Discipleship Stage

"In the discipleship stage, which must not last less than two years, there is a systematic and rigorous formation that has at its core the goal of growing in an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through the life of meditation and contemplation, as well as the training of one's character in Christian virtue, so as to lay a solid foundation for future stages. The study of philosophy occurs during the discipleship stage." (PPF6, no. 132)

Seminarians in the discipleship stage develop the relationship between faith and reason, philosophy and theology, and the nature of truth, growing in the ways of the Word and Holy Wisdom. Each seminarian in the discipleship stage will discern God's call to present himself for the priesthood and be able to articulate the understanding of that call. This comes through self-knowledge, ongoing growth, healthy relationships, and affective maturity through the grace of God. This decision is then affirmed by the seminary formation team.

Areas of Focus

Human Dimension

- Solid in moral character
- Chastely celibate
- Self-aware
- Self-possessed
- Affectively mature
- Formed in habits of self-care
- Open to growth and direction
- Capable of healthy relationships and communality
- Effective in communication
- Open to persons of diverse backgrounds
- Conscientious in stewardship
- Obedient to authority
- Possessed of pastoral leadership qualities

Spiritual Dimension

- Prayerful in solitude
- Faithful in liturgical and communal celebration
- Disciplined in daily *Lectio Divina* and spiritual reading
- Balanced in ascetical practice
- Regular in the use of the Sacrament of Penance and spiritual direction
- Attentive to special times of spiritual renewal
- Articulate in reflection on his relationship with Christ
- Detached from wealth and comfort

- Free in chaste self-donation
- Humble in accepting the authority of superiors and Church teaching
- Committed to the love and service of God's people in the vocation of priesthood

Intellectual Dimension

- Educated in the liberal arts
- Literate in the natural sciences
- Competent in classical languages appropriate for theological education
- Interculturally adaptable
- Equipped with a knowledge of Western philosophy and critical reasoning skills
- Faithful to the Word of God and magisterial teaching
- Practiced in the sound interpretation and application of Scripture
- Articulate in expressing the tradition and dogmas of the Church
- Formed by a comprehensive assessment of Church History
- Discerning in applying Catholic moral teaching
- Proficient in liturgical and sacramental theology
- Informed by the theology and practice of spirituality
- Prudent in relating canon law to pastoral ministry
- Resourceful in integrating pastoral theology and praxis
- Disciplined in the life-long pursuit of truth and understanding

Pastoral Dimension

- Draws the community together in beautiful celebrations of the liturgy and sacraments
- Preaches effectively
- Counsels skillfully
- Applies Church teaching and theology wisely to ministerial situations
- Exercises inclusive pastoral leadership
- Relates well to all in his role as shepherd
- Pursues multicultural engagement
- Displays a generous and caring spirit
- Evangelizes zealously
- Engages in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and collaboration
- Pursues continuing pastoral education

Intellectual Formation

Intellectual formation during the Discipleship Stage bridges philosophy and the Catholic liberal arts tradition through the advancement of writing and oral communication skills (PPF6, nos. 274–284).

Desired Outcomes

Following the goals and benchmarks of the PPF6 (nos. 289–290), intellectual formation during the Discipleship Stage inculcates:

- Pursuit of truth and love of wisdom
- A grammar of nature and Catholic anthropology
- A differentiation between secular and Catholic visions of reality, knowledge, society, politics, and science, considering the "perennially valid" truths of Church teaching (PPF6, no. 284)

- A grasp of philosophy throughout history
- A cultural and linguistic competency for theological concepts and American ministry
- Advanced communication skills through writing and oratory
- Preparation for graduate theological studies

Academic Curriculum

For the standard 30-credit philosophy curriculum for priestly formation (PPF6, no. 306), Sacred Heart offers the following courses:

Course number, credits, and name		
PH 500	3	Ancient Philosophy
PH 501	3	Medieval Philosophy
PH 502	3	Modern Philosophy
PH 503	3	Contemporary Philosophy
PH 504	3	Logic
PH 505	3	Philosophical Anthropology
PH 506	3	Intro. to Philosophical Ethics
PH 507	3	Metaphysics
PH 508	3	Natural Theology
PH 509	3	Epistemology

For the integration of philosophical studies with the Catholic intellectual tradition and the development of writing and oral communication skills, Sacred Heart also offers the following Catholic Studies courses:

Course number, credits, and name		
CA 510	3	The Catholic Imagination
CA 575	3	Catholic Literature
CA 610	3	Catholic Thought & Culture
CA 690	4	Catholic Studies Capstone Seminar

Discipleship Stage courses may be taken toward the Master of Arts in Catholic Studies. *(See page 19.)*

Pastoral Formation

As the PPF6 indicates, pastoral formation is in some ways the culmination of the entire formation process. It connects with the human, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions and "provides a goal that integrates the other dimensions" (PPF6, no. 372).

Pastoral formation in the Discipleship Stage focuses on laying foundations for skills and dispositions that the seminarian will then build upon in the Configuration Stage.

Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology offers men in discipleship the opportunity to grow in these foundational competencies through participation in formation seminars, active participation in the liturgical life of the seminary and parishes, and opportunities for pastoral charity.

Master of Arts in Catholic Studies

The Master of Arts in Catholic Studies degree encompasses courses for the Propaedeutic and Discipleship Stages, and the program educates students in the integration of truth and wisdom through a broad range of subjects, including: literature, art, philosophy, history, culture, language, and liturgy. Students graduate equipped for further theological studies in preparation for the Catholic priesthood, manifesting Avery Cardinal Dulles's spirit of *sentire cum ecclesia*, a steadfast desire to "think and feel with the Church" in all her complexity and beauty. This degree is only open to students admitted into Sacred Heart's Priestly Formation Program.

All courses are for a letter grade (except Catholic Heritage I and Catholic Heritage II, which may be taken as pass/fail).

Admission Requirements

Admission requires an additional application for the Master of Arts in Catholic Studies (separate from the Priestly Formation Program admissions), including an essay and a letter of sponsor support.

Graduation Requirements

Students must achieve 49 credits in the following areas:
- Core courses (13 credits)
- Catholic Studies electives (6 credits)
- General electives (30 credits)

A seminarian who leaves priestly formation may continue and finish the degree if he:
- Has earned at least 30 credits toward the degree
- Obtains written permission from the Academic Dean and the President-Rector
- Follows relevant handbook policies and procedures, including leave of absence policies

The following conditions also apply:
- Nine (9) credits may be transferred into the Master of Arts in Catholic Studies
- Sixteen (16) credits may be shared with the Master of Divinity Program
- The student must maintain a 3.0 GPA

Desired Outcomes

Assessment follows PPF6 qualities and benchmarks for intellectual formation in the Propaedeutic and Discipleship Stages.

Core Curriculum

(required 13 credits)

Course number,	*credits,*	*and name*
CA 510	3	The Catholic Imagination
CA 575	3	Catholic Literature

CA 610	3	Catholic Thought & Culture
CA 690	4	Catholic Studies Capstone Seminar

Catholic Studies Electives
(minimum 6 credits)
Course number, credits, and name

CA 500	3	Catholic Heritage I: Sal Terrae
CA 505	3	Catholic Heritage II: Sint Unum

Other Catholic Studies electives vary by semester.

General Electives
(minimum 30 credits)
General electives include any course in philosophy, theology, spirituality, history, languages, pastoral studies, Hispanic studies, or Catholic Studies.

Optional Concentration in Philosophy
Students take all 30 general elective credits in philosophy to meet the prerequisite for theological studies (PPF6, no. 306). This is the standard curriculum for seminarians who pursue the Master of Divinity Program.

Optional Concentration in Theology and Tradition
For general electives, students apply 12 credits from the six standard Propaedeutic Stage courses (Catholic Doctrine I & II, Catholic Spiritual Tradition and Priestly Identity I & II, and Reading Sacred Scripture I & II) and take an additional 18 elective credits in theology, philosophy, history, and/or Catholic Studies.

This concentration is designed for seminarians who either do not need all 30 philosophy credits or pursue a flexible Individualized Ordination Track.

B.A./M.Div. Program

As of 2025, SHSST has partnered with the University of Mary (Bismarck, North Dakota) to provide a pathway for the completion of a B.A. in University Studies with a minor in philosophy. Seminarians who do not have a bachelor's degree but who have already earned an Associate of Arts or Science degree or completed at least 52 semester credits of liberal arts coursework from an accredited college or university are eligible. Select SHSST courses for the Propaedeutic and Discipleship Stages (including philosophy and Catholic Studies) can be applied toward this undergraduate degree in preparation for the M.Div. degree during the Configuration Stage. Seminarians who take advantage of the B.A./M.Div. Program are ineligible for the M.A. in Catholic Studies. Please contact the SHSST Registrar for more details.

See Core Course descriptions beginning on page 60. See Financial Information beginning on page 86.