

Uniform Curriculum and Ordinary or Extraordinary Ordination Requirements.
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The BCO's ordinary educational requirements for ordination as a minister are stated in BCO 21-4,

21-4. Ordination Requirements and Procedures

- a. An intern applying for ordination shall be required to present a diploma of Bachelor or Master from some approved college or university, and also a diploma of Bachelor or Master from some approved theological seminary or authentic testimonials of having completed a regular course of theological studies, **or a certificate of completion of and endorsement from a theological study program as approved by the General Assembly and one of the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America.** [Emphasis added]. No Presbytery shall omit any of these educational requirements except in extraordinary cases, and then only with a three-fourths (3/4) approval of the Presbytery. Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any of these educational requirements, it shall always make a record of the reasons for such omission and the parts omitted. The intern shall also present satisfactory testimonials as to the completion and approval of his internship in the practice of the ministry.

- b. **Every candidate for ordination shall ordinarily have met the requirements of the Assembly's approved curriculum.** [Emphasis added]. Ordinarily, the intern shall have been examined in most of the following trials when he was licensed. If the Presbytery previously approved all parts of the licensure examination, it need not re-examine the intern in those areas at this time. If there were areas of weakness, which the Presbytery noted, or if any member of the Presbytery desires to do so, the intern may be examined on particular points again. Additionally, the intern shall be examined on any parts required for ordination which were not covered in his examination for licensure. In all cases, he should be asked to indicate whether he has changed his previous views concerning any points in the *Confession of Faith*, *Catechisms*, and *Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church in America.

With the growth of two-year M.A. programs among seminaries, a question arises whether a two-year M.A. degree from a theological seminary meets the ordination requirements set forth in the BCO. If an M.A. is the only theological education the candidate has had and the candidate has not completed additional requirements (usually in pastoral theology), then the M.A. alone would not meet the educational requirements because a two-year M.A. degree does not meet the requirements of “a certificate of completion of and endorsement from a theological study program as approved by the General Assembly and one of the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America.” An M.A. graduate would need to do additional The Uniform Curriculum adopted by the General Assembly (see *Minutes of the General Assembly*, 1978, p. 214, Appendix G, IV), http://pcahistory.org/ga/6th_pcaga_1978.pdf

The Uniform Curriculum is divided into three major areas with supervised practical experience required in each area:

1. Scripture
 - a. English Bible
 - b. Biblical languages
 - Hebrew
 - Greek
 - c. Methods and Interpretation
 - d. Supervised Practical Experiences
2. Doctrine
 - a. Church History
 - b. Apologetics
 - c. Theology and Ethics
 - d. Presbyterian Church Polity
 - e. Supervised Practical Experiences
3. Practical Theology
 - a. Pastor's personal life
 - b. Worship
 - c. Evangelism
 - d. Missiology
 - e. Pastoral Care
 - f. Christian Education
 - g. Pastoral Administration
 - h. Supervised Practical Experiences

Typically a two-year M.A. or M.T.S. program has only one biblical language or neither biblical language, does not have all the required courses in Practical Theology, and has little or no supervised practical experience. Since an M.A. or M.T.S. program is a two-year rather than a three-year program, it may cover some of the same areas of an M.Div. program but may not be to the same depth or extent. So Presbyteries will need to supplement an M.A. or M.T.S. with additional supervised instruction and experience, which may be gained through a well-planned and well-administered internship program,

There are several models to satisfy ordination requirements:

1. The three-year M.Div. program plus one-year internship (Three plus One Model) is the traditional program. (The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada does not accredit an M.Div. program done totally by online courses because it is a professional program that requires supervised practical experience).
2. An alternative is the two years of residential study in an approved seminary (usually for an M.A. or M.T.S. degree) plus tutorial training in Practical Theology and Supervised Practical Experiences under the supervision of Presbytery. CTS and RTS both now offer two-year accredited M.A. degrees via Distance Learning with limited short-term residential requirements. The tutorial

training together with the internship often take two years after an M.A. or M.T.S. (Two Years of Seminary plus Two years Tutorial Model).

3. Another alternative is academic training in an extension seminary program or Distance Learning program, or online courses from several sources (following the Uniform Curriculum, but not necessarily acquiring a degree in route) plus two years of tutorial training in Practical Theology and Supervised Practical Experiences under the supervision of Presbytery (Two plus Two Model). CTS and RTS both now offer two-year accredited M.A. degrees via Distance Learning with limited short-term residential requirements.

It should be noted that whatever route for ordination preparation is taken, the Presbytery must follow “a theological study program as approved by the General Assembly and one of the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America” that satisfies the content and Supervised Practical Experiences of the Uniform Curriculum. Some Presbyteries have adopted theological study programs that conform to the uniform curriculum adopted by the General Assembly but some have not.

Insofar as I know the General Assembly does not maintain a list of “approved seminaries.” A candidate for the ministry is under the guidance of the Presbytery in that matter (BCO 18-1; 18-4).

Use of the Extraordinary Clause Omitting Some Ordination Requirements

BCO 21-4 a, states unequivocally (using the word “shall”) that if one does not have a bachelor or master’s degree from an approved college or university and also a diploma of Bachelor or Master from some approved theological seminary or authentic testimonials of having completed a regular course of theological studies, he must present a certificate of completion of and an endorsement from a theological study program as approved by the General Assembly and one of the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America. But BCO 21-4 states, “Every candidate for ordination shall ordinarily [emphasis added] have met the requirements of the Assembly’s approved curriculum.”

In my view, it is best to take BCO 21-4 b’s use of the term “ordinarily” (which allows for leeway on the part of Presbytery) in light of BCO 21-4 c., d., and h. that immediately follow 21-4 b. That is, in some extraordinary cases an ordinand (candidate for ordination), may not be required to have completed all of the areas usually required for ordination preparation. This most often involves exemption from the study of Greek and Hebrew.

The use of the extraordinary clause is proper under certain circumstances (BCO 21-4 h. d., and c.):

1. There are extraordinary circumstances regarding the church the ordinand is being called to serve. (Those should be specified in the minutes).
2. The ordinand has proven extraordinary gifts. (The circumstances in which the ordinand has proven his extraordinary gifts should also be recorded in the minutes).
3. There are extraordinary circumstances regarding the ordinand

4. The Presbytery specifies each of the usual requirements for ordination it is willing to omit and approves such a motion by a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority vote.
5. The extraordinary clause may be used in receiving ministers from other denominations (BCO 21-4 h.; 13-6).

In any event “Presbyteries should exercise diligence and care in the use of these provisions [extraordinary clause] in order that they not prevent the ordination of a candidate for whom there are truly exceptional circumstances, nor ordain (nor receive from other denominations (BCO 13-6)) a person who is inadequately prepared for the ministry.”

The Office of the Stated Clerk may give advice and counsel regarding constitutional and procedural matters. Interpretations of *The Book of Church Order*, *The Westminster Standards*, “The Rules of Assembly Operation,” “The Operating Manual of the Standing Judicial Commission,” and/or *Robert’s Rules of Order* by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PCA or staff members of the Office of the Stated Clerk are for information only, however, and are not authoritative rulings that may only be made by the courts of the Church. Responses to inquiries are based on information supplied by the inquirer, which may not necessarily be comprehensive. The Office of the Stated Clerk does not represent parties in ecclesiastical judicial cases and may not prepare judicial cases for parties. Parties to potential cases or cases in process are responsible for their own constitutional and procedural knowledge and understanding. The Office of the Stated Clerk does not give legal advice. When legal advice is needed, professional legal counsel should be secured from one familiar with applicable laws and regulations.