

Sophia Theological Seminary

Catalog

2024-2025

...the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

James 3:17-18

Contents

Introduction	3
Core Values	4
Accreditation.....	5
Boards of Trustees	6
Faculty	7
Academic Calendar	9
Weekly Schedule.....	10
Program of Study: Master of Divinity	11
Program Overview	11
Program Objectives.....	12
Degree Requirements	12
Credit Hours	13
Seminar Sequence	14
Academic Principles, Practices, and Policies.....	15
Attendance.....	15
Advising.....	15
Assessment	15
Student Academic Honor Code.....	16
Library Resources.....	16
Admissions Requirements	17
Transfer Admissions.....	18
Financial Funding Structures.....	18
Community Worship and Breaking of Bread	19
Seminar Descriptions	20
Foundations	20
Pillars.....	22
Lingua Sophia	23
Guided Reading.....	25
Institutional Principles, Practices, and Policies.....	26
Academic freedom.....	26
Statement of Inclusivity	26
Intellectual Property Rights	26
Nondiscrimination Policy and Practices.....	27
Americans with Disability Act and Disabilities Statement	27
Learning Accommodation Needs.....	27
Privacy Policy and Access to Educational Records.....	27
Sexual Misconduct and General Harassment Policy.....	28

Introduction

The wisdom from above is first pure . . . full of mercy and good fruits.

excerpted from James 3.17

Sophia is the Greek word for “wisdom,” and the seed of Sophia Theological Seminary grew from a recognition that, in a changing environment, theological education requires a wise and creative re-imagining. What does such a re-imagined community of learning and living look like?

It is a community created out of:

*an understanding of ministry as **transformational***

Sophia Theological Seminary desires to partner with students who are called and committed to Christian ministry, students who expect their seminary experience to challenge and to change them. Sophia understands God to be at work in the world, transforming it, and understands this time together as a community of learning to be an experience that transforms the community as a whole and each of its members – students, faculty, staff, and partners. Thus transformed, we may, in turn, be agents of God’s transformational work in the world. Sophia aspires to graduate ministers who are deep-thinking, hard-working, world-changing disciples of Jesus.

*a theological education that is **affordable***

The primary system of financial support for Sophia Theological Seminary is the work of Sophia Farms. Rather than contributing financially through a tuition structure, students, alongside teaching members of Sophia, commit themselves to working up to ten hours per week in farm-related labor. The produce of the Farms then provides the operating budget of the Seminary. This integration of endeavors recognizes God’s first commandment to care for creation and provides a rhythm of life and learning, while creating community and serving as a resource for God’s work in the world.

*a mode of teaching and learning that is **integrated***

The mode of teaching at Sophia is in direct response to present realities in which most seminary curricula are segregated by discipline, relying upon student efforts to make crucial connections, and in which the church and the academy struggle with a false understanding that a boundary exists between the “academic” and the “practical.” All teaching at the Seminary happens in seminars that are integrated across disciplines and across any perceived barrier between the “academy” and the “church.”

*an intent to forge partnerships that are **collaborative***

Sophia Theological Seminary is committed to partnership as a way of being God's people and doing God's work in the world, and seeks to partner with organizations, churches, groups, and individuals who share this commitment. As articulated in our Core Values, Sophia understands partnership to be cross-denominational, ecumenical, and interfaith.

A particular relationship the Seminary has forged is with our Covenant Partners. These partnerships enable the Seminary's principles of integrated learning, and the relationship between Sophia and Covenant Partners flows in both directions. Each Covenant Partner commits to employing a student for their three years at Sophia, nurturing and forming them as ministers. Covenant Partners ministers then participate as conveners in Sophia seminars, contributing their contextual perspective as part of the integrated curriculum.

*a financial model that is **sustainable***

The separate establishment of the Seminary and the Farms creates a financial structure and system whereby each institution is free-standing but also integrated, as the work of one enables the work of the other. In this model, the Seminary's and the Farms' operating expenses are financed through the proceeds of the Farms. This structure has two important features: first, it offers a measure of protection to funds invested in the Farms and, second, donations can be used, in larger measure, to enable and expand the community's programs and initiatives.

Core Values

As an embodied community of learners committed to God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the Seminary assents to the following core values:

- a) Life together in community is marked by daily rhythms of study, worship, fellowship, and work and by yearly rhythms of the seasons.
- b) Being a community of inclusive welcome is foundational to the life, work, and self-understanding of the Seminary.
- c) Theological education is to be a holistic endeavor, with a curriculum that is integrated across disciplines, both "classical" and "practical", and that moves freely between "church" and "academy".
- d) Theological education is to be undertaken with rigor, and all members of the community are considered to be learners in need of continued growth and challenge.
- e) Relationships forged between the Seminary and Covenant Partners undergird and strengthen the life and work of both the Seminary and the church.

- f) The community exercises wise stewardship of capital resources, natural resources, and people.
- g) Governance of the community is a collaborative partnership amongst all constituencies invested in the life of the Seminary, each represented with a full and equal voice. Members of the community commit to participatory decision-making practices marked by trust, openness, and transparency.
- h) The community claims its heritage as little “b” baptist, understanding this heritage as historical, transcending specific denominational confines, and equally commits itself to ecumenical and interfaith work, locally and globally.

Accreditation

Sophia Theological Seminary is creating policies, procedures, and systems that follow guidelines and standards set forth by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) for its member institutions, as the Seminary intends to pursue accreditation. The process is rigorous and takes a number of years to complete fully, and the Seminary is committed to achieving this accreditation as expeditiously as possible. ATS standards exist for all aspects of the academic institution: purpose, institutional integrity, curriculum, faculty, resources, governance, student life, and student services.

Boards of Trustees

Sophia Theological Seminary and Sophia Farms each have a Board of Trustees responsible for the governance of their respective Sophia bodies. The board comprises external members, as well as members from within the Sophia Community, including students. The Board of Trustees meets three times per year in May, September, and January. Plenary sessions of the meetings are open for attendance.

2023-2024 Boards of Trustees

Sophia Theological Seminary

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Faculty



“In a time of rapid change in theological education, Sophia Theological Seminary seeks to ground ministerial formation in a number of core areas which are, to me, vital: a focus on the transformational nature of studying, working, and worshipping in community; an intentional emphasis on being a community of inclusive welcome; the integrated nature of the curricula that connects academics to church and world; and an emphasis on sustainability, both as a community (in relationship with Sophia Farms) and as a way of life. I could not be more excited to be part of this journey.”

Dr. Jonathan S. Barnes received a BA from Gardner-Webb University, an MDiv from Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, and a PhD from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. He has published a monograph, *Power and Partnership: A History of the Christian Mission Movement* (Pickwick, 2013), as well as numerous articles about mission history and theology. Dr. Barnes has taught courses at Christian Theological Seminary, Lexington Theological Seminary, Brite Divinity School, and the University of Indianapolis.

Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Dr. Barnes served for twelve years in southern Africa, living and working in South Africa and Mozambique while also working with partner organizations in Lesotho, Botswana, and Eswatini (formerly known as Swaziland). Dr. Barnes also has experience with the national setting of the Disciples of Christ, working for Global Ministries and Higher Education and Leadership Ministries.



“With 4 adult children, I enjoy an increased level of involvement with music (piano, trombone, banjo), literature, and gardening, all of which I consider key to my mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. These interests parallel my commitment to the values held by the Sophia community. Convinced that a minister’s primary tool in ministry is the minister’s personhood, I find transformative Sophia’s vision of an integrated theological curriculum taught in the context of life in community, connected with God’s creation, responsible to the surrounding world, and attentive to the rhythms of work, rest, worship.”

Dr. Mark E. Biddle, Dean of the Faculty, holds a BAH from Samford University (Birmingham, AL), an MDiv from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, KY), a ThM from Rueschlikon Baptist Theological Seminary (Rueschlikon, Switzerland), and a DrTheol from the University of Zurich (Zurich, Switzerland). Dr. Biddle previously served on faculty at Carson Newman College (now University) and Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. Dr. Biddle has published seven books, over forty articles, eleven translated volumes (from German to English), and scores of book reviews. He serves on the editorial board of the *Review & Expositor*. He also serves on the editorial board of the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary and is General Editor of the Reading the Old Testament series.

The history of Dr. Biddle’s church service includes associate minister positions in youth and music in Alabama and Kentucky and pastorates and interim pastorates in Indiana, Tennessee, Virginia, Germany, and Switzerland.



“I consider myself deeply privileged to be involved during these early days of the formation of Sophia Theological Seminary and Sophia Farms, and I am honored to serve as the chair of the Seminary trustee board. The concepts of integration and collaboration are a significant part of the imaginings of Sophia’s leadership, as we strive to weave these concepts into the foundation, the structures, and the practices of Sophia. I am inspired by these ideas taking the shape of a community where being ministers of Jesus Christ in and to this world is to be lived and learned.”

Dr. Melissa A. Jackson received a BA from the University of North Carolina, an MDiv from Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, and a Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) in Hebrew Bible from the University of Oxford. Dr. Jackson returned to BTSR as a faculty member for 7 years. She authored the monograph, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration* (OUP, 2017) and has also written numerous articles on reading the Hebrew Bible through the lenses of comedy and feminist critique. Dr. Jackson is the managing editor of the journal, *Review & Expositor*.

She was ordained to the gospel ministry by Fellowship Baptist Church in Americus, Georgia.

Dr. Jackson’s ministry experience includes service as youth minister in two NC congregations and work with non-profit organizations in the areas of housing and of literacy.



“The concept of a seminary in a farm setting is just the kind of new venture where I can unite my interests in farming and theological education. Sophia offers a completely fresh approach to a learning laboratory in a theological setting. This approach discards the old image of institution and puts students squarely where they need to be: outside where God created it all.”

Rev. Kathy Shereda received a BS in Christian Ministry from Bluefield College and an MDiv from Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. Rev. Shereda recently retired from the pastorate of Purdy Baptist Church in Emporia, Virginia. Ordained in 2002 by First Baptist Church of Petersburg, Rev. Shereda has also served Virginia churches in Henrico, Petersburg, and Jarratt. Her mission and ministry experiences have taken her to Kentucky, Florida, North Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Georgia, Kenya, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Austria, and Canada.

Prior to her service in ministry to the church, Rev. Shereda worked for the Virginia State Park System, eventually becoming a Chief Ranger. She also worked in and later ran her own nursery, becoming both a Virginia Certified Nurseryman and Master Gardener.

Academic Calendar

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Housing Opens	May 15	May 14	May 13
Sophia Boards Meeting	May 17-18	May 16-17	May 15-16
Community Celebration & Orientation	May 18	May 17	May 16
Reading Days	May 20-27	May 19-26	May 18-25
Academic Year/Summer Term Begins	May 28	May 27	May 25
Convocation	May 28	May 27	May 25
Mid-Summer Sabbatical Week	July 8-12	July 7-11	July 6-10
Summer Term Ends	Aug 23	Aug 22	Aug 21
Fall Semester Begins	Sept 10	Sept 9	Sept 8
Sophia Boards Meeting	Sept 20-21	Sept 19-20	Sept 18-19
Fall Sabbath Week	Oct 14-18	Oct 13-17	Oct 12-16
Thanksgiving Recess	Nov 18-Dec 6	Nov 17-Dec 5	Nov 16-Dec 4
Semester Resumes	Dec 9	Dec 8	Dec 7
Christmas Recess	Dec 23-Jan 3	Dec 22-Jan 2	Dec 21-Jan 1
Semester Resumes	Jan 6	Jan 5	Jan 4
Sophia Boards Meeting	Jan 17-18	Jan 16-17	Jan 15-16
Fall Semester Ends	Jan 17	Jan 16	Jan 15
Spring Semester Begins	Jan 27	Jan 26	Jan 25
Spring Sabbath Week	Mar 10-14	Mar 2-6	Feb 22-26
Easter Recess	Apr 21-25	Apr 6-10	Mar 29-Apr 2
Semester Resumes	Apr 29	Apr 14	Apr 6
Spring Term Ends	May 9	May 8	May 7
Sophia Boards Meeting	May 16-17	May 15-16	May 14-15
Community Celebration & Orientation	May 17	May 16	May 15
Graduation	May 18	May 17	May 16

Weekly Schedule

Summer Term

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<u>1:00 – 3:00 pm</u> Lingua Sophia: Biblical Hebrew (Yr 1) Lingua Sophia: Koinē Greek (Yr 2)		<u>1:00 – 3:00 pm</u> Lingua Sophia: Seminal Thought 2	<u>11:30am – 12:30pm</u> Community Lunch and Worship <u>1:00 – 3:00 pm</u> Lingua Sophia: Seminal Thought 1

Fall and Spring Semesters

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<u>1:00 – 4:00 pm</u> Foundations 1	<u>9:00 am – noon</u> Foundations 2	<u>1:00 – 4:00 pm</u> Foundations 3	<u>10:00 – 11:30 am</u> Pillar 2 Lingua Sophia 1 <i>(Biblical Language & Seminal Thought in alternating weeks)</i> <u>11:30am – 12:30pm</u> Community Lunch and Worship <u>12:30 – 2:00 pm</u> Pillar 1 Lingua Sophia 2 <i>(Biblical Language & Seminal Thought in alternating weeks)</i>

Program of Study: Master of Divinity

Program Overview

Sophia Theological Seminar offers a single degree: a three-year Master of Divinity. The Master of Divinity degree is the basic graduate degree in theological education and prepares students to serve in various forms of ministry in the church, in chaplaincy, and in other religiously-based organizations. Seminars and other requirements undertaken in fulfillment of this degree cover a wide range of topics and competencies necessary for service to God's people in the church, society, and wider world.

The year-round academic calendar runs from June to May. The academic calendar is designed in tandem with the farming schedule so students have adequate time to fulfil commitments to study and work. Students are accepted into year cohorts of approximately 12 students. The academic year comprises three terms: a Summer Term, a Fall Semester, and a Spring Semester.

The curriculum of Sophia Theological Seminary is built around two primary concepts: (1) complete integration, across discipline and across notions of "academic" and "applied" and (2) seminars sustained around a single "theme" for the semester.

The curriculum is organized around a series of weekly, semester-long seminars, titled "Foundations," "Pillars," and "Lingua Sophia." Rather than a curriculum with a required set of core courses plus a series of electives, each of Sophia's seminars is organized around a theme that then integrates content across disciplines of theological education: biblical studies, theology, ethics, church history, missiology, and applied disciplines (e.g., homiletics and pastoral theology/care). Over the course of the semester, students are thus able to focus on particular areas of interest within the bigger theme, creating a self-directed program of core + electives.

Seminars are balanced between classroom hours and independent/guided research, and students move sequentially through the seminars as a year cohort. Students in Years 1 and 2 participate in two weekly seminars during the Summer Term and three weekly seminars during the Fall and Spring semesters. Year 3 students participate in 1 weekly seminar during the Fall and Spring semesters. In their second year, students focus on the context of ministry, including preparation for a short-term cross-cultural immersion experience that takes place in the Summer prior to the third year. Third year students undertake a self-directed capstone project under the supervision of faculty.

Seminars are facilitated in a team-taught environment of faculty members across disciplines with the participation of ministers and other community faith leaders, particularly those from the Seminary's Covenant Partners.

Program Objectives

Sophia Theological Seminary endeavors to educate and prepare leaders who engage in imaginative, holistic, and transformative ministry, seeking to increase God's love and justice towards care of neighbor and all creation.

To this end, Sophia Theological Seminary outlines the following objectives for those enrolled in the Master of Divinity program:

- 1) Students will demonstrate knowledge of the broad stream of Christian tradition, beginning with the source in Scripture up to its contemporary expressions, and demonstrate skills in interpreting and articulating this stream contextually;
- 2) Students will demonstrate knowledge of and skills for relating to diverse social and religious communities in ways that demonstrate God's steadfast love;
- 3) Students will demonstrate knowledge of and skills for engaging in the work of justice, seeking to join in God's reconciling work in the world;
- 4) Students will demonstrate knowledge of and skills for ethical, committed, and wise leadership;
- 5) Students will demonstrate knowledge of and skills for living in connection to and harmony with God's creation, in principle and in practice.

Degree Requirements

- 1) Completion of a sequence of six **Foundations** seminars.
- 2) Completion of a sequence of six **Pillars** seminars.
- 3) Completion of a sequence of seven **Lingua Sophia** seminars.
- 4) Completion of a capstone project in the third year, focus of third-year Pillars and Lingua Sophia seminars.
- 5) Completion of a Companionship Experience (CE), a cross-cultural immersion experience, focus of the third-year Summer Pillar seminar .
- 6) Completion of a three-year internship with a Covenant Partner, including an intensive focus on ministry in context during the second year.
- 7) Participation in the work of Sophia Farms, up to ten (10) hours per week, as required by the farming schedule and as directed by the Farm Steward. Possible tasks include planning and preparation of the yearly planting cycle, preparation and cultivation of land, planting and tending crops, harvesting produce, marketing and selling produce, delivering produce, and planning schedules for work.
- 8) Participation in the wider life of the community, including worship, meals, and study and research.

Credit Hours

Year 1	<i>Summer</i>	<i>Fall Semester</i>	<i>Spring Semester</i>
Lingua Sophia 1Sum: Bib Heb & Sem Thought	3		
Foundation 1A: Tools and Materials		6	
Foundation 1B: Creational Roots and Rhythms			6
Pillar 1A: Calling and Forming Ministers		3	
Pillar 1B: Reading, Researching, and Writing			3
Lingua Sophia 1A: Bib Heb & Sem Thought		3	
Lingua Sophia 1B: Bib Heb & Sem Thought			3
Lingua Sophia: Biblical Hebrew Lab		1	
Lingua Sophia: Biblical Hebrew Lab			<u>1</u>
<i>Total Semester Hours</i>	<u>3</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>13</u>

YEAR 1 CREDIT HOURS (3+13+13) **29**

Year 2	<i>Summer</i>	<i>Fall Semester</i>	<i>Spring Semester</i>
Lingua Sophia 2Sum: Koinē Greek & Sem Thought	3		
Foundation 2A: Jesus Messiah as Incarnation		6	
Foundation 2B: Communities Local and Global			6
Pillar 2A: Practicing in Contemporary Contexts		3	
Pillar 2B: Encountering & Exchanging 1			3
Lingua Sophia 2A: Koinē Greek & Sem Thought		3	
Lingua Sophia 2B: Koinē Greek & Sem Thought			3
Lingua Sophia: Koinē Greek Lab		1	
Lingua Sophia: Koinē Greek Lab			<u>1</u>
<i>Total Semester Hours</i>	<u>3</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>13</u>

YEAR 2 CREDIT HOURS (3+13+13) **29**

Year 3	<i>Summer</i>	<i>Fall Semester</i>	<i>Spring Semester</i>
Pillar 3Sum: Encountering & Exchanging 2	3		
Foundation 3A: Peace and Justice as Pinnacles		6	
Foundation 3B: Navigating Change and Crisis			6
Pillar 3A: Laying the Capstone 1		3	
Pillar 3B: Laying the Capstone 2			3
Lingua Sophia 3A: Directed Study		3	
Lingua Sophia 3B: Directed Study, cont.			<u>3</u>
<i>Total Semester Hours</i>	<u>3</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>

YEAR 3 CREDIT HOURS (3+12+12) **27**

TOTAL MDIV CREDIT HOURS **85**

Seminar Sequence

Year 1:

Summer

Lingua Sophia 1Sum: Bib Heb & Sem Thought

Fall Semester

Foundation 1A: Tools and Materials

Pillar 1A: Calling and Forming Ministers

Lingua Sophia 1A: Bib Heb & Sem Thought

Lingua Sophia: Biblical Hebrew Lab

Spring Semester

Foundation 1B: Creational Roots and Rhythms

Lingua Sophia 1B: Bib Heb & Sem Thought

Pillar 1B: Reading, Researching, and Writing

Lingua Sophia: Biblical Hebrew Lab

Year 2:

Summer

Lingua Sophia 2Sum: Koinē Greek & Sem Thought

Fall Semester

Foundation 2A: Jesus Messiah as Incarnation

Pillar 2A: Practicing in Contemporary Contexts

Lingua Sophia 2A: Koinē Greek & Sem Thought

Lingua Sophia: Koinē Greek Lab

Spring Semester

Foundation 2B: Communities Local and Global

Pillar 2B: Encountering & Exchanging 1

Lingua Sophia 2B: Koinē Greek & Sem Thought

Lingua Sophia: Koinē Greek Lab

Year 3:

Summer

Pillar 3Sum: Encountering & Exchanging 2

Fall Semester

Foundation 3A: Peace and Justice as Pinnacles

Pillar 3A: Laying the Capstone 1

Lingua Sophia 3A: Directed Study

Spring Semester

Foundation 3B: Navigating Change and Crisis

Pillar 3B: Laying the Capstone 2

Lingua Sophia 3B: Directed Study, cont.

Academic Principles, Practices, and Policies

Attendance

The curriculum of Sophia Theological Seminary is designed to allow students the flexibility to be wise stewards of their times of work and study outside of the classroom. Furthermore, in a largely seminar-based learning environment, students' presence at seminars is crucial, not only for their own learning, but for that of their peers as well. Students, therefore, are *expected* to be present at all seminars. Known absences must be discussed in advance with the primary convener of the seminar, who will specify terms for making up the missed seminar.

Advising

Entering students are assigned an advisor, and the first meeting between advisor and student is scheduled during Reading Days. Student and advisor should meet at least once during each of Summer term, Fall semester, and Spring semester. Advisors provide information and counsel to students, assisting them in academic and vocational matters.

Year 3 students do their capstone project under the guidance of a supervisor. Where possible and appropriate, the student's advisor will continue as supervisor. Factors affecting a decision to change would be the advisor's advising and supervising load and the student's proposed project focus. Also, where deemed appropriate, a student could have a different advisor and project supervisor.

Assessment

The Seminary uses a longitudinal and portfolio-based assessment system. The foci of assessment are (a) collaboration between faculty and students in learning and (b) student self-direction in concert with overall MDiv program objectives and individual seminar objectives. Transcripts are narrative, not grade-based; they emphasize qualitative assessment, rather than quantitative.

With the aid of faculty, students compose a written program of goals annually during the Pillar 1A seminar in Year 1 and during Reading Days in Years 2 and 3. That program of goals serves as a basis for periodic assessment of progress towards student goals. Formal assessment occurs in the concluding week of each term/semester. Students are assessed (1) by faculty and (2) through self-assessment. This two-pronged assessment includes a written component and a one-on-one conference between student and faculty advisor.

Assessment is across all areas of the curriculum, taking into consideration written work, seminar preparation and participation, and on work in ministry placement. Faculty assessment

is rigorous — constructive, detailed, and extensive. Students are expected to exert a high level of rigor in their self-assessment as well.

In their assessment, faculty offer students specific, measurable feedback to enable students to improve their level of progress across the next assessment period and to revise their goals, if needed. If the assessment process concludes that a student has made insufficient progress towards their goal/s, the student enters the Guided Reading 1 or 2 seminar and continues to work with their advisor to revise their goals and improve progress to an acceptable level.

In recognition that circumstances will arise in which students require a certified transcript from Sophia, faculty will translate each student's narrative transcript into a traditional grade-based structure at the mid-point of Year 2. These letter grades are not part of Sophia's MDiv assessment, are not distributed, and are made available only at a student's request and only for the purpose of providing a grade-based transcript when required of the student by another educational institution or similar entity.

Student Academic Honor Code

Mutual trust and transparency are necessary for developing and maintaining healthy community. Sophia Theological Seminary expects students to commit themselves to the establishment of trust, amongst themselves and between them and the faculty, by accepting responsibility for their own work. The Seminary considers breaches of this trust and responsibility to be serious offenses. Offenses that constitute violation of academic honor include plagiarism, cheating, lying, and academic theft. The process for addressing such breaches is included in the Student Handbook.

Library Resources

Access to quality resources required to meet the educational needs of students is crucial to the life and work of the Seminary. The Seminary continues to evaluate the best means through which to provide this access. Currently the Seminary's library resources exist in four forms:

- Students have access to the Digital Theological Library (dtl2.libguides.com/home), a collection of online resources in religious studies and related disciplines.
- Professors will make sections of their own scholarly libraries available to students, via a lending policy agreed between faculty and students.
- Students have access to a library of ebooks via the Seminary's membership in the Theological Libraries Ebook Lending Project (<https://www.theologicalebooks.org>).
- The Seminary keeps on reserve two copies of texts designated as required reading for seminars.

Admissions Requirements

Sophia Theological Seminary invites applicants to its Master of Divinity program who evidence the call of God's Spirit alongside the intellectual abilities, emotional capacities, and spiritual disciplines required to become responsible leaders in Christian ministry. Consideration for admission is holistic, based on the collective quality of a student's application. No single admissions requirement, on its own, is disqualifying. The Seminary is, however, selective in its admissions standards. Due to the seminar- and research-based curriculum of the Seminary, prospective students must be self-driven, self-motivated, and capable of undertaking guided and independent research.

Persons seeking entry into the Master of Divinity program must submit a formal application containing all of the following items:

- § Proof of a completed bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university, with a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.75 and a preferred cumulative Humanities GPA of 3.25. Official transcripts from all higher education institutions are to be submitted directly to the Seminary.
- § Resume, including any church positions and service, other employment, community involvement, academic honors, and other awards.
- § Autobiographical essay of 1250-1500 words addressing four matters: (1) your Christian pilgrimage, (2) your call to ministry, (3) your decision to apply to Sophia Theology Seminary, including your expectations for your seminary experience, and (4) your goals for ministry, as you currently envision them.
- § Academic writing sample of 2000-2500 words on any topic. The sample must include in-text citations or footnotes and an appended bibliography. It may be an excerpt of a larger work.
- § Three letters of recommendation: one from a church leader and two others: from two professors, two professional supervisors, or one from each. References should be able to evaluate the applicant's academic and professional qualifications and to speak to the applicant's character, capability, and clarity of purpose.
- § Background check. The applicant is responsible for the fee of \$24.95. An applicant with a conviction is not automatically excluded from consideration. Faculty evaluate the nature of the offense in making a decision. Upon request, applicants are provided an opportunity to respond to information in the background check.
- § Application fee of \$40.00 (non-refundable).
- § Interview, preferably face-to-face at the Seminary, but a video call is acceptable.
- § Post-interview written reflection.

When the Seminary has received all materials and conducted the interview, the Faculty will review and discuss the completed application. Once the committee has reached a decision regarding acceptance or denial, prospective students will receive official notification via both email and postal mail. For accepted students, this letter will contain instructions on communicating your intent regarding acceptance, including a deadline by which to submit such communication. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis; however, priority is given to those applications received in full by the published deadline.

Transfer Admissions

Students seeking to transfer to Sophia Theological Seminary from another MDiv program must submit a formal application following the process and list of required materials outlined above under “Admissions Requirements.”

Potential transfer students are additionally required (1) to write an entrance essay, based on a prompt or prompts assigned at the time of application, and (2) an interview, either virtually or in person, to be arranged upon receipt of all application materials. This part of the process serves to assess the student for placement in the MDiv sequence and to ascertain any areas in which the student requires additional study to become proficient in the Seminary curriculum. Transfer students may be admitted into the Year 1 or Year 2 cohort. Upon a successful transfer, the Seminary will work with the student to tailor content to fill any curricular gaps. Transfer students may be required to participate in an assessment at the end of their first semester and/or academic year to evaluate progress.

Financial and Funding Structures

Sophia Theological Seminary is supported, in a number of ways, by the work of Sophia Farms, particularly financially. All members of Sophia Seminary contribute their labor to the work of the Farms. Students do not pay tuition and housing in the usual way; instead, they work, on average, ten hours a week in farm-related activities. These activities cover a range of needed jobs, from cultivating the land to transporting produce to managing the CSA to nurturing relationships with partners. The Farm Steward supervises the work of Sophia Farm.

In a placement with one of Sophia’s Covenant Partners, each student serves in a church or other organization for the duration of their three years of seminary. The Seminary aids in securing a placement, while students and Covenant Partners together forge a covenant that will guide their relationship during the time the student is working in the community.

The Seminary is pursuing accreditation; however, the process takes up to seven years, during which the Seminary will be unaccredited. Not having accreditation has implications for students who have prior student loan debt, as student loans cannot be deferred while students attend institutions that are not accredited. The Seminary will work with students who are in this particular financial situation.

Community Worship and Breaking of Bread

Sophia Theological Seminary is not only an academic community; it is also a worshipping community. During the Summer term and the Fall and Spring semesters, the community gathers on Fridays from 11.30-12.30 for worship followed by a common meal. No other activities are scheduled during this hour. The Worship Committee is responsible for planning worship, enlisting members from the Sophia community, as well as guests, for worship leadership.

Worship is a time for the community to cultivate practices of faithful Sabbath. It is a time to feed and to be fed, as all members of the community are called to be present as participants and as worship leaders. Students are expected to lead regularly in worship, as part of their ministerial formation, and innovation and creativity during this time of worship is encouraged.

On days when community members gather to work on the Farms, the day's work begins with a time of morning prayer in the field. The Worship Committee establishes a schedule for community members to lead morning prayers.

Seminar Descriptions

I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion.

I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice.

Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

When the Lord established the heavens, I was there.

When the Lord marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker.

Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars.

Proverbs 8:12, 20, 23, 27, 29-30; 9:1

Foundations

Foundation 1A: Tools and Materials for Wisdom Theology and Practice

This seminar's focus is on foundational topics, continuing from the Summer Readings seminar. Work of the seminar will cover prolegomena of all core disciplines, emphasizing them, not as separate and distinct, but as integrated and dependent.

Topics to be covered include: prolegomena, the use of theological language, ministering cross-culturally, preaching as story-telling, the desert fathers/mothers, issues of social location, early texts (biblical, historical, theological), and forming and using methodology/pedagogy. (*Year 1 Fall, 6 credit hours*)

Foundation 1B: Creational Roots and Rhythms of Wisdom Theology and Practice

This seminar focuses on aspects of creation, exploring the significance of creation across disciplines and in the life and work of the Seminary, the church, and the student, as student and as minister.

Topics to be covered include: Genesis, the agrarian parables, food, human sexuality, earth justice, eco-theology, bioethics, monastics and industry, the Trinity, the *missio Dei*, the arts in worship and pastoral ministry, Sabbath. (*Year 1 Spring, 6 credit hours*)

Foundation 2A: Jesus Messiah as Incarnation of Divine Wisdom

This seminar focuses on the figure and ministry of Jesus Christ and related topics.

Topics to be covered include: New Testament gospels, Christology, salvation, sin, incarnation, soteriology, Christological controversies, ecumenism, imperialism/colonialism/post-colonialism, ministers as Christ's representatives, bridging "world" & Christ in worship/pastoral care, prayer, practicing hospitality. (*Year 2 Fall, 6 credit hours*)

Foundation 2B: Communities Local and Global Committed to Wisdom Theology and Practice

This seminar focuses on the Church, and its expressions locally, globally, and denominationally – especially in forms “baptist.” Discussion centers around church as community and how the church exists in and interacts with its wider culture and “world.”

Topics to be covered include: Acts, epistles, ecclesiology, Psalms, religious liberty, public theology, Baptists, Anabaptists, reformation, church and empire, global church, churches as systems, holiness, inclusivity in worship, technology, *lectio divina*, theology of mission, “Christian” education. *(Year 2 Spring, 6 credit hours)*

Foundation 3A: Peace and Justice as Pinnacles of Divine Wisdom

This seminar focuses on the presence and impacts of power, violence, and trauma in society and in the church, both on macro levels (systems) and micro levels (local congregation, congregants), and how churches can intervene, in ministry and in dismantling negative structures.

Topics to be covered include: Lamentations, latter prophets, Esther, Revelation, The Kin(g)dom of God, eschatology, interpretive strategies that engage hierarchical structures (feminist, womanist, liberation theology, post-colonialism, queer theology), socio-religious movements (Suffragists, Civil Rights, peace movements), economics in the church, criminal justice system, war, genocide, anti-Semitism/holocaust, solidarity and mutuality, community development, advocacy, worship as reconciliation, spiritual disciplines. *(Year 3 Fall, 6 credit hours)*

Foundation 3B: Navigating Change and Crisis in the Ministry of Wisdom

This seminar focuses on the role and task of the minister and the church during times and seasons of change, including cyclical and life change, as well as change in a context of crisis. Change at both the macro level (systems) and micro level (community, local congregation, congregants) will be considered.

Topics to be covered include: wisdom literature, Song of Songs, Job, New Testament household codes, parables, theodicy, suffering, human sexuality, the ethical in the everyday, hospitality, the liturgical year, pastoring through change and crisis, trauma-informed ministry, pastoral care through seasons of life, prayer, baptism, communion, weddings, funerals, vocation, intergenerational worship/ministry/education, mission as participation. *(Year 3 Spring, 6 credit hours)*

Pillars

Pillar 1A: Calling and Forming Ministers of Wisdom

This seminar guides students to an understanding of the person and work of the minister. Focus is inward in self-reflection and self-assessment and outward in reflection on ministry as vocation. During this seminar, students compose their initial program goals for use in their assessment narrative.

Topics to be covered include: self-exploration of calling to ministry, vocational identity, personal development and self-care, how ministerial formation shapes ministry, the practice of theological reflection, formulating functional theologies of ministry. (*Year 1 Fall, 3 credit hours*)

Pillar 1B: Reading, Researching, and Writing Wisdom Theology

This seminar focuses on the foundation principles of conducting academic research and writing in a biblical/theological context. Some sessions will be a “laboratory” format, in which students can be tutored on current work.

Topics to be covered include: reading theologically, selecting sources, using library resources, forming a coherent argument, planning and executing the writing of an exegetical/research paper, citing sources. (*Year 1 Spring, 3 credit hours*)

Pillar 2A: Practicing a Ministry of Wisdom in Contemporary Contexts

This seminar focuses on the ministry work students have undertaken and are undertaking, leading and serving in their ministry placements. The seminar will focus on both practical skills necessary to the work of ministry, as well as biblical and theological bases undergirding those practicalities. Students will discuss particularities of their context. They will reflect on identity and role, professional development, and self-care. This seminar will be largely facilitated with/by ministers in the community and in their places of ministry. (*Year 2 Fall, 3 credit hours*)

Pillar 2B: Encountering and Exchanging Diverse Experiences of Wisdom in the World: Understanding the Challenge

This seminar focuses on the *missio Dei* in an interconnected, globalized world, moving from understanding mission as something done “for” or “to” others to understanding mission as being done “with” others. This seminar also focuses on preparation for and participation in a cross-cultural experience with missional companions/partners, either domestically or abroad.

Topics to be covered include: the biblical/theological basis for the *missio Dei*, the Church in the world, theological/ethical presuppositions around mission, the relationship between culture and mission, mutuality, developing congregational understanding of domestic and

international mission through a lens of companionship/partnership, justice-centered relationship, location-specific study, formulation of a theology of mission. *(Year 2 Spring, 3 credit hours)*

Pillar 3Sum: Encountering and Exchanging Diverse Experiences of Wisdom in the World: Undertaking the Journey

In the Summer of the third year, students will participate in a 10 to 12-day cross-cultural experience with missional companions/partners. While emphasis will be on visiting companions/partners that focus on agricultural development and creation care (core components of the Seminary's ethos and context), immersion experiences will include a variety of contexts, both domestically and abroad. *(Year 3 Summer, 3 credit hours)*

Pillar 3A: Laying the Capstone for Wisdom Theology and Practice, I

Students undertake a year-long project with both research and applied components. With the guidance of a supervisor, students choose a topic that is integrative, reflecting the integrated nature of the curriculum. The first part of the project includes developing a topic, creating a project prospectus, and conducting research. *(Year 3 Fall, 3 credit hours)*

Pillar 3B: Laying the Capstone for the Theology and Practice of Wisdom, II

In the second part of the year-long project, students complete their research, write up the project, deliver it in a presentational setting, including the appropriate form of delivering any applied components (e.g. worship, community education). *(Year 3 Spring, 3 credit hours)*

Lingua Sophia

Lingua Sophia 1Sum: Biblical Hebrew (Learning the Basics) and Seminal Thought

This seminar has two components in alternating seminar meetings: Biblical Hebrew and Seminal Thought. In Biblical Hebrew sessions, students are introduced to the basic vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of Biblical Hebrew. In Seminal Thought sessions, students engage in close readings in English of foundational texts across the areas of church history, ethics, mission, and theology. *(Year 1 Summer, 3 credit hours)*

Lingua Sophia 1A: Biblical Hebrew (Building Proficiency) and Seminal Thought

This seminar is a continuation in content of Lingua Sophia Summer seminars. Study of Biblical Hebrew grammar continues, including translation of selected biblical texts. Students are introduced to methods and resources for exegesis. Students also continue engagement with

Seminal Thought across the areas of church history, ethics, mission, and theology, applying analytical and interpretive methods and skills. *(Year 1 Fall, 3 credit hours)*

Lingua Sophia 1B: Biblical Hebrew (Practicing Interpretation) and Seminal Thought

This seminar continues the work of the previous Lingua Sophia seminars. Students undertake translations of Biblical Hebrew texts, applying exegetical and interpretive skills to reading the texts. Students also continue engagement with Seminal Thought across the areas of church history, ethics, mission, and theology, applying analytical and interpretive methods and skills. *(Year 1 Spring, 3 credit hours)*

Lingua Sophia: Biblical Hebrew Lab

In a weekly language lab, students practice language skills, individually and in small groups, with the support of a professor/tutor. *(Year 1 Fall and Spring, 1 credit hour/semester)*

Lingua Sophia 2Sum: Koinē Greek (Learning the Basics) and Seminal Thought

This seminar has two components in alternating seminar meetings: New Testament Greek and Seminal Readings. In New Testament sessions, students are introduced to the basic vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of New Testament Greek. In Seminal Thought sessions, students engage in close readings in English of foundational texts across the areas of church history, ethics, mission, and theology. *(Year 2 Summer, 3 credit hours)*

Lingua Sophia 2A: Koinē Greek (Building Proficiency) and Seminal Thought

This seminar is a continuation in content of Lingua Sophia Summer seminars. Study of New Testament grammar continues, including translation of selected biblical texts. Students are introduced to methods and resources for exegesis. Students also continue engagement with Seminal Thought across the areas of church history, ethics, mission, and theology, applying analytical and interpretive methods and skills. *(Year 2 Fall, 3 credit hours)*

Lingua Sophia 2B: Koinē Greek (Practicing Interpretation) and Seminal Thought

This seminar continues the work of the previous Lingua Sophia seminars. Students undertake translations of New Testament Greek texts, applying exegetical and interpretive skills to reading the texts. Students also continue engagement with Seminal Thought across the areas of church history, ethics, mission, and theology, applying analytical and interpretive methods and skills. *(Year 2 Spring, 3 credit hours)*

Lingua Sophia: Koinē Greek Lab

In a weekly language lab, students practice language skills, individually and in small groups, with the support of a professor/tutor. *(Year 2 Fall and Spring, 1 credit hour/semester)*

Lingua Sophia 3A: Directed Study Supporting Capstone Project

Under the guidance of a supervisor, students work independently to choose biblical texts, other primary texts, and secondary texts as part of their reading and research for the capstone project. Students are expected to provide their own translations of selected biblical texts. *(Year 3 Fall, 3 credit hours)*

Lingua Sophia 3B: Directed Study Supporting Capstone Project

Under the guidance of a supervisor, students continue the work of the previous semester's Readings Seminar, continuing to engage with biblical texts, other primary texts, and secondary texts as part of their reading and research for the capstone project. Students are expected to provide their own translations of selected biblical texts. *(Year 3 Spring, 3 credit hours)*

Guided Reading

Guided Reading 1

In a directed study format, transfer students in Year 1 or returning Year 1 students who require remediation engage in a tailored program to increase fluency/competency with the curricular content and objectives. The student and a faculty director coordinate the structure and content of the program together, building it around the student's needs. The student will commence the program of study in the Summer term. The program's duration is based upon the faculty supervisor's ongoing assessment of student work and could continue into and through the academic year. Students undertake the Guided Reading program concurrently with the required seminars of the Year 1 cohort. *(Year 1 Summer, Fall, and Spring)*

Guided Reading 2

In a directed study format, transfer students in Year 2 or returning Year 2 students who require remediation engage in a tailored program to increase fluency/competency with the curricular content and objectives. The student and a faculty director coordinate the structure and content of the program together, building it around the student's needs. The student will commence the program of study in the Summer term. The program's duration is based upon the faculty supervisor's ongoing assessment of student work and could continue into and through the academic year. Students undertake the Guided Reading program concurrently with the required seminars of the Year 2 cohort. *(Year 2 Summer, Fall, and Spring)*

Institutional Principles, Practices, and Policies

Academic freedom

Amongst its guidelines, ATS states, “Schools shall uphold the freedom of inquiry necessary for genuine and faithful scholarship...” Sophia Theological Seminary embraces the freedoms of scholarship, inquiry, and dialogue as distinctly necessary for “genuine and faithful scholarship.” In an institution of higher learning, robust discourse and the interchange of ideas, both amongst members of the institution as well as with colleagues in other institutions, is of paramount importance. The members of Sophia Theological Seminary are committed to the free exchange of ideas and the discourse this exchange generates. That freedom extends to written and spoken forms of communication.

Statement of Inclusivity

Sophia Theological Seminary is committed to promoting a diverse and just environment for all people, in which practices and language encourage and enable the achievement of inclusion. The community values people, perspectives, and experiences in whatever ways our diversity is manifest, including cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, races, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds.

The seminary recognizes the continuing debate, as well as the resultant conflicting views, regarding how language is used in Christian contexts. Recognizing the importance of language particularly in the achievement of inclusion, the Seminary promotes inclusive language, including language about God, humanity, cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, races, and religions and language regarding characteristics such as sex, gender, sexual identities, social class, age, and differing abilities. All members of the community are expected to be inclusive and respectful with their language in academic work as well as seminary publications, written and online correspondence, and official documents.

Intellectual Property Rights

Intellectual property is the tangible or intangible results of scholarship, research, development, teaching, and other intellectual activity. The individualized content of seminars and other teaching environments, including any online instruction, shall remain the intellectual property rights of the course instructor, including the right to create and retain archived and exported copies of the course content in digital or other format.

Any recording by students of seminar meetings or in other teaching environments requires the prior assent of all seminar conveners.

Nondiscrimination Policy and Practices

Sophia Theological Seminary values diversity and challenges structures that intentionally or unintentionally encourage and enable discrimination. As such, the Seminary does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, national origin, citizenship status, religion, disability status, membership in uniformed service, or any other category protected by applicable law.

The Seminary is an equal opportunity employer and maintains a policy and associated practices of nondiscrimination with respect to all employees and applicants for employment. All personnel actions, such as recruitment, hiring, compensation and benefits, promotion, and separation, follow this policy and its associated practices of nondiscrimination.

Americans with Disability Act and Disabilities Statement

Sophia Theological Seminary commits to providing an inclusive, open, and accessible environment for all students, and the Seminary complies with the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act and the Virginia Disability Act. For students with a disability that impacts their studies, the Seminary will make reasonable accommodations. If a student may require accommodations, they should inform faculty as soon as possible so their needs may be met appropriately and expeditiously.

Learning Accommodation Needs

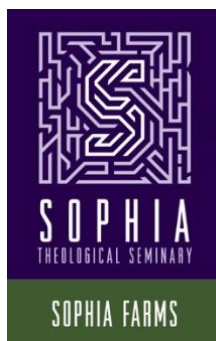
Sophia Theological Seminary is committed to helping students receive the fullest learning experience possible. Any student with a proven learning disability is responsible to provide a doctor's letter stating recommended accommodations. Students with reason to believe they require accommodation, but do not have a previous diagnosis, are encouraged to arrange testing procedures. Faculty will work within the provided recommendations while maintaining academic expectation and integrity.

Privacy Policy and Access to Educational Records

Sophia Theological Seminary complies with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). This Act is designed to protect the privacy of educational records, to establish the rights of students to inspect and review their educational records, and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate or misleading data through informal and formal hearings. Students also have the right to file complaints with the FERPA office concerning alleged failures by the Seminary to comply with the Act.

Sexual Misconduct and General Harassment Policy

While at this point in time Sophia Theological Seminary is not legally bound by Title IX regulations, the Seminary is committed to the principles found therein and will work proactively to create and maintain a safe, nurturing environment for all members of the community. The Seminary believes that the journey to acquire knowledge can only flourish in an environment free from sexual misconduct or gender-based discrimination. All forms of such misconduct or discrimination are viewed as acts of aggression and repression and are not conducive to a safe community environment and are, therefore, prohibited on the Seminary and Farms premises or at any off-campus activities sponsored by the Seminary and/or the Farms. The Seminary's full Grievance Policy, which explicates the Seminary's policies and procedures on these matters, is included in the Community Life Manual.



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