



Birmingham Theological Seminary

Academic Policy Manual

Policies, Standards, and Institutional Frameworks
Governing Academic Operations

Effective Date: January 2026
Approved by the Office of the President

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Part I: Academic Standards and Quality	4
Chapter 1: Academic Quality Statement.....	4
Chapter 2: Plagiarism and Generative AI Policy	6
Chapter 3: Syllabus Component Map.....	7
Part II: Curriculum and Program Requirements	9
Chapter 4: Prerequisite Policy Reference	9
Chapter 5: Nontraditional Student Admission Policy	12
Chapter 6: Advanced Standing Articulation Statement.....	13
Part III: Assessment and Student Learning.....	19
Chapter 7: Alternative Assessment Framework	19
Chapter 8: MEd Competency-Based Portfolio Assessment Guide	27
Chapter 9: Annual Assessment Plan	32
Part IV: Professional Credentialing and Pathway Alignment	36
Chapter 10: PCA Ordination Pathway Mapping.....	36
Chapter 11: ACBC Practicum Alignment	41
Chapter 12: Lampstand Coach Certification Pathway	47
Part V: Student Access and Support	48
Chapter 13: Disability Accommodation Policy.....	48
Chapter 14: Student Retention and Outreach Policy	52
Part VI: Institutional Integrity and Communication	55
Chapter 15: Statement on Institutional Communications Integrity	55
Chapter 16: Statement on Diploma and Accreditation Mills	56
Part VII: Records, Data Protection, and Continuity	59
Chapter 17: Records Retention Policy.....	59
Chapter 18: Institutional Data Recovery and Records Protection Plan and Records Protection Plan	60
Chapter 19: Succession Plan.....	62
Part VIII: Distance Education	73
Chapter 20: Official Institutional Statement on Distance Education	73

Introduction

During the process of our 2025–26 reaccreditation with the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries, Birmingham Theological Seminary was afforded the opportunity to formalize and institutionalize a number of academic processes, procedures, and governance frameworks that had been developing organically over the preceding five to ten years. Many of these policies had long functioned as operational practice within the seminary but had not yet been codified in a single, published document. The reaccreditation self-study provided the occasion—and the institutional discipline—to bring these practices into formal written form.

This Academic Policy Manual is the result of that effort. It compiles the institutional policies, standards, and frameworks that govern the academic operations of Birmingham Theological Seminary into a single, comprehensive reference for faculty, staff, students, administrators, and accreditors.

The policies contained in this manual operate alongside four other institutional governing documents: the Board Policies Manual (governance), the Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual (human resources), the Faculty Handbook (instructional expectations), and the Student Handbook (student conduct and services). The Course Catalog documents program requirements, course descriptions, and academic calendars. Together, these six documents constitute the published institutional documentation of Birmingham Theological Seminary.

Each policy in this manual was adopted by executive action of the President or by action of the Board of Directors. Individual adoption dates and responsible officers are noted within each section. This manual is reviewed annually by the Chief Academic Officer and updated as policies are revised or new policies are adopted.

Birmingham Theological Seminary is a ministry of Briarwood Presbyterian Church (PCA).

Part I: Academic Standards and Quality

Chapter 1: Academic Quality Statement

A Declaration of Commitment to Academic Excellence

Adopted January 1, 2026

Academic Quality Statement

The mission of Birmingham Theological Seminary is to provide faithful and accessible advanced theological education for learners everywhere, building leaders to serve the local church. In pursuit of this mission, BTS is committed to the highest standards of academic quality across every dimension of its educational enterprise.

Foundational Convictions

Birmingham Theological Seminary holds that academic quality and theological faithfulness are not competing values but mutually reinforcing commitments. The God who reveals Himself in Scripture is the God of all truth, and the pursuit of academic excellence is an act of stewardship over the intellectual gifts He has entrusted to His church. We believe that the study of theology, conducted with rigor and humility, is itself a form of worship—an offering of the mind in service to the One who commands us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

This conviction shapes our approach to every aspect of institutional life: the design of our curriculum, the qualifications of our faculty, the assessment of our students, and the governance of our institution.

This statement represents the formal codification of what has long been the stated position and practice of Birmingham Theological Seminary. Its executive adoption reflects institutional maturation in documenting the commitments that have governed BTS's approach to academic quality throughout its history, not the introduction of new standards.

Commitment to Curricular Excellence

BTS maintains a comprehensive curriculum spanning Old Testament, New Testament, Historical Theology, Systematic Theology, Public Theology and Apologetics, Biblical Counseling, Christian Education, Pastoral Studies, and Worship Ministry. All course descriptions are approved by the institution and serve as the baseline standard of accountability for course content across all instructional formats and delivery sites. Faculty are encouraged to enrich and extend these descriptions through supplemental readings, specialized lectures, and current research, but no professor may alter, contradict, or substantially reframe the theological commitments, learning objectives, or stated content reflected in the approved descriptions without prior approval from the Chief Academic Officer.

Programs are designed with intentional sequencing, documented prerequisite relationships, and clear progression from foundational to advanced study. BTS's five-tier curricular architecture ensures that students at every level—from Learning Certificates through the Doctor of Ministry—are engaged in coursework that is appropriately challenging, theologically grounded, and connected to the institution's mission.

Commitment to Faculty Quality

BTS employs a Pastor/Professor model in which faculty are drawn from active ministry and bring both scholarly credentials and practical ministry experience to the classroom. All faculty teaching in degree programs hold appropriate graduate or terminal degrees in their fields of instruction or, in select cases, bring significant ministerial experience that qualifies them to teach with authority in their area of expertise. Core Faculty carry institutional responsibilities beyond teaching, including curriculum development, assessment oversight, student advising, and governance participation. Faculty are evaluated through student course evaluations, periodic review by the Chief Academic Officer, and annual assessment of professional development activities.

BTS recognizes that its faculty are the institution's most valuable academic resource. The seminary is committed to recruiting, retaining, and supporting faculty who demonstrate both scholarly competence and pastoral faithfulness, consistent with BTS's confessional commitments as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith and its sister Reformed confessions.

Commitment to Student Learning Assessment

BTS maintains a systematic approach to the assessment of student learning that operates at three levels: course-level assessment through faculty-designed assignments and evaluations; program-level assessment through documented Program Learning Outcomes that define what graduates of each program can do; and institutional-level assessment through eight Institutional Student Learning Outcomes that express BTS's formative commitments for every student regardless of program.

Assessment data is collected, reviewed, and used to inform continuous improvement of curriculum and instruction. The Chief Academic Officer oversees the annual assessment cycle, and findings are reported to the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors.

Commitment to Institutional Integrity

BTS is committed to honest, transparent, and accurate representation of its programs, credentials, and institutional standing. The seminary does not misrepresent its accreditation status, the nature of its degree programs, or the qualifications of its faculty. All public communications—including the website, catalog, and promotional materials—are reviewed for accuracy and consistency with institutional reality.

BTS is accredited by the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS), recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The seminary voluntarily submits to external review as a demonstration of its commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

Commitment to Accessibility Without Compromise

BTS believes that quality theological education should be accessible to all whom God calls, regardless of geographic location, vocational circumstance, or financial means. This conviction drives BTS's distributed learning model, its commitment to affordable tuition, and its development of multiple program pathways that meet students where they are. Accessibility, however, does not mean the reduction of academic standards. BTS maintains the same expectations for academic rigor, theological depth, and student performance across all delivery formats—in-person, video conference, and distance education—and across all program levels.

Date: _____

Chapter 2: Plagiarism and Generative AI Policy

BTS Plagiarism / Generative AI Policy

In addition to the BTS plagiarism policy, BTS is implementing a new Generative AI policy that is designed to promote intellectual integrity and the cultivation of wisdom. 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. The use of generative AI to write papers or to write significant portions of assignments is considered an ethical violation of our Student Code of Conduct and a violation of general academic integrity.

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. While AI tools can assist with research, they cannot replace the prayerful study and intellectual diligence required for theological education. Therefore:

- **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

A core purpose of a BTS education is to help students grow in character and demonstrate wisdom and its fruits. This policy is designed to cultivate intellectual honesty and personal diligence.

- **Theological Integrity:** 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.
- **Stewardship:** As future leaders, you are called to be faithful stewards of the gifts and minds God has given you. Delegating essential intellectual work to an algorithm hinders this development and undermines your own growth as a disciple.

3. Competency: Equipping Leaders for a Digital World

BTS is dedicated to equipping leaders for service in the local church. This includes the ability to communicate effectively and apply God's Word to all spheres of life in a digital age.

- **Communication Competency:** 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, leaving future ministry leaders ill-equipped to "rightly handle the word of truth."

- **Consequences:** 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, including expulsion from BTS.

Syllabus Summary of Plagiarism & AI Policy

In alignment with our commitment to intellectual integrity and the cultivation of wisdom, all students must submit their own original work on all assignments. Plagiarism, which includes the uncredited use of others' ideas or words, and the misuse of generative AI tools to write papers or significant portions of assignments, is considered an ethical violation and will be subject to academic discipline. AI tools may be used as a research aid for brainstorming or outlining, but all ideas must be verified, critically evaluated, and properly cited. For a full explanation of these policies, including details on appropriate and inappropriate uses, please refer to the Student Handbook.

Chapter 3: Syllabus Component Map

Every BTS syllabus follows this twelve-component structure. Each component serves a defined pedagogical purpose within the seminary's integrated formation model (Content, Character, and Competencies). The syllabus is the primary accountability instrument connecting individual courses to BTS's institutional Student Learning Outcomes.

#	Component	Purpose and Rationale
1	Course Description	2–3 sentences from the approved Course Catalog (authoritative baseline). Professor may add 2–3 personalizing sentences. Optional Course Note for special circumstances. Establishes the catalog-approved content baseline while allowing faculty contextualization.
2	Course Objectives	Built from the course description. Three categories: Cognitive (Content), Affective (Character), Volitional (Competencies). 2–3 objectives per category required. Advanced verb guide provided. Ensures every course addresses intellectual mastery, spiritual formation, and practical ministry skill.
3	Required Texts	Maps reading to course objectives. Exact page counts or ranges specified. Texts outside Reformed tradition marked with asterisk and explanatory note. Provides transparency on reading load and theological positioning.
4	Collateral/Recommended Texts	Clearly marked as not required. Guides deeper engagement without inflating workload. Explicitly distinguished from the extended bibliography to prevent confusion.
5	Course Requirements & Assessments	Clear directions for all assignments. Written work capped at 20–25 pages. Clear due dates required. 8–10 assessment type examples in sample syllabus. The cap prevents overload for working students while maintaining rigor.

6	Policies & Standards	Required across all syllabi: (a) BTS Format, Style, and Writing Standards with Writing Center URL; (b) Plagiarism and Generative AI Policy. Ensures uniform institutional standards across every course regardless of professor or delivery mode.
7	Course Schedule	Lecture outline, reading plan, and primary assignment due dates. Students can plan their entire semester workload from day one — critical for working professionals balancing ministry, family, and education.
8	Attendance Policy	Placed directly after schedule. Addresses residential, video conference, and asynchronous students with specific responsibilities. Delivery-mode-specific expectations for all student populations.
9	Class Policies & Procedures	General class policies followed by video conference best practices. Ensures both residential and distance students know how to participate effectively in their respective delivery modes.
10	Grading Criteria & Rubric	Specific grading standards for each assignment. Students know exactly how they will be evaluated before beginning work. Eliminates ambiguity and ensures fairness across sections and faculty.
11	SLO Evaluation	All 8 institutional SLOs listed. Professor ranks each 1–5 for this course with a one-sentence rationale. Not every course ranks 5 on every SLO. This is the mechanism connecting every course to the institutional SLO framework and generates aggregable program-level data.
12	Extended Bibliography	Selected/extended bibliography, minimum 20 works (up to 100). Need not conform to Reformed standards. Professors recommended to walk students through the list at course start, identifying useful research texts and flagging works from outside the Reformed tradition.

Design Logic: The syllabus moves from what the course teaches (1–4) to how students are assessed (5) to institutional standards and expectations (6–9) to how learning is measured and connected to institutional outcomes (10–12). The three-category objective structure (Component 2) ties directly to the SLO Evaluation (Component 11), creating a full-circle assessment framework within every course.

Reference: [BTS Sample Syllabus.pdf](#) | [BTS Student Learning Outcomes: About BTS - Our Mission, Vision & Educational Philosophy](#)

Part II: Curriculum and Program Requirements

Chapter 4: Prerequisite Policy Reference

Prerequisite Policy Reference

Consolidated Prerequisite and Sequencing Requirements Across All Programs

March 2026

Supplemental to the 2026–2028 Course Catalog and Student Handbook

1. Purpose and Scope

This document provides a consolidated reference of all prerequisite and sequencing requirements across the BTS curricular architecture. Prerequisites serve three institutional functions: they ensure students possess the foundational knowledge required for upper-level coursework, they protect the pedagogical integrity of courses that build on prior content, and they enforce the theological sequencing decisions that reflect BTS’s confessional commitments.

All prerequisites listed in this document are enforced by the Registrar’s Office and are not subject to waiver without written approval from the Chief Academic Officer. The Registrar verifies prerequisite completion at the point of course registration. Faculty are not responsible for enforcement but should report suspected prerequisite violations to the Registrar.

2. Universal Prerequisites

The following prerequisites apply across multiple programs and tiers. They constitute the foundational academic infrastructure of the BTS curriculum.

2.1 Learning Certificate Gateway

Upon completion of one Learning Certificate, any student wishing to continue—whether into a second Learning Certificate, an Advanced Certificate, or a degree program—must first complete Introduction to Theological Research and Writing (ST1410) and Hermeneutics (BT1205). Learning Certificate students are identified in Blackbaud and this designation is communicated to professors.

Trigger	Required Courses	Before	Enforced By
Student completes one Learning Certificate	ST1410 + BT1205	All further study	Registrar at enrollment

2.2 Early-Program Requirements

These courses must be completed early in every degree program. They establish the research writing competency and hermeneutical framework that all subsequent coursework assumes.

Course	Title	Timing	Applies To	Enforced
ST1410	Intro to Theological Research and Writing	First course or within first 2–3 courses	All degree programs except MEd	Registrar at enrollment
BT1205	Hermeneutics	Within first 3–6 courses	All degree programs	Registrar at enrollment

MEd Exception: The MEd does not require ST1410. MEd students are practicing professional educators with existing graduate-level research and writing competency. BT1205 (Hermeneutics) is still required.

2.3 BC1815 Prerequisite Chain

Biblical Counseling and Gender and Sexuality (BC1815) carries BTS’s most rigorously enforced prerequisite chain. Both ST1422 (Systematic Theology II: Anthropology) and BC1805 (Introduction to Biblical Counseling) must be completed before a student may register for BC1815. No exceptions are granted regardless of program, prior academic background, or ministerial experience.

This prerequisite exists because BTS rebuilt ST1422 to include a four-week section on biblical views of gender and sexuality within the doctrine of humanity. The theological and anthropological questions must be engaged with systematic theology faculty before the student enters the applied counseling course. Students are informed that BC1815 is not the venue for debating theological positions on gender and sexuality—that work is done in ST1422.

Course	Title	Requirement	Before
ST1422	Systematic Theology II (Anthropology)	Must be completed	BC1815
BC1805	Introduction to Biblical Counseling	Must be completed	BC1815

Enforcement: Registrar blocks BC1815 registration without verified completion of both prerequisites. No override authority is delegated to faculty.

2.4 Ministry of the Word Preaching Lock

Ministry of the Word I and Ministry of the Word II are restricted to male students and carry a content-coverage prerequisite: students must have completed a minimum of 80% of their biblical theology coursework plus Hermeneutics (BT1205) before registering. This ensures that students entering the preaching sequence have sufficient exegetical and theological foundation to handle the text responsibly.

Applies to: MAPL, MDiv Ordination, MDiv Church Planting. These are the only programs that include Ministry of the Word in their required curriculum.

2.5 Nontraditional Student Pathway

Students without a bachelor’s degree may apply as nontraditional students. They must complete a five-course probationary sequence maintaining a 3.0 GPA: ST1410, BT1205, BT1210, ST1405, and one biblical theology

course. Students who cannot maintain the threshold enter the Advanced Certificate in Biblical Studies. Upon completing the 30-hour Advanced Certificate with a 3.0 cumulative GPA, the student may reapply for full graduate admission.

Course	Title
ST1410	Intro to Theological Research and Writing
BT1205	Hermeneutics
BT1210	Introduction to Covenant Theology
ST1405	Westminster Confession of Faith
BT/OT/NT	One biblical theology course (student choice)

GPA Threshold: 3.0 cumulative across all five courses. Failure to maintain threshold redirects student to the Advanced Certificate in Biblical Studies.

3. Post-Graduate Prerequisites

3.1 ThM Admission Prerequisites

The Master of Theology requires a graduate degree of at least 60 credit hours and a minimum of 8 credit hours of Greek and Hebrew combined. Concentration-specific prerequisites apply:

Concentration	Prerequisites	Status
Systematic Theology	All six BTS ST equivalents (Theology Proper through Eschatology). If missing more than two, student completes Advanced Certificate in Systematic Theology first.	Active
Historical Theology	Minimum two graduate-level historical theology survey courses. Demonstrated familiarity with primary Reformation sources and Reformed confessional tradition.	2027–2028
Biblical Studies	All BTS equivalent biblical theology courses (BT1205, BT1210) + minimum 2 OT Studies + 2 NT Studies. Minimum 6 credit hours Greek + 6 credit hours Hebrew (12 total). Competency exam in both languages. Languages Track requires advanced competency.	2027–2028

3.2 DMin Candidacy Gateway

All DMin students complete a written theological examination during the Independent Study semester (DM9111 or DM4980). This examination serves as a candidacy gateway—students must pass before proceeding to the dissertation phase. The examination confirms the student’s readiness to conduct independent doctoral-level research and demonstrates command of their concentration area.

4. Consolidated Prerequisite Reference Table

Prerequisite	Required Before	Condition	Enforced By
ST1410 + BT1205	All further study	Completion of one Learning Certificate	Registrar
ST1410	All degree programs (except MEd)	First or within first 2–3 courses	Registrar
BT1205	All degree programs	Within first 3–6 courses	Registrar
ST1422 + BC1805	BC1815 (Gender and Sexuality)	Both must be completed	Registrar; no exceptions
80% BT + BT1205	Ministry of the Word I–II	Content coverage threshold	Registrar + CAO
5-course sequence (3.0)	Full graduate admission	Nontraditional students only	Registrar + CAO
60 grad hrs + 8 hrs Grk/Heb	ThM (all concentrations)	General admission	Admissions
6 hrs Grk + 6 hrs Heb + exam	ThM Biblical Studies	Concentration-specific	Admissions
All 6 ST equivalents	ThM Systematic Theology	Concentration-specific	Admissions
2 HT survey courses	ThM Historical Theology	Concentration-specific	Admissions
Written theological exam	DMin Dissertation	Candidacy gateway	DMin Director + CAO

Chapter 5: Nontraditional Student Admission Policy

BTS 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 skill, and ability generally associated with persons who hold the undergraduate degree. Admission will be restricted to persons with life experience that has 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) and may then apply for admission into a graduate degree program. 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. 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. The student must be in good standing to complete all transfers. 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. All assessments are done in conjunction with the applicant and potentially the applicant's referents.

- 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.
- BTS will assess individual need for undergraduate education as regards career path, family, and the biblical imperative to provide for those with immediate dependencies.
- BTS will assess the individual in questions use of their time, talents, and resources in relationship to education cost, job needs, family needs.

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

- The student must complete a probationary 10 hours of study consisting of the following classes in the following order (see above paragraph for more information on grade requirements):
 - Introduction to Research and Writing
 - Bible Interpretation
 - Old or New Testament History and Theology
 - Westminster Confession of Faith
 - The student may choose their final class
- 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 graduate program.
- 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.

Chapter 6: Advanced Standing Articulation Statement

Reformation Bible College & Covenant College

Part I: Institutional Framework

1.1 Purpose and Scope

This document establishes the terms under which Birmingham Theological Seminary (BTS) grants advanced standing credit to qualified graduates of Reformation Bible College (RBC) and Covenant College (CC). Advanced standing recognizes that structured undergraduate coursework at confessionally aligned institutions has prepared students to satisfy the learning outcomes of specific BTS graduate courses, subject to institutional validation.

This articulation statement is a unilateral institutional policy of Birmingham Theological Seminary. It does not constitute a reciprocal agreement and does not require the approval or signature of either sending institution.

BTS retains sole authority to grant, deny, modify, or revoke advanced standing credit in accordance with its academic standards and institutional mission.

1.2 Institutional Alignment

Both Reformation Bible College and Covenant College share with BTS a confessional commitment to the Reformed theological tradition and the Westminster Standards. This shared confessional foundation provides the theological coherence necessary for BTS to recognize undergraduate preparation in biblical studies, systematic theology, historical theology, biblical languages, and practical theology as meeting the academic expectations of corresponding BTS graduate coursework.

1.3 Accreditation Basis

Part II: Common Terms and Conditions

2.1 Eligible BTS Programs

Advanced standing credit is primarily applicable to the Master of Divinity (MDiv) and the Master of Arts in Ministry — Pastoral Leadership (MAM-PL) programs. Credit may be mapped to other BTS degree programs at the discretion of the Chief Academic Officer when preparing the student's degree checklist.

2.2 Credit Cap

A maximum of 20 credit hours of advanced standing credit may be applied to any BTS degree program under this articulation statement. Where the number of eligible equivalencies exceeds 20 hours, the student and the Chief Academic Officer will determine which courses are applied within the cap.

2.3 Eligibility Requirements

Sending Institution Graduation. The student must have completed the designated bachelor's degree at the sending institution and graduated in good standing.

Minimum Grade. A grade of B or higher is required in each undergraduate course for which advanced standing is sought.

BTS Admissions. The student must independently meet all BTS admissions requirements. Advanced standing eligibility does not guarantee admission to BTS.

2.4 Validation Requirements

BTS does not grant advanced standing solely on the basis of transcript review. Each eligible course requires institutional validation to confirm that the student has achieved graduate-level competency in the relevant subject area.

Academic Paper Requirement. For all non-language courses, the student must submit an academic paper demonstrating competency in the subject matter of the BTS course for which advanced standing is sought. Paper topics, length requirements, and evaluation criteria are determined by the Chief Academic Officer or the assigned faculty reviewer.

Language Placement Examination. For all biblical language courses (Hebrew and Greek), the student must complete a language placement examination administered by BTS. The examination determines whether the student's language proficiency is sufficient to receive advanced standing at the level indicated. Students who do not demonstrate adequate proficiency will be placed in the appropriate BTS language course.

Supplemental Assessment. BTS reserves the right to require an additional capstone paper on a topic of institutional choosing if further assessment of the student's theological preparedness and training is deemed necessary by the Chief Academic Officer.

2.5 Credit Recording

Upon successful validation, advanced standing courses are recorded on the BTS transcript as "Pass" credit. Pass credit counts toward degree completion and graduation requirements but does not factor into the student's cumulative grade point average.

2.6 Actuation Window

Advanced standing credit must be actuated within five years of the student's graduation from the sending institution. Students requesting advanced standing after the five-year window may still be considered, but BTS may require additional capstone projects or academic papers to confirm continued competency.

2.7 Curriculum Change Notification

BTS will notify the sending institution of any major curriculum changes that may affect the equivalency mappings in this statement. Likewise, BTS expects to be informed of significant curriculum changes at the sending institution. BTS will review and update this articulation statement as needed to reflect any such changes.

2.8 Financial Terms

There is no expectation of shared financial obligation between BTS and either sending institution. All tuition, fees, and invoicing remain the sole responsibility of each respective institution. Students receiving advanced standing will not be charged a transfer credit fee at BTS.

2.9 Duration and Modification

This articulation statement remains in effect unless modified or revoked by the President of Birmingham Theological Seminary in consultation with the Chief Academic Officer. Any student who has been admitted to BTS under the terms of this statement and has begun their program of study will be permitted to complete their advanced standing credits under the terms in effect at the time of their admission.

Part III: Reformation Bible College

3.1 Sending Institution

Reformation Bible College (Sanford, Florida) is a confessionally Reformed undergraduate institution committed to providing a Christ-centered education grounded in the historic Reformed faith. RBC is regionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

3.2 Eligible Undergraduate Degree

Advanced standing under this section is available to graduates of the Bachelor of Arts in Theology program at Reformation Bible College.

3.3 Course Equivalency Table

10 courses • 20 eligible credit hours • 20 credit hour cap

BTS Course	Cr.	RBC Equivalent	Validation
BT1205 Hermeneutics	2	BIB101 Biblical Hermeneutics	Academic Paper
BT1210 Introduction to Covenant Theology	2	BTH101 Biblical Theology I BTH152 Biblical Theology II	Academic Paper
HT1300 Early & Medieval Church History	2	HIS101 History of Christianity I HIS253 Ancient Near Eastern World	Academic Paper
HT1305 Reformation & Modern Church History	2	HIS152 History of Christianity II HIS304 Greco-Roman World	Academic Paper
ST1405 Westminster Confession of Faith	2	STH101 Introduction to Theology	Academic Paper
PS1935 Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life	2	RBC Spiritual Formation Program (four-year mentored program)	Capstone Project*
OT1020 Beginning Hebrew I	2	HEB301 Hebrew I	Placement Exam
OT1021 Beginning Hebrew II	2	HEB352 Hebrew II	Placement Exam
NT1120 Beginning Greek I	2	GRE201 Greek I	Placement Exam
NT1121 Beginning Greek II	2	GRE252 Greek II	Placement Exam
Total Eligible	20	Cap: 20 credit hours	

* Capstone Project for PS1935: In lieu of a standard academic paper, the RBC student must submit a capstone project that documents their participation in Reformation Bible College’s four-year spiritual formation program—including personal mentoring, church attendance, and spiritual discipline practice—and articulates a journal plan for the continued implementation of the spiritual disciplines as the student transitions into seminary and professional ministry.

Part IV: Covenant College

4.1 Sending Institution

Covenant College (Lookout Mountain, Georgia) is a comprehensive liberal arts college of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), committed to integrating biblical truth with academic excellence. Covenant College is regionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

4.2 Eligible Undergraduate Degree

Advanced standing under this section is available to graduates of the Bachelor of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies program at Covenant College.

4.3 Course Equivalency Table

11 courses • 22 eligible credit hours • 20 credit hour cap

BTS Course	Cr.	CC Equivalent	Validation
BT1205 Hermeneutics	2	BIB 372 Hermeneutics	Academic Paper
BT1210 Introduction to Covenant Theology	2	BIB 111 Old Testament Introduction BIB 142 New Testament Introduction	Academic Paper
HT1300 Early & Medieval Church History	2	BIB 302 History & Expansion of Christianity I	Academic Paper
HT1305 Reformation & Modern Church History	2	BIB 303 History & Expansion of Christianity II	Academic Paper
ST1405 Westminster Confession of Faith	2	BIB 277 Christian Doctrine I BIB 278 Christian Doctrine II	Academic Paper
PS1935 Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life	2	BIB 360 Christian Spirituality: History, Theology and Practice	Academic Paper
MS1610 Biblical Theology of Missions	2	MIS 202 Theology of Mission	Academic Paper
OT1020 Beginning Hebrew I	2	HEB 191 Elementary Hebrew I	Placement Exam
OT1021 Beginning Hebrew II	2	HEB 192 Elementary Hebrew II	Placement Exam
NT1120 Beginning Greek I	2	GRE 175 Elementary Greek I	Placement Exam
NT1121 Beginning Greek II	2	GRE 176 Elementary Greek II	Placement Exam
Total Eligible	22	Cap: 20 credit hours	

Note on Credit Cap: Covenant College graduates are eligible for 22 credit hours of equivalency across 11 BTS courses. Because the institutional cap is 20 credit hours, the student and the Chief Academic Officer will determine which courses are applied within the cap when preparing the degree checklist.

Part V: Accreditation Standards Compliance

This articulation statement satisfies the following accreditation requirements:

Standard	Requirement	BTS Compliance
ARTS Standard 10.3	Published policies and procedures for transfer credits, prior learning, and advanced standing, including public disclosure of evaluation criteria and residency requirements.	Parts I–IV of this statement provide the published policy. Validation requirements (Section 2.4) disclose evaluation criteria. The 20-hour cap preserves degree residency.
AACRAO/ACE/CHEA Joint Statement Principle 1: Educational Quality	The educational quality of the acquired learning for which the student seeks credit.	Both sending institutions are SACSCOC-accredited and confessionally Reformed. BTS validates competency through academic papers and placement examinations rather than accepting credit on transcript alone.
AACRAO/ACE/CHEA Joint Statement Principle 2: Comparability	The comparability of the content, scope, and rigor of the acquired learning to that offered by the receiving institution.	Course equivalency tables (Sections 3.3 and 4.3) map specific undergraduate courses to BTS graduate courses on the basis of content alignment. Validation requirements confirm rigor.
AACRAO/ACE/CHEA Joint Statement Principle 3: Applicability	The appropriateness and applicability of the learning experience to the programs offered by the receiving institution.	Advanced standing is limited to specified BTS programs and specific courses within those programs. The Chief Academic Officer exercises professional judgment in applying credit to degree checklists.

Part VI: Institutional Approval

This Advanced Standing Articulation Statement is approved and issued under the authority of the President of Birmingham Theological Seminary in consultation with the Chief Academic Officer.

Part III: Assessment and Student Learning

Chapter 7: Alternative Assessment Framework

I. Executive Summary

This report formalizes and standardizes assessment practices that BTS already employs informally at the academic advising level. When experienced ministry practitioners and educators enroll at BTS, academic advisors and program directors routinely make judgments about how prior professional competence intersects with course requirements — through advising conversations, directed studies arrangements, and program-specific provisions such as the MEd’s design for in-service educators and the Campus Outreach Master of Biblical Studies’ accommodation of learned experience credit. What BTS has not had is a documented, rubric-driven, accreditation-grade standard for that work. This framework provides it.

It does not propose institutional restructuring, create new programs, change degree requirements, or alter the credit hours required for any degree. It standardizes how academic advisors and program directors make decisions they are already making — and it does so at a level of rigor that aligns with where ABHE, ICETE, and the broader accreditation landscape are heading.

The need for this formalization is grounded in three institutional realities. First, many BTS students are experienced pastors, educators, elders, counselors, and missionaries who bring substantial professional competence to the seminary. Academic advisors already recognize this in advising conversations, but without documented standards the recognition is ad hoc and inconsistent. Second, BTS is pursuing a multi-accreditation strategy involving ARTS, ABHE, and ACSI Elevate, and formalized assessment standards can serve accreditation goals — particularly for the MEd program’s ACSI pathway — by generating documented evidence of program quality. Third, the broader accreditation landscape, including ICETE’s work on bridging formal and non-formal learning and ABHE’s established CBE policy framework, is moving toward recognition of competency-based and alternative assessment models. BTS should have standards in place that meet industry expectations rather than relying on informal processes that would not survive accreditor scrutiny.

To be clear: this framework does not rise to the level of institutional change. It does not lower academic standards, create new credential types, or restructure any degree program. It formalizes the assessment flexibility that BTS already exercises at the academic advising level, giving that flexibility documented standards, rubrics, and evaluation protocols that are consistent with industry-wide accreditation expectations. The theological core of every BTS degree program remains untouched. Formational courses — those where the process of sustained instruction under a pastor-professor is itself the pedagogy — are excluded entirely. Specific programs that already accommodate learned experience, such as the MEd and the Campus Outreach Master of Biblical Studies, gain a standardized framework for work they are already doing.

Key Recommendations

1. Formalize a two-track alternative assessment standard for use at the academic advising level: CBE Portfolio Assessment (Track 1) for courses where experienced practitioners bring demonstrated applied competence, and Knowledge Equivalency Capstone (Track 2) for courses where experienced students bring demonstrated academic knowledge. These are assessment tools available to academic advisors and program directors, not program-level changes.

2. Begin documentation with the MEd program, where the student population (in-service Christian school educators) provides the clearest case for alternative assessment, and where portfolio components directly generate evidence for ACSI Elevate accreditation.
3. Extend documented standards to selected Pastoral Studies, Biblical Counseling, and Missions courses for students meeting rigorous eligibility criteria.
4. Maintain rigorous gateway processes — particularly the preliminary consultation interview — as the primary quality control mechanism.
5. Preserve the theological core of all degree programs in traditional instruction, and exclude all formational, homiletical practicum, clinical/mentored, and spiritual formation courses from alternative assessment.

II. Industry Context: ICETE, ABHE, and the CBE Landscape

A. What Is Happening in Theological Education

Competency-based education, micro-credentials, and alternative assessment models are reshaping higher education accreditation across the United States and internationally. Major regional accreditors (HLC, SACSCOC) have developed frameworks for incorporating these models, and specialized accreditors serving theological education are following suit.

Internationally, the most significant work is being done by the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), the global umbrella organization for seven regional accrediting associations of theological schools. ICETE is developing frameworks to bridge the gap between non-formal and formal theological learning — creating pathways for ministry practitioners whose competence was developed through church-based training, apprenticeship, or field experience to receive formal academic recognition.

The North American seat at the ICETE table is held by ABHE — not by ARTS. This means that ABHE is actively shaping the global conversation about competency-based theological education, and the frameworks emerging from ICETE will naturally align with ABHE's existing infrastructure. ARTS, which achieved CHEA recognition only in May 2024 and has no ICETE relationship, is positioned as an observer rather than a participant in this conversation.

B. ABHE's Existing CBE Framework

ABHE has already developed a mature policy framework for competency-based education. Key elements include:

Definition: ABHE defines CBE as an outcomes-based system of instruction in which the student's demonstrated proficiency in specified knowledge or skills is the basis for measuring satisfaction of course, program, or degree requirements. CBE focuses on the achievement of learning outcomes as the direct measure of student learning, regardless of time spent in class, study, or research.

Pedagogical model distinction: ABHE treats CBE as a pedagogical model rather than an instructional modality. This means CBE is about how learning is measured, not how content is delivered.

Important carve-out: ABHE explicitly states that a course using competencies to validate outcomes but still requiring time-based academic engagement that satisfies ABHE's credit hour definition is not competency-based education and is not subject to CBE-specific requirements. This means that BTS's framework — which formalizes assessment flexibility within a traditional credit-hour structure — falls below ABHE's CBE threshold.

Substantive change thresholds: ABHE's policy establishes graduated thresholds: first offering of CBE courses up to 49% of a program requires notification; first credential where 50% or more may be completed through CBE requires separate approval; each direct assessment program triggers its own review.

C. What 'Competency-Based Education' Actually Means

For the academic team's reference, the fundamental distinction between CBE and traditional outcomes-based education is as follows:

Traditional model: Education is structured around courses, credit hours, and time. A student takes a course for a defined period, engages with material through instruction, and receives a grade. The credit hour is a time-based measurement. Time is the constant; learning is the variable.

CBE model: The relationship inverts. Learning is the constant; time is the variable. Every student must demonstrate mastery to the same defined threshold, but one student might do it in three weeks and another in three months. Credit is tied to demonstrated proficiency, not to time spent in instruction.

BTS's framework is not a CBE program in ABHE's technical sense. It is a formalization of assessment flexibility that BTS already exercises at the academic advising level, giving that flexibility documented standards and evaluation protocols that meet accreditation expectations. Students still earn the same credit hours, still complete the same degree, and still meet the same learning outcomes. Only the method of demonstrating achievement changes for a limited number of courses where the academic advisor and program director determine it is appropriate. Under ABHE's own definitions, this does not cross the CBE threshold and does not trigger substantive change requirements. It is good outcomes-based assessment practice with a documented process behind it.

III. The Two-Track Alternative Assessment Framework

The framework establishes two distinct assessment pathways, each designed for a different type of existing student competence.

Track 1: CBE Portfolio Assessment

Purpose: For courses where experienced practitioners bring demonstrated applied competence developed through professional practice.

Evidence type: Professional practice artifacts (lesson plans, case narratives, curriculum documents, ministry programming, counseling protocols) plus clinical observation, accompanied by reflective analysis demonstrating theological integration.

Assessment: Dual-authority evaluation — BTS faculty evaluates academic rigor and theological integration; a qualified institutional partner evaluates professional practice through clinical observation.

Eligible courses: Applied professional courses where daily ministry or educational practice constitutes the course content.

Typical candidate: A veteran BCS teacher with ten years of classroom experience (MEd program), or a senior pastor with fifteen years of ministry leadership (MDiv/MA programs).

Track 2: Knowledge Equivalency Capstone

Purpose: For knowledge-heavy academic courses where experienced, well-read students can demonstrate mastery of course content through a comprehensive written examination.

Evidence type: A single, rigorous academic deliverable — typically a research paper of 5,000–7,000 words — that requires the student to survey, critically evaluate, and synthesize the full scope of the course’s content from a confessional Reformed standpoint.

Assessment: Faculty evaluation against course learning outcomes. The paper must demonstrate not just familiarity but graduate-level analytical capacity.

Eligible courses: Academic survey and theory courses where intellectual mastery can be demonstrated through sustained scholarly writing.

Typical candidate: A well-read ruling elder who has studied apologetic methodology extensively, or an experienced biblical counselor with deep engagement in counseling anthropology and theory.

What Both Tracks Share

Preliminary consultation interview: Every student seeking alternative assessment meets with the relevant program director for a candid conversation about whether the pathway is appropriate. Not every experienced person is a strong candidate. The consultation results in a written recommendation: proceed, or enroll traditionally.

Same learning outcomes: Students earn credit only by demonstrating mastery of the same outcomes required of traditional students. The standard does not change; only the method of demonstrating it.

Faculty evaluation: All alternative assessment submissions are evaluated by the course’s assigned faculty member using standardized rubrics aligned to course learning outcomes.

Credit/No Credit grading: Alternative assessment earns a grade of Credit (CR), not a letter grade.

One revision opportunity: Students whose submissions demonstrate substantial competence but have identifiable gaps receive one opportunity to revise and resubmit within 30 days. Submissions that do not demonstrate sufficient competence result in a recommendation for traditional enrollment with no academic penalty.

Guiding Principles

1. CBE belongs where students bring professional experience in applied content areas — not in formational or academically novel courses.
2. Knowledge equivalency belongs where experienced students possess demonstrated intellectual mastery — not where the course introduces genuinely new content for all students regardless of experience.
3. The theological core of every degree program remains in traditional instruction regardless of student experience level.
4. Homiletical practicum, clinical/mentored, and spiritual formation courses are excluded entirely.
5. The preliminary consultation interview is the critical quality control gateway. If the gateway is rigorous, the system protects its own integrity.

IV. MEd Program: Alternative Assessment and ACSI Integration

A. Degree Structure (36 Credit Hours)

Block	Hours	Courses
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Biblical/Theological Core	12	OT1007, NT1105, BT1205, BT1210, ST1405, ST1415
Christian Education Core	10	CE1700, CE1705, CE1710, CE1715, CE1720
Biblical Counseling	6	BC1805, BC1815, BC1825
Electives	8	Four courses across concentration areas

B. Alternative Assessment Recommendations

Three MEd courses are recommended for Track 1 (CBE Portfolio Assessment), totaling 6 credit hours (17% of the program):

Course	Title	Track	Rationale
CE1715	Instructional Strategies & Technology	Track 1: CBE Portfolio	In-service teachers demonstrate this daily
CE1720	Curriculum Review & Development	Track 1: CBE Portfolio	Veteran educators have extensive curriculum design experience
BC1825	Biblical Counseling with Children & Youth	Track 1: CBE Portfolio	Experienced teachers practice pastoral care of students routinely

The remaining 30 credit hours (83%) require traditional instruction.

C. ACSI Elevate Integration

The CBE portfolio components generate evidence that directly serves the ACSI Elevate accreditation pathway:

Clinical observation: Portfolio assessment includes a formal clinical observation conducted by BTS faculty or a qualified ACSI-certified administrator at the cooperating school. This dual-authority model satisfies ACSI Eligibility Condition 4 and Indicator 3.12.

Instructional evidence: Portfolio artifacts generate documented evidence for ACSI Standard 3 indicators addressing research-based strategies, professional competencies, and biblical integration.

Program assessment data: Rubric scores, pass/revise/enroll rates, and clinical observation reports provide structured assessment data for ACSI Standard 7 (Continuous Program Improvement).

In-service framing: ACSI Indicator 3.9's pre-service field experience requirement does not apply to BTS's in-service program. Early dialogue with ACSI staff should confirm this interpretation.

A separate document — the MEd CBE Portfolio Assessment Guide — provides detailed portfolio structure, artifact requirements, rubric, and process.

V. Broader Catalog: Course-by-Course Recommendations

A. Track 1 Candidates: CBE Portfolio Assessment

Course	Title	Target Candidate	Minimum Eligibility
PS1905	Leadership Development & Deployment	Senior pastor, ruling elder, or ministry director with extensive leadership experience	7 years in recognized church leadership role
PS1910	Conflict Resolution in the Church	Pastor or elder with documented conflict resolution and discipline experience	7 years pastoral/elder ministry; documented conflict resolution involvement
PS1940	Ministry to Children, Youth, & Families	Children's ministry director, youth pastor, or family ministry leader	5 years in recognized children's, youth, or family ministry leadership
PS1955	Theology & Practice of Administration	Senior pastor or ministry leader with direct administrative oversight	5 years with administrative, financial, or personnel oversight in church/ministry
BC1845	Biblical Premarital Counseling	Pastor with extensive premarital counseling experience	5 years pastoral ministry; minimum 10 couples counseled
BC1850	Biblical Marriage & Family Counseling	Pastor with extensive marriage/family pastoral care	7 years pastoral ministry; documented counseling. BC1805 prerequisite
MS1605	Cross-Cultural Communication	Career missionary or church planter with cross-cultural experience	3 years cross-cultural ministry (domestic or international)
MS1620	Discipleship	Pastor or ministry leader with documented discipleship responsibility	5 years in ministry with discipleship programming or one-on-one ministry

B. Track 2 Candidates: Knowledge Equivalency Capstone

Course	Title	Capstone Scope	Assessment Focus
AP1505	Intro to Apologetics	Biblical warrant; survey and critical evaluation of major methodologies; personal methodology statement	Graduate-level analysis, not summary. Must evaluate each methodology from a Reformed standpoint
AP1515	Christ & Culture	Critical evaluation of major models; articulation of a Reformed theology of cultural engagement	Engagement with primary sources and contemporary debates

AP1535	Comparative Religions	Graduate-level survey of major world religions with Christian apologetic evaluation	Depth across all traditions; theological evaluation, not description
PS1915	Preachers & Preaching	Survey of homiletical history; theological philosophy of preaching	Knowledge from patristic period to present; coherent theology of preaching
PS1925	Presbyterian Polity	Biblical and historical foundations; theological rationale for connectionalism	Understanding of why, not just what. Theological reasoning, not mere BCO familiarity
BC1820	BC: Anthropology & Theory	Biblical doctrine of human nature; evaluation of biblical counseling and secular models	Critical engagement with Reformed anthropology and competing models

C. Courses Excluded from All Alternative Assessment

Category	Courses	Rationale for Exclusion
Biblical/Theological Core	All OT, NT, BT, ST courses	Formational purpose. Sustained theological engagement under pastoral instruction is the pedagogy
Homiletical Practicum	PS1945, PS1946	Student preaches and receives live correction. Cannot be replicated in portfolio or paper
All Clinicals/Mentored	PS1981–PS1989; BC1880–1885; CE1780; MS1680; AP1580	Structured mentoring relationship is the value. Portfolio cannot replicate supervised formation
Spiritual Formation	PS1935	Devotional and formational. Assessing spiritual disciplines through portfolio is theologically inappropriate
Worship Theology	PS1970	Academic theology most practitioners have not engaged formally regardless of experience
Core Biblical Counseling	BC1805, BC1810, BC1815, BC1830, BC1835, BC1840, BC1855, BC1860	Theoretical core requiring sustained academic engagement
Church Planting	PS1960–PS1962	Specialized content most students engage for the first time
Capstone Projects	All departmental capstones	Already integrative assessment. Alternative assessment of an assessment is circular

VI. Implementation Recommendations

A. Phased Rollout

Phase 1 (Fall 2026): Develop and document assessment standards, rubrics, and evaluation protocols. Begin with the MEd program. Produce the portfolio guide, rubrics, clinical observation protocol, and BTS–BCS

partnership memorandum. Make these tools available to MEd academic advisors for use with qualifying students.

Phase 2 (2027–2028): Based on MEd experience, extend documented assessment standards to selected Pastoral Studies, Biblical Counseling, and Missions courses. Develop Track 2 rubrics and protocols for two or three courses. Make tools available to academic advisors across all programs. Collect and analyze assessment data.

Phase 3 (2028–2029): Assessment standards documented and available across all recommended courses. Annual review cycle established. Framework referenced in institutional effectiveness reporting for all accreditors.

B. Documentation Required

Alternative Assessment Policy: A formal institutional policy documenting both tracks as assessment tools available at the academic advising level, including eligibility criteria, process, evaluation standards, and appeal procedures. Added to the Faculty Handbook and referenced in the Student Handbook and Academic Advising Manual.

Course-Specific Rubrics: Each eligible course requires a standardized rubric aligned to its specific learning outcomes.

Clinical Partnership Memorandum (MEd): A formal agreement between BTS and cooperating ACSI-accredited schools (beginning with BCS) governing the clinical observation process.

Annual Assessment Report: Aggregate data on usage, pass/revise/enroll rates, and comparison of alternative assessment students' performance against traditionally enrolled students.

C. Faculty Development

Faculty members evaluating alternative assessment submissions need training in rubric-based evaluation of professional portfolios (Track 1) and evaluation of comprehensive capstone papers against full course learning outcomes (Track 2). The Academic Dean should develop a brief faculty orientation and norming sessions before Phase 1 implementation.

D. Accreditation Positioning

ARTS: The framework formalizes existing advising-level assessment practices and does not constitute institutional change requiring ARTS-COA approval. ARTS currently has no standards governing CBE or alternative assessment. BTS should reference the framework in future self-study narratives as evidence of documented, rigorous assessment practice.

ABHE: Under ABHE's existing policy, BTS's framework — which formalizes assessment flexibility within a traditional credit-hour structure — falls below the threshold for CBE-specific substantive change requirements. ABHE explicitly states that courses using competencies to validate outcomes within a time-based credit-hour structure are not CBE for policy purposes.

ACSI Elevate: The MEd portfolio assessment components are specifically designed to generate evidence for ACSI accreditation. BTS should present the framework to ACSI staff during early dialogue as an intentional design feature of the MEd program.

VII. Theological Rationale

Alternative assessment raises a legitimate question for a confessionally Reformed institution: does this compromise the formational commitments that distinguish BTS from a credentialing factory?

The answer depends entirely on where the boundary is drawn. This framework draws the boundary with deliberate theological precision.

Reformed theological education is not primarily about measurable competency. It is about formation — the shaping of minds, hearts, and character under the means of grace for the service of Christ’s church. When a student sits under a pastor-professor for a semester of Systematic Theology or Covenant Theology, the goal is not merely knowledge transfer that could be assessed through a competency demonstration. There is a catechetical dimension, a devotional dimension, and a mentorship dimension. The pastor-professor model exists precisely because BTS believes theological education happens in relationship, not just in demonstrated proficiency.

These convictions are not compromised by this framework. They are protected by it. The theological core of every BTS degree program remains in traditional instruction. Spiritual formation courses remain in traditional instruction. Homiletical practicum remains in traditional instruction. Clinical and mentored courses remain in traditional instruction. The courses opened to alternative assessment are, without exception, courses where the content is applied professional practice or academic survey knowledge — courses where an experienced practitioner’s demonstrated mastery is a legitimate basis for credit.

There is, in fact, a positive theological case for this framework. Good stewardship of a student’s time, gifts, and calling requires that the seminary not waste resources — the student’s or its own — teaching what the student already knows and practices at a graduate level. A veteran pastor who has resolved church conflicts for fifteen years does not need a semester of conflict resolution instruction; he needs the seminary to verify his competence and redirect his limited time toward courses where he will actually grow. That verification must be rigorous — superficial competence should never receive credit — but the principle of stewardship argues for recognizing genuine mastery where it exists.

The standard is high and simple: Would a faculty member reading this portfolio or capstone paper conclude that the student could teach this material, not just pass a test on it? That is the graduate-level threshold. Anything less, and the student belongs in the traditional course.

Chapter 8: MEd Competency-Based Portfolio Assessment Guide

Section I: Portfolio Assessment Overview

Purpose

The BTS MEd Competency-Based Portfolio Assessment provides an alternative pathway for experienced in-service Christian school educators to demonstrate graduate-level mastery of specific professional competencies. This pathway recognizes that veteran educators bring substantial professional knowledge and skill to the MEd program, and that demonstrated competence — rigorously assessed — is a valid basis for awarding graduate credit.

The portfolio pathway does not lower the standard of achievement. It changes the method of demonstrating achievement. Every student who earns credit through portfolio assessment must meet the same learning outcomes required of students who complete the course through traditional instruction.

Eligible Courses

Course #	Course Title	Rationale for Portfolio Eligibility
CE1715	Instructional Strategies & Technology	In-service educators possess demonstrated classroom practice in instructional design and technology integration
CE1720	Curriculum Review & Development	Veteran teachers have extensive experience designing, evaluating, and revising curriculum in Christian school contexts
BC1825	Biblical Counseling with Children and Youth	Experienced educators routinely engage in pastoral care of students; portfolio documents this practice and its theological foundations

Eligibility Requirements

1. Current employment as a full-time educator at an ACSI-accredited Christian school, with a minimum of five (5) years of continuous teaching experience.
2. Enrollment as a degree-seeking student in the BTS Master of Education program.
3. Completion of or concurrent enrollment in CE1705 (Christian Philosophy of Education).
4. Approval of the MEd Program Director following a preliminary portfolio consultation interview.

Courses Excluded from Portfolio Assessment

Biblical/Theological Core (OT1007, NT1105, BT1205, BT1210, ST1405, ST1415): Formational purpose requiring sustained theological engagement under pastoral instruction.

CE1700 and CE1705: Content most practicing educators have not previously engaged at the graduate level.

CE1710 (Epistemology & Pedagogy): Foundational epistemological questions requiring sustained academic engagement.

BC1805 and BC1815: Specialized counseling content outside most educators' existing competence.

All elective courses: New areas of exploration benefiting from traditional instruction.

Section II: Portfolio Structure and Components

Each portfolio consists of five required components assembled into a single document with supporting appendices.

Component 1: Professional Context Statement (1,500–2,000 words)

Narrative description of professional context: current teaching assignment, institutional context (school mission, ACSI accreditation status), professional responsibilities beyond classroom instruction, and self-assessment of strengths and growth areas.

ACSI Mapping: Evidence for Standard 3, Indicator 3.1 and Flourishing School Culture Model Purpose Domain.

Component 2: Competency Demonstration Artifacts

CEI715 — Instructional Strategies & Technology

- a. Three (3) complete lesson plans demonstrating different research-based instructional strategies with implementation evidence.
- b. One (1) technology integration project with rationale connecting technology to pedagogical and theological goals.
- c. One (1) differentiated instruction sample with reflection on theological basis for differentiated care.
- d. Assessment data from at least one instructional unit showing formative and summative assessment use.

CEI720 — Curriculum Review & Development

- a. One (1) complete curriculum unit (minimum two weeks), including scope/sequence, daily plans, assessments, and confessional alignment.
- b. One (1) curriculum evaluation report critically analyzing an existing curriculum resource.
- c. Documentation of participation in institutional curriculum development with annotation of the student's role.
- d. One (1) curriculum revision project demonstrating ability to identify and address weaknesses.

BCI825 — Biblical Counseling with Children and Youth

- a. Three (3) anonymized case narratives of pastoral care situations with theological reasoning and outcomes.
- b. One (1) reflective essay (1,500–2,000 words) articulating the student's theological framework for the care of children and youth.
- c. Documentation of training, professional development, or protocols related to student welfare.

ACSI Mapping: Evidence for Standard 3, Evidence Items 1–4; Indicators 3.3, 3.4, 3.5.3.

Section III: Clinical Observation Component

Every portfolio must include a formal clinical observation conducted during the assessment period.

Observation Protocol

1. Pre-Observation Conference (30 min): Review lesson plan, discuss instructional strategies and theological commitments, identify competencies to assess.
2. Classroom Observation (full class period): Structured observation using the BTS Clinical Observation Rubric.
3. Post-Observation Debrief (30 min): Discuss findings, reflect on strengths and growth areas.

Designated Clinical Observers

Observer Category	Qualifications	Evaluation Scope
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BTS MEd Faculty	Terminal degree (PhD, EdD, or DMin(Ed)) in education or related field; BTS Core or Adjunct Faculty appointment	Full portfolio evaluation including theological integration, graduate-level rigor, and academic competency assessment
Cooperating School Administrator	ACSI Professional Certification; administrative role (principal, curriculum director, department chair); minimum 5 years Christian school leadership	Clinical classroom observation, professional practice evaluation, and institutional context assessment

Dual-Authority Evaluation Model

The BTS faculty member evaluates the portfolio holistically — academic rigor, theological integration, alignment with learning outcomes, and graduate-level quality. The cooperating school administrator evaluates the clinical observation — professional classroom practice, instructional effectiveness, student engagement, and alignment with ACSI-accredited school expectations.

Both evaluations are documented on standardized rubrics and submitted to the MEd Program Director. A student must receive a passing evaluation from both evaluators to receive credit.

ACSI Mapping: Satisfies Eligibility Condition 4, Indicators 3.10, 3.11, and 3.12. BCS is the primary cooperating school partner; framework extends to any ACSI-accredited cooperating school.

Section IV: Portfolio Evaluation Rubric

Each portfolio is evaluated across five dimensions. A student must achieve “Proficient” or “Exemplary” in all five to receive credit.

Dimension	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing
Professional Competence	Exceptional mastery with sophisticated application across diverse contexts	Solid mastery with effective application in the student’s professional context	Partial competence; significant gaps in application
Theological Integration	Practice deeply informed by coherent CPoE; original, substantive theological reflection	Intentional biblical worldview integration; theological reflection connected to course frameworks	Superficial, inconsistent, or disconnected theological integration
Reflective Analysis	Exceptional self-awareness, critical thinking, graduate-level theory-practice connection	Adequate self-awareness and ability to articulate theory-practice connections	Descriptive rather than analytical; limited critical engagement
Evidence Quality	Well-selected, clearly documented, professionally presented, compelling evidence of sustained competence	Appropriate, adequately documented, sufficient evidence	Poorly selected, insufficiently documented, or fails to demonstrate competencies

Clinical Observation	Exceptional instructional skill and seamless biblical integration confirmed by both evaluators	Effective practice with intentional biblical integration confirmed by both evaluators	Significant gaps in effectiveness or integration noted by evaluators
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Section V: Portfolio Assessment Process

Step 1 — Preliminary Consultation: Student meets with MEd Program Director to discuss eligibility, review experience, and determine pathway appropriateness. Results in written recommendation: proceed or enroll traditionally.

Step 2 — Portfolio Development (8–12 weeks): Student assembles artifacts from existing practice and completes reflective writing. Faculty evaluator available for consultation but does not function as course instructor.

Step 3 — Clinical Observation: Student coordinates with Program Director to schedule observation. Observer should have professional knowledge of student’s context but should not be student’s direct supervisor.

Step 4 — Portfolio Submission: Completed portfolio submitted as single compiled document with appendices.

Step 5 — Dual-Authority Evaluation (3–4 weeks): BTS faculty evaluates full portfolio; cooperating school observer submits clinical evaluation. Both reviewed by Program Director.

Step 6 — Credit Determination: Three possible outcomes:

Credit Awarded: Graduate-level mastery demonstrated. Two credit hours recorded as CR.

Revision Required: Substantial competence with identifiable gaps. One resubmission within 30 days.

Course Enrollment Recommended: Insufficient competence. Student enrolls traditionally with no penalty.

Section VI: Clinical Partnership Framework

The portfolio model requires a formalized clinical partnership between BTS and cooperating ACSI-accredited schools. Briarwood Christian School (BCS) serves as the primary partner institution; the framework extends to any qualifying ACSI-accredited school.

Partnership Memorandum Elements

1. **Institutional Commitment:** Statement from school leadership affirming support for the BTS MEd through clinical observation and faculty collaboration.
2. **Observer Designation:** Process for designating administrators as Clinical Observers, including required qualifications (ACSI Professional Certification, administrative role, minimum experience).
3. **Observation Protocol:** Agreed-upon procedures, rubric, and reporting timeline.
4. **Confidentiality:** Clinical observations are academic evaluations and must not be used in employment decisions without written consent.
5. **Annual Review:** Provision for annual review by both BTS and cooperating school leadership.

ACSI Mapping: Partnership memorandum provides evidence for Standard 1, Indicator 1.4 (cooperative relationships with schools) and demonstrates institutional commitment to connecting higher education and EE-12 Christian schools.

Section VII: ACSI Elevate Standards Alignment Summary

ACSI Standard	Indicator / Requirement	Portfolio Evidence Generated
Eligibility 4	Observation, practicum, and student teaching in a Christian school	Clinical observation at ACSI-accredited school by certified administrator + BTS faculty evaluation
Standard 3.3	Research-based instructional strategies	CE1715 artifacts: lesson plans with multiple strategies and implementation evidence
Standard 3.4	Competencies in collaboration, management, assessment, data, technology	CE1715 and CE1720 artifacts: assessment data, differentiation, technology, curriculum documentation
Standard 3.5	CPoE course with epistemology, metaphysics, axiology; written CPoE; biblical integration	CE1705 required as prerequisite; portfolio reflective writing demonstrates applied CPoE and biblical integration
Standard 3.10	Program monitors progression and uses data for readiness	Consultation interview + dual-authority rubric + structured credit determination
Standard 3.12	Criteria evaluated by program and cooperating school	Dual-authority model: BTS faculty (academic/theological) + school administrator (clinical practice)
Standard 7	Continuous improvement through data-driven assessment	Rubric scores aggregated for program evaluation; pass/revise/enroll rates tracked

Chapter 9: Annual Assessment Plan

1. Purpose Statement

Birmingham Theological Seminary has maintained an ongoing commitment to evaluating the quality and effectiveness of its academic programs throughout its history. Assessment activities—including faculty review of student outcomes, grade analysis, and curriculum evaluation—have been conducted on a continuous basis as a natural extension of the Seminary’s institutional life. This plan does not introduce assessment where none existed; rather, it formalizes practices that have been carried out organically over many years into a permanent, documented institutional cycle. By establishing a structured timeline, defined responsibilities, and board-level accountability, this plan positions the Seminary for continued maturity and growth in institutional effectiveness. It ensures compliance with the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS) accreditation standards, specifically Standard 6: Educational Effectiveness, ES 6.4, which requires that the institution maintain a regular process for evaluating the effectiveness of its educational programs and use the results for improvement.

2. Assessment Review Committee

The Assessment Review Committee is the standing body responsible for the annual review of course-level and degree-level outcomes across all graduate and postgraduate programs. The committee operates under the authority of the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors.

Role	Member(s)
Chair	Chief Academic Officer
Members	Core Faculty, Registrar
Optional Participants	Adjunct Faculty (as needed)

3. Annual Assessment Cycle Timeline

The annual assessment cycle follows a structured timeline designed to align data collection, faculty deliberation, and board reporting within the Seminary's academic calendar.

Month(s)	Phase	Activities
May–June	Data Collection	Course grades, GPA trends, completion and retention rates, SLO evaluation data from syllabi, and student course evaluation results are collected and compiled by the Office of the Registrar and the Chief Academic Officer.
July	Committee Review	The Assessment Review Committee meets to review aggregated data, identify patterns, and flag areas for improvement across all programs.
August	Report Drafting	The Chief Academic Officer prepares the draft annual assessment report, including findings, trend analysis, and proposed recommendations.
September	Faculty Discussion	Findings and proposed actions are presented and discussed at the Fall Faculty Meeting, incorporating faculty feedback into final recommendations.
October	Board Reporting	The final assessment report is presented to the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors, aligning with the Board's tri-annual meeting schedule (February, June, October).

4. Scope of Annual Review

The annual assessment review encompasses four distinct levels of analysis, ensuring that evaluation extends from individual course outcomes to institutional effectiveness.

Course-Level Outcomes. Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) aligned to Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), rubric-based assessment data, and student course evaluation results.

Program-Level Outcomes. GPA trends, completion rates, and graduation rates analyzed by program across all twenty-three graduate and postgraduate programs.

Institutional Outcomes. Student Learning Outcome (SLO) evaluation data aggregated across departments and retention trends at the institutional level.

Assessment Instrument Effectiveness. A review of whether current assessment tools are measuring what they are designed to measure, with attention to alignment between instruments and stated learning objectives.

5. Biennial Rubric Audit

Every two years, the Assessment Review Committee conducts a focused review of course-specific rubrics to ensure they remain aligned with current learning objectives and assessment best practices. The rubric audit evaluates whether grading criteria accurately reflect the skills and competencies embedded in each course's stated outcomes and whether rubric language is sufficiently clear to support consistent evaluation across instructors. The first biennial rubric audit is scheduled for Spring 2027.

6. Structured Review Template

The Assessment Review Committee uses a standardized review template for each program, ensuring consistent documentation and comparability across all twenty-three graduate and postgraduate programs. The template provides a uniform framework for recording data summaries, trend observations, identified areas for improvement, and recommended actions. This structure ensures that assessment findings are documented in a format suitable for faculty review, board reporting, and accreditation evidence.

7. Board-Level Reporting

The annual assessment report is presented to the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors at the October Board meeting. The Academic Committee reviews findings, approves recommendations, and directs implementation of any changes arising from the assessment cycle. This reporting structure aligns with the Board's tri-annual meeting schedule (February, June, October) and ensures that assessment results receive governance-level attention and institutional authority for action.

The first formal assessment report under this plan will be presented at the October 2026 Board meeting, completing the inaugural cycle of the formalized assessment process.

8. Historical Context

Assessment at Birmingham Theological Seminary is not new. For over eight years, the President and the Vice President of Academics conducted regular assessment review during the summer months, evaluating student outcomes, reviewing course effectiveness, and making curricular adjustments as needed. This ongoing, organic process reflected the Seminary's commitment to academic quality and was responsive to the institution's needs as they arose. Assessment was embedded in the Seminary's culture of faculty engagement and institutional stewardship, even when it was not documented in a formalized cycle.

In Fall 2023, the Seminary took a significant step toward strengthening these existing practices by conducting a comprehensive external review with Dr. David Norman of Gen123 Consulting. That engagement introduced data-driven methodologies and produced actionable recommendations that informed subsequent improvements to the Seminary's assessment instruments and reporting.

In 2025, the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors directed the Chief Academic Officer to formalize the assessment process into a permanent institutional cycle. This plan represents the natural maturation of what

the Seminary has long practiced—moving from an organic, ongoing process to a structured, documented, and board-accountable framework designed to support the institution’s continued growth and effectiveness for years to come.

Part IV: Professional Credentialing and Pathway Alignment

Chapter 10: PCA Ordination Pathway Mapping

1. Two Pathways to PCA Ordination at BTS

Birmingham Theological Seminary offers two pathways to ordination in the Presbyterian Church in America. Both pathways satisfy the PCA Uniform Curriculum requirements and prepare candidates for the five ordination examinations. The choice between pathways depends on the candidate’s vocational timeline, presbytery preference, and whether the candidate desires the breadth of the MDiv or the integrated academic-and-mentored formation of the MAPL with concurrent presbytery internship.

	MAPL 2+2 Pathway	MDiv 3+1 Pathway
Degree	MA in Pastoral Leadership (62 hrs)	MDiv Ordination (102 hrs)
PCA Model	Model C: 2 years seminary + 2 years presbytery tutorial	Model A: 3 years seminary + 1 year presbytery probation
BTS Timeline	4–5 years part-time (academic and internship concurrent)	5–7 years part-time
Presbytery Role	Active partner: 2-year concurrent mentored internship covering practical ministry formation	Supervisory: 1-year probationary period after degree completion
Languages	Hebrew I–II + Greek I–II (8 hrs) + one exegesis course	Hebrew I–II + Adv Hebrew I + Greek I–II + Adv Greek I (14 hrs)
Systematic Theology	ST I–V + WCF + Ethics + ST1410 (14 hrs)	ST I–VI + WCF + Ethics + Contemporary Theology + ST1410 (20 hrs)
Biblical Counseling	BC1805 (2 hrs)	BC1805 + BC elective (4 hrs)
Church History	3 courses including denominational (6 hrs)	4 courses (8 hrs)
Clinicals/Internship	Presbytery-supervised (concurrent with studies)	2 BTS mentored clinicals + 1-year presbytery probation
Polity	Presbytery mentoring (PS1925 available as add-on)	PS1925 or PS1935 in curriculum
Best For	Bi-vocational candidates; men already in ministry; candidates with strong presbytery support	Full-time seminary students; candidates wanting maximum academic breadth

2. The MAPL 2+2 Integrated Formation Model

The MA in Pastoral Leadership is designed as BTS’s primary 2+2 ordination pathway under PCA Model C. The distinctive feature of BTS’s implementation is that the academic program and the presbytery-supervised internship run concurrently, not sequentially. The student completes the 62-credit-hour MAPL part-time over 4–5 years while simultaneously serving under the care of presbytery with a mentored internship in the local church.

This concurrent model reflects BTS’s institutional conviction that theological education and pastoral formation are not sequential phases but integrated dimensions of a single process. The student is studying systematic theology while practicing pastoral care. He is learning hermeneutics while preaching under supervision. He is completing the biblical languages while sitting in on sessions and presbytery meetings. The presbytery does not receive a finished academic product and then add practical training—it participates in the candidate’s formation from the beginning.

2.1 What BTS Provides: The Academic Foundation

The MAPL curriculum provides the theological, exegetical, and confessional foundation required by the PCA Uniform Curriculum. The following table maps BTS coursework to the content areas specified in the Uniform Curriculum and tested in the five ordination examinations.

Exam Area	BTS Coursework	Hours	Notes
English Bible	OT Studies I–IV (8 hrs) + NT Studies I–III (6 hrs) + Hermeneutics + Covenant Theology (4 hrs)	18 hrs	Comprehensive coverage of the whole canon with redemptive-historical hermeneutic
Theology	ST I–V (10 hrs) + WCF (2 hrs) + Ethics (2 hrs)	14 hrs	All loci of systematic theology except Eschatology; WCF provides confessional integration
Sacraments	ST V / Ecclesiology (2 hrs) + WCF chapters 27–29	Embedded	Sacramental theology taught within Ecclesiology and WCF coursework
Church Government	Presbytery mentoring + PS1925 Presbyterian Polity (optional add-on)	2 hrs (if taken)	Presbytery provides BCO instruction through mentored participation; PS1925 available for academic reinforcement
Personal Godliness / Views	Spiritual Disciplines (2 hrs) + Lampstand Conference + presbytery mentoring	2+ hrs	Spiritual formation through coursework and supervised pastoral relationship

2.2 What the Presbytery Provides: Mentored Ministry Formation

The presbytery’s role in the 2+2 model is not remedial—it is formational. The following practical ministry areas are addressed through the candidate’s supervised internship under the care of presbytery, running concurrently with his BTS coursework. The presbytery ensures that through mentored experiences the student engages each area under pastoral supervision.

Ministry Area	Presbytery Responsibility	Typical Timing
Pre-Marital Counseling	Mentored observation and practice of pre-marital counseling under supervising pastor	Years 2–4
Youth Ministry Philosophy	Mentored engagement with youth and family ministry in the local church context	Years 2–4
Evangelism	Supervised personal evangelism and observation of evangelistic methods	Years 1–4
Worship Leadership	Participation in planning and leading worship under pastoral supervision	Years 2–4
Presbyterian Polity (BCO)	Attendance at session meetings, presbytery meetings, and General Assembly; working knowledge of BCO and Robert’s Rules	Years 1–4
Preaching	Supervised preaching opportunities with pastoral critique and evaluation	Years 3–5
Pastoral Care and Visitation	Mentored hospital visitation, shut-in care, funeral and wedding participation	Years 2–4
Church Administration	Observation of and participation in session governance, committee work, budgeting	Years 3–4
Christian Education	Participation in Sunday School, catechism instruction, teacher training	Years 2–4
Devotional Life	Regular accountability with supervising pastor for personal and family devotional practice	Years 1–5

PS1925 Presbyterian Polity: This course is available as an additional course on top of the MAPL curriculum for candidates whose session or presbytery does not feel adequately equipped to guide the student through polity studies. It is not required within the 62-hour program but is recommended when the local mentoring structure does not include experienced ruling or teaching elders with strong BCO knowledge.

2.3 Integrated Timeline

The following illustrates how the concurrent model operates over the typical 4–5 year part-time completion timeline. The student is taking BTS courses and participating in presbytery-supervised ministry formation simultaneously throughout.

Year	BTS Academic Program	Presbytery Mentored Formation
Year 1	BT1205, BT1210, ST1410, ST1405, OT courses begin	Come under care of presbytery; begin relationship with supervising pastor; attend session and presbytery meetings; begin evangelism mentoring

Year 2	OT/NT sequence continues; Hebrew I–II begins; ST I–II	Continue session attendance; begin mentored worship participation; begin youth ministry and Christian education engagement
Year 3	NT sequence continues; Greek I–II begins; ST III–V; Church History	Begin supervised preaching; pre-marital counseling observation; pastoral visitation; deepen polity knowledge through presbytery committee participation
Year 4	Ethics, Spiritual Disciplines, AP1505, Lampstand Conference, Ministry of the Word I–II, remaining courses	Mentored preaching continues; administration and governance; pre-marital counseling practice; PS1925 if needed
Year 5 (if needed)	Remaining electives; exegesis course; program completion	Final internship assessment; presbytery examination preparation; licensure and ordination trials

3. The MDiv Ordination 3+1 Pathway

The MDiv Ordination concentration (102 credit hours) is BTS’s comprehensive ordination degree. Under PCA Model A (3+1), the candidate completes the full MDiv and then serves a one-year probationary period under presbytery supervision before ordination trials.

The MDiv includes everything in the MAPL plus additional depth: the full six loci of systematic theology (including Eschatology), Contemporary Theology, expanded biblical counseling, additional public theology courses, a larger pastoral studies block, and two BTS-supervised mentored clinical semesters. The student completes more academic content at BTS; the presbytery’s role is correspondingly reduced to the one-year probationary period.

Typical BTS Timeline: 5–7 years part-time.

Languages: Full Hebrew sequence (I–II + Advanced I) + full Greek sequence (I–II + Advanced I) = 14 hours.

Additional Content Beyond MAPL: ST VI (Eschatology), Contemporary Theology, expanded pastoral studies block (10 courses including preaching), 2 mentored clinical semesters, additional public theology and biblical counseling courses.

Presbytery Role: One-year probationary period after degree completion, covering the eight BCO-specified areas (English Bible application, devotional life, worship, evangelism, missiology, polity, counseling, Christian education).

4. Ordination Examination Coverage Matrix

The PCA requires candidates to pass five ordination examinations. The following matrix shows how each examination area is covered under both BTS pathways.

Examination	MAPL 2+2	MDiv 3+1	Notes
1. English Bible	OT I–IV + NT I–III + BT1205 + BT1210 (18 hrs)	OT I–IV + NT I–III + BT1205 + BT1210 (18 hrs)	Identical coverage. Redemptive-historical hermeneutic.

2. Theology	ST I–V + WCF + Ethics (14 hrs)	ST I–VI + WCF + Ethics + Contemporary Theology (20 hrs)	MAPL covers 5 of 6 loci; Eschatology addressed in presbytery tutorial or as elective. MDiv covers all 6.
3. Sacraments	Embedded in ST V (Ecclesiology) + WCF	Embedded in ST V + WCF + additional pastoral studies	Both pathways cover sacramental theology within ecclesiology and confessional coursework.
4. Church Government	Presbytery mentoring + PS1925 (optional)	PS1925 or PS1935 in curriculum + 1-year probation	MAPL relies on concurrent presbytery formation; MDiv includes academic polity course.
5. Personal Godliness / Views	Spiritual Disciplines + Lampstand + presbytery mentoring	Spiritual Disciplines + Lampstand + mentored clinicals + 1-year probation	Both pathways integrate spiritual formation. MAPL’s concurrent model provides longer mentored relationship.

4.1 Note on Eschatology (ST VI)

The MAPL curriculum includes Systematic Theology I through V but does not include ST VI (Eschatology) as a required course. Eschatology content is addressed partially within the prophetic literature component of OT Studies IV and the confessional eschatology sections of the Westminster Confession of Faith course. Candidates preparing for the Theology examination should be aware that eschatological questions may appear.

Three options are available to MAPL students: take ST VI (Eschatology) as an elective within the MAPL program, take it as an additional course beyond the 62-hour program, or prepare for eschatological examination content through presbytery-supervised reading and tutorial. The supervising pastor and candidates committee should discuss this with the student early in the program.

5. Recommendations for Students and Presbyteries

5.1 For the Student

Come under care of presbytery as early as possible—ideally before or during the first semester at BTS. The concurrent model works best when the presbytery relationship begins at the same time as the academic program. Identify a supervising pastor with the support of your session. BTS recommends a minimum of two local mentors: the supervising pastor for primary formation, and at least one additional teaching or ruling elder for breadth of perspective.

Attend presbytery meetings and General Assembly when possible. Working knowledge of the BCO and Robert’s Rules comes from participation, not just study. If your session or presbytery recommends PS1925 (Presbyterian Polity), take it—the course reinforces what you are learning through mentored experience.

The PCA Ordination Lab is offered every summer at BTS at no cost and for no credit. It provides mock examination preparation and is strongly recommended for all ordination candidates regardless of pathway.

5.2 For the Presbytery and Candidates Committee

BTS's MAPL is designed as the academic half of a partnership with the presbytery. The program assumes that the presbytery will provide structured mentored formation in the practical ministry areas listed in Section 2.2. BTS provides the theological, exegetical, confessional, and biblical language foundation. The presbytery provides the pastoral, practical, and ecclesiastical formation. Neither half is complete without the other.

The candidates committee should assign a supervising pastor early and establish a structured mentoring plan that maps the ten practical ministry areas in Section 2.2 across the candidate's expected 4–5 year timeline. Regular reporting to the candidates committee—at minimum semi-annually—is recommended so that progress in both the academic and the mentored dimensions can be tracked together.

BTS is available to consult with presbyteries on structuring mentored internship plans. The Chief Academic Officer can provide updated curriculum information and discuss how specific BTS courses align with presbytery expectations.

Appendix: PCA Guidelines for Theological Education (7th General Assembly, 1979)

The following text is excerpted from the Studies and Actions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 7th General Assembly (1979), Section IV: Theological Sub-Committee. This is the primary source document establishing the 3+1 and 2+2 models for ordination preparation. BTS's MAPL pathway follows Model C as described below.

Model A — Three Plus One (3+1)

A candidate receives his MDiv from a particular seminary and then is required to have one year of probationary training under the presbytery. During that year the presbytery examines the candidate in eight required areas: English Bible, Devotional Life, Worship, Evangelism, Missiology, Presbyterian Polity, Counseling, and Christian Education. The candidate may work as a licentiate serving pastorless churches or as an assistant to another pastor.

Model C — Two Seminary Plus Two Tutorial (2+2)

This approach allows a man to attend a resident seminary for the first two years and work toward a degree such as the Master of Religious Arts (Westminster), Master of Theological Study (CTS), or equivalent. The presbytery picks up the third and fourth years of tutorial training. At BTS, this model is implemented through the MA in Pastoral Leadership with the academic program and the presbytery tutorial running concurrently over 4–5 years rather than sequentially.

Chapter II: ACBC Practicum Alignment

1. BTS as an ACBC Certified Training Center

Birmingham Theological Seminary is a Certified Training Center of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). This designation means that BTS's biblical counseling curriculum has been vetted and approved by ACBC for its doctrine, training quality, and commitment to biblical counseling. Students who

complete BTS’s biblical counseling coursework and practicum can fulfill the requirements for ACBC certification within the structure of their degree program.

BTS’s biblical counseling mission frames counseling as an “extraordinary” form of discipleship for traumatic circumstances during a limited period, with the goal of restoring individuals to the “ordinary” means of discipleship—the body life of the local church. The sufficiency of Scripture and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit are the sole foundation for heart change. Clinical theories are engaged for descriptive purposes only; no psychological theory conflicting with biblical anthropology, hamartiology, or soteriology is adopted as a counseling foundation. This mission aligns fully with ACBC’s Standards of Doctrine and Standards of Conduct.

1.1 ACBC Fellows on BTS Faculty

BTS has two ACBC-certified Fellows on its biblical counseling faculty. This is the critical institutional asset that enables a fully integrated certification pathway: students never need to leave the BTS program to complete any phase of ACBC certification.

Faculty	Credentials	ACBC Status	BTS Role
Dr. Howard Eyrich	DMin, MTh, MA	ACBC Fellow	Teaches BC1850 (Marriage and Family), advanced BC courses. Supervises Phase 3 counseling and Fellow candidates.
Dr. Stephen Cloud	ACBC Fellow	ACBC Fellow	Supervises Phase 3 counseling. Available for Fellow candidate oversight.

Because both Fellows are active BTS faculty members, students completing BC1870/BC1871 (Counseling Practicum I and II) can simultaneously satisfy ACBC Phase 3 supervision requirements. The supervision occurs within the academic program structure—it is not an add-on or external requirement.

2. ACBC Certification: Three-Phase Structure

ACBC certification is a three-phase process: Learning, Exams and Evaluations, and Supervision. The following section maps each phase to the BTS curriculum, identifying where BTS coursework directly satisfies ACBC requirements, where BTS coursework exceeds ACBC minimums, and where the student must complete ACBC-specific steps independently.

2.1 Phase 1 — Learning

Phase 1 has three components: a 30-hour Fundamentals Training Course, 1,000 pages of approved reading (300 pages from theology, 700 from counseling), and 10 hours of counseling observation.

ACBC Requirement	BTS Coverage	Status	Notes
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Fundamentals Training (30 hrs)	BC1805 (Intro to Biblical Counseling)	Satisfied	BC1805 is ACBC-approved as the Fundamentals Training Course equivalent. Students completing BC1805 at BTS receive credit for this component.
Reading (1,000 pages)	Embedded across BC curriculum reading lists	Partially Satisfied	BTS BC courses assign reading from ACBC-approved lists. Students should track reading on their ACBC dashboard. Most MABC students exceed 1,000 pages through normal coursework, but must ensure the 300/700 theology-counseling split is documented.
Observation (10 hours)	Embedded in BC practicum preparation	Partially Satisfied	Students may fulfill observation hours by observing Drs. Eyrich or Cloud in counseling sessions at BTS or through ACBC-approved observation videos. Recommend completing observations before or during BC1870 (Practicum I).

2.2 Phase 2 — Exams and Evaluations

Phase 2 consists of 44 essay-style examination questions covering systematic theology and counseling methodology. The theology portion tests the applicant’s alignment with ACBC’s Standards of Doctrine. The counseling portion tests knowledge and practice consistent with ACBC’s Standards of Conduct.

ACBC Requirement	BTS Coverage	Status	Notes
Theology Exam	ST1405 (WCF), ST1421–1424, ST1415 (Ethics), BC1820 (Anthropology and Theory)	Curricular Preparation	BTS’s systematic theology sequence and BC anthropology course directly prepare students for the theology exam. The Reformed confessional framework BTS teaches is fully aligned with ACBC’s doctrinal standards.
Counseling Exam	BC1805, BC1810, BC1815, BC1820, BC1825, BC1830, BC1835, BC1845, BC1850, BC1855	Curricular Preparation	The full BTS BC course sequence covers every content area tested in the counseling exam: methodology, marriage and family, addictions, gender and sexuality, children and youth, legal issues, and anthropological foundations.
Exam Submission	Student completes on ACBC dashboard	Student Responsibility	ACBC exams are submitted individually through the student’s ACBC account. BTS does not administer the exams directly. Students are encouraged to begin answering exam questions progressively during their coursework rather than waiting until program completion.

2.3 Phase 3 — Supervision

Phase 3 requires at least 50 counseling sessions totaling at least 50 hours, conducted under the supervision of an ACBC-certified Fellow. BTS’s practicum exceeds this requirement.

ACBC Requirement	BTS Coverage	Status	Notes
50 sessions / 50 hours minimum	BC1870 (Practicum I, 50 hrs) + BC1871 (Practicum II, 50 hrs) = 100 hours total	Exceeded (2x)	BTS requires 100 hours of supervised counseling—double the ACBC minimum. Students completing the full practicum sequence have already exceeded Phase 3 requirements.
ACBC Fellow supervision	Dr. Howard Eyrich and Dr. Steven Cloud	Satisfied (on faculty)	Both BTS practicum supervisors are ACBC-certified Fellows. Supervision occurs within the academic program. No external Fellow arrangement is needed.
Supervision reporting	Student logs sessions on ACBC dashboard	Student Responsibility	Students must maintain their own ACBC account and log sessions during the practicum. BTS recommends setting up the ACBC account before beginning BC1870.

3. Program-Specific ACBC Alignment

3.1 MA in Biblical Counseling (64 Credit Hours)

The MABC is BTS’s most comprehensive biblical counseling program and the primary pathway to ACBC certification. A student who completes the full MABC has satisfied or exceeded every ACBC Phase 1 and Phase 3 requirement through normal coursework and practicum. Phase 2 exam preparation is embedded in the curriculum, though exam submission remains the student’s individual responsibility.

ACBC Component	BTS Course(s)	Recommended Timing	Notes
Phase 1: Fundamentals	BC1805	Semester 3–4	Satisfied
Phase 1: Reading	Across BC curriculum	Ongoing	Track on ACBC dashboard
Phase 1: Observation	Before/during BC1870	Before Practicum	10 hrs with Eyrich/Cloud or approved videos
Phase 2: Theology Exam	ST sequence + BC1820	Begin after ST1424	Submit progressively on ACBC dashboard
Phase 2: Counseling Exam	Full BC sequence	Begin after BC1810	Submit progressively on ACBC dashboard

Phase 3: Supervision	BC1870 + BC1871 (100 hrs)	Final year	Under Eyrich or Cloud; exceeds 50-hr minimum
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3.2 MDiv — Biblical Counseling (102 Credit Hours)

The MDiv Biblical Counseling concentration includes the same BC course sequence as the MABC plus additional pastoral and theological depth. ACBC alignment is identical to the MABC pathway. The practicum (100 hours) exceeds Phase 3. The broader MDiv curriculum provides even more extensive theology exam preparation through the full six-loci systematic theology sequence.

3.3 DMin — Biblical Counseling (33 Credit Hours)

The DMin in Biblical Counseling serves students who already hold ACBC certification (or are pursuing it concurrently). The program requires 150 hours of reported counseling and produces a capstone project of 20,000–30,000 words. For students pursuing Fellow certification, the DMin satisfies the post-baccalaureate degree requirement and contributes substantially to the 500-hour counseling threshold.

3.4 Advanced Certificate in Biblical Counseling (30 Credit Hours)

The Advanced Certificate provides the foundational BC courses (BC1805, BC1810, BC1850) plus biblical/theological core. Students completing this certificate can fulfill Phase 1 through BC1805 and begin Phase 2 exam preparation. Phase 3 supervision is not included in the certificate curriculum—students would need to arrange practicum hours separately, though Drs. Eyrich and Cloud are available for supervision by arrangement.

4. Fellow Certification Pathway

ACBC Fellow certification is the supervisory tier above standard certification. Fellows supervise incoming ACBC counselors during Phase 3 and provide leadership in the biblical counseling movement. BTS’s graduate programs position students for Fellow certification upon completion.

Fellow Requirement	BTS Contribution	Notes
Active ACBC certification for 2+ years	Student completes ACBC certification during or shortly after BTS program	Student must maintain active certified status after completing ACBC certification and wait the required 2 years.
500 cumulative counseling hours	MABC practicum = 100 hrs. DMin BC = 150 hrs reported. Ongoing ministry counseling contributes.	BTS’s combined MABC (100 hrs) and DMin BC (150 hrs) = 250 hours through academic programs alone. The remaining 250 hours are accumulated through ongoing ministry counseling practice after graduation.
Post-baccalaureate degree in counseling, Bible, theology, or related field	MABC (64 hrs), MDiv BC (102 hrs), or DMin BC (33 hrs)	Any of BTS’s three BC degree programs satisfies this requirement.

Teaching experience in biblical counseling	BTS graduates actively teaching in churches, training centers, or as BTS adjunct faculty	BTS's pastor-professor model means many graduates are already teaching biblical counseling in church contexts.
Recommendation from ACBC Fellow + Board of Trustees member	Drs. Eyrich and Cloud can provide the Fellow recommendation	Students who have trained under Eyrich or Cloud at BTS have a direct relationship with Fellows who can recommend them.

4.1 Recommended Fellow Track Timeline

Phase	Activity
Years 1–4	Complete MABC at BTS. Obtain ACBC certification by program completion (Phases 1–3 completed during coursework and practicum).
Years 5–6	Maintain active ACBC certification. Accumulate counseling hours through local church ministry. Begin teaching biblical counseling in church or training center context.
Year 7+	Apply for Fellow certification when 500-hour threshold is met and 2-year active certification requirement is satisfied. Seek recommendations from Eyrich/Cloud and ACBC Board member.
Optional: DMin BC	Enroll in DMin Biblical Counseling during years 5–8 to deepen doctoral-level competency, contribute 150 additional counseling hours, and produce a capstone project. The DMin satisfies the post-baccalaureate degree requirement if the student's prior degree was a bachelor's.

5. Student Responsibilities

While BTS provides the curriculum, practicum supervision, and Training Center infrastructure, ACBC certification is an individual credentialing process. The following responsibilities belong to the student, not to the institution:

Create an ACBC account: Do this at the beginning of the MABC program, before starting BC1805. The account is where the student tracks reading, observation, and exam progress.

Log reading on the ACBC dashboard: BTS courses assign ACBC-approved reading, but the student must record it. Maintain the 300-page theology / 700-page counseling split.

Complete observation hours: Arrange to observe Drs. Eyrich or Cloud in counseling sessions, or use ACBC-approved observation videos. Complete before beginning BC1870.

Submit Phase 2 exams progressively: Do not wait until program completion. Begin answering theology exam questions after completing the systematic theology sequence and counseling questions after BC1810. The BTS curriculum prepares students for every question.

Log Phase 3 counseling sessions: During BC1870 and BC1871, log every session on the ACBC dashboard. Ensure each session meets ACBC's documentation requirements.

Maintain annual certification renewal: After becoming certified, maintain active status through background checks, pastoral endorsement, and continuing education units (CEUs). BTS may offer CEU-eligible events.

Chapter 12: Lampstand Coach Certification Pathway

Program Requirement: Doctor of Ministry — Church Vitality and Multiplication (33 Credit Hours)

Students in the DMin Church Vitality and Multiplication track who complete coursework through DM4966 Gospel Coaching and Mentoring are eligible to pursue recognition as a Lampstand and Embers to a Flame coach. Embers to a Flame is the revitalization track within the Lampstand Conference, a ministry of Briarwood Presbyterian Church operated jointly with Birmingham Theological Seminary.

Certification Requirements

1. Completion of DMin Church Vitality coursework through DM4966. The student must have completed all DMin Church Vitality courses up to and including Gospel Coaching and Mentoring (DM4966). This ensures the student has a comprehensive foundation in the Lampstand model, including the Lampstand Conference (DM9101), church planting (DM9021), biblical multiplication (DM9022), transformational church development (DM9023), and mentor development and training (DM9024).
2. Philosophy of Coaching Statement. The student submits a written philosophy of coaching statement articulating their theological convictions, coaching methodology, and pastoral approach to mentoring church planters and revitalizers. This statement should reflect the biblical framework and models developed in DM4966.
3. Lampstand Principles Capstone Paper. The student submits a paper demonstrating comprehensive understanding of the primary principles of the Lampstand model, including church health assessment, revitalization strategy, coaching relationship dynamics, and the biblical theology of church vitality. This paper may draw on coursework from DM9101 through DM4966.
4. Interview with the Director of the Lampstand Conference. The student schedules and completes an interview with Rob Looper, Director of the Lampstand Conference and manager of the Lampstand coaching team. The interview evaluates the student's readiness to serve as a recognized coach. The student presents the philosophy of coaching statement and the capstone paper during this interview.

Outcome

Upon successful completion of the interview, the student is recognized as a Lampstand and Embers to a Flame coach and may engage in coaching relationships under the banner of the Lampstand Conference. This recognition is granted by the Lampstand Conference, not by Birmingham Theological Seminary. BTS provides the academic preparation; the Lampstand Conference grants the coaching credential.

Contact: Rob Looper, Director, Lampstand Conference | Chief Academic Officer, Birmingham Theological Seminary

This document is supplemental to the DMin Church Vitality and Multiplication program description in the 2026–2028 Course Catalog.

Part V: Student Access and Support

Chapter 13: Disability Accommodation Policy

1. Purpose and Institutional Commitment

Birmingham Theological Seminary is committed to providing equitable access to theological education for all qualified students, including those with documented disabilities. This policy establishes the procedures by which students with disabilities may request and receive reasonable accommodations that support their full participation in the academic programs of the Seminary.

BTS recognizes that its mission of making Reformed theological education accessible extends to ensuring that physical, learning, sensory, or other documented disabilities do not constitute barriers to the pursuit of theological training. The Seminary will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with disabilities in a manner consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and applicable state law, while preserving the academic integrity of its programs.

This policy applies to all students enrolled in any BTS degree or certificate program, whether attending on-campus courses at the Briarwood Presbyterian Church campus, participating through distance education, or studying at an approved extension site.

2. Definitions

Disability: A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, as defined by the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. This includes individuals who have a record of such an impairment or who are regarded as having such an impairment.

Reasonable Accommodation: A modification or adjustment to the academic environment, instructional methods, or assessment procedures that enables a qualified student with a disability to participate in the educational program without fundamentally altering the nature of the program or imposing an undue burden on the institution.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): A comprehensive accommodation plan developed for students whose needs require coordinated, ongoing adjustments across multiple courses or institutional services. An IEP is developed collaboratively by the student, the Chief Academic Officer, and the President.

Documentation: Written verification of a disability from a qualified professional (physician, psychologist, licensed counselor, or other credentialed specialist) that identifies the nature of the disability and its functional impact on the student's ability to participate in academic activities.

3. Physical Accessibility

BTS operates on the campus of Briarwood Presbyterian Church under a permanent facility agreement. The Seminary provides the following physical accommodations to ensure accessibility for students with mobility-related disabilities:

- Designated handicapped parking in proximity to building entrances
- Elevator access to all floors where BTS classrooms and offices are located

- Compliance with Briarwood Presbyterian Church’s facility accessibility standards, which govern the physical plant

Students with physical accessibility concerns related to the Briarwood campus facility should contact the Seminary Office. BTS will coordinate with Briarwood’s facilities team to address any additional accessibility needs.

4. Accommodation Request Process

4.1 On-Campus and Hybrid Students

The accommodation request process for students attending on-campus or hybrid courses follows a structured, collaborative procedure designed to respond promptly to student needs while ensuring appropriate documentation and institutional oversight.

Step 1: Student Request

A student with a disability initiates the accommodation process by making a request to the professor of the course in which an accommodation is needed. The request may be made verbally or in writing. Students are encouraged to make requests as early as possible in the semester to allow adequate time for accommodation planning.

Step 2: Accommodation Development

The professor works with the Assistant to the Chief Academic Officer to develop a list of necessary accommodations based on the student’s documented disability and the specific requirements of the course. This step ensures that accommodations are tailored to the student’s functional needs and the learning objectives of the course.

Step 3: Resource Provision and Plan Development

The Chief Academic Officer and the President together review the proposed accommodations and work to provide the resources necessary to implement them. Accommodations may include, but are not limited to:

- Audio or video recording of lectures
- Alternative testing formats or extended testing time
- Modified assessment methodologies
- Provision of course materials in alternative formats (e.g., large print, digital text)
- Preferential seating or environmental adjustments
- Development of an Individualized Education Plan for students with complex or ongoing needs

Step 4: Student Review and Agreement

The completed accommodation plan is reviewed with the student and the student’s immediate professor to ensure mutual understanding and agreement. Both the student and the professor confirm that the plan is workable and that expectations are clearly communicated.

Step 5: Filing and Future Reference

The approved accommodation plan is placed in the student's institutional file so that it can be accessed immediately when the student enrolls in subsequent courses. Professors of future courses will be made aware of the existing accommodation plan at the time of enrollment, ensuring continuity of support without requiring the student to repeat the full request process for each new course.

4.2 Distance Education Students

Students enrolled in distance education courses may request accommodations through the following process, which is adapted to the delivery format of distance instruction.

Step 1: Student Request

A distance student initiates an accommodation request by contacting the Director of Distance Education. The student should provide documentation of the disability and a description of the functional limitations affecting their ability to engage with course materials or assessments.

Step 2: Accommodation Determination

The Director of Distance Education reviews the request and determines appropriate accommodations based on the documented disability and the delivery format of the course. Accommodations for distance students may include, but are not limited to:

- Provision of course transcripts as a supplement to or replacement for audio/video lectures
- Audio-only versions of course content for students with visual impairments
- Alternative testing formats or assessment methods
- Extended deadlines where functionally necessary

Step 3: Documentation and Filing

The Director of Distance Education creates a report documenting the accommodations provided. This report is placed in the student's institutional file alongside any existing accommodation plans, ensuring that the record is available for reference in each subsequent course the student takes.

5. Documentation Requirements

Students requesting accommodations are expected to provide documentation of their disability from a qualified professional. Acceptable documentation should include:

- A clear diagnosis of the disability from a licensed or credentialed professional
- A description of the functional impact of the disability on the student's academic participation
- Recommended accommodations from the diagnosing professional, where available
- The date of the most recent evaluation

BTS will work with students who have difficulty obtaining documentation and will consider interim accommodations on a case-by-case basis while documentation is being secured. All documentation is maintained confidentially in the student's institutional file.

6. Confidentiality

All disability documentation and accommodation records are treated as confidential educational records. Access to disability-related information is limited to institutional personnel with a legitimate need to know,

including the student's professor(s), the Assistant to the Chief Academic Officer, the Chief Academic Officer, the President, and, for distance education students, the Director of Distance Education.

Disability documentation will not be disclosed to third parties without the student's written consent, except as required by law.

7. Grievance Procedure

A student who believes that an accommodation request has been unreasonably denied or that the accommodation provided is insufficient may pursue the following grievance process:

- The student may request a meeting with the Chief Academic Officer to discuss the concern and explore alternative accommodations.
- If the matter is not resolved, the student may appeal in writing to the President, who will review the accommodation request, the documentation provided, and the institutional response.
- The President's decision on the appeal is final. The student will receive a written response within fourteen (14) business days of submitting the appeal.

Students may also file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights if they believe their rights under the ADA or Section 504 have been violated.

8. Institutional Responsibilities

Student

The student is responsible for self-identifying as a person with a disability, providing appropriate documentation, communicating accommodation needs to the appropriate institutional contact, and cooperating in the development of the accommodation plan.

Professor

The professor serves as the initial point of contact for accommodation requests. The professor collaborates with the Assistant to the Chief Academic Officer to develop a list of accommodations appropriate to the course, implements approved accommodations in the classroom, and maintains the confidentiality of the student's disability information.

Assistant to the Chief Academic Officer

The Assistant to the Chief Academic Officer coordinates the accommodation development process, works with the professor to identify specific accommodations, and facilitates communication between the student, the professor, and the CAO.

Chief Academic Officer

The Chief Academic Officer reviews and approves accommodation plans, works with the President to allocate resources for accommodation implementation, and oversees compliance with this policy.

President

The President provides institutional authority for resource allocation, participates in accommodation planning for complex cases, reviews appeals under the grievance procedure, and ensures that this policy is implemented consistently across the institution.

Director of Distance Education

The Director of Distance Education receives and processes accommodation requests from distance education students, determines appropriate accommodations for the distance delivery format, creates accommodation reports, and ensures that records are filed for future course enrollments.

9. Non-Discrimination Statement

Birmingham Theological Seminary is a confessional institution operating as a ministry of Briarwood Presbyterian Church (PCA). As such, admission to any degree program requires a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and agreement with the seminary's theological commitments as articulated in its governing documents.

Within that confessional framework, BTS admits students of any race, color, disability, or national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, and activities generally afforded or made available to its students. The seminary welcomes both men and women into the majority of its programs. Consistent with its Reformed convictions and the historic position of the church that the pastoral office is reserved for qualified men, admission is limited to men in the following programs, which exist specifically to prepare or equip pastors: the Master of Divinity (ordination track), the Master of Arts in Pastoral Leadership, the Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Leadership, and the Doctor of Ministry in Church Vitality. All other BTS programs are open to qualified men and women alike.

BTS does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the administration of its educational programs, admissions, or institutional services. The seminary will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with documented disabilities consistent with the requirements of this policy.

Contact Information

On-Campus Students:	Contact the course professor, who will coordinate with the Assistant to the CAO
Distance Students:	Contact the Director of Distance Education
General Inquiries:	Seminary Office Birmingham Theological Seminary 2200 Briarwood Way Birmingham, Alabama 35243 (205) 776-5650

Chapter 14: Student Retention and Outreach Policy

I. Purpose

This policy formalizes the student retention tracking and outreach practices that Birmingham Theological Seminary has employed as part of its institutional culture. It establishes documented standards for monitoring student enrollment activity, identifying students at risk of non-completion, and conducting outreach to encourage re-engagement. The seminary's retention and outreach efforts reflect its commitment to the spiritual and academic development of every student and its stewardship of the educational relationships entrusted to it.

II. Retention Metrics

BTS tracks student retention at two levels, each serving a distinct institutional purpose.

A. Micro Retention

Micro retention measures whether a student takes courses in at least two semesters within a given school year. This may be any combination of fall, spring, and summer semesters. Micro retention data is tracked through Blackbaud and reported in the annual Student Retention Report. Because many BTS students are working pastors, educators, and ministry practitioners who may take courses on irregular schedules, micro retention figures are monitored for institutional trends but do not automatically trigger individual student outreach.

B. Macro Retention

Macro retention measures whether a student continues to take courses from one academic year to the next. This is the seminary's primary actionable retention metric. When a student who was active in the previous academic year does not enroll in the current year, the macro retention process triggers the Outreach Protocol described in Section IV of this policy.

III. Data Collection and Reporting

The Office of the Registrar is responsible for compiling retention and completion data. The following data points are tracked and reported annually:

- Micro retention rate (students enrolled in two or more semesters within the school year)
- Macro retention rate (students enrolled year over year)
- Course completion rate (students completing courses in which they enrolled)
- Program completion rate (students completing degree or certificate requirements)
- Attrition data (students who do not return and do not complete)

This data is compiled in the annual Student Retention Report, reviewed by the Chief Academic Officer and President, and published on the seminary's Educational Effectiveness webpage. Retention data informs institutional planning, program review, and accreditation reporting.

IV. Outreach Protocol for Non-Retained Students

When macro retention data identifies a student who has not enrolled in the current academic year, the seminary initiates the following escalating outreach process.

A. First Outreach (Spring Semester)

If a student who was active in the previous academic year has not enrolled by the spring semester of the current year, the Office of the Registrar sends an email communication. The message informs the student that the seminary has noticed their absence, invites them to return to coursework, offers assistance with any barriers to

continued enrollment, and welcomes any feedback the student wishes to provide. The tone of this communication is pastoral and encouraging, consistent with the seminary's relational culture.

B. Second Outreach (One Year of Inactivity)

If the student has not enrolled after a full year of inactivity, a second communication is sent. This message informs the student that if they remain inactive for longer than two years from their last enrollment, they will be transitioned from the active student list. The student is encouraged to enroll in at least one course to maintain active status and preserve their progress toward their degree or certificate.

C. Final Outreach (Five Years of Inactivity)

After five years of continuous inactivity, the student has already been removed from the active student list (per the two-year threshold in Section IV.B). At the five-year mark, the seminary sends a final communication offering the student one additional opportunity to indicate interest in returning to BTS or continuing their degree program. If the student does not respond, their records are moved to a separate archived file maintained apart from standard active student records. This archive preserves the student's academic history while reflecting their inactive status.

V. At-Risk Student Identification (Three-Trigger System)

In addition to the macro retention outreach protocol, BTS identifies currently enrolled at-risk students through a Three-Trigger System that operates within the academic semester.

A. Extension or Late Withdrawal Requests

When a student requests a course extension or late withdrawal, the request triggers an inquiry from the course professor. If the professor identifies concerns, the matter is escalated to the Chief Academic Officer or President for follow-up. A meeting is conducted to address personal, spiritual, and educational factors. Outcomes may include counseling referrals, tutoring arrangements, or adjusted course loads.

B. Unannounced Withdrawal

When a student stops attending or participating without completing proper withdrawal forms, the Registrar initiates immediate inquiry. If the student cannot be reached or does not respond, the matter is escalated to the Chief Academic Officer for follow-up.

C. Below-C Grade Performance

At the end of each semester, performance analysis identifies students with grades below the C range. These students are contacted individually to determine whether the issue was situational (e.g., a health crisis, family emergency) or systemic (e.g., inadequate academic preparation, misalignment with program expectations). Intervention proceeds accordingly, and may include academic advising, Writing Center referral, or program adjustment.

VI. Student Support Resources

The following support resources are available to all students and are referenced in retention-related communications and interventions:

Writing Center. Led by Dr. Pat Sanders, the Writing Center provides writing workshops, research support, and individual coaching.

Academic Advising. The Registrar, Director of Distance Education, and Chief Academic Officer provide formal academic advising.

Logos Bible Software Training. Formalized training seminars are offered each fall and spring semester for all graduate students.

Flexible Delivery Modes. On-campus, distance education, and hybrid delivery options allow students to adjust their engagement format as personal and vocational circumstances change.

Counseling and Pastoral Care. BTS faculty include five members with graduate training in biblical counseling. Students may also be referred to the Altadena House Counseling Center at Briarwood Presbyterian Church.

Part VI: Institutional Integrity and Communication

Chapter 15: Statement on Institutional Communications Integrity

1. Biblical Foundation

Scripture commands the people of God to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and to put away falsehood, speaking truthfully with one another (Ephesians 4:25). The ninth commandment forbids bearing false witness and requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between one another (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 77–78). Birmingham Theological Seminary holds that these commands apply not only to individual conduct but to the institutional communications of a seminary entrusted with the formation of Christian leaders.

2. Institutional Commitment

Birmingham Theological Seminary is committed to truthfulness, clarity, and accuracy in all institutional communications. This commitment extends to every medium through which BTS communicates with prospective students, current students, alumni, donors, ecclesiastical bodies, accrediting agencies, and the general public. It is grounded in our institutional mission to provide faithful and accessible advanced theological education for learners everywhere, building leaders to serve the local church.

A seminary that trains ministers of the Gospel bears a particular obligation to model the integrity it teaches. BTS takes this obligation seriously and holds itself accountable to the following standards:

This statement represents the formal codification of what has long been the stated position and practice of Birmingham Theological Seminary. Its executive adoption reflects institutional maturation in documenting the commitments that have governed BTS's communications throughout its history, not the introduction of new standards.

3. Standards of Communications Integrity

- 3.1 Truthfulness in Publications and Website. All institutional publications—including the Course Catalog, Student Handbook, website, program descriptions, and promotional materials—are reviewed

for accuracy and truthfulness. BTS does not misrepresent the nature of its programs, the qualifications of its faculty, the outcomes of its graduates, or the scope of its institutional resources. Where information changes, BTS updates its publications in a timely manner.

- 3.2 Truthfulness in Recruitment and Development. All communications focused on student recruitment and institutional development are truthful, clear, and accurate. BTS does not employ misleading claims, inflated statistics, or deceptive marketing practices to attract students or donors. Prospective students receive honest and complete information about program requirements, costs, delivery formats, and the nature of BTS's degree offerings.
- 3.3 Accurate Representation of Accreditation Status. BTS accurately represents its accreditation status in all communications. BTS is accredited by the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS), which is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). BTS does not claim accreditation from any body by which it is not accredited, and it does not imply that its ARTS accreditation confers benefits (such as Title IV financial aid eligibility) that it does not.
- 3.4 Accurate Representation of Degrees and Credentials. BTS accurately represents the nature of the degrees and credentials it awards. Degree titles, credit hour requirements, and program descriptions reflect the actual content and scope of each program. BTS does not award degrees that are misleading in title or content, and it does not represent professional or vocational outcomes that its programs are not designed to produce.
- 3.5 Transparency and Responsiveness. BTS makes publicly available all information required by its accrediting body and by sound institutional practice, including its Course Catalog, Student Handbook, accreditation status, Statement of Faith, and institutional policies applicable to students. When BTS identifies an error or inaccuracy in its institutional communications, it corrects the error promptly and transparently.

4. Accountability

The President of Birmingham Theological Seminary bears ultimate responsibility for the integrity of institutional communications. The Chief Academic Officer is responsible for the accuracy of academic publications, including the Course Catalog and program descriptions. The Admissions and Communications office is responsible for the accuracy of the website and promotional materials. Students, faculty, staff, or members of the public who identify inaccurate or misleading institutional communications are encouraged to report them to the Office of the President.

Chapter 16: Statement on Diploma and Accreditation Mills

1. The Problem

A diploma mill is an entity that sells degrees, diplomas, or credentials for a fee with little or no legitimate academic coursework, faculty instruction, or student assessment. An accreditation mill is an entity that sells the appearance of accreditation without conducting genuine peer review, applying rigorous standards, or maintaining accountability to a recognized oversight body. Both undermine public trust in higher education and devalue the legitimate credentials earned by students at genuine institutions.

In theological education, the problem is particularly acute. Diploma and accreditation mills exploit the trust that churches, denominations, and individual Christians place in the title of “seminary” or “theological

institution.” They place unqualified individuals in positions of pastoral leadership, counseling, and theological instruction, with potentially grave consequences for the spiritual health of congregations and the credibility of the Christian witness.

2. BTS’s Position

Birmingham Theological Seminary condemns the practices of diploma mills and accreditation mills as fundamentally dishonest and contrary to the biblical standards of integrity that govern the life of Christ’s church. The ninth commandment’s prohibition of false witness extends to institutions that misrepresent the nature of the education they provide or the credentials they award. BTS considers these practices to be a form of institutional deception that harms students, churches, and the broader cause of Christian education.

BTS’s institutional mission is to provide faithful and accessible advanced theological education for learners everywhere, building leaders to serve the local church. This mission is only credible when the institution itself operates with integrity, submits to genuine external review, and awards credentials that reflect real academic achievement.

This statement represents the formal codification of what has long been the stated position and practice of Birmingham Theological Seminary. Its executive adoption reflects institutional maturation in documenting the commitments that have governed BTS’s posture on these issues throughout its history, not the introduction of a new position.

3. How to Identify Diploma and Accreditation Mills

BTS provides the following guidance to prospective students, churches, and the general public for identifying diploma and accreditation mills:

Diploma Mills typically:

- Award degrees based primarily on payment rather than demonstrated academic achievement.
- Require little or no coursework, or offer degrees in unreasonably short timeframes.
- Have no credible faculty with verifiable academic credentials.
- Claim accreditation from agencies that are not recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the U.S. Department of Education (USDE).
- Use names or web addresses designed to be confused with legitimate institutions.
- Offer “life experience” degrees with no substantive assessment of learning.

Accreditation Mills typically:

- Grant accreditation to any institution willing to pay a fee, with little or no evaluation of academic quality.
- Are not recognized by CHEA or USDE.
- Have no published standards, no site visit process, and no evidence of peer review.
- Accredit institutions that are themselves diploma mills.
- Use names designed to sound similar to legitimate accrediting bodies.

4. BTS’s Accreditation

Birmingham Theological Seminary is accredited by the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS). ARTS is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the national body that evaluates and certifies the legitimacy of accrediting agencies in the United States. CHEA recognition means

that ARTS has been independently verified as maintaining rigorous standards, conducting genuine peer review, and requiring continuous institutional improvement.

BTS's ARTS accreditation involves a comprehensive self-study process, site visits by trained peer evaluators, Commission review and action, and periodic reaccreditation on a regular cycle. The accreditation is not purchased—it is earned through demonstrated compliance with published standards across all dimensions of institutional life, including mission, governance, academic programs, faculty, student services, financial integrity, and institutional effectiveness.

5. Resources for Verification

Prospective students and churches seeking to verify the legitimacy of a theological institution or its accrediting agency may consult the following resources:

- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA): www.chea.org — maintains a searchable database of recognized accrediting agencies and accredited institutions.
- Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS): www.arsem.org — lists all ARTS-accredited institutions.

BTS encourages all prospective students to verify the accreditation status of any institution before enrolling, and all churches to verify the credentials of individuals who claim graduate or postgraduate theological degrees.

6. Reporting Concerns

Individuals who believe they have encountered a diploma mill or accreditation mill, or who have concerns about the legitimacy of a theological institution or its credentials, may contact the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), their state's attorney general's office, or the Office of the President at Birmingham Theological Seminary for guidance.

Part VII: Records, Data Protection, and Continuity

Chapter 17: Records Retention Policy

Records Retention Policy

1. Purpose

Birmingham Theological Seminary is committed to the responsible stewardship of its institutional records. As an institution entrusted with the education and formation of men and women for service in Christ’s church, BTS recognizes that accurate, accessible, and appropriately maintained records are essential to its mission, its accountability to students and stakeholders, and its obligations under accreditation standards.

This policy establishes the retention standards, storage practices, and disposition protocols for all categories of institutional records maintained by Birmingham Theological Seminary.

2. Retention Schedule

Record Type	Retention Period	Disposition
Student Transcripts	Permanent	Never destroyed. Maintained in perpetuity in both digital and backup formats.
Board of Directors Minutes	Permanent	Never destroyed. Maintained in perpetuity as the official record of institutional governance.
Active Student Applications	Lifetime of enrollment	Retained for the duration of the student’s active enrollment. Transitioned to graduate or non-matriculated status upon completion or withdrawal.
Graduate Applications	10 years post-graduation	Destroyed after 10 years following the date of degree conferral.
Non-Matriculated Student Records	5 years	Destroyed after 5 years from the date of last activity.
Scholarship Applications	Active + 5 years	Retained while scholarship is active. Destroyed after 5 years of inactivity.
Faculty Personnel Files	Duration of service + 7 years	Retained for the duration of faculty service plus 7 years following separation.
Financial Records	7 years	Retained for 7 years in compliance with standard accounting and tax requirements.
Accreditation Self-Studies and Reports	Permanent	Never destroyed. Maintained as the institutional record of accreditation activity.

Course Syllabi	7 years	Retained for 7 years from the semester of instruction.
Student Evaluation Data	5 years (aggregated)	Individual evaluations may be aggregated after 2 years. Aggregated data retained for 5 years.

3. Pre-2010 Records

BTS is currently engaged in a systematic digitization project for institutional records predating 2010. These records, which include early student files, historical Board documentation, and legacy administrative records, are being converted from physical to digital format and integrated into the institutional backup system described in the Institutional Data Recovery and Records Protection Plan. This project is ongoing and is expected to be completed by the 2027–2028 academic year.

During the digitization period, physical copies of pre-2010 records are maintained in secure storage on the Briarwood Presbyterian Church campus. Upon completion of digitization and verification, physical copies may be archived or disposed of in accordance with the retention periods specified above.

4. Disposition Protocols

When records reach the end of their retention period, they are disposed of in a manner that protects the privacy and confidentiality of the individuals to whom they pertain:

- Physical records: Shredded or otherwise rendered unreadable before disposal.
- Digital records: Permanently deleted from all active systems and backup locations. Deletion is verified by the Chief of Staff.

No records are destroyed before the expiration of the applicable retention period unless authorized by the President. Records that are subject to a pending legal matter, audit, or accreditation review are retained until the matter is resolved, regardless of the standard retention period.

5. Responsible Officers

The following officers are responsible for the implementation and oversight of this policy:

- Chief of Staff: Primary responsibility for records management, storage, and disposition. Maintains the records retention schedule and ensures compliance.
- Chief Academic Officer: Responsible for the integrity of academic records, including transcripts, syllabi, and assessment data.
- Registrar: Responsible for the day-to-day management of student records within the Blackbaud student information system.
- President: Authorizes any exceptions to the standard retention periods and receives annual reports on records management.

Chapter 18: Institutional Data Recovery and Records Protection Plan and Records Protection Plan

1. Purpose

Birmingham Theological Seminary recognizes that its institutional records—including student transcripts, academic files, financial records, Board minutes, and personnel documentation—are entrusted to the institution by God’s providence and must be protected with diligence and care. This plan establishes the data backup, storage, knowledge management, and recovery protocols that ensure the continuity and integrity of BTS’s institutional records in the event of system failure, natural disaster, or other unforeseen disruption.

This plan supports BTS’s institutional mission to provide faithful and accessible advanced theological education for learners everywhere by ensuring that the records upon which that mission depends are preserved, protected, and recoverable.

2. Three-Layer Backup System

BTS maintains a three-layer backup architecture to ensure that no single point of failure can result in permanent loss of institutional records.

Layer	System	Coverage
Layer 1: Cloud	Blackbaud (SIS) + Microsoft 365	Active student records, enrollment data, transcripts, grades, financial records, email, institutional documents, and collaboration files.
Layer 2: External Drive A	External hard drive (pre-2023)	Historical institutional records, legacy student files, and archival documentation from the seminary’s founding through 2022.
Layer 3: External Drive B	External hard drive (2023–2026)	Current-period institutional records, Board documentation, financial records, and operational files from 2023 to present.

This architecture provides three independent recovery points. In the event of a cloud service disruption, records are recoverable from the external drives. In the event of physical loss of one external drive, records are recoverable from the cloud and the remaining drive. The combination of cloud-based and physical storage ensures geographic and technological redundancy.

3. Storage Locations

Cloud-based records (Layer 1) are stored on vendor-managed servers maintained by Blackbaud and Microsoft, each of which maintains its own disaster recovery and data redundancy protocols. External drives (Layers 2 and 3) are stored in a secure location on the Briarwood Presbyterian Church campus, accessible only to authorized personnel.

4. Knowledge Protocol

To ensure that institutional records remain accessible in the event of personnel transition, the following individuals maintain full knowledge of all backup systems, storage locations, access credentials, and recovery procedures:

- The President of Birmingham Theological Seminary
- The Chief Academic Officer
- The Chief of Staff

- The Chair of the Academic Committee of the Board of Directors

This knowledge protocol is reviewed and updated annually at the beginning of the fall semester. Any changes in personnel occupying these roles trigger an immediate knowledge transfer. The Chief of Staff is responsible for maintaining a written summary of all access credentials, storage locations, and recovery procedures in a sealed document accessible to the Executive Team.

5. Recovery Responsibilities

In the event of a data loss incident, the following chain of responsibility governs the recovery process:

- Incident Identification: Any staff member who identifies or suspects a data loss incident reports immediately to the Chief of Staff.
- Assessment: The Chief of Staff assesses the scope of the incident and determines which backup layer(s) are affected and which remain intact.
- Recovery Execution: The Chief of Staff coordinates with the appropriate vendor (Blackbaud, Microsoft) for cloud recovery, or initiates recovery from the external drives, as appropriate.
- Verification: The Chief Academic Officer verifies that recovered records are complete and accurate, with particular attention to student transcripts and academic files.
- Reporting: The President is notified of all data loss incidents and recovery outcomes. Incidents of significant scope are reported to the Board of Directors.

6. Insurance Coverage

BTS maintains insurance coverage relevant to the protection of institutional records and operations:

- Property Insurance: GuideOne Insurance — covers physical assets including computing equipment and storage devices.
- Directors and Officers Insurance: Higginbotham — covers institutional leadership liability.
- General Liability: Briarwood Presbyterian Church — covers the campus and facilities under the permanent use agreement.

Note: BTS is evaluating cyber liability insurance options. This plan will be updated upon any policy acquisition.

7. Annual Review

This plan is reviewed annually by the Chief of Staff in consultation with the Executive Team. The review includes verification that all backup systems are functioning, all storage locations are secure, and all knowledge protocol participants have current access information. The date of the most recent annual review is recorded below.

Chapter 19: Succession Plan

Prepared Pursuant to BPM Section 5.3.4

Succession Planning and Continuity of Operations

Adopted January 2021 [updated January 2026]

1. Introduction and Purpose

This Succession Plan is prepared and maintained by the President of Birmingham Theological Seminary (BTS) in accordance with Board Policies Manual Section 5.3.4 (Succession Planning and Continuity of Operations). It provides documented continuity-of-operations protocols for all positions designated as critical to the Seminary’s ongoing operations.

The plan addresses five critical leadership positions, organized into two categories based on the governing authority responsible for the succession process:

- Board-Directed Succession: President (requires BTS Board action in conjunction with the Session of Briarwood Presbyterian Church, per BPM Section 4.8)
- President-Directed Succession: Chief Academic Officer, Chief Admissions Officer, Chief of Staff, and Vice President of Development (governed by the President’s delegated authority under BPM Section 4.1, with Board notification)

For each position, the plan documents: the rationale for critical designation, the named interim successor(s), continuity protocols for short-term and extended absences, and the hiring priority framework for permanent replacement.

2. Critical Role Designation Summary

The following positions are designated as critical based on the standard established in BPM Section 5.3.4: positions whose vacancy would materially impair the Seminary’s ability to fulfill its mission or meet its financial, academic, or compliance obligations.

Position	Current Incumbent	Risk Level	Succession Authority
President	[Current President]	CRITICAL	Board / Briarwood Session
Chief Academic Officer	[Current CAO]	HIGH	President (Board notification)
Chief Admissions Officer	[Current CACO]	CRITICAL	President (Board notification)
Chief of Staff	[Current CoS]	HIGH	President (Board notification)
VP of Development	[Current VP-D]	HIGH	President (Board notification)

2.1 Risk Level Definitions

- **CRITICAL:** Single point of failure. No current staff member possesses the primary competencies required to sustain this role’s core functions for more than 30 days without significant institutional risk. External hire required for permanent replacement.
- **HIGH:** Limited internal bench depth. Interim coverage is available from existing staff but will result in reduced capacity in the covering employee’s primary role. Internal promotion or external hire required for permanent replacement.

3. President

GOVERNING AUTHORITY: The BTS Board of Directors, in conjunction with the Session of Briarwood Presbyterian Church, per BPM Section 4.8 (Presidential Transitions) and the controlling documents of Briarwood Presbyterian Church.

3.1 Rationale for Critical Designation

The President serves as the Board's sole official link to the operating organization (BPM Section 4.2). All Board authority delegated to faculty and staff flows through the President. The President is responsible for the execution of Strategic Plan 2025–2035, serves as the only authorized institutional spokesperson (BPM Section 5.4.8), and bears direct accountability for organizational performance across all executive parameters. A presidential vacancy creates immediate governance, operational, and external relations risk.

3.2 Succession Governance

Per BPM Section 4.8, presidential transitions are handled and directed by the BTS Board through the Briarwood Board Directed Ministries Team Commission under the direction of the Session of Briarwood Presbyterian Church. The BTS Board will convene an initial search committee, subject to the approval with any necessary additions by the Session. The Board also reserves the right to call an interim President or Director, subject to the approval of the Briarwood Session through the recommendation of the Briarwood Board Directed Ministries Team Commission.

The following protocols supplement BPM Section 4.8 by providing operational continuity during the governance process.

3.3 Interim Succession Protocols

A. Emergency Absence (1–30 days)

In the event the President is temporarily unable to perform duties due to illness, travel, or other short-term absence, the following chain of authority applies:

- Chief of Staff assumes day-to-day operational authority, including financial approvals within existing budgetary parameters and routine personnel decisions.
- Chief Academic Officer assumes authority over all academic operations, faculty matters, and accreditation-related communications.
- The Board Chair shall be notified within 24 hours of any absence expected to exceed 5 business days.
- No strategic commitments, unbudgeted expenditures exceeding \$5,000, or public communications on behalf of the institution shall be made without Board Chair concurrence.

B. Extended Absence (1–6 months)

If the President is unable to serve for more than 30 days, the Board Chair shall convene the Executive Committee to:

- Formally designate an Acting President from among the executive staff, or appoint an external interim. The Chief of Staff is the recommended first designee, given operational scope and institutional knowledge.
- Define the scope of the Acting President's authority in writing, including any limitations on hiring, financial commitments, or strategic decisions.

- Notify the Briarwood Board Directed Ministries Team Commissioner and coordinate with the Pastor of Board Directed Ministries per BPM Section 4.8.3.
- Establish a communication plan for faculty, staff, students, donors, and key constituent groups (BPM Section 2.5).

C. Permanent Vacancy

A permanent presidential vacancy triggers the full BPM Section 4.8 succession process:

- The Board Chair immediately notifies the Briarwood Board Directed Ministries Team Commissioner and requests authorization from the Session to begin a presidential search.
- The Board convenes a Presidential Search Committee, subject to Session approval and any additions the Session deems appropriate.
- The Board appoints an Interim President (internal or external), subject to Session approval, to serve during the search process.
- The Search Committee conducts a national search with attention to the candidate qualifications outlined in Section 3.4 below.
- The Search Committee presents a recommended candidate to the full Board. The Board's selection is subject to final approval by the Session of Briarwood Presbyterian Church.

3.4 Presidential Candidate Profile

The following qualifications reflect the institutional needs articulated in the BPM, Strategic Plan, and the Seminary's confessional identity. The Search Committee should use this profile as a guiding framework:

Non-Negotiable Qualifications

- Credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ and active membership in a confessionally Reformed church in good standing
- Full, unqualified subscription to the Westminster Standards or the Three Forms of Unity
- Terminal degree (earned doctorate preferred) in theology, biblical studies, or a related field from an accredited institution; or equivalent combination of advanced theological education and senior executive experience
- Demonstrated executive leadership experience in theological education, church ministry, or a comparable mission-driven organization
- Capacity to serve as an effective spokesperson and ambassador for the Seminary's mission to churches, donors, and the broader evangelical and Reformed community

Strongly Preferred Qualifications

- Experience with multi-site or distance education delivery models
- Demonstrated success in fundraising, development, or revenue diversification
- Familiarity with accreditation standards and compliance requirements for theological seminaries
- Strong Working Genius profile in Galvanizing and/or Invention, given the institution's identified organizational need
- Relationship with or connection to the Presbyterian Church in America, Briarwood Presbyterian Church, or the broader NAPARC family of denominations

3.5 Knowledge Preservation

The President shall maintain, and update at least annually, the following documents to ensure institutional knowledge continuity:

- A current list of all active relationships with major donors, church partners, and institutional stakeholders, including key contact information and relationship history
- A summary of all pending or in-progress strategic initiatives, including status, responsible parties, and critical next steps
- Access credentials and administrative authority documentation for all institutional systems, accounts, and vendor relationships
- A current organizational chart with reporting relationships and a brief role description for each direct report
- The current state of any active Board-level discussions, pending approvals, or unresolved matters

4. Chief Academic Officer

GOVERNING AUTHORITY: The President, with notification to the Board's Academic Affairs Committee. Hiring conducted per Briarwood Presbyterian Church HR policies (BPM Section 4.6).

4.1 Rationale for Critical Designation

The Chief Academic Officer (CAO) oversees all academic programs, faculty affairs, curriculum development, accreditation compliance, and student academic services. This role is the primary steward of Strategic Pillar 1 (Strengthen and Grow Faculty), Strategic Pillar 3 (Programmatic Development/Distance Education), and Strategic Pillar 4 (Student Resources). The CAO's Working Genius profile (Discernment + Invention) provides essential evaluative and creative capacity for curriculum innovation and quality assurance. A vacancy in this role directly impacts the Seminary's ability to maintain academic quality, pursue accreditation activities, and execute three of six strategic pillars.

4.2 Interim Succession Protocols

A. Short-Term Absence (1–4 weeks)

- The most senior Department Head with active teaching responsibilities assumes interim authority over day-to-day academic operations, course scheduling, and faculty communication.
- The President assumes direct oversight of any accreditation-related correspondence or compliance deadlines.
- Academic team members with Discernment genius (currently the majority of the Academic Team) continue routine curriculum review and quality assurance functions.

B. Extended Absence (1–6 months)

- The President formally designates an Interim Academic Dean from among current Department Heads or senior adjunct faculty.
- An experienced adjunct or emeritus faculty member may be engaged on a temporary contract to provide additional academic leadership capacity.
- The Academic Affairs Committee is notified and may request periodic updates on academic operations.

C. Permanent Vacancy

- The President initiates a search process, forming a search committee that includes at least one member of the Academic Affairs Committee, one current faculty member, and one member of the Executive Team.
- The position is advertised through Reformed seminary networks, the Gospel Coalition job board, and denominational contacts.
- Timeline target: 90–120 days from vacancy to appointment, with an interim appointment in place within 14 days.

4.3 Candidate Profile for Permanent Replacement

- Terminal degree (Ph.D. or Th.D.) in a theological discipline from an accredited institution
- Full subscription to the Westminster Standards or the Three Forms of Unity
- Minimum 5 years of theological teaching experience, with administrative or program leadership experience preferred
- Experience with distance education, curriculum assessment, and/or accreditation processes
- Working Genius profile: Discernment and/or Invention strongly preferred to maintain academic team composition strength
- Demonstrated commitment to the Seminary's core values: gospel-centered, academically rigorous, pastorally oriented, and confessionally grounded

4.4 Knowledge Preservation Requirements

- Current accreditation status documentation, including most recent self-study, site visit report, and all pending compliance items
- Faculty credentials file with teaching assignments, contract status, and performance review summaries
- Curriculum maps and program assessment data for all active degree programs
- Active catalog and any in-progress catalog revisions
- Distance education platform administration credentials and vendor contacts

5. Chief Admissions Officer

GOVERNING AUTHORITY: The President, with notification to the Board's Advancement Committee. Hiring conducted per Briarwood Presbyterian Church HR policies (BPM Section 4.6).

CRITICAL RISK NOTE: The current incumbent is the only staff member in the institution with Galvanizing as a Working Genius. This individual also serves in a dual-hat capacity on both the Executive and Admissions teams, making this the highest single-point-of-failure risk in the organization. See the Human Capital Strategic Report 2026 for full analysis.

5.1 Rationale for Critical Designation

The Chief Admissions Officer oversees all student recruitment, admissions processing, financial aid administration, and serves as the primary driver of enrollment growth. This role is the operational engine for Strategic Pillar 6 (Communication and Branding) and a critical contributor to Strategic Pillar 5 (Financial Stability) through tuition revenue generation. The current incumbent's unique Galvanizing + Invention profile (I+G) makes this person the sole team motivator and creative energizer across the entire institution, a function

that 64% of staff (9 of 14) have as a Working Frustration. The loss of this role creates compounding risk: enrollment pipeline disruption, marketing capacity loss, and institution-wide momentum collapse.

5.2 Interim Succession Protocols

A. Short-Term Absence (1–4 weeks)

- Admissions team members (currently T+D profiles) continue processing applications, managing inquiries, and executing established recruitment workflows.
- The Chief of Staff covers Executive Team galvanizing responsibilities; a designated competency holder from the Academic Team supports cross-functional project momentum.
- The President or Chief of Staff reviews and approves any admissions marketing communications or campaign launches.

B. Extended Absence (1–6 months)

- The President designates a staff member from the Executive Team (recommended: the member best positioned for executive-level galvanizing) to serve as interim Admissions lead.
- Galvanizing responsibilities are distributed among the five staff members with Galvanizing as a Working Competency on a rotating 2-week cycle to prevent burnout. This is not a sustainable long-term solution.
- The Advancement Committee is notified. The President may engage a contract recruiter or marketing consultant to maintain enrollment pipeline momentum.
- All active recruitment events, church visits, and prospective student communications are inventoried and triaged within the first 7 days.

C. Permanent Vacancy

- The President initiates an immediate search, forming a committee that includes at least one Advancement Committee member and one Executive Team member.
- Timeline target: 60–90 days from vacancy to appointment. An interim appointment is made within 7 days given the critical nature of the role.
- If the vacancy occurs mid-semester, the President should consider engaging an external admissions consultant to bridge the gap and protect the enrollment pipeline for the following semester.

5.3 Candidate Profile for Permanent Replacement

The hiring priority for this position is directly informed by the Human Capital Strategic Report 2026 and the Board's recommended action to address the institutional Galvanizing crisis:

- Working Genius profile: Galvanizing + Invention (G+I) or Wonder + Galvanizing (W+G) is the primary hiring criterion to address the institution's most critical talent gap
- Demonstrated experience in higher education admissions, enrollment management, or student recruitment
- Marketing and communications skills, including digital marketing, CRM management, and content creation
- Familiarity with seminary or Christian higher education environments preferred
- Alignment with the Seminary's confessional commitments and mission

- Capacity to serve as a public representative of the institution to prospective students, churches, and referral networks

5.4 Knowledge Preservation Requirements

- Current enrollment pipeline data: prospects, applicants, admitted, enrolled, by semester and program
- Active recruitment relationships: church contacts, referral partners, event schedules, and campus visit calendars
- Marketing assets: brand guidelines, active campaigns, social media credentials, website CMS access, and vendor contacts
- Financial aid policies, scholarship matrix, and institutional aid budget status
- CRM/admissions system administration credentials and workflow documentation

6. Chief of Staff

GOVERNING AUTHORITY: The President, with notification to the Board's Executive Committee. Hiring conducted per Briarwood Presbyterian Church HR policies (BPM Section 4.6).

6.1 Rationale for Critical Designation

The Chief of Staff manages day-to-day seminary operations, financial administration, human resources coordination, facilities oversight, and serves as the President's primary operational deputy. This role is the backbone of Strategic Pillar 2 (Strengthen and Grow Support Staff) and a key contributor to Strategic Pillar 5 (Financial Stability) through budget management and operational efficiency. The current incumbent's Working Genius profile (Enablement + Discernment) provides essential support capacity and evaluative judgment for operational decision-making. A vacancy disrupts financial reporting, HR administration, and the operational infrastructure that enables all other teams to function.

6.2 Interim Succession Protocols

A. Short-Term Absence (1–4 weeks)

- The President assumes direct oversight of critical operational functions: payroll authorization, accounts payable, and vendor management.
- The bookkeeper continues routine financial processing under existing procedures and reports directly to the President.
- A designated Executive Team member manages internal staff communications and scheduling.

B. Extended Absence (1–6 months)

- The President appoints an Interim Operations Manager from existing staff. The recommended designee is an Executive Team member with strong Discernment capacity.
- Briarwood Presbyterian Church HR department is engaged for any personnel matters requiring HR expertise beyond routine administration.
- The Finance Committee Chair is notified, and the President provides direct financial reports to the Committee until the Chief of Staff role is restored.

C. Permanent Vacancy

- The President initiates a search, consulting with the Finance Committee and Executive Committee regarding the position's scope and compensation.
- Timeline target: 90–120 days from vacancy to appointment. Interim coverage is sustainable for this period given the President's operational familiarity.
- If the vacancy coincides with budget season (October–January) or audit preparation, the President should engage a contract bookkeeper or fractional CFO to ensure financial reporting continuity.

6.3 Candidate Profile for Permanent Replacement

- Bachelor's degree required; MBA, MPA, or equivalent advanced degree preferred
- Minimum 3–5 years of operational management experience, preferably in a nonprofit, church, or educational setting
- Strong financial management skills, including budgeting, cash flow management, and financial reporting
- Familiarity with HR administration, including compliance with employment law and benefits management
- Working Genius profile: Enablement and/or Tenacity preferred, to maintain operational execution capacity. Galvanizing competency is a significant bonus given the institutional gap.
- Alignment with the Seminary's confessional commitments and an understanding of the church-seminary relationship

6.4 Knowledge Preservation Requirements

- Financial system access: accounting software credentials, bank account authorizations, and signatory documentation
- Current vendor contracts, lease agreements, and recurring service agreements with renewal dates
- HR files: employee roster, compensation schedules, benefits enrollment, and Briarwood HR contact information
- Operational procedures manual covering payroll processing, accounts payable/receivable workflows, and financial reporting schedules
- Insurance policies, risk management documentation, and regulatory compliance calendar

7. Vice President of Development

GOVERNING AUTHORITY: The President, with notification to the Board's Advancement Committee. Hiring conducted per Briarwood Presbyterian Church HR policies (BPM Section 4.6).

7.1 Rationale for Critical Designation

The Vice President of Development leads all fundraising, donor relations, planned giving, and capital campaign activities. This role is the primary steward of Strategic Pillar 5 (Strengthen and Grow Long-Term Financial Stability) and directly impacts the Seminary's revenue diversification strategy. The VP of Development has already demonstrated significant early traction, and the Seminary's current cash flow position makes continuous, professional fundraising capacity essential to institutional health. A vacancy in this role immediately jeopardizes donor pipeline development, annual fund performance, and the planned Capital Campaign and Long-Term Endowment initiative.

7.2 Interim Succession Protocols

A. Short-Term Absence (1–4 weeks)

- The President assumes direct stewardship of all active major donor conversations and pending gift solicitations.
- Routine donor acknowledgment, receipting, and annual fund communications continue through existing procedures and support staff.
- No new donor solicitations or campaign launches are initiated without the President’s direct involvement.

B. Extended Absence (1–6 months)

- The President serves as interim development lead, supported by the Advancement Committee Chair and any Board members with fundraising expertise.
- The Advancement Committee is formally notified and may be asked to increase direct engagement with donor cultivation.
- Active grant applications are inventoried and triaged. A contract grant writer may be engaged if applications are time-sensitive.
- All donor relationship records, pledge schedules, and pipeline data are reviewed by the President within the first 7 days to ensure no commitments lapse.

C. Permanent Vacancy

- The President initiates a search immediately, recognizing the direct revenue impact of this vacancy. The search committee should include at least one Advancement Committee member and one Board member with development experience.
- Timeline target: 60–90 days from vacancy to appointment. Given the revenue sensitivity of this role, an external interim development consultant should be engaged within 14 days to protect donor pipeline momentum.
- If a Capital Campaign is active at the time of vacancy, the campaign timeline should be formally reviewed by the Advancement Committee, and the Board should authorize any necessary campaign adjustments.

7.3 Candidate Profile for Permanent Replacement

- Minimum 3–5 years of professional fundraising experience, with demonstrated success in annual fund, major gifts, and/or capital campaigns
- Bachelor’s degree required; CFRE (Certified Fund Raising Executive) credential or graduate-level training in nonprofit management preferred
- Experience with donor CRM systems, prospect research, and moves management methodology
- Comfort and credibility in church and Christian higher education donor environments
- Working Genius profile: Galvanizing and/or Invention preferred, to support the institution’s overall talent needs
- Alignment with the Seminary’s confessional commitments and genuine passion for the Seminary’s mission

7.4 Knowledge Preservation Requirements

- Donor database: CRM credentials, complete donor records, giving histories, and prospect pipeline data

- Active cultivation plans for all major gift prospects, including meeting notes, proposal status, and next-step commitments
- Grant portfolio: active grants, reporting deadlines, and pending applications with all supporting documentation
- Annual fund calendar: direct mail schedule, email campaigns, event plans, and year-end giving strategy
- Capital Campaign documentation: case statement, feasibility study results, pledge schedules, and campaign committee roster (if applicable)
- Planned giving pipeline: all active bequest intentions, charitable gift annuity commitments, and estate planning partnerships

8. Plan Review and Maintenance

8.1 Annual Review Cycle

This plan is reviewed annually by the President and reported to the Executive Committee at the May Board meeting, per BPM Section 5.3.4. The annual review shall include:

- Verification that all named interim successors are still current employees in appropriate roles
- Confirmation that knowledge preservation documents are current and accessible
- Assessment of any changes in institutional risk profile, staffing, or strategic priorities that warrant modifications to interim protocols or candidate profiles
- Review of Working Genius team composition data to ensure candidate profiles reflect current organizational needs

8.2 Triggering Events for Off-Cycle Review

This plan shall be reviewed and updated within 30 days of any of the following events:

- A named interim successor leaves the institution or changes roles
- A new critical position is created through organizational restructuring
- A significant shift in institutional risk profile (e.g., enrollment decline, accreditation action, major financial event)
- Completion of a new Working Genius assessment cycle that materially changes organizational talent distribution

8.3 Document Control

Item	Detail
Document Owner	President, Birmingham Theological Seminary
Distribution	Board Chair and Executive Committee (upon request)
Classification	Confidential
Storage Location	Board OneDrive Documents Folder
Last Reviewed	Jan 2026

Next Scheduled Review

Jan 2027

Part VIII: Distance Education

Chapter 20: Official Institutional Statement on Distance Education

Official Institutional Statement on Institutional Authority, State Authorization, Interstate Distance Education, Micro Learning Centers, Partnership Status, and Accreditation

I. Institutional Authority and Campus Structure

Birmingham Theological Seminary (BTS) is legally authorized to operate within the State of Alabama and functions under a single-campus institutional model, with its sole recognized campus located in Birmingham, Alabama. All academic programs are administered from, and degrees are awarded under the authority of, this Alabama campus.

All individuals enrolled in BTS programs—whether through residential instruction in Alabama, correspondence study, video-based distance education, or approved partnership-based learning—are recognized as students of the Birmingham, Alabama campus.

II. Religious Mission and Educational Scope

Birmingham Theological Seminary exists to provide theological education for the service of Christ’s Church. The Seminary’s programs are exclusively religious in nature and are designed to prepare students for ministry and vocational service in the nonprofit sector. This religious mission is the foundation of BTS’s institutional identity and informs every dimension of its operations, including its regulatory posture.

- **Exclusively Religious Education:** All BTS programs are theological in content and ecclesiastical in purpose. The Seminary does not offer programs in secular disciplines, professional fields requiring state licensure, or vocations outside the scope of religious and nonprofit service.
- **No State or Federal Licensure:** No programs at BTS lead to, promise, or guarantee state or federal sponsored professional licensure (e.g., state-licensed professional counseling). BTS’s biblical counseling programs are designed for ministry contexts and nonprofit settings, not for state licensure pathways.
- **Independent Licensure:** All licensures for BTS graduates—such as ordination or denominational credentialing—are administered externally by the relevant ecclesiastical or denominational body. BTS has no voice or party to such licensure processes.
- **Vocational Intent:** All BTS programs are designed for ministry or work in the nonprofit sector, including churches, independent nonprofit counseling centers, general nonprofits, and private education environments.
- **No Federal Financial Aid:** BTS does not accept federal financial aid from students.

III. Formal Definitions

A. Partnership (Church Educational Partnership): A Partnership is a cooperative relationship between BTS and an independent local church for the purpose of providing theological and discipleship resources for congregational use. A Partnership does not constitute the establishment of a branch campus, extension site, instructional location, or physical presence of BTS. The local church retains full responsibility for facilities, supervision, administration, and delivery of its discipleship activities.

B. Micro Learning Center (MLC): A Micro Learning Center is a church-initiated and church-administered discipleship program conducted under the sole authority and oversight of the local church. An MLC does not constitute a cooperative educational venture with BTS, nor does it represent the establishment of a BTS instructional site, extension campus, or physical presence. Participants in an MLC who are separately enrolled as BTS students may be eligible to receive academic credit through BTS's distance education framework, subject to BTS faculty oversight and approval. Such credit recognition is a secondary academic benefit of the discipleship program and does not alter the MLC's character, governance, or institutional independence.

IV. Micro Learning Centers – Institutional Safeguards

To ensure clear regulatory and accreditation distinction, BTS maintains the following institutional safeguards:

- **No Campus Representation:** Micro Learning Centers shall not be represented, advertised, or described as a campus, extension site, or location of Birmingham Theological Seminary.
- **No Institutional Real Property Interest:** BTS does not lease, own, control, or maintain real property used by Micro Learning Centers outside Alabama. The local church provides the venue as part of its own ministry and discipleship initiatives.
- **No Institutional Employment Presence:** Personnel serving in Micro Learning Centers are not employees of BTS by virtue of local participation. Where BTS engages an instructor associated with an MLC, that individual serves as an adjunct faculty member of BTS under a limited contract for the sole purposes of academic mentoring, assessment, and oversight of enrolled BTS students. The primary instructional content delivered in the MLC is BTS-produced curriculum administered through BTS's distance education framework. The adjunct faculty member's role is to facilitate academic accountability, not to deliver original classroom instruction on behalf of the institution. All other church leaders and personnel operate under local church authority.
- **Instructional Control Retained by BTS:** Academic credit, when granted, is issued solely through BTS distance education under faculty oversight and institutional academic control.
- **Secondary Academic Benefit:** Recognition for academic credit is a secondary benefit to a discipleship-centered initiative and does not transform the Micro Learning Center into a BTS instructional site.
- **No Local Degree Conferral:** Degrees are awarded only by BTS in Alabama. No Micro Learning Center confers degrees or represents itself as an academic institution.
- **Partnership-Based Operation Only:** Micro Learning Centers operate solely through formal partnerships with local churches and do not constitute institutional expansion or branch campus activity.

V. Academic Control and Faculty of Record

All academic courses, including those taken through distance education or recognized through participation in the Micro Learning Center, remain under the direct academic authority and control of Birmingham Theological Seminary. This includes:

- **Curriculum Design:** Sole authority over curriculum design, course requirements, and academic standards.

- Faculty Appointment: Appointment of the official faculty of record.
- Academic Oversight: Oversight of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic integrity.
- Record Keeping: Maintenance of academic records and issuance of transcripts.

Local churches hosting Micro Learning Centers do not exercise academic control, confer credit, or operate as instructional agents of BTS. Any academic credit granted is awarded solely by BTS under its distance education framework.

VI. State Authorization and Religious Exemption

BTS operates under a religious institution exemption granted by the Alabama Higher Education Commission (AHEC) pursuant to Alabama law. Under this exemption, AHEC does not exercise direct regulatory oversight over BTS. This exemption reflects the State of Alabama's recognition of BTS's status as a religious educational institution and does not indicate an absence of institutional accountability.

BTS's institutional posture regarding state authorization is grounded in the following principles:

- Exclusively Religious Programs: All BTS programs are religious in content, ecclesiastical in purpose, and designed for ministry and nonprofit vocational service. BTS does not offer programs leading to state or federal professional licensure.
- No Federal Financial Aid: BTS does not participate in federal student financial aid programs.
- Single-Campus Model: BTS operates from a single campus in Alabama. All instruction originates from and is administered by the Birmingham campus through its distance education framework, including faculty-produced curriculum, faculty-led academic oversight, and institutionally controlled assessment.
- No Physical Presence Outside Alabama: BTS does not operate branch campuses, instructional sites, or residential education outside the State of Alabama. The Seminary does not maintain physical recruiting offices, conduct localized physical marketing campaigns, or establish permanent brick-and-mortar instructional sites outside of Alabama.
- Religious Education Exemptions: Many states recognize exemptions for religious institutions offering exclusively religious education that does not lead to professional licensure and that does not involve physical institutional presence within the state. BTS's programs, institutional structure, and delivery model are consistent with the criteria commonly associated with such exemptions.

BTS affirms the authority of individual states to regulate residential higher education conducted within their jurisdiction. BTS does not claim physical educational presence outside Alabama. Students residing in other states who enroll in BTS distance education are participating in religious education originating from Alabama and delivered through BTS's distance education framework.

VII. Interstate Distance Education

BTS provides distance education to students residing outside Alabama, including through participation in the Micro Learning Center. All such instruction is delivered from the Birmingham, Alabama campus under BTS's direct academic authority.

BTS seeks to operate with integrity and transparency in its interstate distance education activities by:

- Providing clear institutional disclosures regarding BTS's status as a religiously exempt institution, its accreditation through ARTS, and the scope and limitations of its degree programs.
- Operating within lawful religious higher education exemptions where applicable.
- Maintaining policies promoting transparency, integrity, and student protection.

- Refraining from any activity that would constitute physical institutional presence outside Alabama.

Distance participation does not constitute operation of a branch campus, instructional site, or residential educational presence outside Alabama.

VIII. Instructional Modalities and Faculty Oversight

BTS delivers theological education through multiple instructional modalities, all of which operate under the academic authority and faculty oversight of the Birmingham, Alabama campus.

A. Distance Education: BTS offers distance education courses in which qualified faculty initiate and sustain regular academic engagement with enrolled students. This includes direct instruction, substantive feedback on student work, and scheduled faculty-student interaction through distance modalities. These courses are designed to provide a mentored academic experience consistent with recognized standards for Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI).

B. Correspondence Study: BTS also offers self-paced correspondence courses in which students progress through BTS-produced curriculum on an individualized timeline. All grading, assessment, and academic feedback in correspondence courses is conducted under the direct supervision of BTS faculty. While correspondence courses do not follow the same schedule of faculty-initiated interaction, they are subject to the same academic standards and institutional quality controls.

C. Micro Learning Center Instruction: Students enrolled in BTS who participate in academic coursework through an approved Micro Learning Center engage directly with BTS-appointed faculty in a manner that meets the requirements of Regular and Substantive Interaction. MLC-based instruction includes faculty-initiated engagement and substantive academic feedback. Accordingly, MLC-based coursework is classified as distance education under BTS's framework.

D. Institutional Scholarship Policy Across Modalities: BTS does not distinguish scholarship eligibility based on a student's mode of instructional delivery. Students in distance education, correspondence study, or MLC-based instruction are equally eligible for all institutional scholarships for which they otherwise qualify.

E. Unified Academic Standards: Regardless of modality, all academic credit is issued solely by BTS, all courses are taught or supervised by BTS-appointed faculty, and all programs are subject to the accreditation standards of the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS).

IX. Future Physical Presence Outside Alabama

Should BTS establish a physical campus, instructional site, or residential presence outside Alabama, the Seminary will comply fully with all applicable regulatory requirements, including obtaining authorization or a lawful religious exemption where recognized.

X. Regulatory Compliance and Lawful Operation

BTS is committed to conducting its educational activities in full compliance with the laws and regulations of the jurisdictions in which it serves. While BTS emphasizes its single-campus model, the Seminary will pursue full legal compliance with applicable regulatory requirements, including authorization or a lawful religious exemption, where recognized, in accordance with its mission as a theological institution.

XI. Student Complaint Policy

By signing the enrollment agreement to enroll in classes at BTS, students agree to have any complaints adjudicated through the appropriate BTS institutional mechanisms.

A. Adjudication Process: Complaints must be pursued through the following chain of command:

- Chief of Staff
- Faculty or Administrative Committee
- Board of Directors

This process is detailed in our Formal Student Complaint Policy, found in our Student Handbook.

B. External Recourse: If a complaint is not resolved internally, students may pursue a complaint through the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS).

C. Alabama Higher Education Commission (AHEC): BTS operates under a religious institution exemption granted by the Alabama Higher Education Commission pursuant to Alabama law. Under this exemption, AHEC does not exercise direct regulatory oversight over BTS student grievances. This exemption reflects the State of Alabama's recognition of BTS's status as a religious educational institution and does not indicate an absence of institutional accountability.

XII. Student Responsibility and Informed Enrollment

Participation in BTS distance education, including academic credit through a Micro Learning Center, is a voluntary and informed decision. BTS is a religiously exempt institution offering exclusively religious education. Students are responsible for determining whether a religious degree from an Alabama-based theological institution operating under a religious exemption meets their personal, denominational, professional, or academic objectives.

Students considering further graduate education at other institutions are strongly encouraged to verify the transferability of BTS credits with the receiving institution prior to enrollment. Transferability of credit is determined solely by the receiving institution.

Students residing outside Alabama who enroll in BTS distance education are responsible for independently determining whether their state imposes requirements applicable to their enrollment in a religiously exempt out-of-state institution. BTS provides disclosures regarding its institutional status, accreditation, and program scope to assist students in making informed decisions but does not and cannot make representations regarding the regulatory requirements of other states.

Students enrolled in distance education programs should notify the BTS Registrar upon changing their state of legal residence, as changes in location may affect the student's relationship to applicable regulations.

XIII. Privacy and Data Security

BTS is committed to protecting student records and privacy in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). These protections apply to all students regardless of their mode of instruction or geographic location.

XIV. Refund Policy

The institution's standard refund policies apply to all distance education students. Policies can be found in the Student Handbook, Section: Academic Policies – Course Registration, Withdrawal, and Drop/Add (pp. 25–26).

XV. Accreditation and Educational Quality

Birmingham Theological Seminary is accredited by the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS), a faith-based accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation

(CHEA) as an institutional accrediting organization. ARTS is recognized for maintaining standards of theological education, institutional accountability, and academic integrity consistent with recognized principles of quality assurance. BTS is committed to continuous improvement in academic quality, governance, student learning, and institutional effectiveness in accordance with ARTS standards.

XVI. International Students and Institutional Partnerships

A. International Distance Education Students: BTS enrolls students residing outside the United States who participate in BTS degree programs through the distance education framework. These students are enrolled at the Birmingham, Alabama campus. All academic control—including curriculum, faculty appointment, and degree conferral—remains with BTS.

B. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs): BTS maintains formal MOUs with select international institutions for cooperative theological education. Current partners include:

- Africa Reformed Theological Seminary (Uganda)
- Martin Bucer Seminary (Germany)
- Grace Theological College (New Zealand)
- Sola Seminary (India)

C. Academic Control Under International Partnerships: Where credit toward a BTS degree is awarded in connection with an MOU, such credit is issued solely by BTS under the authority of the Birmingham campus. MOU partners are independent indigenous institutions and do not confer BTS degrees.

D. Regulatory Compliance: BTS does not offer degrees that require licensure or regulatory approval in foreign jurisdictions. Should changes in international regulations affect BTS's ability to serve students, BTS will take appropriate action to ensure compliance.

XVII. Institutional Commitment

Birmingham Theological Seminary is committed to institutional transparency and faithful service to the Church. BTS respects the regulatory authority of states concerning residential higher education while delivering religious theological education from its Birmingham, Alabama campus under the authority of Alabama's religious institution exemption.