# Learning about The United Church of Canada Theological Schools

# Vancouver School of Theology

## Recruiter or Admissions contact person

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## Open houses or events people can attend in coming year

Every fall around the beginning of November VST offers an all-day Open House. Guests sit in on classes, attend community worship, and learn about the admissions process.

Every winter VST has a two-day Explorer’s Weekend, usually mid February or beginning of March. Guests stay for two days. VST feeds and houses interested discerners who get an in-depth experience of VST. Explorers tour the school, socialize with students, attend worship, attend class, hear almost if not all the faculty share about their areas of passion and teaching styles, and are invited to participate in the annual G. Peter Kaye lecture series.

VST also has lecture series and workshops open to clergy, congregations, and the general public throughout the year. Two longstanding events are the Somerville Workshop in the fall and the G. Peter Kaye lectures in the winter. There are also free public lectures by visiting faculty during summer school in July.

## What programs do you offer?

On its own VST offers a series of Master’s degrees, diplomas, and a continuing education certificate. In conjunction with other institutions VST also offers a research PhD and a BA.

VST master’s degrees:

* + - * + Master of Divinity (MDiv)

‒ MDiv Honours

‒ MDiv by Extension (for Indigenous Studies students)

‒ MDiv with students at Huron College

‒ MDiv with students at Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre

* + - * + Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS)
        + Master of Arts in Indigenous and Inter-Religious Studies (MAIIS)
        + Master of Arts in Public and Pastoral Leadership (MAPPL)

‒ MAPPL with a specialization in Spiritual Care

Find out more about our [graduate degrees](https://vst.edu/students/prospective/degree-programs/graduate-degrees).

VST advanced master’s degrees and diploma:

* Master of Theology (ThM)

‒ ThM with a specialization in Indigenous and Inter-Religious Studies

* Graduate Diploma in Theological Studies

Find out more about our [advanced degrees and diploma](https://vst.edu/students/prospective/degree-programs/advanced-degrees).

VST master’s diplomas:

* Diploma in Theological Studies

‒ Through VST and through Indigenous Studies Program (ISP)

* Diploma in Denominational Studies
* Diploma in Indigenous and Inter-Religious Studies

Find out more about [master’s diplomas](https://vst.edu/students/prospective/degree-programs/certificates-diplomas).

VST partnered with Durham University in England to offer a [joint research PhD program](https://vst.edu/students/prospective/degree-programs/under_grad), currently available to Canadian citizens and landed immigrants.

VST partnered with St. Mark’s College to offer a [VST Track BA in Theology and Culture](http://stmarkscollege.ca/channels/undergraduate-programs/vst-track-ba/).

## Can people study by distance?

Yes, definitely. VST has worked hard to offer the most up to date distance technology. Students who cannot come to Vancouver full time can study from wherever they are. For example, a regular force military member “attended” class from her naval ship off the coast of Chile!

Students can take courses synchronistically (live) and asynchronistically (watch a recording of the class within the week). Synchronous distance students’ faces appear on a screen in the classroom. Everyone in the class can see and hear the distance students, and the distance students can see and hear everyone in class. It is easy to interrupt, ask questions, and be in group discussions.

Because VST is accredited through the Association of Theological Schools, 25‒30 percent of various degrees must be accomplished onsite, in person. VST has created a schedule that ensures the community is created and fostered during onsite modules. Both distance and local students take onsite modules, reinforcing relationships that are slowly built through the screen.

Distance students come to campus for a one-weekend intensive in the fall, one in the spring, and a two-week January inter-term (the first two weeks of January). Attendance during summer school is not mandatory but is another option to complete onsite requirements for distance students.

VST also has a short-term housing fund. Distance students coming to campus for an intensive can apply to the fund and receive up to 50 percent off their housing costs during their stay. There are a number of affordable housing options near the school.

## What financial support does your school offer students?

Over the years VST has been blessed—and continues to be blessed—with people who want to contribute to students’ abilities to study. VST has five entrance scholarships for which people can apply, and one final-year scholarship that VST administers. As well, number of external funding opportunities are listed on the VST website. And, VST has a very healthy bursary program. Once applicants are accepted they are welcome to apply to the bursary fund and receive up to 50 percent off their tuition (based on financial need).

## Can people take Centre for Christian Studies or Designated Lay Ministry externals with you?

Yes, CCS and DLM externals can be completed through VST.

Whether a student has an undergraduate degree or not, they are eligible to take their external courses through VST. They would take the courses as unclassified students. Then they would send the registrar a letter from the school stating they are a current student in good standing.

NB: Students with an undergraduate degree already may want to consider turning their external courses into a [VST Diploma in Theological Studies](https://vst.edu/students/prospective/degree-programs/certificates-diplomas). For example, the eight CCS externals would satisfy the requirements for a diploma—the extra step would be submitting an application to VST for the diploma program.

## What is your approach to equipping people preparing for ministry leadership?

VST is called to form and educate thoughtful, engaged, and generous Christian leaders.

To do this work the school makes available a number of resources and opportunities for learning. Ministry students have access to their Director of Denominational Formation, who will journey with them through the church and academic requirements of their degree. As well, faculty are ever present to students for questions, conversation, and further study.

With the blessing of an Inter-Religious program and Indigenous Studies program as integral parts of the school, students are also prepared for ministry leadership through the diversity of voices and viewpoints in each class. Students learn how to go deep in their understanding of their own faith tradition and wide in their understanding of other faith traditions.

The school’s week is centred around community worship in which all members of the school’s community contribute to leadership. The VSTSA (student association) creates opportunities throughout the year for community building and formation, and members of the association sit on all the school’s committees.

It is the school’s goal to equip graduates with the tools needed to interact with the joys and challenges of ministry in the world today.

## Do you have an affiliation with an undergraduate school?

YES. VST has partnered with St. Mark’s College on the University of British Columbia campus. Discerners can apply to the [St. Mark’s VST Track—BA in Theology and Culture](http://stmarkscollege.ca/channels/undergraduate-programs/vst-track-ba/) to achieve their undergraduate degree and more. While studying at St. Mark’s, students in their last two years may take all their first-year Master’s courses at VST. So, by the time students graduate they will have decreased their total study time by one whole year.

## What makes your school unique?

All of today’s theological schools must adopt innovative approaches to education. Many schools are partnering with other institutions to offer fast-track undergraduate degrees, joint PhD programs, part-time study, and distance education. VST offers all of these.

VST has also managed to provide an ecumenical classroom experience while staying true to its Christian roots. Most students come from Christian traditions from around the world, but because of the Inter-Religious program spearheaded by Rabbi Laura Duhan-Kaplan and the school’s over 35-year relationship with Indigenous communities through the Indigenous Studies Program, the student body is also made up of strong and faithful voices from faith traditions other than Christianity. The Rev. Ray Aldred (Cree) directs our Indigenous Studies program. These two programs are integrated into the curriculum of degrees. This creates a vibrant classroom learning experience and a well-practised respect and understanding for faiths other than one’s own. Ministry degree students also have the opportunity to take courses at a 90 percent reduction at the Sauder School of Business at UBC. This program of four courses results in a diploma, Excellence in Leadership, alongside the degree in ministry.

Perhaps what makes VST unique is that while enrollment in many seminaries is decreasing over time, VST enrollment has begun to increase. The year 2018 was the highest enrollment rate in 18 years. One could hear students in the hall say things like “There’s such an energy here,” “The classrooms feel full,” “There is such a great vibe. This is exciting.” Donations for the support of students and the operations of the school are also at an all-time high, indicating that our vision has struck a note with the publics we serve.

## Anything else people should know?

If you want to experience VST, VST wants to welcome you. If there are barriers to your learning—financial, educational, geographic—talk to Richard Topping, VST’s principal. He would welcome the conversation. If God is calling you to a theological education, then VST will do its part to help make that happen.