



***Fitness for Ministry Program  
for  
Christian Ministries Majors***

**STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**2012-2013**

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE FITNESS FOR MINISTRY PROGRAM**

Effective fall 2010, all incoming Christian Ministries majors at Messiah College will be required to participate in a Fitness for Ministry program as part of their Christian Ministries major. This handbook serves as a guide for students in that program. All Christian Ministries majors should make themselves familiar with the policies and requirements contained in this handbook.

### **Mission of Messiah College**

Messiah College is a Christian college of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. The College is committed to an embracing evangelical spirit rooted in the Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan traditions of the Christian Church. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.

### **Mission of the Christian Ministries Major**

The major in Christian Ministries (B.A. in Christian Ministries) prepares women and men for entry-level positions in congregational and para-church ministries. This program can also serve as a foundation for future education in a seminary setting. With its three concentrations (in Congregational Ministries, Cross-Cultural Ministries, and Youth Ministries), the major incorporates practical elements, but it also requires students to acquire competency in biblical and theological reflection, which serve as the theoretical foundations for this course of study. Critical thinking and oral and written communication skills are also stressed.

### **Mission and Rationale of the Fitness for Ministry Program**

The goal of the Fitness for Ministry program is to both assess and increase Christian Ministries majors' fitness for ministry in the following areas: intellect, character, and Christian faith. As faculty of the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies, we believe that Messiah College's conferral of a B.A. in Christian Ministries should indicate more than a student's ability to pass the required academic courses. It should indicate that, to the best of our knowledge, the student is academically, morally, and spiritually fit to fill a ministry position upon graduation from Messiah College. The establishment of this fitness for ministry protocol seeks to serve both churches and students, neither of whom is served when students receive Christian Ministries degrees but are unfit for ministry.

## **Fitness for Ministry Program: Overview**

From the student standpoint, the Fitness for Ministry program has two main components, both of which are required:

1. Participation in **spiritual formation groups** at two points in a student's academic career: (a) one early-career group, typically in the student's sophomore year; (b) one late-career group, typically in the student's senior year. These formation groups will be part of regularly offered major courses and are described in more detail on p. 9 of this handbook.
2. Ongoing development of a **ministry portfolio** that establishes a student's fitness for Christian ministry. This portfolio, which will be reviewed by BRS Department faculty on a regular basis, will include letters of recommendation from church leaders; written self-reflections on student's sense of vocational call; student self-reports about church participation and ministry involvement; chapel attendance reports generated by the Office of College Ministries; and criminal background check and child abuse clearance forms.

In addition to completing the two requirements above, students in the Christian Ministries major will be expected to abide by the requirements of the college's "**Good Moral Character**" policy and its **Academic Integrity Policy** and maintain a **minimum cumulative GPA of 2.75** in Christian Ministries major courses.

## STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

### Basic Requirements and Expectations

Students in the Christian Ministries major are:

1. required to attest to an ongoing commitment to Jesus Christ and a desire to serve Christ through ministry to others.
2. required to attend a local congregation frequently and consistently.
3. required to participate regularly in Christian ministry endeavors (first-year students exempt).
4. required to meet all deadlines for assembling their ministry portfolios.
5. required to fulfill Messiah College's chapel attendance requirements each semester.
6. required to have criminal background checks and child abuse clearance.
7. required to participate in department-organized spiritual formation groups twice during their academic careers.
8. subject to Messiah College's Good Moral Character Policy. Violation of this policy will result in probationary status or dismissal from the major.
9. subject to Messiah College's Academic Integrity Policy. Violation of this policy will result in probationary status or dismissal from the major.
10. expected to maintain a 2.75 cumulative GPA in major courses. Christian Ministries majors who fail to meet this standard risk dismissal from the major.

### Portfolio Development

Each student in the program is required to contribute required documents to his/her Fitness for Ministry portfolio according to the schedule outlined below. This portfolio will be kept in the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies, and will be overseen by the Fitness for Ministry Program Coordinator. The Program Coordinator will remind students of the deadlines below, but it is the student's responsibility to send these documents to the Program Coordinator by the stated deadlines. Unless otherwise stated by the Program Coordinator, these documents should be produced and sent in electronic form.

#### First Year:

- February 1
  - a 500-word statement written by the student, attesting to the student's Christian commitment and desire to serve Christ and the church
  - a signed form acknowledging program expectations, including the student's abidance by the college's Good Moral Character policy;
  - a signed waiver granting access to educational information, including gpa information, college disciplinary records, and chapel attendance information;
  - letters of reference from two church leaders, requested by the student, in which the leaders assess the spiritual commitment and fitness for ministry of the applicant;
- May 1
  - a self-report by the student on his/her church attendance since September 1

#### Second Year

- October 15

- 1000-word statement, written by the student, on his/her sense of call to ministry and plans for pursuing and developing that call in the coming year
- May 1
  - a self-report by the student on his/her church attendance and ministry involvement in past year

### Third Year

- October 15
  - the following criminal history clearance documents: Act 34, Act 33/151, FBI Clearance.
  - 1000-word statement, written by the student, on his/her sense of call to ministry and plans for pursuing and developing that call in the coming year
- May 1
  - a self-report by the student on his/her church attendance and ministry involvement in past year

### Fourth Year

- October 15
  - 1000-word statement, written by the student, on his/her sense of call to ministry and plans for pursuing and developing that call in the coming year

## **Good Moral Character Policy**

All students in the Christian Ministries major are expected to abide by the college's Good Moral Character Policy. This includes:

1. Satisfactory Pennsylvania Act 34 and 33/151 criminal history clearances performed in October of the student's third year.
2. Academic and disciplinary records reflecting behaviors consistent with the Community Covenant of Messiah College (reportable infractions are listed below). A student whose academic or disciplinary record documents a substantial disregard for the rights of others, to include any police record of having violated federal, state, or local laws (e.g., discriminatory, coercive, abusive or exploitative behavior, including sexual or racial harassment) and/or a lack of integrity (e.g., severe or repeated incidents of academic or other personal dishonesty) will be regarded as having failed to satisfy this requirement.
  - a. Academic Infractions -- Any violation of the Academic Integrity Policy published in the current Messiah College Student Handbook (see p. 5 of this handbook). Violations of the Academic Integrity Policy include the following offenses: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, misrepresentation of academic records, facilitating academic dishonesty, computer offenses, unfair advantage.
  - b. Community Development Infractions -- A finding of responsibility by the Messiah College disciplinary process or an arrest by an off-campus police agency for any of the following offenses:
    - (1) Underage drinking
    - (2) Discriminatory behavior: racial, gender

- (3) Harassment behavior: abusive, sexual
- (4) Personal dishonesty: stealing and/or theft of services
- (5) Possession and/or use of illegal drugs
- (6) Campus possession of college-banned weapons, for ex. firearms
- (7) Willful destruction of property
- (8) Initiating bomb scares and/or false fire alarms
- (9) Other incidents as identified by the Dean of Students.

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

Personal integrity is a behavioral expectation for all members of the Messiah community: administration, faculty, staff, and students. Violations of academic integrity are not consistent with the community standards of Messiah College. These violations include:

Plagiarism: Submitting as one's own work part or all of any assignment (oral or written) which is copied, paraphrased, or purchased from another source, including online sources, without the proper acknowledgment of that source. Examples: failing to cite a reference, failing to use quotation marks where appropriate, misrepresenting another's work as your own, etc.

Cheating: Attempting to use or using unauthorized material or study aids for personal assistance in examinations or other academic work. Examples: using a cheat sheet, altering a graded exam, looking at a peer's exam, , having someone else take the exam for you, using any kind of electronic mobile or storage devices (such as cell phones, PDAs, Blackberry, iPods, iPhones, Flashdrives, DVDs, CDs), communicating via email, IM, or text messaging during an exam, using the internet, sniffers, spyware or other software to retrieve information or other students' answers, purposely disconnecting from the internet to cause a lock on an online exam, etc.

Fabrication: Submitting altered or contrived information in any academic exercise. Examples: falsifying sources and/or data, etc.

Misrepresentation of Academic Records: Tampering with any portion of a student's record. Example: forging a signature on a registration form or change of grade form on paper or via electronic means.

Facilitating Academic Dishonesty: Helping another individual to violate this policy. Examples: working together on an assignment where collaboration is not allowed, doing work for another student, allowing one's own work to be copied.

Computer Offenses: Altering or damaging computer programs without permission. Examples: software piracy, constructing viruses, introducing viruses into a system, copying copyrighted programs, etc.

Unfair Advantage: Attempting to gain advantage over fellow students in an academic exercise. Examples: lying about the need for an extension on a paper, destroying or removing library materials, having someone else participate in your place, etc.

Penalties for Violations of the Academic Integrity Policy - A faculty member may exercise broad discretion when responding to violations of the Academic Integrity Policy. The range of responses may include failure of the course to a grade reduction of the given assignment, or in the event of a particularly egregious offense, suspension or dismissal from the Program.



The academic integrity policy in its entirety can be found in the Graduate Program Student Handbook and should be reviewed by every student, as the primary responsibility for knowledge of and compliance with this policy rests with the student.

## PORTFOLIO REVIEW PROCESS

A department review committee, comprised of the Fitness for Ministry Program Coordinator and two additional faculty members of the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies, will review all student portfolios in the manner described below. We fully expect that the vast majority of Christian Ministries majors will have portfolios that demonstrate their fitness for ministry. This review process gives the department faculty an opportunity to discuss any issues we see that may hinder a student's ministry in the future. In some cases—we anticipate very few cases—students will be judged unsatisfactory in this review process and will therefore be dismissed from the major and required to complete another Messiah College major.

### Review Schedule

1. At the close of each semester, the coordinator will access the following information for each Christian Ministries major and include it in each student's portfolio:
  - a. Semester and cumulative grade point average in major-courses
  - b. Relevant disciplinary information, including academic integrity violations
  - c. Chapel attendance information
2. In May, all Christian Ministries majors' portfolios will be divided among members of the review committee. Members will read the assigned files and note which files have problematic issues. If committee members have questions about a student's self-reported church involvement, the program coordinator will follow up with the church in question.
3. During May Development week, the review committee will meet to discuss all the files and rate students' records as follows:
  - a. Satisfactory – student may proceed in the major
  - b. Probationary – student may proceed in the major, but with probationary status.
  - c. Unsatisfactory – student must be removed from the Christian Ministries major. Students may be judged unsatisfactory on any of the following bases:
    - i. failure to address factors that resulted in probationary status;
    - ii. an egregious disciplinary violation, e.g., criminal activity;
    - iii. repeated disciplinary violations;
    - iv. repeated chapel probations;
    - v. an inability to testify to a Christian spiritual commitment;
    - vi. a pronounced lack of involvement with a community of faith;
    - vii. failure to address minimum GPA expectations.
4. Following the meeting of the review committee, the program coordinator will generate letters informing all Christian Ministries majors of their status.
  - a. Students on probationary status will be apprised of the reason for probation, and will be informed of expectations going forward.
  - b. Students who are dismissed from the program will be apprised of the reason for dismissal, and will be instructed to seek another major (e.g., the alternate Christian Studies major).
  - c. Letters sent to dismissed students and students placed on probation must be copied to the BRS Department chair.

## **Appeals Process**

We anticipate very few students to be deemed unsatisfactory in the review process outlined above. Nonetheless, those who are deemed to be unsatisfactory will be dismissed from the Christian Ministries major and required to complete another major at Messiah College. Those who are dismissed from the major may appeal the decision of review committee to the chair of the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies. Students may appeal the decision of the department chair to the Dean of the School of Humanities. The decision of the dean shall be final.

## **Alternate Major**

Students who are dismissed from the Christian Ministries major will be assisted to find another major at Messiah College that is suited to their gifts and abilities. Students with senior status who are dismissed from the Christian Ministries major may choose to complete a major in "Christian Studies," a major that is not otherwise available to Messiah College students. This particular major will allow the student to complete a B.A. at Messiah College without devoting more time to his/her undergraduate education.

## **SPIRITUAL FORMATION GROUPS**

All Christian Ministries majors will be required to participate in two spiritual formation groups during the course of their Messiah careers, one early-career group and one late-career group. Groups will be held in the context of required Christian Ministries courses. The early-career groups will consist of students enrolled in either CHRM 210: Theology of Ministry; or CHRM 220: Introduction to Christian Mission. The late-career groups will consist of students enrolled in CHRM 493: Christian Ministries Seminar. (It's possible that a few students will take both CHRM 210 and CHRM 220. These students will be expected to participate in spiritual formation groups in the context of both courses, unless they are taking the two courses simultaneously.)

### **Objectives of the Groups**

Lower-level groups will provide a setting for students to:

- explore issues of “calling” – what does it mean to be called to ministry? How do we know if we’re called to ministry? What are the potential pitfalls in this area?
- consider the importance of spiritual health to fruitful ministry
- engage in spiritual practices that contribute to spiritual health
- reflect on and deepen their spiritual commitment
- reflect on their relationship to the church

Senior-level groups will provide a setting to:

- explore potential pitfalls in ministry (e.g., lacking basic professionalism)
- voice fears/anxieties about a career in ministry
- engage in spiritual practices that contribute to spiritual health
- reflect on and deepen their spiritual commitment
- reflect on their relationship to the church

### **Composition of the Groups**

- Each group will consist of approximately five Christian Ministries majors and one mature Christian leader who will serve as the group’s mentor.
- Early-career groups will be gender-segregated, i.e., some groups will consist of female students with a female mentor, whereas other groups will consist of male students with a male mentor.
- Late-career groups will be gender-integrated.

### **Meeting Time and Frequency**

Each group will meet 10-12 times during the course of the semester, during the standard chapel time as outlined in their respective course syllabi. Students will receive one chapel credit for each time they attend a mentoring group.

### **Grading**

Although student participation in the spiritual formation groups is not graded per se, students will be expected to attend all sessions. Students who have more than one unexcused absence from the mentoring group will fail the entire course, and students who have more than three total absences (excused or unexcused) will likewise fail the entire course.

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