

**REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT FOR
REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION**

to

**St. John's University School of Theology and Seminary
Collegeville, MN**

10/23/2017 to 10/26/2017

for

The Board of Commissioners of
The Commission on Accrediting of the
Association of Theological Schools

EVALUATION COMMITTEE

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Brief description of St. John's University School of Theology and Seminary

Founded in 1857, Saint John's was originally established to educate young men for the priesthood by the Minnesota Territorial Legislature. It was the first Catholic institution of higher education in Minnesota. In 1883 the State Legislature authorized the school to grant academic degrees and changed the legal title of the school from "St. John's Seminary" to St. John's University. From the beginning, Saint John's educated monks for the priesthood while also welcoming diocesan seminarians and members of other religious communities.

The establishment of the Benedictine Institute of Sacred Theology in 1958 by Saint Benedict's Monastery led to a cooperative arrangement whereby Saint John's Seminary became the first Roman Catholic theologate to offer graduate degrees to women. From this evolved a dynamic model of education for collaborative ministry at Saint John's. In 1979, the academic program for seminarians, known as the School of Divinity, and the graduate program in theology were merged to form the School of Theology. In 1988, the seminary formation program was brought together with the academic program to form what is now known as the School of Theology and Seminary.

Today, the school remains committed to the education and formation of monastic seminarians, religious sisters and brothers, and lay people.

Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary (SOT/Sem) is one of only four Catholic theological schools in the upper Midwest. The distinctive essence of the school is shaped by the Roman Catholic and Benedictine traditions and the liturgical and ecumenical heritage of Saint John's Abbey. Students come from all walks of life and all corners of the world.

The school's vibrant community is enriched by the presence of Saint John's Abbey, Saint Benedict's Monastery, the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, *The Saint John's Bible*, the Episcopal House of Prayer, and the Liturgical Press, as well as the undergraduate programs at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University. It is also enriched by the school's membership in the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools.

The on-site visitation committee was impressed with the school's Benedictine ethos, with its special emphases on community, spirituality, stability, and hospitality, an ethos that is embraced by its various constituencies—from students to regents—and summarized in the oft-heard phrase "pursuit of wisdom."

2. Accreditation History

In the mid-1940's the undergraduate program gained accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary School. North Central accredited the graduate program in 1964 with the understanding that all MA degrees received from 1958-1963 were accredited degrees. The North Central accreditation was finalized in 1969.

The School of Divinity received initial accreditation from the American Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in 1969, accrediting the Master of Divinity degree. In 1999 ATS and North Central accredited SOT/Sem for 10 years. On February 18, 2009, the institution's accreditation was reaffirmed by ATS for a period of ten years, until Fall 2018. At the school's request the visitation for reaffirmation

was moved to the Fall 2017. At that time, the following degree programs were approved: Master of Divinity, Master of Arts in Liturgical Music, Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry, Master of Arts (Liturgical Studies), and Master of Arts (Theology). On June 19, 2009, preliminary approval for the Masters of Theology degree was granted, as well as preliminary approval for a comprehensive distance education program.

Since the last comprehensive visit on October 12-15, 2008 the MA (Liturgical Studies) has been discontinued in March 2016, as well as the approval of the change in nomenclature from the MA in Pastoral Ministry to MA in Ministry (Standard B) and MA (Theology) to Master of Theological Studies (Standard D).

3. Adequacy of the self-study

There were eight subcommittees set up for the self-study. These committees consisted of 2-4 faculty members; 1-2 members of the administrative staff, and in some cases one student. The Steering Committee overseeing the self-study consisted of three faculty members and one administrator.

The self-study was meticulously written with plenty of explanatory details. The institution has accurately identified with candid transparency its strengths, concerns, and recommendations. The self-study reflects the Benedictine charism of stability as it gives a definite historical character to the narrative.

II. GENERAL INSTITUTIONAL STANDARDS

1. Purpose, Planning and Evaluation

St. John's Seminary (SOT/Sem) at St. John's University crafted their mission statement in 2001 with a vision towards the future. It was the collaborative work of administration, staff, faculty, and students at the direction of the Board looking at the school's vision for service to the church. Two underlying dynamics of the mission is the Benedictine characteristic of stability and its adaptability to new contextual realities. The mission is integrally connected to the vision, strategic planning, and curriculum. The mission of SOT/Sem focuses on four main points: a community of faith, an academic community, a community of formation for lay and ordained ministry, and a community connected to the Benedictine tradition. The mission statement approved in May 2001 has been reviewed and reapproved in 2005-2006, in 2009, and again in 2016-2017. Each review and approval was in the light of each strategic plan of the same years.

The on-site visitation committee notes that it is very evident that SOT/Sem has taken and continues to take the planning processes very seriously over its last eighteen years, especially most recently. The process for the new strategic plan began in the Executive Committee meeting of September 24, 2014. By summer 2015 the President of St. John's University established for SOT/Sem a Task Force, constituted by Board members, faculty, staff, students, and alumni/ae, to address the issues of: (1) market, that is, analyzing how to align the institution with potential students; (2) mission, adopting curricular changes to carry out the mission more effectively, making modifications in several degree programs, MDiv, Master of Ministry [formerly MA in Pastoral Ministry], and Master of Theological Studies [formerly MA in Theology], while eliminating the MA in Liturgical Studies; (3) structure, restructuring the Admissions and Development with new hires in each area; and (4) leadership with a new Dean, who was appointed in December, 2015. This same Task Force set the stage for the development of financial models to assist SOT/Sem. The Task Force produced a "Five-Year Strategic Plan" for SOT/Sem by January 2017,

consisting of six strategic priorities: (1) enrollment, (2) development, (3) curricular development, (4) marketing and communications, (5) student life, and (6) facility master plan. The plan has been approved by the SOT/Sem Board of Regents and St. John's University Board of Trustees and reviewed by the SOT/Sem Executive Board. In terms of development, the "mantra" of the Presidential Task Force and the institution's constituency is "45/85/600." This means by the year 2022/2023 there will be 45 residential students at SOT/Sem, 85 FTE students, and \$600,000 of revenue being raised in the annual fund. The on-site visitation committee acknowledges that SOT/Sem is making very commendable progress towards these goals and financial stability, but is recommending **to require a report by November 1, 2020 regarding progress in implementing a financial plan that brings financial stability to the school, including progress in key enrollment and annual fund goals, as well as appropriate draws on the endowment (Standard 1, section 1.2).**

While the on-site visitation committee is asking for the aforementioned report it also wishes to acknowledge that the institutional planning and evaluation process, built on a renewed vision for the school, has been crafted carefully and owned collaboratively by the regents and the leadership of the university, the school, and the abbey.

Evaluation at SOT/Sem involves three complementary processes for programs and personnel: (1) Assessment of the progress on the strategic plan, which is integral to the annual planning process. This assessment is on an annual basis and effects the development and approval of the budget by the Board. (2) Program review, which is a comprehensive system of reviews using the principles of *Projects that Matter: Successful Planning and Evaluation for Religious Organizations*. The reviews include degree programs, and formation and student life conducted by the Graduate Theological Studies (GTS) committee. Data is received and reports are produced for faculty, staff, and program changes. The aforementioned changes in the curriculum are an example of this process of assessments. The ten-year assessment system gives each program a comprehensive evaluation once between accreditation visits, assuming reaffirmation is for a ten-year period. The entire process for each program evaluation from data gathering, assessment, and recommendations takes about three years to complete. (3) Personnel. Faculty have a clearly defined system of third-year and tenure reviews that is directly connected to performance measured against expectations defined in the *Faculty Handbook* and assessed in a peer review process. Ultimately, the Board of Trustees of the University oversees the results defined in the *Faculty Handbook*. Administrative and support staff have a clearly defined annual review.

The on-site visitation committee acknowledges the valiant efforts and work that all of the constituents of SOT/Sem have made to the mission, planning, and evaluation efforts to make the institution realize its present stability and secure future.

2. Institutional Integrity

As mentioned above, the SOT/Sem is an integral part of St. John's University. Since 2012, it has been incorporated separately from the Abbey of Saint John, a Roman Catholic Community of Men, but remains an important mission of this Benedictine Monastery. The on-site visitation committee noticed that the school enjoys a harmonious relationship with the Abbey, the undergraduate School of the University, the department of theology of the University and the College of Saint Benedict. This is demonstrated in an exemplary way by the close working relationship of the Abbot, the University President, the Provost, the Dean of the SOT/Sem, and the Rector of the Seminary. Also mentioned above, the president convoked a Task Force in 2015 to focus exclusively on the future of SOT/Sem for which the goal was to stabilize its enrollment, improve endowment, and balance the budget in view of its importance to the mission of the Benedictine foundation.

Embedded in the University, the SOT/Sem enjoys a wealth of resources that would not be available to it as a freestanding entity. The on-site visitation committee was impressed with the dedication of the faculty, all except two of which hold a dual appointment in the University's department of theology. The faculty is committed to the implementation of Roman Catholic and Benedictine ideals and values. There are ten core values described in its publications: Love, prayer, stability, conversatio, obedience, discipline, humility, stewardship, hospitality, and community. The university administration views the SOT/Sem as an important element of the administration, despite its small size in relationship to the whole. All elements see the SOT/Sem as "the agent for carrying out that part of the mission of the university devoted to graduate theological education."

The school remains committed to promoting racial and ethnic diversity and gender equality, while at the same time acknowledging challenges posed by the demographics of its geography in rural Minnesota and its Roman Catholic and Benedictine traditions. Preference has to be given to hiring from the male Benedictine community and deference given to the guidelines of the Roman Catholic Church for priests to be involved in the education of seminarians. The school judges the number of women present on the faculty and staff to be adequate. There are four women and ten men on the tenure track faculty, nine women and three men on the staff, and half the students in the past decade have been women. Nevertheless, the school recognizes that faculty, staff, and students are overwhelmingly white and European.

The awareness to raise conscience in this area began in the 1990's with an effort to offer a graduate program attentive to Hispanic ministry. The initiative floundered because of an inability to recruit Hispanic students to the program. In 2004 the school hired a leading Roman Catholic Hispanic theologian, but he left in 2009 to become U.S. ambassador to the Vatican. From 2013 to 2015 another leading Hispanic was a member of the faculty and contributed in the area of Latino studies. In 2017 the school approved a plan for its students to participate in an immersion experience through the Mexican-America Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas. From 2000-2010 the SOT/Sem convened daylong multicultural workshops in the fall and spring terms, which evolved into the Changing-Faces Series. This series brought a major speaker to the campus for several days for consideration of issues involved in multi-cultural ministry. The school is to be commended for its attention to this component in several other initiatives, e.g., Youth and Theology in Ministry, the Lilly Community Project, and the deacon formation program for the Saint Cloud Diocese.

The SOT/Sem also has a contingent of international students, the majority from Asia. Some monastic students come from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Religious communities are the primary source for international students. The School offers substantial tuition scholarship to these students. The school also offers a program of study in Jerusalem through which the students encounter the culture, geography, and people of this land and experience the diversity of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

The policies and procedures of the school are fully documented and available on line and in print, e.g., the recently revised *Student Handbook* of the SOT/Sem. These include requirements for the degree programs and their costs, the policy on refunds, and procedures regarding plagiarism, human rights, sexual assault, and grievances. The school abides by the policies of the equal employment opportunities commission. The school complies with all government guidelines for institutions participating in U.S. federal student's financial assistance. The school reports an extremely low default rates in their federal loan programs. The programs and activities of the school are conducted in accord with ATS Commission standards and comply with all civil laws and regulations.

3. Theological Curriculum: Learning, Teaching and Research

The theological curriculum of SOT/Sem articulates clearly the school's educational purpose to "foster study and prayer in a community of learners" within the context of "the Roman Catholic and Benedictine traditions and the ecumenical and liturgical heritage of Saint John's Abbey." Students are encouraged to engage in the "pursuit of wisdom" as part of a residential, praying community. The "sense of place" at SOT/Sem is palpable. Not only is it stated on their website and in their documents, it is reflected in all of the constituencies served by the seminary: students, faculty, board members and staff.

The curriculum has been developed in light of the standards of ATS, as well as in the context of the needs of current and potential new students, who include candidates for priesthood, the permanent diaconate and lay ecclesial ministry, as well as those who may be pursuing doctoral studies.

SOT/Sem offers five theological degrees: the MDiv, the MA in Ministry, the MA in Liturgical Music, the MTS and the ThM. For the most part, the students enrolled in these degree programs intend to minister within the Roman Catholic Church as ordained priests (MDiv program for priests), permanent deacons or in some aspect of lay ecclesial ministry (MDiv for Lay Ecclesial Ministers, MA in Ministry, MA in Liturgical Music, and the MTS) and those who intend to pursue doctoral studies toward research and teaching (ThM). In all degree programs students are directed to an integration of theological reflection, deepened spirituality, growth in moral sensibility and character, and the acquisition of skills requisite to the exercise of ministry not only within Roman Catholicism, but also within other Christian traditions.

While all degree programs share some common classes, each program reflects a design that will enable it to match the particular educational goals of the specific degree. SOT/Sem initiated a vision and strategic planning process, which included a revision of the curriculum in 2016. This was part of the larger process begun in 2002 to evaluate each program on a regular cycle.

The most recent revision includes these changes:

1. Revamping of the MDiv toward distribution requirements
2. Restructuring and renaming the MA in Pastoral Ministry to an MA in Ministry
3. Incorporation of MA in Liturgical Music and MA in Theology degrees to an MTS

The academic faculty has oversight of the theological curriculum. Faculty members are fully engaged in all elements of the curriculum including teaching, assessment of student learning, program assessment, and research for class and for scholarship.

Members of the faculty engage primarily in an "interactive lecture-discussion format that encourages students to participate." Faculty are involved with students and also take advantage of other trained professionals at St. John University/College of St. Benedict to enhance learning strategies.

The faculty of SOT/Sem participates with one another and with students in their theological scholarship in a variety of ways. They publish and present in scholarly journals and professional conferences. In addition to their own theological research and writing, the faculty helps its students to develop the habit of lifelong learning and reflection through programs like "Difficult Conversations," *Obsculta*, and various scholarly and ecclesial events held on campus.

Though SOT/Sem is located in rural Minnesota, it engages with diverse publics. Among those who study at SOT/Sem are students from several European, Asian and African countries. While most of the students are Catholic, there is a commitment to ecumenism, especially in the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical

and Cultural Research.

4. Library and Information Resources

As the self-study states at the beginning of Standard 4, “Benedictine communities have always recognized the importance of libraries as fundamental resources for learning and St. John’s University has honored that heritage by maintaining a strong collection of books and other resources.” Alcuin Library exemplifies that heritage.

The self-study states that the library holds over 425,000 print books, 272 current print periodicals, and 50,716 periodical titles online as well as over 575,000 e-books. Another important resource for the SOT/Sem is the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) which “preserves and provides access to the handwritten textual traditions of humanity and has built the world’s largest collection of manuscripts on microfilm” as well as a “collection of reference works to support the study of these manuscripts.” Among these are manuscripts from areas of the world threatened by war and violence so they will not be lost.

Of special note for this institution is the Saint John’s Bible, both the original art object and the Heritage Edition. This work is displayed prominently in Alcuin Library, but its primary purpose is to enhance the study of scripture. The self-study notes that the faculty needs to continue to incorporate the Saint John’s Bible into the education of students.

According to the self-study and confirmed by the on-site visitation committee interviews, “Library acquisitions in support of SOT/Sem are guided by a collection development policy regularly reviewed by both library and faculty and substantially revised in 2014.” Other acquisitions are driven by demand, i.e., requests for materials from library patrons. In addition, students have access to collections of other theological schools through the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools and to other college and university library collections through Minitex, connecting the libraries in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

St. John University has recently invested \$25 million dollars in renovation of the library including infrastructure for wireless connectivity, study rooms, new offices for staff, research spaces for visitors, a conference room, and a classroom equipped with state-of-the-art technology. Students at SOT/Sem have full access to these resources.

Though the librarian assigned to assist SOT/Sem does not have faculty status, he does participate in faculty governance activity on a non-voting basis. In an on-site committee interview with the librarian, he stated that the faculty was proactive in including him in faculty meetings, discussions and decisions about library resources.

The investment to the Library notwithstanding, the self-study notes that money for new acquisitions has decreased over the last decade. While this is a common problem for academic institutions, the faculty of SOT/Sem has been creative in managing the limited resources. They have worked with library staff to design plans for using both print and electronic resources to enhance student learning.

5. Faculty

The members of the faculty of SOT/Sem reflect the collaborative community of faith and learning. Of

special mention is the support that members of the faculty offer to one another as members of a learning community. As noted in the self-study, “the faculty continues to be one of the strengths of the SOT/Sem.”

All members of the faculty possess the requisite degrees and educational credentials to teach the courses assigned to them. In addition to teaching at SOT/Sem, all but two members of the faculty also teach undergraduate classes at either Saint John’s University or the College of St. Benedict. All members of the faculty are Catholic; however, that is in keeping with the specific mission of the seminary, which trains candidates for Catholic priesthood and others for ministry within Catholicism. The faculty is well represented by Benedictine clergy and lay women and men.

The composition of the faculty serves the mission of the seminary well. It is clear from the self-study and the on-site visitation committee interviews with the faculty that they are deeply committed to teaching, learning, and working together for the mission of the institution. Many of the faculty have been there for a long time and work together very well. They have been energized by their collegial work through some difficult transitions over the past couple of years. One fruit of this work has been a new creativity. In addition, the number of faculty seems adequate for the student population. During the time of strategic planning, the faculty worked collaboratively with the Board of Regents and the Administration of St. John’s University to find ways to keep all full-time faculty, while also reducing the budget.

SOT/Sem has the all components of faculty policies within its Faculty Handbook. There is no issue with articulation or adherence to faculty rights, responsibilities, etc. SOT/Sem has a stable faculty, which is supported by policies of tenure and a regular process of observation by the Dean.

Compensation of faculty is competitive with other like institutions. Moreover, faculty have comfortable working conditions.

According to the self-study and as confirmed by interviews with the faculty by the on-site visitation committee, the faculty shares in the governance of the seminary academic programs and is responsible for curriculum planning, design, and oversight. Each member of the faculty has the freedom to discuss the subjects in which they have competence. The faculty has been actively and deeply involved in student learning through the planning and assessment of course, degree, and program goals and objectives.

Among the effects of the realignment of courses and responsibilities, faculty lost “research reassignments” (release time), which has had a negative impact on their ability to conduct research and write. Moreover, since the faculty has taken on undergraduate classes, they have a larger number of students per semester, with all the work that comes with that. Though engagement in the undergraduate program has had some positive impact, e.g., faculty are more attentive to pedagogy with undergrads, in general, it has been seen as a hindrance to their work.

Moreover, the faculty is concerned that the amount of funds they receive for participating in national or international academy meetings (\$750 annually) “no longer adequately covers travel, conference fees, and hotel stays.” *The on-site visitation committee encourages that attention be given to faculty scholarship that is supported and sustained through institutional policies and practices that allow sufficient time for research and writing, in addition to the focus on teaching and mentoring students.*

The on-site visitation committee encourages the institution to give attention to aforementioned in light of what the committee saw as a very dedicated faculty who exhibit gracious collegiality and exemplify collective stability, with the fifteen members averaging more than seventeen years of service at the

school.

6. Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, and Placement

The self-study states that the school is an academic community rooted in the Christian tradition, which it interprets “in light of the Roman Catholic and Benedictine heritage passed on to us by the rich theological, liturgical, and ecumenical heritage of Saint John’s Abbey.” The purpose and mission as a theological school is clarified by this assertion: “We believe the Holy Spirit is calling the church to a more collaborative ministry among the baptized and is calling the SOT/Sem to offer quality collaborative education for that ministry.” The commitment is “to the education and formation of lay people along with seminarians, deacons, and monastic men and women for ministry in the Roman Catholic church.”

The school has various groups to help with student services, from recruitment to placement, including the recruitment team, the Admissions Committee, the Director of Student Services, and the SOT/Sem student government. The self-study points to the difficulty of maintaining consistency in recruitment efforts and in admissions procedures and practices with six people in ten years filling the position of Director of Admissions. In 2016 the school added the position of Admissions Associate and Communications/Marketing Specialist. Awareness of the School—not its image—is recognized as a primary challenge. Recently, efforts have been made to develop and strengthen relationships with colleges, universities, volunteer programs, parishes and faith-based organizations. Various publications, printed and electronic, giving the mission and vision of the graduate school and the various programs offered are distributed to parishes, colleges, and others.

The admissions policies and procedures of the school are clearly articulated on the school’s website and in its Student Handbook. The school requires: a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution, except in rare, individually analyzed cases; the Miller Analogy Test, or Graduate Record Exam; three letters of recommendation from professors or professional contacts; the candidate’s personal, written statement of 1250-1500 words about life experiences and views of the Church; and a list of books and articles read in the last three years. The admission requirements for the MDiv, MAM (Master of Arts in Ministry), MALM (Master of Arts in Liturgical Music), and Master of Theological Studies (MTS) are identical, with the exception that MALM requires a strong undergraduate minor in music and that two of the three letters of recommendation be from music instructors. The Master of Theology degree (ThM) requires students already enrolled to maintain a 3.5 GPA in graduate courses and others to have an MA degree from an accredited institution. All serve to provide evidence of the suitability of the candidate for graduate study of theology and service in the Church. Three members of the admissions committee and one additional faculty member in the applicant’s area of study review the credentials of the candidate.

The SOT/Sem seeks an enrollment of 100 to 120 students with an FTE of 70-90. In the fall of 2017 the headcount was 100 students with an FTE of 64. The decrease in numbers of students interested in formal study of theology leading to a career of service in the church appears to be a national trend. Practitioners view the trend with foreboding as current parish professional staff are fast approaching retirement age. The school is likewise concerned about the critical mass of student required for collaborative study of theology and ministry. *Therefore, the on-site visitation committee encourages attention be given to enrollment results that allow the school to achieve its mission and meet its goals of having a sufficient quantity and quality of students of appropriate diversity and ecumenicity that reflects its key constituencies and strategic plans.*

The school is appropriately concerned about diversity in its student body and has a number of initiatives to improve the situation. One program in particular deserves mention: Youth in Theology and Ministry

(YTM). The program is the result of a Lilly Foundation grant and has as its mission “to apprentice Catholic leadership youth, counselors, and adult mentors to live as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.” The 13-month curriculum includes two 14-day summer institutes. Participants take college level theology classes in the morning, do community service each afternoon, and practice a variety of Christian prayer forms each evening. Between the two summer institutes, the students complete a service-justice project in their home parishes with the help of an adult mentor. 80% of those enrolled complete the course. Since its inception, 513 high school youth have participated; 84 subsequently enrolled in the College of Saint Benedict–Saint John’s University. In 2017, 22% of those enrolled were Hispanic or persons of color. A survey of 181 youth, who had completed the program, showed that 61% were considering theological study in college; 76% were considering priesthood or religious life; 100% of the 2017 cohort said that they have a personal relationship or friendship with Jesus Christ.

The SOT/Sem offers a wide range of student services in conjunction with the resources available in the wider university. The school offers introductory level courses to students with diverse backgrounds to prepare them for more focused courses in liturgy, scripture, spirituality, systematics and other disciplines. Other services include assistance with orientation, residential life, course registration, technological training, academic advising, writing, and the like. The school has developed clear policies to ensure the rights and responsibilities of each member of the community and to create and maintain a learning environment that is safe and orderly. Behavior policy violations are handled by a judicial process, whose procedure is clearly spelled out in the *Student Handbook*.

The assessment of student life and services was the responsibility of the Graduate Theological Studies Committee. Such an assessment was conducted in 2006. In 2016-17 this assessment became the responsibility of the Student Life Committee. A formal assessment was underway in 2016-2017. The SOT/Sem also follows all federal guidelines about confidentiality of student records and private information contained in them. All educational expenses are posted on school’s website for each term. The cost reflects the institution’s needs and research done on tuition and fees of comparable graduate schools. Financial aid is available through scholarships, graduate assistantships, student loans, and student employment. Such aid ranges from 50% to 100% for full time, degree-seeking students. Part-time degree students are eligible for aid from 25% to 40%. The graduate school does not formally find placements for graduating students. Informal assistance through consultation with staff and faculty has resulted in an impressive 90% and 100% placement of graduates.

7. Authority and Governance

SOT/Sem’s authority and governance is guided by three factors: the Gospel injunction to love neighbor,; the principles of the Rule of St. Benedict, and the principles of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative. These three factors appear to be embraced and affirmed by the consensus of the 2016 alumni survey and the 2017 student life survey regarding community life at SOT/Sem.

SOT/Sem has gone through various relationships and changes over the last 27 years, especially in regards to St. John’s Abbey, St. John’s University (SJU), the Roman Catholic Church in the person of the bishop of the diocese of St. Cloud, wherein SOT/Sem is located, and the College of St. Benedict, as well as the changing demographics of the seminary from a predominantly seminarian to a predominantly lay student body.

The governance and authority of SOT/Sem has moved from an advisory board with no governance authority, called the Committee of Regents in 1990, to the Board of Overseers in 1997 with authority for the primary governance of the institution. This change was accompanied by more participation of laity,

women religious, and priests in governance. This change reflected the aforementioned change in demographics. In 2012 SJU became a distinct corporation in relationship to St. John's Abbey. Governance at SJU, of which SOT/Sem is a part, is overseen by the Board of Trustees. In 2016 SOT/Sem Board of Overseers approved a revision to its statutes, which then was approved by the SJU Board of Trustees in March 2017. The nomenclature of governance at SOT/Sem moved from Board of Overseers to the Board of Regents.

The rights, responsibilities, and power of the SOT/Sem Board of Regents and its relationship to St. John's Abbey, and SJU are described in four documents: (1) *Principles for Governance of the School of Theology and Seminary*; (2) *Statutes of the School of Theology and Seminary*; (3) *By-Laws for the School of Theology and Seminary*; and (4) *Statement of the Regents on the School of Theology and Seminary*. As a Roman Catholic seminary, SOT/Sem conforms to Canon Law in the Roman Catholic tradition and the oversight documents from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB): *Program for Priestly Formation*, 5th edition; the *National Directory for the Formation, Life and Ministry of Permanent Deacons in the United States*; and *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*; as well as *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministry*.

The faculty authority for the academic program is described in the *Faculty Handbook* and is accord with the faculty governance of SJU. Staff rights and responsibilities are articulated in the *Administrative Handbook*. The administrative staff is engaged with the Board of Regents and the faculty and students in the evaluation of various programs and strategic planning processes. Students participate in governance by virtue of their constitution and have representatives on the faculty council at meetings, the GTS, and the SOT/Sem Board of Regents. The student government selects all student representatives participating in governance. The alumni are represented on the Presidential Task Force. SOT/Sem makes sustained efforts to keep the alumni engaged with the institution development and alumni relations.

The on-site visitation committee was impressed with the active participation of all the constituencies in the Strategic Plan 2021-2022. It is very obvious that there is a respect on the part of all of the constituencies for each other. For example, the Board of Regents is very clear about their rights and responsibilities while respecting the rights of the faculty for areas such as curriculum development and oversight. This is true of the administrative staff and the faculty, as well as the students.

The SOT/Sem Board of Regents has definitely taken its role of governance seriously, especially for fiduciary responsibility, management, and oversight of the Comprehensive Strategic Plans of 2015-2016, of 2021-2011, and its presence on the Presidential Task Force.

Over the last several years the Board of Regents, formerly the Board of Overseers, has grown in maturity and confidence in their rights and responsibilities. They see themselves as having become "comfortable in our own skin," especially in governance with the administration and faculty. The on-site visitation committee noted that this is one board that is definitely not passive. Because of the longevity of its members, it has grown through board education and sophistication. There are term limits for the board: three terms of three years. Members have to take one year off the board and then can be reappointed. This has happened to several members of the board. The board sees its relation to SOT/Sem as a community working collaboratively with SJU, the Abbey, administration, faculty, and students. The other constituencies at the seminary corroborated this attitude. The board was able to articulate clearly the challenges that lay ahead: the need to increase the endowment, to increase scholarship funds for students and faculty scholarship opportunities, to become more aggressive and sophisticated in marketing, branding, and online learning.

8. Institutional Resources

SOT/Sem as a graduate school within the SJU draws on the resources and services available to all entities within the institution, as noted above. The seminary is deeply rooted within the Benedictine tradition and reflects the mission and vision of the abbey.

The institution is committed to respect the dignity and rights of the other. Discrimination and harassment based upon race, religion, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, familial status with regard to public assistance, or other legally protected category or characteristic are antithetical to the mission of the institution. The policies and procedures regarding these for the administration, faculty, staff, and students are found in the appropriate handbooks: *Administration Handbook, Faculty Handbook, Staff Handbook, and Student Handbook*.

The Human Resources department for SJU handles all aspects of personnel services and is responsible for the development and implementation of policies and procedures from recruitment through retirement. Resources are available and updated for compliance with federal and state regulations and mandates. The on-site visitation committee interviews with staff indicated that HR responds well to inquiries and that the communication to employees is good. But it was also indicated that some of the resources are not easy to find. HR might consider asking for feedback from staff regarding the ease of accessing information available to them.

Support staff indicated that the SOT/Sem gives across the board annual increases. Salaries are determined by market range within the context of comparative range in the area.

The key sources of revenue for SOT/Sem include tuition and fees from students, gifts solicited from donors for the annual fund and for endowed scholarships, and grant revenue for programming, as well as the draw on the endowment. While the SOT/Sem has had a deficit for the past few years, this year shows a strong positive surplus. Therefore, the draw on the endowment is down to 5.75% from 7.25% in FY 2015 and 2016. This has been due to a number of factors: good investment of the endowment fund; the faculty restructuring of curricular hours in degree programs, which lead to course offerings from roughly 20 courses each semester to 15 per semester, therefore not needing as many adjunct faculty members; slightly higher FTE for students, even though last year there were some 30 students graduating—an unusually high number; and the fundraising strategies implemented by the Development Office that are increasing the annual fund in the Theology Days program and in the Fellows Society program, as well as two unrestricted gifts this year; the Board of Regents assisting in identifying potential supporters; and the continued leasing of one and one-half floors of the Emmaus Hall to St. John's Preparatory School, providing \$153,000 per year. The Development Office continues to add new scholarships each year. The scholarships begin at \$50,000 with the average about \$350,000. There are presently over 100 scholarships. The positive surplus has been a concerted effort on the part of all constituencies. The Board of Regents is very conscious of its fiduciary responsibility to SOT/Sem. and has assisted in the development of the Strategic Plan 2021-2022 with representatives of all of the constituencies of the seminary. *In light of these positive developments the on-site visitation team encourages SOT/Sem to give attention to the financial results that allow the school to achieve fiscal stability with a more sustainable draw on the endowment, adequate tuition revenues, and increased annual funds.* (Cf. Standard 1 above regarding the report due November 1, 2020.)

SOT/Sem develops its own budget and submits it to SJU. The annual audit is conducted for SJU. Even though separate financial statements are prepared for each operating entity of SJU, including SOT/Sem, these separate statements are unaudited.

Annual fundraising goals are set by the Board of Regents of SOT/Sem based upon the recommendations of the Development Committee of the Board working with the Development Office. These efforts work in conjunction with the SJU Institutional Advancement to ensure that donors interested in theological education and service to the church are identified and cultivation efforts are coordinated so that gifts can be allocated accordingly.

SOT/Sem is part of SJU. Originally it was part of St. John's Abbey. At present the Abbey owns almost 3,000 acres. SJU is well known in the region for its preservation of the natural environment. The lakes and property are beautiful, and multiple acres of wetlands on the property have been restored out of respect for the physical resources on campus.

SOT/Sem is located primarily in Emmaus Hall, which was St. John's Seminary, a diocesan seminary building built in 1950. Emmaus Hall contains classrooms for SOT/Sem, rooms and suites for resident students, a chapel, dining room, offices for some of the faculty, and space for social events, multi-purpose room and various common rooms. There are also student residences in Huschle House and St. Francis House. Office space for faculty is also in St. Luke Hall. Because all these are within the SJU campus, the maintenance department of the university cares for all updates and repairs for the physical space. Interviews with support staff at the Emmaus Hall and resident students indicate that requests for repairs or assistance or updates are handled with relative efficiency by the university. The Strategic Plan 2021-2022 includes capital improvements to Emmaus House, but the funding still needs to be raised. While St. John's Preparatory school is still renting until that institution builds its own building, there seems to be no indication of when that will take place in the future.

All facilities are inspected for safety and known hazards and are updated to bring them into compliance with guidelines for safety and meet the standards regarding services to those with disabilities.

Information Technology Services supports an environment that fosters continual learning opportunities with appropriate information services, computing and networking tools for staff, faculty, and students. These are provided by SJU. Wireless access is available in every building on campus. All graduate residences and classrooms are wired for internet and cable connections. All classrooms are wired as smart classrooms with internet access. Software licenses are provided at no extra charge to students who connect personal computers to the campus network. SOT/Sem pays an annual allocation to SJU for the expertise provided by Information Technology Services and a small technology fee is assessed to each student to help defray the cost. The IT department provides ongoing education for faculty, staff, and students. The educational workshops and dates are available on the website of the university. Technical support services are available, as well. The on-site visitation committee interviews with staff indicate that there is room for improvement in the use of technology. But, the staff also recognizes that this is the responsibility of SJU and not SOT/Sem. The IT department evaluates the instructional and information technology being used by faculty, staff, and students and updates these as needed. Interviews with the faculty, staff, and students by the on-site visitation committee confirmed this.

Support staff has access to the Professional Development Fund for Support Staff for continuing education. There are an online instructions and application. A staff member can apply, and if the application is not accepted, the employee can appeal the denial.

The on-site visitation committee made particular note of how those living, working, and studying at SOT/Sem benefit from the rich tradition of the Benedictine spirituality and ethos. This was demonstrated to the committee by the overwhelmingly positive reactions of those interviewed from the Board of Regents, faculty, support staff, and students. The relationship between the Abbey, SJU, SOT/Sem, and the College of St. Benedict has a harmony that speaks well of the institutions and the leadership being

provided.

SOT/Sem is a member of the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools, which includes Luther Seminary, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, Bethel Seminary, and St. Paul Seminary. Graduate students may cross register among the five schools; however, students who live at SOT/Sem are at a considerable distance from the other four schools, so the commute time often becomes a factor.

III. EDUCATIONAL STANDARD

ES.4 Distance Education

For the most part, the courses at SOT/Sem are taught in class. That said, there has been and continues to be distance education for some students in some courses. Because the “sense of place” is such an integral part of the education at SOT/Sem, no student can complete all aspects for any degree online. But because of the diversity of students and the distance that some students drive for class, hybrid and/or online classes are options.

When SOT/Sem began online courses, they had approved up to 12 credit hours of online learning for MA degrees, and up to 18 credits for the MDiv. In 2014, they increased that number to 24 credits. They sought approval for a comprehensive online program from ATS in 2009, but have not put that into action yet for two reasons: 1) they want to approach this learning design intentionally and slowly, and 2) they still need to seek approval from the Higher Learning Commission. These courses serve the needs of the local church. Moreover, the faculty reports that the students in these courses enrich class discussion by their varied life and ministerial experiences.

At the beginning of online programming, all course offerings were asynchronous. Beginning in 2016-2017, SOT/Sem has the capacity to offer synchronous courses. The current schedule offers asynchronous, synchronous, and hybrid courses.

For the most part, the full-time faculty teaches online courses. The adjunct faculty who teach in the online program are either part-time administration or persons very familiar with SOT/Sem, so there is no distinction among faculty who teach face-to-face and those who teach online. One strength of the distance program has been the attention to course design and assessment that ensures that “distance-learning courses must achieve the same learning outcomes as on-campus residential courses.” The faculty has included the distance-learning program into the regular cycle of their assessment. In addition, they have invited specialists in distance education to help them design and implement various aspects of the online program.

SOT/Sem provides the infrastructure to make online courses work well. All classrooms in the SOT/Sem are equipped for synchronous online courses. The Learning Management System (Canvas) is suited for this learning model. SOT/Sem provides staff for support of faculty who teach online, and the school has engaged professionals to do training for faculty. Some of the faculty have taken on the role of being advocates for increased online learning. The IT staff makes sure that students who enroll in distance education classes know the specifications required by the LMS. The library has an increasing number of resources that are available to students in the distance-learning program.

Though the distance education program is a modest “work-in-progress,” the plans and procedures already in place signal a good direction for SOT/Sem. The school is well placed to continue these modes of learning.

ES.6 Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

In the last ATS reaffirmation of SOT/Sem, it was recommended that a report was due back “regarding the implementation of systematic assessment of degree programs and student learning.” Overall the Board of Commissioners of ATS gave a positive assessment of SOT/Sem’s program of educational effectiveness assessment. The on-site visitation committee saw evidence of the assessment of student learning outcomes. In fact, the “culture of assessment” is very evident and alive within the institution and the professors. Most recently, the seminary has gone through the assessment process coordinated by the Graduate Theological Studies committee that has brought it to revamping of the degree programs.

The original schedule of assessment since the last reaffirmation called for each degree program to be evaluated every three to five years. It became clear that the amount of work involved, the repeated requests for information from students, alumni/ae and faculty, the need for a timely production of these reports from the data, and the ability to use the results effectively made the original schedule unworkable. Initially, the institution followed a five-year cycle, which gave each degree program a comprehensive review twice between each accreditation visits. In some cases, the response rate on surveys became too small for evaluative purposes, which was problematic. SOT/Sem has learned the “wisdom” from these experiences that it is really contrary to the accreditation standards that calls for a plan that is “simple, sustainable, and sufficient to answer fundamental question about educational effectiveness” (ES.6.1). The seminary has learned that it takes about three years for each program review to collect data, make the assessment, and follow-up with recommendations for changes. Therefore, each degree program will be evaluated once during the ten-year accreditation process.

Originally, each professor was asked to embed into each semester course two learning outcomes that could be assessed and the data collected for program review. This proved too much data for analysis. At the present, the professors are asked to embed into their course one learning that can be collected as data for the particular degree program, which is being assessed at that particular time. This has proven to be more realistic and in keeping with accreditation standards.

SOT/Sem has a curriculum conference each year where the results of the learning outcomes are reviewed. The interview of the on-site visitation committee with assessment committee of the faculty revealed that this past academic year the faculty realized at the curriculum conference that there was an imbalance of student learning outcomes in their programs. For the faculty, this was a keen insight. It was as though the proverbial “light went on!” The reaction of the on-site visitation committee was very positive: the faculty is discussing student learning outcomes, program reviews, and assessment in an atmosphere that is positive and effective. In regards to the student learning outcomes embedded into the courses, the faculty is encouraged to develop rubrics which they can use for assessment. The reality is that faculty members are sharing rubrics with each other for this purpose.

Given the degree program changes that have occurred in the past year as well as the new cycle for program reviews the on-site visitation committee is recommending **to require a report by November 1, 2019, regarding progress in implementing an assessment plan that is simple, sustainable, and sufficient to answer fundamental questions about educational effectiveness, with a summary of assessment results for the learning outcomes for each degree program and a discussion of how those results have been used to improve each program and overall student learning (Educational Standard, section ES.6.1).**

ES.7 Academic Guidelines

The evaluation committee reviewed the school's adherence to this section of the Educational Standard and found no areas of concern related to admissions, transfer of credit, and advanced standing.

ES.8 Nondegree Instructional Programs

The school offers a 22-credit Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction, as well as a more generic 18-credit Graduate Certificate, with at least 9 credits in a focused area of study. These certificate programs meet this standard.

IV. DEGREE PROGRAM STANDARDS

Degree Program Standard A. Master of Divinity

SOT/Sem has offered the MDiv Degree as the ordination track for seminarians, monastic and secular, for several decades. Since the closing of the seminary for diocesan seminarians, the focus has been on the ordination of monks to priesthood. Beside the *Program for Priestly Formation* of the USCCB, the *Rule of Benedict* also guides the priestly formation and education of monk-seminarians. Since 1990 the SOT/Sem has offered a version of the MDiv for lay students. It follows the ATS Commission Standard and the USCCB's *Coworkers in the Vineyard: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*.

The MDiv for those seeking ordination is offered as a four-year residential program of 109 credits. The MDiv program for lay candidates requires 78 credits and is equivalent to three years of full time study. The shorter version of the MDiv seeks to make accessible this program for lay candidates who would otherwise find the time commitment and expense formidable obstacles. Both tracks include Clinical Pastoral Education, field education work, spiritual direction, and commitment to communal prayer.

The knowledge base (see below) is provided by the full range of theological courses in dogmatic theology, scripture, Liturgy, and the like. The skill for leadership in ministry is provided by several courses and field education opportunities. Seminary students are required to take 12 credits in field education; lay candidates take 9 credits. The field opportunities are under the supervision of site supervisors and occur in campus ministry, graduate assistantships at the University and College of Saint Benedict, parishes in the St. Cloud area, diocesan sites, social service agencies, hospitals, and elder care facilities. These practical courses are taken concurrently with the academic courses and enable the student to integrate theory with practice. Spiritual Formation takes place by participation in the Church's Liturgy (Eucharist and Liturgy of the Hours), communal prayer, monthly spiritual direction, participation in group spiritual companionship sessions (monthly for two years), and a one-credit course, "Practice of Discernment in Prayer."

Learning outcomes for the degree were developed around four areas: knowledge base for theology and ministry, skill or the capacity for ministerial leadership, formation (commitment to personal and spiritual growth), and Benedictine practices. There are four expected outcomes for each of the program tracks. They are identical, except that the third outcome for ordination candidates in the self-study adds "as well as live [sic] celibacy as both a gift and a discipline, with awareness of its theological, personal, and pastoral meaning." One wonders whether there are other outcomes that should be specified for an additional year of work involving 31 more credit hours.

The MDiv is assessed once in a ten-year cycle, though that review takes several years. The degree was evaluated last in 2012 by the Graduate Theological Studies Committee through survey of graduates from the program 2005-2011. Several changes were made to the program in 2015-2016: (1) students were given more choice in the selection of courses by requiring a general distribution of credits rather than specific courses; (2) cultural, interfaith, and ecumenical diversity in theology and ministry classes were incorporated by adding a comparative theologian to the faculty in 2015-2016 academic year who teaches two graduate courses per year; and (3) learning outcomes were reduced from 18 to 4 for each track. Graduates responding to the survey reported that their preparation for reading theological texts critically was very high (83%). Two-thirds reported that their preparation for preaching, pastoral care, and social issues was excellent.

The self-study expresses a need to pay more attention to the formation of non-Roman Catholic seminarians and students according to their denominational requirements. At present, there are none enrolled in the MDiv seeking ordination in a denomination other than Roman Catholic. The faculty of the SOT/Sem recognizes that preparing non-Catholic seminarians for ordination involves formation in that denomination beyond the capacity of the faculty at present. Seminarians who are non-Catholic would have to take some initiative in obtaining formation appropriate for their denomination.

The admission requirements for the MDiv, MAM, MALN, and MTS (Program Standards A, B, C, and D) are virtually the same (see under General Institutional Standard 6). The completion rates reported for this degree seem low: from 2008 to 2016 of the 22 men who entered the seminary, five completed the degree. For the 75 lay students who enrolled in this degree during the same time-period, 42 completed the degree. In the institutional fact sheet provided, in the 2015-2016-academic year, 38% completed the degree. In 2016-2017 academic year, 40% completed the degree. The administration and faculty were surprised by these rates and could offer no explanation, but agreed that if accurate, the faculty needs to have a serious discussion.

For this reason the on-site visitation committee is recommending **to require a report by November 1, 2018, regarding the school's graduation rates for its five degree programs, clarifying whether the relatively low rates reported on the ATS Annual Report Form for fall 2016 and its fall 2017 self-study are accurate, and, if so, how the school plans to improve its retention and graduation of students (Degree Program Standard A, section A.1.4.2; Standard B, section B.1.4.2; Standard C, section C.1.4.2; Standard D, section D.1.4.2; and Standard I, section I.1.4.2).**

Degree Program Standard B. MA in Ministry

This is a new degree as of spring 2016. The faculty voted to change the Masters in Pastoral Ministry with its requirement of 48 credits to a Master of Ministry with a reduced requirement of 36 credits. It was thought that the shorter degree would be more attractive to certain students, e.g., diaconal candidates and lay students interested in working in parishes, schools, and chaplaincies. Part-time students were taking four years to complete the former degree. Students enrolled in that degree now have the option of transitioning to the new degree program, although the school will support students who wish to continue pursuing the earlier degree. The faculty believes that the MAM degree could be completed in two years of full-time study. Students enrolled part-time should complete the degree in three or four years.

The reduction in credit hours for the MAM was balanced by a concentration in one of five areas: diaconal ministry, youth and family catechesis, liturgical leadership, pastoral care, and spiritual direction. The five concentrations share a common number of core courses in scripture (2), doctrine (1), moral theology (1), Liturgy (1), and history (2). Each concentration has four courses of specialization (12 credits) and

placement in field education (3 credits) appropriate to the area of specialization; e.g., the concentration in spiritual direction requires the student to complete a certificate in spiritual direction, take two ministry courses focused on spiritual direction, and do a field education practicum in spiritual direction. The degree has a formation component. Students are required to take a one-credit course, “Practice of Discernment in Prayer,” participate in a spiritual companioning group (monthly for two years), and attend spiritual direction (monthly for 1.5 years). The new degree also requires a capstone portfolio of assignments and exams from courses, which is reviewed by a faculty committee in a summative assessment. The faculty has instituted a mid-degree student evaluation. Eighteen credits may be completed online.

The learning outcomes for the MAM were developed from two publications of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops: *“Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry and Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States.* The degree outcomes are: (1) accurately represent the Christian tradition and teachings of the Catholic Church; (2) utilize practical theological skills to describe ministry situations and contexts, interpret situations theologically, and develop effective strategic responses; (3) demonstrate growth and integration in intellectual, spiritual, pastoral, and human formation for ministry; and (4) incorporate the Benedictine charisms of biblical, liturgical, and communal life into their ministerial identity and practice. The degree is too recent to permit assessment of the desired outcomes of this degree, but see the on-site visitation committee recommendation under Standard A.

The admission requirements for the MAM are the same required for admission to the MDiv. The regular teaching faculty of the SOT/Sem teach the courses and do the academic advising and evaluation. Several adjunct faculty who teach the pastoral ministry courses serve in parishes or diocesan leadership.

Degree Program Standard C. MA in Liturgical Music

The Master of Arts in Liturgical Music has a rich history at St. John’s University, long considered the birthplace of the liturgical movement in the United States. The degree has been comprehensively revised. Its new requirements and curriculum were approved in December of 2016 and implemented in the Summer 2017. The MALM is designed to prepare students for pastoral leadership in the various aspects of music appropriate for worship in the Roman Catholic Church. This interdisciplinary degree brings together study of the liturgy, competence in performance, development of pastoral leadership necessary for parish musicians, a spiritual formation component, and fieldwork appropriate for this degree. While the previous degree required a minimum of two summers and one academic semester, the revised degree consists of four consecutive semesters, plus one credit offered only during the summer.

The revised degree requires 42 credits that may be completed in four consecutive semesters, with the addition of one credit of Voice Care offered in the summer. The revised requirements call for 15 credits in theology (one course in the History of Christianity, Scripture, or Systematics; 9 required credits and 3 elective credits in liturgy), 8 credits of theology and music synthesis (Seminar); 10 credits of applied music; 3 credits in Choral Conducting; 3 credits of formation; and electives in either theology or music.

The SOT/Sem has identified three learning outcomes: (1) Students will gain a basic knowledge of the liturgy and the role of music in worship. Students will understand and be able to use theological and liturgical vocabulary and concepts in liturgical, theological, and ministerial discussions. Students will be able to engage in research, writing, and oral expression of liturgy-related topics. (2) Students will demonstrate musical excellence in a major area through juries, a practicum, a final project, and musical competence in a secondary area through juries and course work. (3) Students will integrate liturgical

knowledge and musical competence into their ministerial identity, preparing them for pastoral leadership in leading congregational worship. Students also take spiritual direction in the first semester and have four sessions with a spiritual director each succeeding semester. There is a one-credit practicum/theological reflection in the final year.

The admissions requirements of this degree are the same as two previous degrees, but include the following additions. The accredited B.A. degree must include at least a strong minor in music. The student also must complete an audition and interview with the faculty. Students must also take examinations in music theory and music history. In the fall semester of 2017, five students were enrolled in this degree program. See committee's recommendation under Standard A.

The MALM degree draws upon the music faculty of the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University. The music faculty is widely recognized for their expertise in organ performance, choral conducting, Gregorian Chant, and the role of music in liturgy. The liturgy faculty has been somewhat diminished by retirement and the loss of a tenure-track member. Still the faculty remains strong with five instructors. The ability to field instruction in composition has been made possible by the arrangement of hiring an eminent composer of liturgical music as needed for the occasional student majoring in composition. The Wicks organ in the Emmaus Chapel has been completely rebuilt and the upright piano has been replaced with a very fine baby grand piano. The faculty judges that there are now adequate keyboard resources for worship and for instruction.

Degree Program Standard D. Master of Theological Studies (MTS)

The MTS at SOT/Sem is a new degree. It was created in Spring 2016 when the faculty "voted to change the general MA in theology (a 42-credit degree program . . .) to a general MTS with 48 credits. The rationale for this change was three-fold: 1) to align their academic program more closely with Notre Dame and Boston College, the biggest competitors for students; 2) to develop a degree that combines a strong core curriculum with additional courses that provide breadth and depth useful for further study, teaching, writing, and other professional fields; and 3) to distinguish this degree from a degree focused on ministry (MAM). "The new MTS [is] a longer, residential and academic focused degree."

This degree focuses on academic theology, theological research and writing, and academic skills oriented toward doctoral studies and other professional, academic endeavors. It was designed in relation to the ThM, which prepares a student even more intentionally for doctoral work.

The program content includes 48 hours of course-work, one approved graduate paper and a comprehensive oral examination. 24 credits are required in the following areas: History of Christianity (6), Doctrine (6), Sacred Scripture (6), Liturgy (3), and Monastic Studies or Spirituality (3). 21 credits come from the following list: 9 credits in a focus area (History, Doctrine, Scripture, Liturgy, or Monastic Studies or Spirituality), 12 credits from any other course offered, including Pastoral Ministry courses; the final 3 credits are part of the Reading for the Comprehensive exam.

In the time of transition, students who had enrolled in the MA program at SOT/Sem have the option to complete the MA for which they matriculated or switch to the new MTS. The faculty is committed to helping students complete the original MA degree or make the transition to the new degree. In fact, in the on-site visitation committee interviews with the faculty, they stated that they were "excited about what we've done and where we are going." In every conversation with faculty, there was deep engagement with all elements of the program.

The MTS is designed to be completed in two full-time academic years. Students may accelerate the pace of completion if they enroll in summer classes. Students who study part-time may take longer to complete the degree. Students can complete all courses on campus in traditional classroom settings, or they can combine traditional coursework with summer, and/or online courses. Students may also enroll in courses in any of the Consortium School offerings at United Theological Seminary, Bethel Seminary, Luther Seminary and Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity.

Despite the fact that this particular degree is new to SOT/Sem, it is rooted in a strong academic MA. The success of the MA bodes well for the new degree program.

Because the MTS is new, there is no body of work to assess, especially the Graduate Paper and the comprehensive exam. However, there is a plan to include the MTS as part of the regular cycle of assessment.

A continuing challenge for this degree program, as well as all the other the degree programs, is enrollment. Other areas of the report address this issue (see Standard 6). According to the Fall 2017 SOT/Sem Enrollment Profile, approximately twenty students are enrolled in either the MA (the older degree) or the new MTS.

Degree Program Standard I. Master of Theology (ThM)

Beginning in fall 2010, SOT/Sem began to offer the ThM after receiving preliminary approval from ATS in June 2009. This degree builds on the strong academic MA (now MTS) of SOT/Sem. The purpose of the ThM program is to prepare students for doctoral work in theology or related theological work that requires theological specialization beyond what can be obtained with the academic master's degree alone.

The ThM is a one-year program beyond the MA/MTS/MDiv. The focus is “designed to increase both the breadth and the depth of a student’s knowledge of theology. . . . [It also] allows more time for developing the [foreign] language skills . . . for doctoral work,” primarily Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, and German. The degree is also directed toward faculty-guided thesis research and writing.

Successful completion of the degree requires the writing of a substantial thesis of 80 pages or so, which the student will publicly and orally defend before two faculty members.

Because of the specialized nature of this program, it has a small enrollment. Since its inception, 31 students have matriculated into the ThM. 18 of those have completed their thesis (58%). Approximately half of these graduates have enrolled in doctoral programs. Other graduates have made substantial contributions to their professional work in light of their theses.

Students enrolled in the ThM earn 24 credits beyond their master’s degree. 15 credit hours are chosen based on the research and writing needs of each student, 3 credits in a research seminar, and 6 credits for thesis writing. The required thesis must demonstrate mastery of at least one foreign language source.

Proficiency in a foreign language can be demonstrated in one of several ways: enrolling in a class at SOT/Sem, St. John University/College of St. Benedict, or at any accredited college or university; or “students whose accredited transcript shows language proficiency at the intermediate level will qualify as having completed the language requirement. Credits in foreign language can be counted toward the degree.”

Ordinarily students complete this degree at SOT/Sem. The abundance of resources in Alcuin Library is ideal for this kind of research and work.

Students enrolled in the program spoke very highly about it. They praised the attention of the faculty to their work, the fine library, and the Benedictine spirit of SOT/Sem, all of which provide an environment that nurtures their work.

That said, one of the challenges for this program is enrollment. Though the program is intentionally small, the self-study notes that having only a handful of students enrolled in each academic year “will be a constant challenge. It also requires [the faculty] to balance the needs of a small cohort with institutional resources. This is especially true of the time of the faculty. The ThM may take an inordinate amount of faculty time.

Among the recommendations in the self-study is “continued conversations regarding the right balance between a small program driven in part by faculty interest weighed against our consolidation of other degree programs due to limited resources.” As part of their plan for assessment of programs, it is wise to keep this recommendation in mind.

V. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

After reviewing all appropriate information in light of the Commission’s *Standards and Procedures*, the Evaluation Committee recommends to the Board of Commissioners the following actions:

1. To reaffirm the accreditation of St. John’s University School of Theology and Seminary for a period of ten years, with the next comprehensive evaluation visit in fall of 2027, one term before the period of accreditation expires on March 31, 2028
2. To approve the following degree programs:
 - Master of Divinity
 - Master of Arts in Ministry (Professional MA)
 - Master of Arts in Liturgical Music (Standard C)
 - Master of Theological Studies (Academic MA)
 - Master of Theology (ThM)
3. To approve the following extension site: None
4. To grant approval to offer comprehensive distance education: Yes
5. To encourage that attention be given to maintaining and enhancing these distinctive strengths:
 - a. The school’s Benedictine ethos, with special emphases on community, spirituality, stability, and hospitality, an ethos that is embraced by its various constituencies—from students to regents—and summarized in the oft-heard phrase “pursuit of wisdom.”
 - b. An institutional planning and evaluation process, built on a renewed vision for the school that has been crafted carefully and owned collaboratively by the regents and the leadership of the university, the school, and the abbey.

- c. A dedicated faculty who exhibit gracious collegiality and exemplify collective stability, with the fifteen members averaging more than seventeen years of service at the school.
6. To encourage that attention be given to the following areas of needed growth during the next period of accreditation:
- a. Faculty scholarship that is supported and sustained through institutional policies and practices that allow sufficient time for research and writing, in addition to the focus on teaching and mentoring students (Standard 5, section 5.4)
 - b. Enrollment results that allow the school to achieve its mission and meet its goals of having a sufficient quantity and quality of students of appropriate diversity and ecumenicity that reflect its key constituencies and strategic plans (Standard 6, Introduction)
 - c. Financial results that allow the school to achieve fiscal stability with a more sustainable draw on the endowment, adequate tuition revenues, and increased annual funds (Standard 8, sections 8.2.1.1-5)
7. To require the following reports addressing areas of needed improvement, with each action below linked to one or more specific Standards:
- a. To require a report by November 1, 2018, regarding the school's graduation rates for its five degree programs, clarifying whether the relatively low rates reported on the ATS Annual Report Form for fall 2016 and in its fall 2017 self-study are accurate, and, if so, how the school plans to improve its retention and graduation of students (Degree Program Standard A, section A.1.4.2; Standard B, section B.1.4.2; Standard C, section C.1.4.2; Standard D, section D.1.4.2; and Standard I, section I.1.4.2).
 - b. To require a report by November 1, 2019, regarding progress in implementing an assessment plan that is simple, sustainable, and sufficient to answer fundamental questions about educational effectiveness, with a summary of assessment results for the learning outcomes for each degree program and a discussion of how those results have been used to improve each program and overall student learning (Educational Standard, section ES.6.1).
 - c. To require a report by November 1, 2020, regarding progress in implementing a financial plan that brings fiscal stability to the school, including progress in achieving key enrollment and annual fund goals, as well as appropriate draws on the endowment (Standard 1, section 1.2).