such a change occurs. An audit student may change from audit to credit by submitting an approving statement signed by the professor and paying the increased tuition.

Online Class Expectations (Zoom)

BTS utilizes Zoom as its primary video conference delivery platform. Some classes may occasionally use GoToTraining. Students should recognize that the ability to have world-class faculty available to them via video conference is a blessing. Here are several best practices for video conference classes:

- **Use the Chat:** The chat function is one of the best tools to store questions for the professor or class.
- **Designate a “Chatter”:** Enlisting and rotating students to monitor the chat box helps the professor and the students stay engaged.
- **Do not turn off video!** Keeping your video on is a sign that you are engaged with the materials and the learning situation.
- **Keep your mute button on unless ready to speak!** Video on, microphone off—this leads to a happy classroom!
- **For faculty:** have all materials available before class (syllabus, notes, handouts, etc.).
- **For students:** take handwritten notes. Taking notes by hand is a tactile action that studies show increases student retention.
- **Targeted Questions:** As a professor, identify students by name before asking a question, then ask, then repeat the student’s name and give them time to think.
- **Simple PowerPoints:** Even simple PowerPoints that break up the class into units or modules can help students keep track of progress and discussion.

Course Information

Course Materials

Students are responsible for obtaining all required materials and books for classes. These should be obtained before the first class. Textbooks may be bought at the Briarwood Bookstore for residential students or ordered from Amazon.com or another online provider. Starting in January 2027, a significant number of student texts will be available through the Perlego online library for digital use. Each semester’s textbook list with the current syllabus is published on the BTS website or may be obtained from the seminary office.

Location of Classes

BTS operates on a one-campus model with learning centers in partnership with local churches and their discipleship ministries. Primary classes are held at the Birmingham campus, with learning centers in Huntsville and Montgomery, Alabama. Temporary or micro-learning centers may also operate for live, in-person classes in any region where a church wishes to host a BTS professor. These are not campuses and are only functional if the host church promotes the classes and there are a minimum number of students to make the class financially viable. All class locations and delivery modalities will be posted on the website with the schedule.

Instructional Delivery Modes

BTS offers three overlapping course delivery systems. These modalities can be combined for any degree program to provide flexible completion options:

- Live, in-person classes at our Birmingham campus or in micro-learning centers.
- Live video conference classes via Zoom (synchronous), with asynchronous options available with permission from the professor of record.
- Correspondence, distance education classes: self-paced classes that the student has three months to complete.

Course Extension Requests and Retake Policy

Students may request from the professor up to one week extension without having to fill out an extension form. Any request for longer than one week must be communicated to the Chief Academic Officer via the Extension Request Form (available online). The professor has discretion in providing up to one-week extension. The Chief Academic Officer has complete discretion over longer extensions. Extensions are an act of mercy and are not required of the Academic Team.

Retake Policy

Students may retake a class in which they earned a “D” or an “F” one time and upon satisfactory completion of the course, they will receive an average of the two class scores.

Auditing Policy

BTS welcomes audit students in classes, except in some specific instances where classes require a prerequisite or classes that are gender restricted (i.e., Ministry of the Word 1 and Ministry of the Word 2). Some classes are locked by prerequisite at the discretion of the Chief Academic Officer. Audit fees are \$50 per credit hour (\$100 per graduate class). Doctoral audit fees are \$300 per class and require approval of the Director of Postgraduate Studies. While audit students are welcome, professors’ primary responsibilities are to the credit-seeking students.

Plagiarism

Academic integrity is a cornerstone of scholarly work. Plagiarism, the act of presenting another’s work, ideas, or expressions as one’s own, is a serious violation of this principle. This policy outlines the expectations, procedures, and consequences related to plagiarism at BTS.

Definition of Plagiarism

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:

- **Direct Copying:** Using exact phrases, sentences, or paragraphs from another source without proper citation.
- **Paraphrasing:** Rewording or rephrasing someone else’s ideas without giving proper credit.

- **Use of Unattributed Sources:** Presenting information, data, or analysis from another work without appropriate acknowledgment.
- **Self-Plagiarism:** Submitting one's previous work, in whole or in part, without proper citation or approval, as new content. (This does not include reusing papers written in doctoral classes for later use in dissertation construction.)
- **Unauthorized Collaboration:** Submitting collaborative work under a single author's name without acknowledging the contributions of others.
- **Improper Use of AI Tools:** Utilizing generative AI tools to produce text, data, or other scholarly materials without appropriate disclosure or citation. See also the Generative AI Policy below.

Scope

This policy applies to all graduate and postgraduate students across all programs, including coursework, research, theses, dissertations, publications, and any other academic work.

Responsibilities

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism and ensuring that their work adheres to the highest standards of academic integrity. Much of this information is taught in the Introduction to Theological Research and Writing class for graduate students and Research and Design for postgraduate students. Faculty members are responsible for educating students about plagiarism, providing clear guidance on citation practices, and taking appropriate action if plagiarism is suspected.

Procedures for Handling Plagiarism

When plagiarism is suspected, the faculty member should gather relevant evidence and discuss the case with the student. If the issue is not resolved at the faculty level, the case should be referred to the Academic Team, which will conduct a formal investigation. The Academic Team will determine whether plagiarism has occurred and the appropriate sanction. Every time the Academic Team must take up plagiarism cases, it reports on them to the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors, including the names of the students and faculty involved.

Sanctions

Sanctions for plagiarism may include, in escalating order: warning, revision of work with a capped grade, grade penalty, academic probation, suspension, expulsion, or revocation of degree in cases of extreme plagiarism discovered after graduation.

Appeals

Students have the right to appeal the Academic Team's decision. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Chief Academic Officer within 14 days of the decision. The Chief Academic Officer will present the appeal to the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors, including the faculty member who first identified the offense as a non-voting ex officio representative. The Committee's decision is final.

Prevention and Education

BTS is committed to educating students about academic integrity through the BTS Writing Center (with online resources on plagiarism, style guides, and citation practices), workshops and seminars on ethical research, access to plagiarism detection software and writing support services, and faculty mentorship.

Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) Policy

This policy recognizes that while AI tools are a modern reality, their use in a seminary context must be guided by the principles of faithful discipleship and academic rigor. Unless clearly directed by the instructor, all students should submit their own original work, independent of artificial intelligence tools.

1. Content: A Vision for Intellectual Integrity

As a seminary committed to strong academic standards, we expect students to develop their own critical thinking and theological synthesis skills.

- **Permitted Uses:** Students may use generative AI as a research aid for tasks such as brainstorming initial ideas, creating rough outlines, or summarizing complex texts to gain a basic understanding.
- **Required Practices:** When using AI for these purposes, students must critically evaluate the generated content for accuracy and theological soundness. All ideas, arguments, or structures derived from AI must be properly cited as a source and integrated into the student's own original work.
- **Prohibited Uses:** Using generative AI to write papers, create significant portions of assignments, or generate content without verification and citation is strictly prohibited.

2. Character: The Cultivation of Wisdom

Our commitment to the truth of Scripture requires a corresponding commitment to intellectual truthfulness in all academic work. Taking intellectual shortcuts by misusing AI compromises the character necessary for faithful ministry. As future leaders, students are called to be faithful stewards of the gifts and minds God has given them.

3. Competency: Equipping Leaders for a Digital World

The process of writing papers and preparing sermons is a primary way students grow in their communication efficacy and content knowledge. Misusing AI circumvents this essential development. A violation of this policy is a serious breach of academic integrity and will result in a zero on the assignment and/or a lowered letter grade for the course. If determined to be an egregious violation, it could lead to further sanctions administered through the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors, including expulsion from BTS.

Grading and Grade Scales

Grading Scale and Quality Points Per Hour

A (95–100) = 4.0 Quality Points | A- (90–94) = 3.5 Quality Points

B (85–89) = 3.0 Quality Points | B- (80–84) = 2.5 Quality Points

C (75–79) = 2.0 Quality Points | C- (70–74) = 1.5 Quality Points

D (65–69) = 1.0 Quality Point | D- (60–64) = 0.5 Quality Point

F (Below 60) = 0.0 Quality Points

General Grading Guidelines

A: Represents a superior understanding of the subject matter, prompt and complete preparation of assignments, outstanding ability as manifested by such things as original thinking, extra reading or projects, and an interested attitude in and contribution to class discussions.

B: Represents a good understanding of the subject matter, prompt and complete preparation of assignments, above average ability as manifested by reading comprehension, and an interested attitude in and contribution to class discussion.

C: This student's work during the semester is satisfactory but is lacking in significant areas and does not show a grasp of some basic principles or does not meet several of the key objectives outlined in the course syllabus.

D: There are serious problems with the student's work this semester, though it is still passable. It represents a poor performance in comprehending the course content and only meets the minimal standard of the professor.

F: This work is unacceptable and fails to meet the requirements of the assignment.

In a course in which a failing grade has been received, a student who has feasible reasons may ask the professor to grant permission to take a re-examination or complete a reassignment within 21 days after notification of the failing grade. When a student repeats a course where he or she has earned an F, the F will be replaced by an average of the two class scores.

Grading Criteria and Assessment for Research and Longform Papers

BTS has adopted the most recent edition of Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* as its standard style guide. All papers are to be double-spaced, 12 point, Times New Roman font. Detailed grading rubrics for research papers are available from the BTS Writing Center.

Incomplete Grades

Should a student find it impossible to complete work on time, the professor should be the first to know. The professor is required to report a grade of "I" (Incomplete) within two weeks of the end of the semester. The student has six weeks from the semester's end to have the professor change the incomplete grade to a final grade. If no final grade is received by the six-week deadline, a failing grade will be posted. If a student submits course materials after the end of the semester but within the six-week period, the student's final course grade will be lowered by one letter grade. The primary difference between incomplete work and requesting an extension is that the extension allows the student to keep the highest grade form attained, while the incomplete means a minimum of one letter grade reduction.

Student Access to Grades

Student grades are accessible in their Student Portal in Blackbaud. Grades are only visible after tuition fees are paid.

Grade Grievance Procedure

Student Grievance Procedure

Students who are dissatisfied with a submission grade or comments received from a faculty member are asked to contact the faculty member of record through the Chief Academic Officer's office. If the grievance is sustained, the faculty member can modify the evaluation. If the student still believes a submission was unfairly evaluated, he/she may resubmit the original graded copy along with an unmarked copy to the Chief Academic Officer for reevaluation. The second grade becomes the grade of record, even if it reflects a lower score. If this resolution is unsatisfactory, the parties may appeal to the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors. The decision of this Committee is final.

Faculty Grievance Procedure

Faculty are responsible for evaluating all work sent to them and cannot return work without first evaluating and making comments. Individual faculty members may at their discretion allow papers to be reworked. Students who do not wish to resubmit would then be assigned the grade according to the original evaluation. If the student is dissatisfied with the grade received and the faculty option, the student may proceed with the student grievance procedures above.

Other Potential Grievance Issues

Grievances relating to other issues, whether academic or non-academic, may be submitted in written form to the Chief Academic Officer. Students are encouraged to first approach the person with whom they have a grievance (Matt. 18:15). The Chief Academic Officer will provide a written response. If the response is not satisfactory, the person may appeal to the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors. The decision of this Committee is final.

Academic Probation and Dismissal

All Seminary students must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 2.0. At the end of any semester, a student whose overall average is below 2.0 will be placed on academic probation. If, after the next semester, the student has not raised the average to at least 2.0, the student will be dismissed for academic reasons. The Chief Academic Officer can also place a student on probation based on academic violation of BTS policies and/or relevant student improprieties. The terms and conditions of probation will be documented in writing.

BTS Learning Management System (LMS)

BTS utilizes Blackbaud as the primary Student Management System (SMS) and the learning management system for in-person and video conference classes. LearnDash is the LMS for distance education classes. All students are given a Blackbaud login when they go through the application process. BTS conducts a live, in-person New Student Orientation in the fall and a video conference New Student Orientation in the spring. The fall orientation will be recorded and made available to students who are unable to attend.

Graduation

Starting in 2027, graduation will occur on the second Friday of the month of May. Each student must understand all graduation requirements. The responsibility for meeting the requirements for a degree rests with the individual student.

A student may walk at graduation if they have six hours or fewer remaining to complete in the summer semester, but they must have a degree completion plan on file with the Chief Academic Officer. Students who walk under this provision will receive their diploma the night of graduation but must return it; the diploma will be mailed upon completion of remaining summer classes.

Students must notify the Seminary office of their intention to apply for graduation at least one year before graduation. BTS keeps student progress records and will also work to notify the student one year prior to graduation if they qualify. Each graduate must pay a graduation fee (\$200) before graduation, whether the student participates in the graduation ceremony or not. This fee covers the administrative costs of processing graduation, including diplomas, printing, shipping, and general graduation costs.

Spiritual Life and Conduct Expectations

BTS Community Standards

Student Lifestyles

BTS is a religious, non-profit Seminary representing Jesus Christ to Birmingham and the world. The policies of BTS have been and continue to be in submission to the Word of God. BTS expects its students to conduct themselves in a manner that will not raise questions regarding their Christian testimonies. A Christian lifestyle should reflect the Biblical perspective of integrity and appropriate personal and family relationships, business conduct, and moral behavior (1 Corinthians 10:31, Colossians 3:17). Students should be aware that this includes how they utilize such technology as the internet, texting, social networking, and blogging.

Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

BTS embraces, affirms, and teaches the gift of sexuality, divinely designed as an act of intimacy to be embraced only within the bounds of a heterosexual, monogamous, covenantal, conjugal marital relationship. Sexual activity outside of those bounds or advocacy of the same is not consistent with the Christian lifestyle BTS expects of students. BTS students are expected to demonstrate a teachable spirit, an ability to share love for others, a willingness to live contentedly under authority, and a commitment to follow the Matthew 18 principle when an issue arises with fellow students. The BTS Statement of Faith expects all students to maintain a lifestyle based on Biblical standards of moral conduct in which Christ has pre-eminence (Colossians 1:18). More information on the BTS position regarding gender and sexuality can be found in accordance with the PCA position paper on Gender and Sexuality, and the Briarwood Statement on Gender and Sexuality (available upon request from the office or in the Appendices of the Faculty Handbook).

Firearms

BTS students are not allowed to bring firearms, weapons, explosives, or other dangerous materials on Briarwood Presbyterian Church property or at any BTS class location unless certified by the State of Alabama as a Law Enforcement/Peace Officer.

The Lord's Day

As believers, students are expected to observe the Lord's Day as a day of Sabbath rest. BTS administration and faculty are clearly instructed not to email students on the Lord's Day, except in the case of extreme or inclement weather communications for Monday morning classes. While we do not control what staff or students can do on the Lord's Day, we strongly encourage students and staff to avoid seminary work on Sundays to the best of their ability. BTS encourages professors to avoid Mondays as due dates, except where necessary (Monday classes).

Academic Discipleship

BTS views education as a specific activity of discipleship. As such, we expect the classroom to be academic in nature, but to also deeply resonate with practical ministry application, personal spiritual formation, and even spiritual renewal. The eight BTS student learning outcomes found in the Mission/Vision statement represent this discipleship-oriented approach to graduate and postgraduate education.

Academic Standards and Code of Ethics

Academic Integrity

BTS assumes that all of its students desire to pursue all academic work with honesty and scholarly integrity. Breaches of academic honesty and integrity are infringements of the mutual faith and trust essential to the academic enterprise. Activities that have the effect or intention of interfering with education, pursuit of knowledge, or fair evaluation of a student’s performance are prohibited. Examples include cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, multiple submissions, misrepresentation of academic records, facilitating academic dishonesty, unfair advantage, and computer crimes. For the detailed Plagiarism and Generative AI policies, see the Academic Information section of this handbook.

Those students whose work definitively can be shown to breach academic honesty or scholarly integrity will face academic investigation. Sanctions will be imposed, ranging from grade reduction to course failure to dismissal from the school.

Counseling Services

Students are encouraged to discuss any personal matters and seek desired guidance from any faculty or staff member; however, we encourage students to remember that most of our professors are not trained counselors. BTS does not offer institutional or professional counseling services. For academic counseling regarding academic progress, students should contact the Chief Academic Officer or the Registrar. For personal counseling needs, we recommend contacting The Altadena House at Briarwood Presbyterian Church for counseling options.

Technology Policy

Understanding that technology is only as useful as those who utilize it, BTS recommends an adoptive stance towards technology for information dispersal and a cautious stance towards technology for information processing. BTS is committed to utilizing technology for the dissemination of information and to make accessible to students world-class professors from around the world. However, while we expect students to be able to use telecommunications technology, we also highly recommend students utilize analog means of classroom study—keep handwritten notes, read in physical books, draft and outline ideas by hand, etc.

Students who are not taking live, in-person classes but availing themselves of video conference and other distance education methods are required to have technology and internet access that can facilitate video conference-based classes.

Student Expectation of Privacy

Due to current privacy concerns, students have the right to review educational records relating to themselves and the right to request changes in those records if it is believed that the records are inaccurate, misleading, or violate the students' rights. Information about students' records will not be released to third parties without the express written consent of the student (including transcripts and financial records). However, BTS reserves the right to release such records to its contractors and government agencies as necessary to conduct the ordinary operations of BTS, including tax reporting, compliance with federal and state law and court orders, and financial compilations or audits.

Student Contact Information

Current student contact information is necessary for the staff and faculty at BTS to communicate with the students. Every student is responsible for ensuring that BTS has accurate postal address information, telephone information, and a current email address. These are normally reported in the application process, but we also request that, if the contact information changes, students should notify the Seminary Office via email at registrar@bts.education or telephone at 205-776-5650.

Students will receive BTS student newsletters and other potential communications via email. Students may choose to opt out of these communications for any reason.

Claims and Disputes

Academic grievances should be directed to the Chief Academic Officer following the Grade Grievance Procedure and Other Potential Grievance Issues procedures outlined in the Academic Information section of this handbook.

Personal grievances, including student-on-student disputes, faculty interactions outside the academic grading context, or other non-academic matters, should be directed to the Chief of Staff. Students are encouraged to first approach the person with whom they have a grievance (Matt. 18:15). If the matter cannot be resolved at the supervisory level, access to the Finance and Human Resources Committee of the Board of Directors via the Chief of Staff is available. The Committee's decision is final.

Student Services and Information

Distance Education

The BTS Master of Biblical Studies and multiple certificate programs are fully available to students via correspondence classes in a self-paced program. Students can start classes on the first or the fifteenth of the month (with the exception of Introduction to Theological Research and Writing, which launches only on the first) and will have three months to complete their course work. Students may complete courses faster if they are capable. Currently BTS has over 30 courses available via our distance learning platform.

Students may enroll in a distance education (DE) course at any time, one course at a time. There is a separate form to be completed to enroll in a DE course, available online. Students are responsible for purchasing textbooks. Three months is the maximum time allowed for completion of a DE course. If a student exceeds the three-month allotted time frame, a request for a one-time two-week extension must be applied for. If the course is not completed in this time frame, it will result in a failing grade, and the student must re-enroll and re-pay the course tuition.

DE exams are taken on the honor system. Almost all DE exams are now considered open book and open note. BTS does not require a proctor, but students are required to sign an honor statement saying that they observed the appropriate protocols given in the exam packet.

BTS's distance education programs operate under the academic authority and faculty oversight of the Birmingham, Alabama campus. BTS is a religious institution offering exclusively religious education, operating under a religious institution exemption granted by the Alabama Higher Education Commission. All instruction originates from and is administered by the Birmingham campus. Students residing in other states who enroll in BTS distance education are participating in religious education originating from Alabama. Students are responsible for determining whether a religious degree from an Alabama-based theological institution meets their personal, denominational, professional, or academic objectives. For full institutional disclosures, see the Accreditation section of this handbook.

Certificate in Christian Ministry (CCM) via Distance Education

BTS offers an online Certificate in Christian Ministry (CCM) to non-US residents only via the internet. Non-US residents may take courses in the Certificate Ministry curriculum for academic credit and will, upon satisfactory completion of all required courses, earn a Certificate in Christian Ministry from BTS. BTS does not charge any fees or tuition for this certificate program. Students must earn at least a 75 on each exam to pass and must have a 75 or better average to pass each course.

Students may receive up to 10 hours of credit applied to the Master of Biblical Studies or a larger program with the completion of five capstone projects supervised by the Director of Distance Education, subject to a \$200 credit transfer fee. US residents (regardless of citizenship or immigration status) may not take the CCM courses for academic credit. However, US residents may view the courses, download the readings, and take the quizzes and exams for their own edification.

Directed Studies

Directed studies classes must be approved by the Chief Academic Officer. Directed studies are course credits obtained by working directly with a professor in a group of one to three students or individually. These arrangements are permitted primarily for students who cannot schedule a necessary course before their planned graduation. The course must be completed within a three-month time frame.

Guidelines include: a minimum of two book critiques (combined readings of 600–1,000 pages, each report 3–5 typed pages); at least two exams; one course project of 12–15 pages with an average of two footnotes per page demonstrating acceptable academic standards and a bibliography of 5–7 books. All research papers must be formatted in accordance with Turabian Chicago standards including the title page. Papers are to be in 12-point Times New Roman font and double-spaced. If a student exceeds the three-month time frame, a one-month extension may be applied for with a fee of \$50. Incomplete work at the end of the extension period will result in a failing grade. For groups of four or more students, BTS will offer a full class.

Student ID Badges

BTS requires an identification badge and card for each student. Badges must be worn to all classes, as they help identify students at the various seminary locations, particularly on the Briarwood campus, and are useful for security purposes. The ID cards may also be used to secure student discounts at certain stores and may also allow entrance to certain libraries. All badges and cards remain active unless the student becomes inactive, at which point the student must apply for a new ID card and badge.

Writing Center and Standards

Writing Center

BTS operates its own Writing Center and Writing Workshops. Information can be found at the BTS Writing Center website: btswritingcenter.net. The BTS Research and Writing Center exists to support students with research and writing aids from writing workshops to online resources. The Writing Center is directed by Dr. Pat Sanders, Director of Research and Writing.

Research and Writing Standards

BTS has adopted the Turabian style of writing format for all research papers, clinicals, and dissertations (DMin), consistent with other theological schools. Students should use the most recent edition of *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian and *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology* by Nancy Vyhmeister. BTS is not endorsing all theological positions in Vyhmeister; however, it remains the standard text for learning how to write and research for theological education. BTS also publishes a Turabian Style Guide, available online at the BTS Research and Writing Center website. All papers are to be double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman font.

Library Resources

The BTS Library is located in the Briarwood Presbyterian Church facility. Students are welcome to check out books as long as they adhere to the rules of the library. BTS also has library privileges at Samford University on Lakeshore Drive. Student ID badges must be presented. Any fees incurred are the responsibility of the student. For distance education students, we recommend that students find the local community college or university library and use their BTS student identification badge to purchase a library card for that local library.

All BTS students have access to the LOGOS Remote Library with over 3,000 reference volumes and the Galaxie Research Journal Library, containing the majority of reformed theological academic journals. Access is granted if the student stays in good standing academically and fiscally at the seminary. After being accepted into BTS, students should contact the Registrar for information on getting access to the software for download. BTS runs a Logos training lab one Saturday each Fall and Spring semester.

Starting in January 2027, all BTS students will have access to the Perlego Theology and Research Library, with over 1,500,000 book titles available for digital use. BTS is also working to add the ATLA Religion Database for extensive journal collections.

Birmingham Theological Journal

The Birmingham Theological Journal (BTJ) showcases the work of BTS students, faculty, alumni, and guest contributors. Now in its third volume, the BTJ is an internally blind-reviewed journal with plans to transition to a peer-reviewed, blind-copy journal by 2028. Copies are available in the seminary office or online at: btswritingcenter.net/btj.

Class Recordings

In the age of hybrid in-person and video conference classes, BTS policy is that all classes on video conference will be recorded and those recordings will be made available to all students in the class. However, if the class is not on video conference, if the student wishes to record it, it is their responsibility.

Evaluations

Each semester, students are asked to complete an electronic course evaluation for each class. Students will receive an email containing a link to an online evaluation form for each course they register for. Participation is strongly encouraged. These evaluations are essential in our work in helping professors know how to be better teachers and helping students effectively evaluate their educational climate and processes.

Handbook Publication Notice

Every effort is made to provide accurate and up to date information. Birmingham Theological Seminary reserves the right to change statements in the Student Handbook concerning, but not limited to, policies, academic offerings, tuition and fees. BTS will make a reasonable effort to alert current students of any changes. However, it is the student's obligation to review this handbook periodically and be aware of its content. The information in this handbook supersedes and replaces the information in all previous publications. Where there is a conflict between the versions of the handbook, the most current version takes precedence.