

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| to: | dr. philip krey |
| from: | rev. heidi rodrick-schnaath |
| subject: | progress report |
| date: | March 24, 2014 |
| cc: | dr. jayakiran sebastian, elizabeth brunton, john heidgard, rEV. lOUISE JOHNSON |

**December 19, 2013:** An initial response to the Lilly Grant for the Abundant Life, Student Advising Center was submitted by Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath to Dr. Phillip Krey. The memo reflected conversations with Elizabeth Brunton, Director of Financial Aid.

Following a **January 15, 2014** meeting with Louise Johnson and Ms. Brunton, Pr. Rodrick-Schnaath submitted a *Narrative Staffing Proposal* to Dr. Krey and Dean Sebastian. The text that immediately follows is a condensation of that proposal.

The Abundant Life student advising center (hereafter referred to as “the Center”) will have a regular staff which includes: Research Director, Center Director, three Student Staff members for the academic year, one Student Staff member for summer 2014, and the Director for Financial Aid.

The Research Director will analyze the effectiveness of the Center as described in the Grant proposal, along with other duties that may be assigned by the program coordinator. This person may be an existing faculty or staff member with the requisite skills or an outside researcher.

**The Center Director** will oversee organization, staff, training, publicity and resource materials for the Center. As stated in the Grant Proposal, this position will be filled by the Coordinator of Student Services. It is estimated that 20% of her time would be spent in Center activities.

**Three Student Staff** people will serve as the face-to-face resource for the Center. They will be trained to work with the Benefits Bank program and have a working knowledge of all three MDiv schedules: Co-Op, Accelerated and Traditional. They would be trained to assist students in using some of the assets in the *Personal Finance Workbook* which was used in Financial Coaching program 2012/13. They would also be advised on when it would be most appropriate to refer a student to another staff person or a Financial Coach. It is hoped that these staff members will have some background in finances, education or be enrolled in the MAPL program. Each staff person would work ten hours a week over the course of the Academic year.

One Student Staff person will work prior to Fall 2014 to set up and organize the Center prior to its opening. This person would also help to produce promotional materials, application forms, resource materials, etc.

**The Director for Financial Aid** would provide training, support and student referrals to the Center. She might also provide periodic workshops or small group sessions for students on a variety of financial topics.

# Program Goals and Outcomes

Based on the Initial Grant Proposal, the goals and outcomes for the Center may be summarized as:

* Increase student enrollment.
* Reduce debt load for full-time and part-time students.
* Enroll students in the Accelerated MDiv Program.
* Enroll students in the Co-op MDiv Program.
* Establish student advising center that would assist students with issues related to personal finances, stewardship, academic planning and candidacy completion.
* Capture information from current students to be used in future facets of the program.

At this point the outcomes hoped for in the grant proposal are too large to effectively measure outcomes on a quarterly basis. More specific goals need to be addressed by the Director of the Co-op MDiv Program and the Coordinator of Student Services in conjunction with the President, Dean and Cabinet. Questions to be answered should include:

* When is the Center projected to be open?
* Can goals for staff training be addressed in the Spring and Summer of 2014?
* Can we evaluate changes in debt load on a quarterly basis or is that something to be measured by the program researcher at the end of each year?
* How do we most effectively gather data for non-ELCA students that has not been captured in the past?
* What kind of service goals do we establish for the center? How many appointments is considered a success? What kind of appointments are a success?
* How can we assist the Admissions office and the Registrar in guiding students towards the two new models for the MDiv degree? How do we help students understand that not everyone is equipped to complete their degree in an accelerated fashion?

# Stewards of Abundance

The ELCA report on the Stewards of Abundance program which was released in February 2014, brings up some issues that will be important to consider as we move forward.

* Data analysis is solely focused on ELCA MDiv students. LTSP’s student body is far more diverse.
* Percentage of students with educational debt has remained fairly stable.
* Noticeable increases in average debt per borrower between 2006 and 2013.
* No clear relationship between debt and financial aid could be determined. [Page 2]
* Debt levels have grown because cost of education has risen, while scholarship and grant aid have remained fairly flat. [10]
* Students bear a greater responsibility for funding their tuition because of reduced giving from congregations and parishioners. [10]
* Average cost of living has increased. Impacted in part by age, marital status and family size. [Philadelphia’s cost of living is perhaps the highest of the 8 ELCA seminaries.]
* Cost of health insurance has been a large concern for students. [10]
* In at least one ELCA seminary, financial education and budgeting advice is given before financial aid is disbursed. [11]
* Many students have a limited knowledge of Financial Topics – 36%. [13]
* Students frequently have negative financial behaviors including: borrowing out of convenience rather than necessity, spur of the moment shopping decisions, shopping as entertainment, paying late bill fees.
* Students frequently unaware of how much they are paying in debt. [14]
* Students could benefit from writing a “money biography” so they can understand their financial habits more clearly.
* About half of students have a budget, but all can benefit from using one.
* “In order to graduate without debt, these respondents have to be creative in their cost-cutting efforts and assertive in their fund-raising efforts. [16]
* More than half worry about their ability to pay their bills.
* About half of pastors indicated resentment about the amount of debt they had to incur to become a pastor. [What is the impact on alumni giving?]
* A relatively small number reported that their candidacy committee encouraged them to participate in financial coaching.
* About a third of respondents said they were unaware of the Financial Coaching program. [47]
* 13-23% reported not having a coach because they didn’t think they needed one.
* Topics that interested students were:
  + Budgeting/Managing Spending
  + Options for reducing debt
  + Savings or investment strategies
  + How to be a good steward so as to teach good stewardship
  + How to think more intentionally about money
  + Options related to pension/retirement
  + Information on compensation packages
  + What makes up a credit score and how to improve it
  + Options related to health insurance
  + Scholarship information
* Some students did not participate in financial coaching due to scheduling conflicts.
* Recommendations of report include using financial education programs to attract prospective students. [70]
* Information about programs should be shared with potential donors. [70]
* More frequent conversations about finances need to take place between candidates, candidacy committees and seminaries. [71]

**Accelerated Master of Divinity**

**In early March**, Pr. Rodrick-Schnaath and Ms. Brunton , along with Senior seminarian Joshua Ferris, developed some parameters for **the Accelerated MDiv program**. Pr. Rodrick-Schnaath has developed a mock course schedule and Ms. Brunton is investigating the financial aid implications for students engaging in a continuous 24 months of studies.

The following assumptions are proposed for this program.

* Participants in the Accelerated Program (A/P) begin in the Fall only.
* Participants are a part of a Cohort. Each cohort would share a faculty advisor. Groups would be limited to six persons.
* Late admissions cannot enroll in this program.
* Students who wish to transfer to the Traditional program must do so by the end of their Spring 1 Semester.
* For the purposes of Financial Aid, the two calendar years of the program would be divided into three Academic Years.
* Students required to complete a basic unit of CPE would do so during Summer 1.
* Three courses would be designed specifically for this program:
  + 2 half credit courses held Winter 1 and Winter 2. These would be electives that would be structured to meet the specific needs of the program.
  + 10 week online course in Summer 1 which would meet the Spirituality requirement and would have intentional conversation about CPE.
* Candidates would complete the internship requirement as a Capstone Intern or as a Resident Pastor.
* At the 9 month mark of an internship beginning September 1, the intern would submit their Approval Essay. A Faculty Panel could be held in May with Faculty voting at their June meeting. The Coordinator of Student Services would work with candidates to insure they were completed with the Approval Process prior to July 1 so that they would be eligible for the October Regional Assignment.