

Finding the right fit: Profiles of Ministry, Stage II, at Dallas Theological Seminary



George Hillman is assistant professor of spiritual formation and leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Every summer, my wife and I take down a large bag of clothes from our daughter's closet as we make the yearly wardrobe switch from her school clothes to her summer clothes. Inevitably, as has happened every summer before, most of the clothes that fit her last summer no longer fit this summer. It is amazing how fast middle school girls grow. Although it would be much more

economical for our daughter to stop growing each year, little girls eventually become young ladies. So our quest for right fitting clothes continues each year.

In many ways, Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) has been on a quest for the last couple of years to find assessment instruments that "fit" its situation. As the director of the field education program, I needed a way to assess student character and readiness for ministry. After using a variety of self-made assessment tools prior to my arrival in 2002, DTS has been using Profiles of Ministry Stage II for the last couple of years. Let me share what we have learned as a larger nondenominational evangelical seminary in implementing this wonderful assessment tool.

Benefits of Profiles of Ministry

Richer internship exit interviews

The greatest benefit of using Profiles of Ministry program instruments has been seen in our internship exit interviews. Each student is required to have a ninety-minute exit interview with his or her internship coordinator (our department's professional field educators) at the conclusion of the internship. During these interviews the student's vocational clarity, understanding of strengths and weaknesses, plans for lifelong

learning, and theological reflection are discussed. The scores from Profiles of Ministry Stage II have become an objective starting point for many of these conversations with our students.

All of the areas discussed in the Personal Characteristics section of the *Interpretive Manual* (Responsible and Caring, Family Perspective, Personal Faith, and Potential Negative Tendencies) provide a gold mine of conversation and reflection material for our internship coordinators during these exit interviews. We are particularly finding rich discussions with our students on their scores of Personal Responsibility, Perceptive Counseling, Ministry Precedence over Family, and Belief in a Provident God. Profiles of Ministry Stage II and its use of case studies is fortunately bringing to the surface many of these crucial issues that were remaining invisible prior to our implementation of this assessment tool.

We currently use only the *Casebook* and the *Field Observations* with our internships, but we will be piloting the use of the *Interview* with our students this fall. The decision to add this important final component of Profiles of Ministry Stage II has come as a result of the successes we have seen from using the *Casebook* and *Field Observations* in these internship exit interviews. We believe that the insights gained from the *Interview* component will only add more potential discussion points with our students.

Assessment of seminary competencies

Another benefit is that Profiles of Ministry deals with a wide variety of issues that can be integrated into our seminary's competency measures. Our seminary has six core competencies for student development in the areas of biblical interpretation, theology, communication, Christian spirituality, servant leadership, and cultural engagement. Every intern at our seminary must have developmental goals for his or her internship, based on four of the six core competencies:

- ♦ *Christian Spirituality*—“The student, by means of the Spirit, demonstrates increasing love and devotion to God and loving service to others.”
- ♦ *Servant Leadership*—“The student models servant leadership and equips others in a God-given direction through Christlike character, leadership capability, and love.”
- ♦ *Communication*—“The student is able to persuade others with respect to biblical and

theological truth through oral, written, and electronic media.”

- ♦ *Cultural Engagement*—“The student demonstrates appreciation for the contributions of different cultures and is committed to evangelism and biblically based ministry with appropriate engagement with people in those cultures.”

What Profiles of Ministry Stage II provides is a snapshot of where our students are in relation to these specific competencies. Instead of having our interns and on-site field education mentors complete a battery of assessments on each student, Profiles of Ministry Stage II gives us the variety that we need for our competencies in a single assessment instrument. The class scores from Profiles of Ministry can then be used by our school in tailoring learning environments for student development.

Tailorings for a large nondenominational seminary

Physical dispersion and number of students

With the benefits, there have also been some tailorings that we have had to do to make Profiles of Ministry fit our setting. One challenge has been size. Dallas Theological Seminary is no different from other seminaries working with a more physically dispersed student body. Besides the campus in Dallas, we also maintain extension sites in Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Atlanta, and Tampa, as well as online formats. Another contributing factor is that we allow students to complete their internships globally. So even if we are working with a Dallas campus student, that student might be fulfilling his or her internship by serving at a church in inner city Chicago or working with a mission school in India. With a student population of approximately 1,800 students spread around the world, it is challenging to distribute and collect the Profiles of Ministry material.

The good news is that an important time saver is now offered. This summer The Association of Theological Schools made the *Field Observations* for Profiles of Ministry Stage II available online. Our first wave of online *Field Observations* will come in this fall, and I am anticipating that having this form online will save my staff many hours of collating. Instead of having six answer sheets to keep track of (one *Casebook* answer sheet and five *Field Observation* answer sheets), my administrative staff will have to deal with

only the *Casebook* answer sheet. Also, having the *Field Observation* online will help eliminate the need to mail “replacement” *Field Observations* around the world to student or field observers who misplaced these forms (which is a constant request considering the number of forms that leave our office each semester).

Wording for nondenominational evangelicals

Another challenge has been wording. Because The Association of Theological Schools represents such a broad variety of denominations and Christian traditions, some of the wording and theological views of the Profiles of Ministry do not necessarily connect with our students or churches. Many students at our seminary come from nonliturgical backgrounds with either loose or nonexistent denominational ties. Words such as “parish” and “Eucharist” have little contextual meaning for these students or churches. This has sometimes created a barrier for our students working through the *Casebook* and for our field observers working through the *Field Observation*.

The *Casebook* and *Field Observation* instructions provide information about the use of certain terms in the questions. We have addressed this language barrier by emphasizing and elaborating these mental word substitutions for our students and field observers to assist them in completing the forms:

- ♦ *Parish, Congregation, or Church*—“The ministry venue where he/she is serving”
- ♦ *Worship, Eucharist, Mass*—“Leading of worship either in front of the entire congregation or in front of his/her ministry venue”
- ♦ *Teaching or Preaching*—“Presenting a lesson either in front of the entire congregation or in front of his/her ministry venue”

With these suggestions, most people are able to make the mental substitutions needed to complete the *Casebook* and *Field Observation*.

Nontraditional vocations

A final challenge has been with nontraditional vocations. Besides traditional pastors and missionaries, we are supervising internships for school teachers, curriculum developers, biblical researchers, chaplains, media arts technicians, conference speakers, webmasters, and authors. While Profiles of Ministry Stage II is a more natural assessment for traditional ministerial roles,

Selected highlights of the spring Graduating Student Questionnaire

The 2007–08 group profile from this spring's *Graduating Student Questionnaire* included 4,937 responses from 137 schools. The following highlights should provide a helpful sketch of the overall findings.

Overall assessments of the seminary experience were positive:

- A list of sixteen statements explored graduates' satisfaction with their seminary experience. The three most important sources were *Faculty were supportive and understanding, I have been satisfied with my academic experience here, and If I had to do it over, I would still come here.*
- 79.2 percent of MDiv students rated their field education or internship experience *Important* or *Very important*. For these students, the two top effects of field education/internship were *Improved pastoral skills* and *Better idea of my strengths and weaknesses.*

Financial support and debt continue to be of concern among graduating seminarians:

- 62.1 percent of graduates brought no educational debt with them. 8.7 percent came with a debt load of \$30,000 or more.
- 43.0 percent of graduates incurred no new educational debt during seminary while 22.3 percent had a debt load of \$30,000 or more at the time of their graduation.
- 12.6 percent of graduates had a monthly payment for educational debt of \$500 or more.
- The three most important sources of income for graduates included *Scholarship/grant, Off-campus work, and Spouse's work.*

In thinking about future employment, fewer than half of all graduates anticipate full-time parish ministry:

- 47.8 percent of MDiv graduates anticipated full-time parish ministry. The next two areas were *Undecided* and *Hospital or other chaplaincy.*
- 18.2 percent of non-MDiv graduates anticipated full-time parish ministry. The next two areas were *Undecided* and *Other.* ♦

some of the questions do not connect with these more nontraditional roles. This challenge is most obvious in the *Field Observations*, since many of the people completing these questions have not seen the student in the church settings that are described. Still we believe so strongly in the benefits of Profiles of Ministry that we are having all of our students complete the materials as a part of their internships. Our rationale is that every student will need to learn how to function in a leadership role in a local church, whether or not he or she is fulfilling a more traditional ministerial role.

One solution has been to provide a guide for our field observers. In these unique settings for our nontraditional vocation students, we have developed a list of *Field Observation* "essential questions." These questions relate to Fidelity to Task and Persons, Commitment Reflecting Religious Piety, Christian Spirituality, Self-Serving Behavior, Self-Protecting Behavior, Intuitive Domination of Decision Making, and Clarity of Thought and Communication. As noted in the previous section, these characteristics directly correspond to our school's core competencies. A chart is provided to these field observers, guiding them through approximately half of the questions in the *Field Observation* booklet. Our reason is simple—we would rather receive some information from a field observer than to have a field observer become frustrated and not complete the *Field Observation* at all. We believe that every one of our field observers should be able to answer these selected questions with relative ease.

Finding the right fit

Compared to many of our sister schools using Profiles of Ministry, Dallas Theological Seminary is a relative "newbie." As with any newbie, there are growth spurts and adjustments that need to be made along the way. We are still in the process of trying to find the right fit for making Profiles of Ministry run smoothly with our students. More importantly, we are constantly trying to adjust our own system so that the students are getting the maximum benefit from the treasures that are found in the Profiles of Ministry scores. But we love how the clothes are fitting so far. ♦

RESOURCE

The GSQ is administered to students just prior to graduation. It collects demographic and financial information about students and inquires about levels of satisfaction with aspects of their seminary experience and intended work after graduation.

This instrument along with the ESQ and AQ provide valuable information for multiple-year assessment of your school as well as comparison with other participating ATS member schools through use of the Total School Profile. The data are useful for institutional assessment, planning, marketing, and recruitment. Many of the reported items relate directly to the standards of the ATS Commission on Accrediting. Visit www.ats.edu > Resources > Student Information to learn more.