

# MINISTERIAL STANDING: A HOLISTIC PROCESS FOR UNDERGRADUATE MINISTRY FORMATION

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## *Abstract*

The assessment of ministry preparation is a constant challenge in an academic setting, especially given the changing landscape of emerging adults. Effective ministerial development is to be holistic that includes the personal, spiritual, academic, and social development of students. In order to provide a means to assess these qualities, Northwest Nazarene Universities' School of Theology and Christian Ministries has developed a formative pathway called Ministerial Standing. Ministerial Standing provides an objective rubric and portfolio to assess the student's development annually during their college experience. It also provides a means of accountability for congregations and faculty who are engaged in the formation process. This article will give an overview of this ministerial standing process and how faculty and congregations are engaged in this formative process. It will also explore some of the challenges and successes of this Ministerial Standing process.

## *Background*

In conversations over a decade ago between regional ministry leaders in the Church of the Nazarene and faculty from Northwest Nazarene University's School of Theology and Christian Ministry (STCM) we discovered that our students were successfully moving through our undergraduate program in preparation for a vocational call to full time ministry but were not holistically prepared for what awaited them in the local church. Most had done quite well in terms of academic achievement and grade point average. Their issues were varied. Some were not mature enough, not living balanced lives, moral troubles, and/or had significant debt. Some who could write fantastic papers did not relate well with others. Of course there were great successes as well – students who simply left our campus and were doing very well in local churches, graduate school, seminary education, and other ministry endeavors. But as these conversations continued, and the stories filtered back through our school we began to see more needed to happen in our sacred halls than was currently taking place.

It was during this process that I (Mark) began to envision a process that provided a holistic accountability process that was formative for our students. We wanted to provide a context for students to share about God's call on their lives to serve the Church and the Kingdom. This process provides an opportunity for us to hear their stories, the narratives of their lives, and how that narrative is developing. We recognize that many students come to us with more of a general call to ministry and need guidance and direction about how they can fulfill that call in life and ministry. Many students come to us with a narrative that is filled with hurt and pain and they need a safe place to talk about these issues.

The goal of the process was to be formative and redemptive. The evaluation process needed to be holistic to address academic success, personal & spiritual development, church leadership, and integration of theology and ministry. The interview process begins by having students share with us about their faith journeys and their call to ministry. One of our primary roles is to be a

community that helps to affirm their calling and gifts and graces for ministry. In order to develop a holistic process I developed a rubric based on a four point likert scale that included the four C's from the Course of Study preparation process: Content, Competency, Character, and Context. Each of these is briefly described below:

1. Academic Excellence (Content). Students have to maintain a 2.5 grade point average to receive ministerial scholarship. The academic areas that are assessed include writing skills, crucial thinking abilities, and communication.
2. Leadership (Competency). Students are to be actively involved in a local church ministry and engaged in either campus leadership and/or ministry leadership. Leadership also includes work experience and gifts and graces for ministry.
3. Spiritual Formation (Character). Students are asked to be accountable about their relationship with God. This includes what kinds of daily spiritual formational practices are being used to grow in grace. We also provide accountability regarding their personal development and whether there are any destructive behaviors that are hindering their relationship with God? (drinking, pre-marital sex, pornography, etc.). Students are also to submit peer reviews regarding their Christian witness.
4. Contextualization (Context). Students are asked about how they are integrating a Wesleyan theology with ministry. How does the student integrate Scripture and theology in contemporary life? And what is the primary purpose of the Church and the Church's role in the world? Students are to articulate how we are to minister in a diverse world? (See Ministerial Standing Interview below).

This process provides an opportunity for faculty to assess the growth and development during their four years at NNU. At these annual interviews, guided by faculty members, students are given areas of affirmation, areas of development, and any action items that might need to be addressed before the next meeting. They are also given feedback regarding their vocational call to ministry and how they are progressing in their understanding of that calling.

Once I (Mark) developed this process and when Dr. Mike Kipp joined our faculty he began to make this vision operational by giving leadership to the ministerial standing process. Since the beginning, the ministerial standing process has provided the faculty in the School of Theology and Christian Ministries and district leadership with a means to assess the preparedness of its graduates.

### *Student E-Portfolios*

Throughout the curriculum in the STCM we have chosen important courses and assignments that have a particular bearing on a person's ministerial development. For example during their first year students are enrolled in Introduction to Christian Ministries in which each student writes a spiritual autobiography. This paper (along with others in their ministry profile) is placed in an electronic portfolio that is accessible to the student and all faculty members of the STCM. This allows faculty to have a deeper understanding and insight into our students as they progress through our program.

In order to facilitate the process of students uploading these papers into the electronic portfolio system the syllabi of faculty require specific papers to be posted. It is then up to the faculty person to ensure they are uploaded. The list of course papers required in each course are listed below:

#### Year 1

1. *Spiritual Autobiography* from PRTH 1710 Introduction to Ministry.
2. *Philosophy of Christian Education Paper* from CHED 1810 Introduction to Christian Education

#### Year 2

3. *Applied-Ethics Paper* from PHIL 2020 Ethics
4. *History and Manual paper* from CHED 2410 History & Manual of the Church of the Nazarene.

#### Year 3

5. *Philosophy of Spiritual Formation Paper* from PRTH 3210 Spiritual Formation and Christian Discipleship.
6. *Sermon Example* from PRTH 3710 Preaching.
7. Video of Sermon from PRTH 3710 Preaching.
8. *My Philosophy of Holiness Paper* from THEO 4240 Christian Holiness.
9. *An Exegetical Paper* from BIBL 3110 Old Testament Interpretation.
10. *An Exegetical Paper* from BIBL 3120 New Testament Interpretation.

#### Year 4

11. *Pastoral Leadership in Emergent Culture* from PRTH 4802 Pastoral Leadership.
12. *Leadership Profile* from PRTH 4820 Pastoral Leadership.
13. *Theology Research Paper* from THEO 4530 Christian Theology I.
14. *Theology Research Paper* from THEO 4540 Christian Theology II.
15. *Philosophy of Pastoral Theology* from PRTH 3100 Pastoral Theology .
16. Integrative senior paper that covers;
  - a. Vocation Calling
  - b. Gifts and Experience in Ministry
  - c. Understanding of doctrine of holiness – authority of the Bible – theology of the Church
  - d. Philosophy/Theology of Ministry
  - e. Future educational plans
17. PRTH 4960 Internship material

### *Annual Interviews*

Annually all second year<sup>1</sup> students to graduating seniors go through an interview process. The seniors interview in the fall, and second and third year students interview in the spring. This timing serves two purposes: 1) divides the amount of interviews, and 2) enables graduating seniors who may not achieve ministerial standing to change their major to Applied Studies and

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<sup>1</sup> We utilize this designation rather than class designation to account for transfer students. Rarely will a first year in our school transfer student go through the interview process unless their graduation date requires it.

still “walk” in Commencement exercises in the spring. We have determined this to be the most gracious and yet honest approach to this process. We quickly found that there must be “teeth” to this process for it to fulfill its purpose of enabling us to place our endorsement on students who receive a degree from the STCM at NNU.

As part of the annual process all students submit an application for Ministerial Standing (two peer character references, and a letter of recommendation from their current pastor--not their home pastor, unless of course these are one in the same). These documents along with the assignments they have submitted electronically provide a basis for our faculty to determine how they are progressing in their ministerial thought, lifestyle, and academic progress. The names of all applicants are also submitted to the Student Development Office for approval as well. This is an important step which has uncovered important issues in the past that may have gone undetected otherwise.

Ideally the two faculty persons assigned to each student will conduct all three interviews with them during their career at NNU. It is this relationship that ensures the process will be formative as the faculty get to know each student and can determine their progress over time. We work to not hold up some ideal standard for each student to achieve but rather seek to see them personally develop over time. Below is our statement of the Ministerial Standing process that can be found in the 2012-13 NNU undergraduate catalog:

Ministerial Standing is a formative process that encourages the highest possible standards in students planning to enter vocational ministry. This process seeks to be developmental and holistic by recognizing personal growth in students over time, rather than merely applying a fixed standard uniformly. Prior to achieving Ministerial Standing, a student is considered to be in ministry observation/exploration. Ministerial Standing is mandatory for admission to the program of ministry preparation. The items assessed in the process toward acceptance are: academic excellence, personal initiative (Social Responsiveness), leadership, spiritual formation (Christ-like Character), and the ability to integrate academic learning into the local ministry context (Creative Engagement).

Students are eligible to apply for Ministerial Standing in the spring semester of their sophomore year and each year thereafter. Achieving Ministerial Standing involves an annual process of application, submission of critical assignments in ministerial training, character references from peers, NNU faculty, Student Development, and pastors, and an annual interview with a faculty team from the STCM. Students not qualifying for Ministerial Standing will be given clear feedback and encouraged to reapply the following year.

Ministerial Standing must be achieved in order to meet ordination requirements in the Church of the Nazarene and graduate with a major from the School of Theology and Christian Ministries. Students not achieving Ministerial Standing, but meeting all other degree requirements, will receive an NNU degree but not necessarily from the School of Theology and Christian Ministries. Further, Ministerial Standing will be strongly considered in awarding Religion Department scholarships as well as in making recommendations to local churches, district superintendents, and graduate schools.

The interviews are scheduled for 60 minutes, 45 minutes for the interview and 15 for the faculty team to talk about the interview, fill out the interview form, and provide feedback to the student. This is a vital part of the process in order to deliver clear information to the student regarding areas of affirmation and areas of further development. Some students are given action items that need to be addressed before next year's interview. These action items are always formative and generative for the student.

The objective of this process is to determine if students are developing holistically. The interview begins by inviting students to tell us their faith story and their call to ministry. The interview includes talking about theological issues such as Wesleyan theology, authority of the Bible, etc., but the majority of the time is spent talking with the student about their personal and spiritual lives and their calling to ministry. We cover issues of current ministry, church involvement, debt load, romantic interests and sexual boundaries. We have found this time to be much akin to a "pastoral call" with each student and their feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and specifically about the care they have felt through this process. In fact many students have suggested that the process occur twice each year!

The three possible outcomes of the interview process are: 1) Yes, 2) No – and clear feedback and action steps are provided as to why and how to get to a "yes" and 3) Not Yet. This final category allows us to step into the situation of a struggling or lazy student with very prescriptive steps to take in order to achieve Ministerial Standing. This requires extra work on the part of the interview team who agree to meet and follow up with student as needed, but has yielded very satisfactory results with several students in the past who are now successfully serving in ministry positions around the world.

### *Summary*

The benefit of the ministerial standing process is to hear students share about their deep love for God and their commitment to serve the Church and the Kingdom. Most students are earnestly seeking to understand more clearly their vocational calling and how they can participate in what God is doing in the world. The process helps faculty members become aware of the diverse issues and challenges that students face as they prepare for a life of ministry. Faculty are reminded that God is still calling young men and women to serve in the Church and they are looking for significant adults to mentor and guide them through this process. The process provides an opportunity for faculty and students to share in the broader narrative of God's story and calling. Faculty and students value this process because they recognize that the Christian life is best lived in covenant community, a community that cares deeply about their lives and calling.

## APPENDICES

**School of Theology & Christian Ministry**  
**Ministerial Standing Application**  
 School Year \_\_\_\_\_

**What is Ministerial Standing?**

Ministerial Standing is a formative process that encourages the highest possible standards in students planning to enter vocational ministry. This process seeks to be developmental and holistic by recognizing personal growth in students over time, rather than merely applying a fixed standard uniformly. The items assessed in the process toward acceptance are: academic excellence, personal initiative (Social Responsiveness), leadership, spiritual formation (Christ-like Character), and the ability to integrate academic learning into the local ministry context (Creative Engagement).

Prior to achieving Ministerial Standing, a student is considered to be in ministry observation/exploration. However, Ministerial Standing is mandatory for formal admission to a program of ministry preparation and for graduation with either a Christian Ministry or Missions major from the School of Theology and Christian Ministries. Ministerial Standing is also required for those students who are seeking to fulfill the educational requirements for ordination in the Church of the Nazarene. In addition, Ministerial Standing will be strongly considered in awarding Religion Department scholarships as well as in making recommendations to local churches, pastors, church leaders, and graduate schools.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ NNU Box # \_\_\_\_\_

Home Church: \_\_\_\_\_ Church Member: Yes No

Denomination: \_\_\_\_\_ Ministerial License: Local District

Degree: Christian Ministry Intercultural Ministry Philosophy  
 Phil/Religion

Minor: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Cumulative GPA: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Credits Completed: \_\_\_\_\_ Sophomore  
 Junior Senior

Do you plan on attending seminary? Yes No

What church are you attending in the Treasure Valley?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

What is your present church involvement while here at NNU?

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Are you involved in any campus clubs or other co-curricular activities? If so explain

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Briefly describe the area or areas of Christian service to which you believe God is directing you.

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What are the strengths that you have to offer in Christian service?

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In what ways has NNU helped to affirm your call to Christian service?

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What spiritual disciplines do you regularly practice to help you maintain a growing walk with God?

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As of now, what are your goals for Christian service after graduation from NNU?

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Please list **courses titles and professors** of your current courses:

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- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |

**ITEMS TO COMPLETE FOR APPLICATION TO MINISTERIAL STANDING:**

1. Complete the Ministerial Standing Application and submit to Mrs. Barbara Manley.
2. Submit a letter of recommendation from the supervisor of your most recent field experience or the *current pastor* of the Church in which you worship.
3. Submit two peer character references – *forms available on Angel Min. Standing Community Group*.
4. Submit all required papers to your portfolio on Angel for review by the faculty prior to your interview.

**WITH YOUR RESPONSE TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT YOU GIVE PERMISSION TO THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES TO SHARE THIS AND OTHER ACADEMIC/PERSONAL INFORMATION WITH THE APPROPRIATE FACULTY COMMITTEES.**

**Additionally, your signature serves as your affirmation that you are living in accordance with the Lifestyle Guidelines of NNU.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## **Ministerial Standing Feedback 2012**

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewers' \_\_\_\_\_

General comments

Affirmations

Areas for Development

Action Steps to be taken

Final decision regarding Ministerial Standing for 2012 – YES / NO / NOT YET

**Ministerial Standing Interview**  
**School of Theology and Christian Ministry Majors**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluation Process**

Religion Department Objectives	Outcomes (4=high)
<b>1. Academic Excellence (Content)</b>	
<b>a. Cumulative Grade Point Average:</b>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Application Is your cumulative GPA right now a good measure of your academic abilities? If not, why not?	
<b>b. Writing:</b> <i>Based on the portfolio items, what is the quality of the students writing ability?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Bb Portfolio writing samples	
<b>0-poor</b> - no clear thesis statement and/or supporting content <b>1-fair</b> - below average writing ability <b>2-average</b> - developmentally typical writing <b>3-good</b> - better than typical for student of class standing <b>4-excellent</b> - strong writing ability and style	
<b>c. Critical Thinking:</b> <i>Based on the portfolio materials, how well does the student analyze and synthesize ideas?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Bb Portfolio writing samples	
<b>0-poor</b> - little to no evidence of critical thinking <b>1-fair</b> - below average ability (based on writing samples) <b>2-average</b> - developmentally typical thinking skills <b>3-good</b> - better than typical for student of class standing <b>4-excellent</b> - strong critical thinking skills	
<b>d. Communication:</b> <i>Based on this interview, how well does the student communicate verbally?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Interview Process	
<b>0-poor</b> - little to no eye contact, inarticulate and confused speech <b>1-fair</b> - below average communication ability <b>2-average</b> - developmentally typical eye contact, body language etc. <b>3-good</b> - better than typical for student of class standing <b>4-excellent</b> - strong eye contact, poise, and thoughtfulness	
<b>2. Leadership (Competency)</b>	
<b>a. Church Involvement:</b> <i>What is the student's involvement in local church ministry?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Application	

<b>0-poor</b> - little to no church attendance <b>1-fair</b> - occasionally attends church <b>2-average</b> - attends church regularly <b>3-good</b> - attends church and involved in weekly ministry <b>4-excellent</b> - attends church involved in weekly ministry and other	
<b>b. Campus leadership/Ministry involvement:</b> <i>What is the student's involvement in leadership on campus or in other ministry setting?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Application	
<b>0-poor</b> - little to no involvement <b>1-fair</b> - some involvement <b>2-average</b> - regular pattern of weekly involvement <b>3-good</b> - non-course related involvement (not for credit) <b>4-excellent</b> - exemplary ministry leadership	
<b>c. Work Experience:</b> <i>In what ways has the student carried out responsibility through a job or ministry position?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Tell us about your past work experiences?	
<b>0-poor</b> - never worked <b>1-fair</b> - occasional part-time work <b>2-average</b> - regular pattern of part-time work <b>3-good</b> - completed summer / ongoing internships <b>4-excellent</b> - ongoing internships and summer full-time work	
<b>c. Gifts and Graces:</b> <i>In what ways has the student developed his/her gifts and graces in ministry?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Are you aware of your spiritual gifts? What are they?	
<b>0-poor</b> - little to no knowledge of spiritual gifting <b>1-fair</b> - some vague understanding of spiritual giftedness <b>2-average</b> - developmentally appropriate understanding of gifts <b>3-good</b> - understands and uses spiritual gifts <b>4-excellent</b> - frequent use of spiritual gifts in various settings	
<b>3. Spiritual Formation (Character)</b>	
<b>a. Relationship with God.</b> <i>How does the student describe his/her relationship with God?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Tell us about your relationship with God.	
<b>0-poor</b> - God is distant <b>1-fair</b> - some evidence of "God sightings" in one's life <b>2-average</b> - evidence a growing relationship with God <b>3-good</b> - better than average spiritual life <b>4-excellent</b> - solid growing faith and frequent witness of God's work	
<b>b. Personal devotions:</b> <i>What spiritual disciplines has the student cultivated in his/her personal life?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>

Question on Application	
<b>0-poor</b> - no clear devotional life <b>1-fair</b> - occasional practice <b>2-average</b> - regular pattern of some spiritual disciplines <b>3-good</b> - frequent practice of various spiritual disciplines <b>4-excellent</b> - exemplary devotional life	
<p><b>c. Christian Lifestyle:</b> <i>Does the student exemplify a Christian lifestyle?</i></p> <p>Are you living a life of witness that is contributing to God's kingdom or are there open or hidden activities, attitudes, entertainments, dress styles, etc. in your life that would make people question your relationship to the Lord?</p> <p>Given that we live in a sex saturated society and that many persons have struggled in their past or are struggling in the present, how can we help in your life to be all that God wants you to be for his Kingdom? Are there specific issues in this area that need attention? (e.g. porn, promiscuity etc.) What measures have you taken to assure you maintain sexual purity? For example, what boundaries have you established for relating to the opposite sex?</p> <p>Pornography seems to be a serious problem for many men and a growing problem for women these days, in part because of its easy availability on the Internet. How are you doing in this area?</p> <p>How are you dealing with the financial pressures that can so easily entangle us? E.g. Consumer / credit card debt? School or other loan burden that might disable you from entering ministry?</p> <p><b>0-poor</b> - little to no evidence of Christian commitment  <b>1-fair</b> - below average Christian lifestyle and practice  <b>2-average</b> - developmentally typical Christian commitment  <b>3-good</b> - better than typical for student of class standing  <b>4-excellent</b> - strong Christian lifestyle</p>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
<p><b>d. Christ-like Character:</b> <i>Does the student reflect Christ-like character through interaction with peers, faculty, &amp; staff?</i></p>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
Peer and Faculty References – integrity/lying/cheating/ etc.	
<b>0-poor</b> - little to no evidence of Christ-like Character <b>1-fair</b> - below average <b>2-average</b> – emerging conformity to Christ-like Character <b>3-good</b> - better than average <b>4-excellent</b> - strong and consistent Christ-like Character	
<b>4. Contextualization (Context)</b>	
<p><b>a. Theology:</b> <i>How does (Wesleyan) theology relate to ministry?</i></p>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>

Describe a Wesleyan understanding of ministry.	
<b>0--poor</b> - no clear understanding <b>1-fair</b> - some evidence of understanding the interdependence of theology and ministry <b>2-average</b> - a developmentally appropriate integration of theology <b>3-good</b> - better than average integration of theology <b>4-excellent</b> - a strong theologically based view of ministry	
<b>b. Bible:</b> <i>How does the student view the integration of the Bible in contemporary life?</i>	
What role does the Bible play in your day to day life?	
<b>0--poor</b> - little to no influence of the Bible in worldview <b>1-fair</b> - some evidence that the Bible influences worldview <b>2-average</b> - regular pattern of integration of the Bible in worldview <b>3-good</b> - worldview influenced by the Bible and ability to apply scripture beyond proof-texts <b>4-excellent</b> - worldview grounded in biblical theology and sound exegesis	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
<b>c. Church:</b> <i>What is the church's role in the world?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
What would you say is the Christian Church's role in the world?	
<b>0-poor</b> - little to no evidence of a developed ecclesiology <b>1-fair</b> - some evidence of developing ecclesiology <b>2-average</b> - developing ecclesiology <b>3-good</b> - better than average ecclesiology <b>4-excellent</b> - strong ecclesiology	
<b>d. Ministry:</b> <i>How do we effectively minister in a multi-worldview context?</i>	<b>0 1 2 3 4</b>
How does one effectively minister in our world?	
<b>0-poor</b> - little to no understanding of practical ministry <b>1-fair</b> - some evidence knowledge of practical ministry <b>2-average</b> - developing philosophy of ministry <b>3-good</b> - better than average developed ministry philosophy <b>4-excellent</b> - strong grasp on need to both model and practice faith	
<b>Total</b>	<b>/64</b>

**General Comments:**

**Areas of Affirmation:**

**Areas of Development:**

**Action Items: Areas that need further development before next year's interview. These items will be communicated to the student for further development.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Faculty Interview Team Signatures:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Peer Character Reference** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Pastoral Rec.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Peer Character Reference** \_\_\_\_\_

It is the recommendation of the interview team that this student be accepted to/continue in the program of Ministerial Standing at this time (yes / no / not yet).

\_\_\_\_\_