

Prior Approval Protocol for Theological Faculty of the Concordia Universities

In accordance with LCMS Bylaw 3.10.6.9.2, which mandates clear guidelines and procedures for the appointment of theological faculty, this rubric outlines the formal process for securing prior approval of such faculty members at LCMS universities and colleges. It is designed to assist university Presidents in selecting theological faculty and obtaining approval for them.

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The LCMS Convention, in its 2016 resolution 7-06 B, made the following statements,

- Whereas, 2013 Res. 5-05B also restored the prior approval process for initial appointments of theology faculty at Concordia University System (CUS) institutions, but set forth a process different from that used for seminary faculties and
- Whereas the prior approval process, as amended, has been beneficial and has not caused any issues with institutional accreditation or otherwise, and
- Whereas, The boards of regents and presidents of all of our Concordia institutions have demonstrated their support of the concept of prior approval for theology faculty by their adoption of the Lutheran Identity Standards (R15; CW, pp. 77–78), which provide in relevant part that “[as] the LCMS Bylaws indicate, all full-time theology faculty receive prior approval from the CUS Board of Directors before being appointed or called (Bylaw 3.6.6.1)”; and
- Whereas, Our Concordia institutions are lights in a dark world and provide valuable opportunities to share the Gospel, when they identify an academic course as a theology course, they are making a public confession that it is intended to convey the Gospel and our doctrine in its truth and purity, and thus it is appropriate that all those who regularly teach such courses receive prior approval in accordance with Synod bylaws; and
- Whereas, In the rapidly changing world of higher education, many colleges and universities increasingly use adjunct instructors who teach courses on campus, online, and at satellite locations, often on a regular and continuing basis, and
- Whereas, It is necessary to provide a process for prior approval that ensures mastery of the appropriate academic qualifications, aptness to teach, and theological soundness, while ensuring that our institutions have the flexibility they require to meet the needs of their particular academic programs from semester to semester, by allowing the appointment of faculty, or the redeployment of faculty already on staff who are not already full-time theology faculty, so as to meet the institution’s needs under the oversight of its theology department for up to one year, thus providing adequate time to seek prior approval if the instructor will continue to teach theology courses beyond one year; and
- Whereas, CUS schools are given responsibility for the training of ministers of religion—commissioned; and
- Whereas, an important mission of the CUS is to prepare church workers, some of whom continue their theological education at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

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From the 2023 Handbook:

3.10.6.9.2 All initial appointments to persons serving on theology faculties or teaching classes in or cross-listed with the theology department shall require prior approval by a majority vote of the President of the Synod (or his designee), the chairman of the Council of Presidents (or his designee), and a member of the Concordia University System board selected by the chair and shall include a thorough theological review. The three voters shall be ordained. The president of Concordia University System shall facilitate the process. *Initial appointment refers to the initial engagement of any person to teach one or more theology courses, regardless of the assigned academic department, other than faculty who teach theology courses up to one academic year in any three-year period.*

This resolution underscored the critical importance of a highly qualified theological faculty in preserving and advancing the Church's Confessional theology, practice, and mission. Recognizing this as a fundamental responsibility, this rubric is constructed to ensure that all theological faculty possess the requisite theological knowledge, unwavering doctrinal fidelity, and pastoral acumen essential for effective ministry and teaching within the Concordia University System of the LCMS.

By establishing rigorous standards and an appropriate evaluation process, this rubric seeks to foster a theological faculty that is deeply committed to the faithful proclamation of the Gospel, the cultivation of Christian scholars, and the formation of future pastors, deaconesses, commissioned workers, and laypersons, all equipped to serve the Church and the world with distinction.

This rubric is intended to serve as a comprehensive framework for LCMS colleges and universities. It provides clear expectations and guidance while preserving the institution's autonomy to make informed decisions regarding theology faculty appointments.

This process is not designed to simply check off a pre-set number of boxes to say one is qualified. It is designed to ensure that those who teach prospective pastors, deaconesses, and church workers are fit and able to lead the next generation in service to Christ and the church. Likewise, the prior approval panel takes into account many factors beyond those laid out in the LCMS Bylaws when granting prior approval.

Standards

The standards that the Prior Approval Panel (PAP) will use to verify that a candidate is qualified include:

- a. Holds an advanced degree in theology (PhD, ThD, DMin, STM, MDiv will be considered on a case-by-case basis), or a closely related field (e.g., classics), preferably from an LCMS institution; other institutional degrees will be considered. A candidate who is in a doctoral program or All-But-Dissertation (ABD) must disclose the expected date of dissertation completion and submit annual progress reports to the institution and PAP. If extenuating circumstances require an extension of the time needed to complete the dissertation, this must be reported to the

institution and the PAP. The dissertation will be submitted, when available, for the PAP to review the theological content. Prior approval will be rescinded if the dissertation is abandoned or if the dissertation demonstrates that the candidate does not meet one or more of the standards set forth herein.

- b. Is in good standing on the roster of the LCMS and as a member of an LCMS congregation.
- c. Possesses a high level of theological acumen.
- d. Demonstrates support for the LCMS, its doctrine, and its practice as articulated in its constitution, bylaws, and doctrinal resolutions.
- e. Is “able to teach” in the sense of 2 Timothy 2:24, especially in an academic setting.
- f. Has high regard in the community and the wider church family.
- g. Demonstrates the ability to work with students and provide a model for church work and service.
- h. Is able to deliver educational content through various modalities (e.g. face-to-face, online, hybrid).
- i. Is able to deliver and effectively apply educational content across multiple student categories (e.g. traditional undergraduate, adult, graduate)
- j. Presents a minimum of three (3) letters of recommendation from LCMS sources that attest to these aforementioned standards.

(Prior approval is a comprehensive evaluation that is not intended solely to evaluate orthodoxy and academic credentials. It is also meant to ensure that an appointment to teach theology at a given time will best serve the clear and effective public confession of our Concordia Universities in their theological and cross-listed courses. Prior approval always remains at the committee’s discretion.)

Process

- I. Each initial appointment of a theology faculty member must undergo prior approval. This includes any faculty member who teaches one or more courses for more than one year in any three-year period (3.10.6.9.2). Adjunct faculty must receive prior approval if they teach for more than one year in any three-period period.
- II. Before initiating a search for a theology faculty (full-time) member, the President, Provost, or Chief Mission Officer should meet with the President of the CUS to review the position description and invite input on possible candidates.
- III. After the position is posted and a pool of candidates is received and vetted, the president of the institution should notify the CUS president of the names of the people they intend to interview before scheduling those interviews. The CUS President will then request feedback from the Prior Approval Panel on the candidates being vetted

while the university moves through its process. **This feedback will be provided to the president during the process.**

- IV. The university shall submit a formal request for prior approval. The request packet shall include a letter stating that the TFIF has been reviewed with the candidate by the institution's president and a regent; the candidate's OMIF, CV, and TFIF; the three letters of recommendation from LCMS sources (standard j); and other documentation that the candidate meets standards. This request may include specific information from the university regarding specific duties required and not required of this candidate (e.g. specific focus of teaching and courses to be assigned.)
- V. The CUS president will attempt to facilitate the Prior Approval Panel meeting for each candidate (full-time or adjunct) within two weeks after the required documentation has been submitted.
- VI. After the panel has discussed the candidate, the decision will be communicated in an official letter from the office of the CUS President. The university president will also be contacted by phone to discuss any concerns, especially if the panel declines a candidate.
- VII. All current theology faculty (adjuncts) who started after July 14th, 2016, and have yet to receive prior approval will receive retroactive approval from the committee. If these adjuncts are used in the future, the university presidents will submit a packet of information consisting of a PIF, SET, TFIF, and department head's evaluation of their teaching, a sample of class evaluations of the students from their class, and any syllabus and reading list as an illustration of their teaching philosophy.
- VIII. For adjunct faculty, the one-year approval can be in place; should an adjunct teach a second year, the full prior approval process will need to be followed.