**Pastoral Synthesis Project**

**The Pastoral Synthesis Paper (PSP) as a capstone project:**

The Pastoral Synthesis Paper or PSP demonstrates the student’s thorough familiarity with a range of scholarly sources in theology along with the ability to make substantive and integrative connections between those sources and the issues and concerns that arise in the context of the contemporary practice of ministry. It is neither a research paper nor a reflection paper but an integration of the two.

The PSP is a 30-35-page paper that allows the student to address a pastoral dilemma or issue and to bring to it what s/he has read and learned in theology through his/her career at LMU. The paper must be typed, double-spaced, using 12-point font, with footnotes or endnotes according to the Chicago Manual of Style. Aside from an integrative introduction and conclusion, the paper has four components or sections: (1) the description of a “case,” that is, an evocative story or vignette from pastoral ministry that illustrates an important contemporary pastoral issue or dilemma, (2) an exploration of the larger historical, cultural, and ecclesial context in which the pastoral issue or dilemma has arisen, (3) a theological analysis of the issues that lie behind the pastoral issue or dilemma, and 4) a tentative plan for a project or program to address the need exposed by the case.

**Case component:** In this section (3-4 pages), the student uses a “case,” that is, the narrative of an incident in his or her experience of ministry, in order to introduce and sketch out the contours of a contemporary pastoral issue, problem, or dilemma. The section would include both a short narrative of the incident and an in-depth description of the pastoral issue or dilemma it illustrates. For example, a student might tell the story of a parish pastoral council meeting at which an assertive group of Anglo parishioners stated decisive opinions about proposed changes to the liturgical space followed by paralyzing silence on the part of a group of the Latino/a parishioners on the council. The student would then demonstrate how this incident demonstrates the pastoral challenge of perceived powerlessness and a lack of “voice” among parish leaders from Latino/a cultures in the United States.

**Context component:** In this section (5-6 pages), the student offers a description and some analysis of the larger social, cultural, and/or ecclesial context that gave rise to the pastoral issue, problem, or dilemma. All pastoral issues occur in a context—there is no generic pastoral ministry that works the same for everyone. In our own culturally diverse context, we are more aware of this than ever. This section allows the student to present and reflect on the complex dynamics that shape the pastoral issue in question—in the larger society, within the particular cultural groups involved, and in the church environment. Students should refer to scholarly sources documenting or describing the context, including relevant statistical or quantitative and narrative or qualitative materials. For example, a student looking at the challenges to religious literacy among the increasingly unchurched emerging adult generation might present statistical surveys showing increasing lack of commitment to any religion or a lack of knowledge about basic religious ideas and stories. S/he might also look at data on theories of faith development.

**Theological component** (18-20 pages in length): In this section, the student will draw upon theological tradition and contemporary theological expressions in order to address key theological issues raised by the pastoral issue described in the first section. The student will make use of biblical and theological scholarship. Students should avoid “proof-texting” in their use of Scripture, making sure to exegete passages carefully or to comment on themes and theologies in the Bible rather than isolated passages. They should note their own interpretations and how they compare with biblical scholarship. Their theological scholarship should coherently address the pastoral issue they have chosen, engage primary and secondary texts, and demonstrate a broad knowledge of theology from the courses they have taken.

For example, if the pastoral issue raised in the first component pertained to confusion and non-participation in the sacrament of confirmation, this component might address biblical theologies of the Holy Spirit, the history and theology of the sacraments, and/or contemporary Trinitarian theologies. Students might attend to sources such as the Pentecost account in Acts 2, Patristic sermons on initiation, the revised Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, and feminist theologies of the sacraments. If the pastoral dilemma is the lack of spiritual direction available in Spanish speaking faith communities in the United States, then the theology component ought to present biblical theologies of spiritual guidance and mentorship, Latino/a theologians’ approaches to spirituality, and/or an account of the preferential option for the poor in liberation theology. This part of the essay offers conclusions and a summary of the writer’s own convictions about the theological issue behind the pastoral issue or dilemma in question.

**Plan or project component** (4-6 pages): Here the student develops a tentative plan or project that practically addresses the pastoral issue, doing so taking note of the theological analysis just completed. The student offers a concise description of the proposed project or plan. What are its features? Where and when might it happen? This component demonstrates the student’s practical skills in developing and implementing some form of pastoral service in concrete circumstances yet with theological depth.

For example, a student might have raised the issue of the underappreciated needs of homeless women in urban contexts. Having reflecting on feminist theological anthropologies and the preferential option for the poor in liberation theology to establish an appropriate theological analysis of the problem, the student would then turn to developing a basic pastoral plan for a faith sharing group for homeless women that recognizes their personhood and agency. The student would go on to describe the project, how it addresses the need, and how it incorporates the theological themes illustrated in the previous component.

**Grading:** The Pastoral Synthesis Project carries three credit hours. The PSP will be evaluated by the student’s PSP director on the basis of the use of scholarly sources, the clarity of presentation, and the development and integration of the various components. Students who make use of a more challenging and diverse bibliography, who write clearly and creatively, and who develop and integrate all the sections in an exceptional manner will receive a grade of “pass with distinction.” Students who demonstrate an inadequate understanding of limited sources, who write in an unclear manner, and who fail to complete and integrate all the sections will receive a failing grade. All who fall between the two will receive a grade of “pass.” Those who fail are eligible to receive a second opportunity (only a second opportunity) to pass. For a second opportunity, students must submit a revised PSP within one year of the original project due date. Students may also be asked to make minor revisions before turning in a final copy to the Theological Studies department (i.e., Jennifer Scott) and from there to the Hannon Library.

**Note about Incompletes:** If a student is unable to complete the PSP by end of the term, they will receive a grade of Incomplete in the course. Directors and students will negotiate a new deadline for the PSP. By university policy, a graduate student may have up to one year to complete the course and receive a grade. Students will not be permitted to graduate until they have completed the PSP and the course.

**PROPOSAL FOR PASTORAL SYNTHESIS PROJECT**Please use this form or an exact copy, attaching your bibliography.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Student ID #\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Student’s contact information (address, phones, e mail): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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A one sentence description of the pastoral issue I wish to address:

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The Scriptural and theological themes I will explore in order to address the pastoral issue:

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Attached is a proposed bibliography for the PSP.

Directors will be assigned by expertise in the area you are addressing, but you may propose a professor you wish to work with:

Proposed director: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I acknowledge that the PSP Proposal will be refined in the course of my working with my director.

Student’s signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Please send to Dr. Brett C. Hoover, Associate Chair for Graduate Education, at* [*bhoover@lmu.edu*](mailto:bhoover@lmu.edu) *or 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3700, Los Angeles, California 90045. Please retain a copy of this form for your own records.*

**NOTICE OF COMPLETION  
PASTORAL SYNTHESIS PROJECT**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Student ID #\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Student’s contact information (address, phones, e mail): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Title of Pastoral Synthesis Project:

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Please attach an abstract describing your PSP in 400 words or less.

It is my judgment that this pastoral synthesis project…

\_\_\_ has satisfied the capstone requirement

\_\_\_ has satisfied the capstone requirement with distinction

\_\_\_ has **not** satisfied the capstone requirement

for the Master of Arts degree in Pastoral Theology of the Department of Theological Studies, Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts, Loyola Marymount University.

PSP Director’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Student’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*This form must be submitted to Dr. Brett C. Hoover, Associate Chair for Graduate Education, at* [*Brett.Hoover@lmu.edu*](mailto:Brett.Hoover@lmu.edu) *or 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3700, Los Angeles, California 90045. Students should retain a copy of this form for their own records.*