

ETHICS IN COMMUNITY LIFE, LEARNING, AND PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY

Introduction

Student learning is at the centre of the work and mission of the Montreal School of Theology. MST strives to create learning experiences that are challenging, supportive, and lead to student growth. MST is also a Christian community in which we seek to live as members of the body of Christ, giving and receiving from one another so that we can together grow to full maturity in Christ.

Guidelines for Learning and Community Life

Across all of MST's programs, courses, and community life, we seek to be guided by the following expectations and hold ourselves mutually accountable to them. Students in the In Ministry Year begin each year with a community learning covenant, which is consistent with these expectations.

The Montreal School of Theology is an ecumenical theological consortium which affirms that people are suited for Christian ministry and leadership by their personal character as well as their spiritual commitment and giftedness, academic competence, and ministry skills. This means that personal qualities are as important as knowledge and the mastery of specific ministerial skills. The process of moving toward effective Christian leadership, therefore, requires an intentional focus on the building of Christian character.

As an ecumenical community of faith and learning, The Montreal School of Theology functions with the belief that Christian character is developed through the experience and practice of community and is developed by self-discipline rather than externally enforced discipline. Students are responsible for following the community standards and expectations set by their theological college. At the same time, each student is expected to participate in the life of the consortium in a manner that befits those preparing for Christian ministry.

Our programs are oriented towards theological knowledge, professional formation, and personal growth. The goal of these programs is not to ensure all students have a single set of beliefs or think the same way. Rather, we respect and encourage diversity of opinions, views, and perspectives.

While we may have different views, we are united by a commitment to certain actions that build up our community life. In particular, it is expected that all members of the community, including faculty, staff, and students will in their actions demonstrate an attitude of respect, generosity, and Christian maturity towards other members of the community. This includes refraining from any form of written or verbal communication or other actions that demean or discriminate against an individual or group. Demeaning and discriminatory behaviour can occur in relation to various aspects of an individual's identity or membership in a group, including but not limited to: life experience, health status, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or ethnicity.

As an ecumenical Christian consortium of schools serving students from many different denominations, the Montreal School of Theology stands in the theological tradition of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic

church. We also recognize and affirm the right of each of the participant churches to develop and teach their own confessional standards. We are committed to helping students relate positively to their own tradition and reflect critically and constructively on their tradition in an ecumenical context. Students are enjoined to deal with controversial issues through a fair consideration of the various interpretations and due sensitivity to divergent understandings.

Students, by virtue of their application for admission to their respective college and the Montreal School of Theology, upon their registration agree to accept and abide by the standards and expectations of their college and the theological consortium. The Montreal School of Theology, acting through the Academic Committee, reserves the right to refuse admission, to discipline students, or to dismiss students who, in its assessment, have violated these standards by their actions or attitudes.

Learning Environment

Learning in community, where one participates and contributes in a meaningful manner, either physically or virtually, is at the centre of the MST experience. There are certain expectations for those who participate in this environment. For courses, classes, workshops, and other educational events offered as part of MST programming, this includes:

Preparation

Your instructor can be expected to:

- Be well-prepared, having done those things necessary to offer a worthwhile educational experience to all participants.

As a student you will be expected to be prepared and to actively participate during the event of learning in community, having:

- Read the required reading and completed other assigned preparatory work and clarified those things you did not understand.
- Formulated questions and prepared yourself to make a fruitful contribution to the learning experience of all participants.

During the learning experience (which could take place in a traditional classroom, online, or in an external setting like the intercultural experience)

Your instructor will treat all students with respect. That means:

- Addressing questions that arise, and honestly admitting when an answer is unknown
- In the case of teaching a course, setting out clearly in the course syllabus the expectations of the instructor for the student, the learning outcomes of the course and how they relate to program learning outcomes, and the basis on which grades are assigned.
- Encouraging and allowing all to participate in the learning event, offering equal time for participation between online and live students in a hybrid learning environment.
- Responding promptly to requests for accommodations in situations where most or all learning is done online
- Assuming that you have come to class prepared and therefore ready to be called on to participate without embarrassment
- Making space for you to express your views and ask questions
- Work to maintain a climate of respect and learning, free from ridicule

- Being careful, when expressing a personal opinion, not to impose one's views on others.

As a student you will:

- Take your instructor and fellow students seriously and treat all with respect
- Participate in all learning events, unless you provide clear communication in advance that you are unable to do so.
- Be present on time, continue to be present and not leave early, unless you clearly indicate to your instructor in advance.
- Have the appropriate books and texts with you.
- Make good use of the learning event by being engaged throughout
- Ask questions for clarification
- Participate in all discussions so that learning is a communal enterprise.
- Monitor your own participation so as to allow others to participate equally.
- Respect other students and their ideas, and not holding side conversations that distract other students or the instructor.
- Respect within an online learning setting means that participants do not disconnect their screen
- Communicate proactively about needs for accommodations in situations where most or all learning is done online

Expectations about Online Learning

Technical

- A high-speed, reliable connection to the Internet that is available to you for significant blocks of time each day
- A modern and updated computer that is available to you for significant blocks of time each day. You can use a smartphone phone or tablet for webinars.
- Your computer needs to be equipped with a microphone and speakers and a webcam or built-in camera.

Physical

- A space where you can participate in webinars on various video platforms that is as quiet as possible. If possible, avoid a setting where there will be interruptions. To protect the privacy of other students, a place where you will not be overheard (or use of headphones) is ideal.

Personal

- Adequate computer skills (e.g., turn speakers or microphone on and off, enable web cam, find documents easily, search the Web, enable Cookies, upload and download files, watch a video).
- Commitment to learn programs that are new to you (Populi, Zoom).
- Commitment to regularly read and respond to emails.`

Adherence to Guidelines

When an instructor fails to live up to these guidelines, students have the right to challenge him/her. Likewise, the instructor expects all students to live up to their responsibilities during the totality of the

learning event. In the spirit of Christian community, students and instructors are encouraged to speak to one another individually when a problem arises. If necessary, students are encouraged to speak to their Director of Pastoral Studies, Principal, or other designated member of their college faculty.

Individual colleges may choose to extend these guidelines to college-specific educational events but are not obligated to do so.

Denominational Policies and Expectations

The colleges of the Montreal School of Theology are committed to shared ecumenical formation for ministry while also giving due cognizance of the policies and practices of the churches and denominations they serve. Each denomination has public policies regarding ethical and professional behaviour of its educators and ministers. These policies are clear on matters of sexual harassment, abuse of power and general impropriety. All faculty and staff related to the colleges of MST are accountable to their college policies. Students are governed by the MST Policy on Harassment and related college or McGill policies.

Power, Power Imbalance, and Appropriate Boundaries

Each college has its own Sexual Abuse and Harassment Policy, located on their respective websites, and all members of the community should familiarize themselves with these policies. Beyond these policies, however, preparing for ministry introduces students to the importance of power and boundaries and the following is offered as general guidelines for approaching these themes during ministerial preparation.

In any relationship there will be fluctuation in the balance of power, but in a supervisory or teaching relationship the balance of power consistently rests with the one in the position of supervisor or educator holding power over the one being supervised or taught. Supervisors/teachers and students are not colleagues or co-workers who simply have different responsibilities. One has authority and the responsibilities of instructing, evaluating, and reporting on the work of the other. An imbalance of power is thus inevitable. Simply being conscious of it and prepared to talk about it addresses the vast majority of challenges that can arise. However, the supervisor will also want to take intentional care to ensure that power is used for the benefit of the church and of the one seeking supervision and never in a fashion that could be understood as self-serving or abusive.

At the same time, many students in MST are preparing for public ministries in which they will exercise a degree of power. Part of the learning of our programs is helping students come to see themselves as someone who exercises power and can do so in an appropriate and constructive fashion. This is addressed in the classroom, in theological reflection, and in field education discussion groups. In considering an action or in reviewing the appropriateness of the boundaries of the relationship, these questions may be helpful as touchstones. “How does this relate to the mandate of supervision/learning/ministry to which I have committed myself?” “Would I be comfortable if other colleagues or the college knew about this intended action?”

Those who have power may misuse or abuse it, that is, they may use their power in wrongful, unjust, or discriminatory fashion. Members of the MST community who believe they are the subject of an abuse of power, whether in the classroom, community, field placement, or other location, should seek assistance and from their Director of Pastoral Studies or Principal or avail themselves of the MST Complaints Policy.