AGST ALLIANCE
Asia Graduate School of Theology Alliance

EAST
East Asia School of Theology

# DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

# PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Welcome to your Doctor of Ministry program!

This handbook provides specific details of the program – read them carefully, so that there are no surprises as you move through your study venture.

Please ensure you also read carefully general guidelines for students from the seminary through which you are registered for this program – that information will complement what you read here.

If there is further information you would like to see included in this handbook, please let us know, so that it can be of maximum value for you and your peers in your study program – as well as future participants.

In the Kingdom's ventures.

(Dr) Tan Sooi Ling
DMin Director, AGST-Alliance

(Dr) Lau Ying Kheng
DMin Program Director (Cohort #3), EAST

# Contents

# Doctor of Ministry

## Program Objectives

This **Doctor of Ministry** program seeks to integrate structured theological reflection and critical thinking on ministerial practice, to provide a formative space for participants to learn, dialogue, challenge, discern and shape their ministry philosophy and practices.

Our DMin is designed to produce graduates who are more competent and passionate reflective ministry practitioners, and who …

- have enhanced skills for ministry, e.g. in preaching, teaching, formation and discipleship.
- are better equipped to assess analytically and think theologically about contemporary ministry issues.
- have a deeper biblical and theological of pastoral ministry and leadership.
- possess expanded leadership, relational and conflict resolution skills.
- are realising their own personal formation and spiritual maturity.

Graduates are likely to continue in (or take up new) pastoral and leadership ministry positions in their churches and organisations. They may be invited to teach applied courses in theological education institutions and other ministry situations.

The DMin program is accredited by Asia Theological Association (ATA). The ATA guidelines for the purpose and nature of professional doctorates like our DMin program are these:

Programs granting the Professional Doctorate degree are designed to prepare the graduates for a qualitatively enriched practice of ministry and to function as leaders in denominational and parachurch agencies, and as Christian ministry trainers. Each of these also includes sophisticated academic and research components.
(*Manual for Accreditation,* ATA, 2013, p. 37).

# Program Components

To achieve the objectives of the DMin program the following components are built in:

- 2 Foundation Courses
- 6 Modules 24 credits
- Dissertation 12 credits

**Foundation Courses**

Applicants who meet preliminary application requirements are invited to attend both Foundation Courses. These courses prepare ministry practitioners for the rigors of DMin studies. A final application essay is submitted after the second Foundation Course.

**Coursework (24 credits)**

Candidates complete modules for 24 credits:

- 6 coursework modules
- 4 credits per module
- 2 modules per year

Each module spans 4 months, and has three phases:

- 6–7 weeks home-based preparation, with some on-line interaction likely.
- a 6 day on-campus intensive (generally Thursday to Tuesday).
- 6–8 weeks post-campus reading and assignments.

The on-campus intensives generally run from Thursday to Tuesday. The locations may vary, depending on the students reside. The timing of the courses intentionally includes Sunday, which will be a day for reflection, spiritual formation activities, corporate worship and sharing, and some recreation.

We will also strongly encourage students to undertake further spiritual development processes during their DMin program, but these activities will not have credit value.

Up to two approved courses (for a maximum of 4 credits per course) from other AGST Alliance programs or other accredited institutions may replace our DMin modules. Cross-credited courses need to be at the appropriate academic level.

**Dissertation (12 credits)**

The dissertation is designed to demonstrate your competence to integrate the theory of the various disciplines drawn on for Christian ministry with your ministry practice. It will comprise an original applied research project that demonstrates sound Christian reflection and which is designed to enhance informed and improved personal and organisational practices.

The length of the dissertation will normally fall in the range of 45,000–50,000 words (excluding references and appendices, but including footnotes), depending on the nature of the research. The dissertation is likely to have a significant quantitative or qualitative element to it.

The dissertation will probably require 18-24 months work after you complete the coursework. A supervisor will be with you through the dissertation process. Two competent external examiners will be appointed to examine the submitted dissertation

A successful DMin dissertation will reflect original research, in candidates' church/ organisational/professional sphere. The dissertation may take one of a variety of forms, tailored to your interests and ministry setting. While it may be conceptual-theoretical research, it will more likely be of an applied nature, with implications for senior leadership in professional and/or policy areas. Hence, it is likely to have a significant quantitative or qualitative research element to it.

While you may come into the DMin program with an idea of the area you want to focus on for your dissertation, you will be encouraged to firm this up after you have a sense of the broad panorama of the program. This will also enable you to maximise the focus of your coursework module assignments.

Details of the dissertation are available in a separate set of guidelines.

# Program Practical Details

The FAQs on the DMin pages of the seminaries' websites cover many of the practical details of this program. We will review the major ones in this section.

**Foundation Courses**

All applicants to the DMin program must attend and successfully complete the requirements of two Foundation Courses.

- August-December 2027 (on-campus intensive late September/early October)
- February-May 2028 (on-campus intensive late March/early April)

**Module Dates**

The modules for the coursework will run on this schedule starting 2028. Each course will include pre-course intensive working on assignments, on-campus classes, and post-course assignments.

- August-December (on-campus intensive late September/early October)
- February-May (on-campus intensive late March/early April)

There may be some variation in the dates, e.g. in order to fit with facilitators' availability. Specific dates will be available later.

**Module Topics**

***Ministry practice*** and ***Christian perspectives*** are integrated in all the components of the program, rather than having separate theology and professional practice modules. ***Critical engagement*** and ***spiritual formation*** components are also woven into each module.

The six module topics are likely to be drawn from this range:

- Christian Thinking and Ministry Practice
- Theologizing in Church and Ministry
- Kingdom, Church and Society
- Biblical and Ministry Perspectives on Leadership
- Christian Education and Faith Formation
- Introduction to ministry research
- Ministry Leadership Issues and Challenges

**Location of On-Campus Sessions**

The on-campus sessions of the modules are usually conducted on the campus of EAST and other locations in Korea, Malaysia, and places where students and lecturers are represented.

*Note:* You need to budget for the cost of travel and living expenses for the on-campus sessions. Budget airlines help ease the travel costs.

**Participation**

The DMin is a cohort program: You will be with a group of participants most of whom will proceed through the coursework together. So you will be able to share your experiences and challenges with others to maximise your learning venture as you interact and 'contextualise' with them – and they are likely to become friends and colleagues to network with after the program.

If you miss some of the on-campus sessions of a module for genuine reasons, you may be given some directed studies to take the place of the missed elements of the module. But if you miss all the on-campus sessions, you are unlikely to be allowed to complete the module. You will need to discuss this with the program director in the first instance.

**Program Marker Points**

All DMin candidates enter the coursework phase of the program on a **two-module probationary basis**: continuation is contingent on adequate attendance at, and participation in the modules, and satisfactory completion of the assessable work.

There will be a **pre-dissertation review**, after you complete the modules, to confirm that you may proceed with the dissertation phase of your program. If your coursework grades are not sufficiently high or we are aware of other factors which make us doubt that you are likely to be able to complete the dissertation at an appropriate level and in good time, you may be awarded another qualification (a *Post-Graduate Diploma in Ministry*).

In the dissertation phase there are two marker points:

- Initially, you need to submit, and have endorsed by our DMin Program Committee, a **focus of interest** for your proposed topic.
- Your formal **dissertation proposal** is a further program marker, submitted some months into your research. Your proposal must be approved by our DMin Program Committee to continue with your dissertation process.

In the dissertation phase, satisfactory **annual reviews** are also required to ensure ongoing continuation in the program.

**Program Duration and Completion**

The maximum duration for completing the DMin is six years. With consistent and diligent work it may be completed in 4-5 years.

If DMin candidates complete the coursework satisfactorily, but don't finish the dissertation within the required time they may be awarded the *Post-Graduate Diploma in Ministry*.

**Dissertation Workshops and Annual Doctoral Colloquium at the Dissertation Phase**

During the dissertation writing phase, one or more dissertation workshops will be scheduled. These periodic workshops for students in the AGST Alliance – EAST DMin program provide structured academic support and a collaborative community of practice for the DMin cohort to navigate the challenges of writing a dissertation alongside full-time ministry demands. By combining faculty consultations, technical instruction, coaching, peer

review, and work-in-progress presentations with dedicated writing time, the workshops equip candidates to refine their research, overcome obstacles, and maintain steady progress toward degree completion.

In addition, DMin candidates once they enter the dissertation research phase are invited to attend the annual 3-day / 2-night Doctoral Colloquium. Attendance a Doctoral Colloquium at least once during the doctoral writing phase is encouraged. The Doctoral Colloquium generally meets in Malaysia.

The purpose of the Doctoral Colloquium is primarily to provide a setting for encouraging you and your peers to 'keep on keeping on', and so bring your research to a successful conclusion sooner rather than later. The focus of the colloquium is thus twofold:

- To enable you to talk through the direction and progress of your research with 'critical friends' (doctoral program peers and faculty) – you will be required to make a presentation of your work to date, followed by discussion.
- To enhance your research ability, with skills training in areas in which you and your peers sense you need further help.

**Time Commitment**

You need to ensure that you are able to give adequate time to the DMin program. This means not just blocking out time during the coursework phase to attend the six day on-campus sessions, but also to allocate significant time for pre- and post-campus study and assignment writing. Later, of course, you will need to allow adequate time to focus on your dissertation research and writing.

Good time management is essential. You will need to restructure your work/ministry load and responsibilities for the duration of the program.

- Some participants have **study leave** provisions in their organisation/ministry setting.
- Others arrange to **cut down their work/ministry load.**
- Others take **unpaid leave**.

The application process includes submission of the *Student Support Framework Memorandum of Understanding* so that the major stakeholders in your program – your family, organisation and/or local church leaders – are informed and committed to help you complete the program well.

**DMin Study Skills**

Getting back into study, especially as a mature-age student, can be daunting. To help you thrive in your program, the two Foundation Courses provide specific research and writing skills workshop activities. These are designed to help you review and/or develop the skills to do effective research and writing, and to use library and internet facilities well.

In addition, a specialised research methods module is part of the DMin program, to ensure students are well prepared for their dissertation research.

**Program Resources**

It is important that you ensure you have good access to resources for your program. If you are in the DMin program, you will have access to the Digital Theological Library (DTL). This is included in the Technology fees.

**Language Medium**

English is the medium of instruction for the AGST- EAST DMin Leadership program.

**Cross-credit of Courses**

In the coursework phase of the DMin program, students may request to cross-credit courses completed at the appropriate academic level at other accredited institutions.

Up to two approved courses (for a maximum of 4 credits from other accredited institutions may replace non-core DMin modules. Cross-credited courses need to be at the appropriate academic level.

Speak with the program director if you wish to request to cross-credit courses into your DMin program.

**Finance Matters**

Check out the details about the fees, administration charges and technical costs on the EAST website here.

Note that you will need to factor other significant costs into your program, beyond the program fees – for travel, accommodation, resources, etc.

**Immigration Matters**

It is essential that you check carefully about immigration regulations ***well in advance*** of the on-campus sessions of coursework modules being conducted in a country other than your own. ***This is your responsibility.***

If you need special permission/visa to go to any country for your intensive classes, EAST is able to provide official letters.

Ensure that you have **at least six months validity in your passport** prior to attending the on-campus sessions of modules or before study centre/library visits in other countries. We do not want to hear that you have not been allowed to board your flight for this reason.

# Expectations of DMin Level Study

What level and quality of study is expected for this DMin program? This question may be answered in two ways.

**Generic Expectations**

As a doctorate, our DMin is an advanced degree which will be recognised internationally. The academic expectations are close to those for an AGST Alliance PhD, except that whereas the PhD tends to have universal application (i.e. it contributes to the theory of the field), the DMin tends to have local application (i.e. it addresses concerns in a specific, local setting).

Think of the expectations as 'becoming a full professional in your field'. In practice this means:

- You have something to say your peers want to listen to.
- You have a command of what is happening in your subject so that you can evaluate the worth of what others are doing.
- You have the astuteness to discover where you can make a useful contribution.
- You have mastery of appropriate techniques that are currently being used, and also be aware of their limitations.
- You are able to communicate your results effectively in the professional arena.
- All this is carried out in an international context – your professional peer group is world-wide.

(adapted from Phillips and Pugh, *How to get a Ph.D,* Buckingham: Open University Press, 1987, pp. 18-19)

**Expectations in an Evangelical Christian Institution**

The above guidelines are generic. But there is another essential dimension to bear in mind in your doctoral study through this AGST Alliance – EAST program.

Doctoral study within an evangelical Christian institution is founded on an understanding of knowledge that is more than academic. In the Bible, acquiring and exercising wisdom involves a combination of faith, reason and action. It requires:

- right belief and committed trust in the living God ("the fear of the LORD is the first principle of wisdom"),
- creative and humble use of the rationality God has granted to humans made in his own image, and
- appropriate living in the world to reflect God's calling and participate in God's mission.

Doctoral study, therefore, pursued on such a foundation, will be *confessional*, *rational* and *missional*. For a Christian, doctoral study is one dimension of what it means to "love the LORD your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength."

Within such a framework of Christian identity and commitment, it is assumed that our doctoral students will be recognised as Christians maturing in faithful discipleship and

having leadership skills as experienced practitioners in aspects of ministry. The following qualities of their doctoral work will be demonstrated through appropriate examination:

- **Comprehensive Understanding,** having demonstrated a breadth of systematic understanding of a field of study relevant to an aspect of Christian ministry, and mastery of the skills and methods of research and applied reflective practice appropriate to that field and ministry context.

- **Critical Skills, Faithfully Exercised**, having demonstrated their capacity for critical analysis, independent evaluation of primary and secondary source materials, ability to integrate academic insights and professional practice in their ministry context, and their commitment to exercise such skills on the foundation of biblical faithfulness to Jesus Christ and his church.

- **Serious Inquiry With Integrity,** having demonstrated the ability to conceive, design and implement a substantial project of inquiry into professional practice, and to do so with Christian and scholarly integrity.

- **Creative and Original Contribution,** having produced, as a result of such disciplined inquiry, a creative and original contribution that extends the frontiers of knowledge, or develops fresh insights and generates new perspectives on professional practice, some of which merit national or international refereed publication.

- **Contextual Relevance,** having shown their capacity, in the course of their doctoral program and in their expectation of its future potential, for biblically-informed critical engagement with the realities of their professional ministry contexts.

- **Ability to Communicate,** having shown an ability in communicating about their area of expertise to peer-level academic and professional audiences, and, where appropriate, to non-specialists in local Christian communities and the wider society in culturally relevant ways, including their mother tongue, for example through teaching, preaching or writing.

- **Missional Impact,** having demonstrated that the doctoral work produced promotes the kingdom of God and advances the mission of the church (both local and global), especially through significant enhancement of professional practice and leadership for transformational service.

All these seven elements are expressed to the glory of God.

(The section above has been adapted from The Beirut Benchmarks for Professional Doctorates, developed by ICETE, 2010/2011.)

If this seems daunting, don't despair! We will help you acquire and sharpen your ability in this areas, as you bring diligence and discipline to the learning process.

Do not hesitate to seek help early to cope with the expectations.

**Note: The *Post-Graduate Diploma in Ministry*** is awarded to students who have completed the DMin coursework but not the dissertation. Thus, it is a credible qualification, giving recognition for achieving at the DMin level.

# Assessment and Grading Scale

**Coursework**

Typically, six main areas are considered when work is assessed for higher education programs such as these:

1. *Evidence of knowledge and understanding of the subject and/or texts*
To what extent does the assignment demonstrate breadth of knowledge, coverage of the topic, depth of understanding of issues, accuracy of information?

2. *Evidence of reading and use of other appropriate resources*
To what extent does the assignment show appropriate use of relevant, well-chosen and both classic and up-to-date literature and/or other source material, and an appropriate and accurate method of referencing?

3. *Quality of critical analysis and interpretation*
To what extent does the assignment demonstrate the ability to identify and analyse underlying issues, problems and questions and relate these to one another; to evaluate arguments and the evidence for them and examine their implications; to identify and to evaluate different perspectives?

4. *Quality of argument and structure (planning) of the assignment*
To what extent does the assignment answer the question in a dear and direct way; form a coherent argument; develop in a logical and convincing way, relating the introduction to the conclusion?

5. *Evidence of critical reflection, personal or ministerial application*
To what extent does the assignment demonstrate critical reflection on evaluation of personal and/or ministerial practice?

6. *Quality of communication skills and presentation*
To what extent does the assignment reflect appropriate standards and academic conventions in relation to the mode of presentation, including clarity of expression, spelling, grammar and syntax, referencing and bibliography?

*[These categories and following criteria have been adapted from R. Ackroyd and D. Major,* Shaping the tools: Study Skills in Theology, *London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1999.]*

Notice above the recurring phrase "to what extent." It is the extent to which the assessment criteria are demonstrated that determines the grade awarded. Thus, the grading scale for the coursework of the DMin – with the assessment criteria for each of these six areas – is shown on the following page.

| Grade | Criteria |
|---|---|
| High Distinction (HD) | Excellent quality – indicating…<br>1. excellent coverage of the topic; accurate in detail offering sophisticated, even original insights; excellent use of examples to demonstrate understanding; clear understanding of complex ideas and issues.<br>2. extensively researched in breadth and/or depth and accurately referenced.<br>3. imaginative, insightful, original, creative interpretations; impressive level of critical analysis and evaluation.<br>4. a persuasive, authoritative coherent argument supported throughout by evidence, ability to show limitations of approaches; systematic and cogent structure.<br>5. evidence of sophisticated, critical reflection and evaluation of personal and/or professional ministerial practice.<br>6. written with flair and panache; fluent and confident; lucidly expressed and accurate in spelling and grammar. |
| Distinction (D) | Very good quality – indicating…<br>1. high level of coverage of the topic; accurate in detail with some originality and innovative insights; good use of examples to demonstrate understanding; clear understanding of complex ideas and issues.<br>2. widely researched in breadth and/or depth and accurately referenced.<br>3. insightful and creative interpretations; high level of critical analysis and evaluation.<br>4. a persuasive, coherent argument supported throughout by evidence, some ability to show limitations of approaches; systematic and cogent structure.<br>5. evidence of a high level of critical reflection and evaluation of personal and/or professional ministerial practice.<br>6. fluent and confident; lucidly expressed and accurate in spelling and grammar. |
| Credit (C) | Good quality – indicating…<br>1. topic is covered in depth; detail is accurate throughout; independence of thought; good identification and understanding of complex ideas and issues.<br>2. well researched and referenced.<br>3. perceptive, thoughtful interpretations; good level of critical analysis and evaluation; systematic analysis of source material.<br>4. presence of a cogent argument, supported throughout by evidence; the work is well structured.<br>5. evidence of critical reflection, understanding and evaluation of personal and/or professional ministerial practice.<br>6. lucidly expressed and accurate in spelling and grammar. |
| Pass (P) | Satisfactory quality – indicating…<br>1. most relevant issues are covered with reasonable understanding; adequate knowledge is demonstrated; most central issues are identified.<br>2. reasonable range of reading, sources not always explicit; not all referencing may be accurate.<br>3. material from a variety of sources is drawn together in interesting ways; development of analysis may not be consistent, giving way to description.<br>4. demonstrates the ability to construct an argument and present supporting evidence; links between introduction and conclusion are made.<br>5. some attempt is made to reflect critically and evaluate; reference is made to personal and/or professional/ministerial practice.<br>6. clearly written; there may be occasional errors in spelling and grammar. |
| Borderline Pass (BP) | Of doubtful quality for a pass, but there are just enough strengths to allow a pass grade to be awarded rather than Fail. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Fail<br>(F) | Unsatisfactory quality – indicating…<br>• *Either* the work is unsatisfactory, deficient and/or insufficient in many respects, relating to both mastery of content and expression;<br>• *Or* work is not submitted, is excessively late, or has been produced by cheating. |
| Incomplete<br>(I) | *[Distinguished from a Fail]*<br>Work is not completed/submitted |

For the purposes of comparison, this grading scale may be compared with other frequently used grading scales. Note that these are comparisons are only approximate:

| **Grade** | **Common descriptor** | **Percentage equivalent** | **Letter equivalent** | **Grade point equivalent** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| High Distinction | Excellent | 85% + | A | 4.0 |
| Distinction | Very good | 75-84% | B+/A- | 3.6 |
| Credit | Good | 65-74% | B/B+ | 3.2 |
| Pass | Satisfactory | 50-64% | C+/B- | 2.6 |
| Borderline pass | Marginal | 40-50% | C-/C | 2.0 – 2.3 |
| Fail | Unsatisfactory | Below 40% | F | < 2.0 |