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Models of Assessing Institutional and Educational Effectiveness: The Pilot School Project

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Continuing the Conversation

Theological Education invites short responses to articles published in this issue to encourage and promote conversation among its readers. Reader responses should be fewer than 1500 words and may be edited for length. Please send responses to Managing Editor, ATS, 10 Summit Park Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1103 <merrill@ats.edu>.

Theological Education, the journal of The Association of Theological Schools, is devoted solely to issues and ideas in graduate theological education in North America. The journal supports the mission of the Association by: (1) providing a forum for scholarly discourse on current issues and trends in graduate theological education in the United States and Canada; (2) addressing the contemporary issues facing the community of theological schools; (3) sharing models of critical analysis and effective practice in theological education; and (4) recording the changes and advances in theological education.

Introduction

Daniel O. Aleshire
The Association of Theological Schools

With the adoption of redeveloped accrediting standards in 1996, the ATS Commission on Accrediting had the major task of overseeing the implementation of the new standards during the 1996-1998 biennium, according to a general plan adopted by the Association concurrent with the adoption of the standards. The 1996 standards include many normative expectations that had been absent or only minimally present in previous editions of the standards, resulting in new expectations of schools seeking ATS accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation.

To help schools learn how to meet these new expectations, eight institutions accepted the Commission's invitation to become "Pilot Schools." These eight institutions were chosen from among all schools anticipating a comprehensive evaluation visit in 1998 or early 1999, and they reflected a variety of characteristics to which ATS accreditation must attend: U.S. and Canadian; Roman Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, and Mainline Protestant; freestanding and college- or university-related; accreditation by ATS and different regional associations; and their experience of some of the variety of institutional factors influencing ATS member schools; enrollment growth, financial stress, increasingly pluralistic student bodies, and the range of degree program offerings, for example.

With funding provided by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, the Teagle Foundation, and the Pew charitable Trusts, the Pilot School Project provided several days of consultation to each school. The consultations focused on efforts to assess institutional and educational effectiveness and to reflect theologically on those approaches to assessment. In addition, the Pilot Schools received one or more ATS staff consultation visits, and their self-study coordinators met several times during the project's two-year duration.

Each of the Pilot Schools has now received its comprehensive accreditation evaluation visit, and in the context of its self-study, each has developed a unique approach to the assessment of educational and institutional effectiveness. Representatives from each Pilot School made presentations at the 1998 Biennial Meeting regarding their approaches to assessment, and the articles comprising this edition of *Theological Education* constitute the final reports of their work to the Association as a whole.

One of the goals of the Pilot School Project was the development of models for assessing educational effectiveness that could be considered for adaptation by other member schools. Each of the approaches reflected in these essays is unique to the theological school that invented it—which is characteristic of most good models of assessment. Because the educational goals, ecclesiastical contexts, and institutional missions vary among ATS accredited schools, it is unlikely that any one assessment approach—or even a group of assessment approaches—will be appropriate for any one school. These case studies tell the stories of eight schools that are attempting to develop models for assessing educational effectiveness that are appropriate to the scholarly and educational goals of these schools and faithful to the religious communities they serve.

The efforts of the Pilot Schools reported in these essays are important first steps in developing educationally and theologically informed approaches to educational evaluation. The assessment of educational effectiveness is not a fad or temporal issue in higher education. Accreditation will continue to examine, with increasingly high expectations, the capacity of institutions to assess the degree to which, and the ways in which, educational goals have been attained. The 1996 ATS accrediting standards focus on the assessment of educational effectiveness in the context of the degree program standards for each degree approved by the Commission on Accrediting, as well as on other aspects of institutional life (especially: 1. Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation; 5. Library and Information Resources; 6. Faculty; 7. Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, and Placement; 8. Authority and Governance; and 9. Institutional Resources—all of which have focused sections regarding evaluation).

With new expectations on schools to demonstrate their educational effectiveness, the Pilot School Project has sought to help theological schools avoid two common problems in educational evaluation. The first is the tendency to adopt measures that are easy to implement but are reductionistic with regard to the nuanced and complex goals of theological education. (How many M.Div. students pass denominational ordination exams or obtain appropriate employment may be easy to determine, but likely will not identify the way in which important educational goals have been obtained.) The second is a tendency to let the educational assessment technology take evaluation in directions that a school's theological sensitivities would not support. (A Roman Catholic theologate cannot be content with assessment that focuses on academic accomplishment and avoids issues of spiritual formation for ministerial priesthood.)

The Pilot School Project invited eight schools to think about assessing their educational effectiveness in ways that are congruent with and appropriate to their vocation as theological schools. Every ATS school, as it engages the work of self-study for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation, will need to do the same thing.

The language of "outcomes assessment" has become ubiquitous in North American higher education. It takes many forms—ranging from an empirical technology of evaluation to a higher education version of "total quality management" to more subtle patterns of understanding the evidences of learning and attainment of an institution's educational goals. Because the meanings of the same phrases vary in higher education research and higher education accreditation, it is helpful to read the reports of the Pilot Schools in the context of the Commission on Accrediting's formally adopted commentary about educational and institutional evaluation, which is published in Section Five of the ATS Handbook of Accreditation. The Handbook describes the general model of evaluation that the Commission understands to be operative in the accrediting standards and notes several cautions regarding the use of the model of evaluation in theological education.

The general model of evaluation requires schools to identify the goals of their institutional or educational efforts, then to collect appropriate information that will provide a reasonable basis for assessing the attainment of these goals. Once the information has been gathered, the school engages the work of assessment: which conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the information? Then, schools need to complete the cycle either by reaffirming goals or strategies to attain those goals or to revise the goals or strategies. The Handbook describes each of the six evaluation models in greater detail.

Tasks of the General Model of Evaluation

The first task of evaluation focuses on the goals of a theological school and asks two important questions. The first question is normative: Are these the goals an accredited school should have for its various areas of work, in terms of the agreed-upon commitments of the community of theological schools expressed by the ATS standards? The ATS accrediting standards define many goals for ATS accredited theological schools. For example, standards regarding theological scholarship faculty, library, student services, institutional resources, extension education, and degree programs contain references to goals expected to be pursued by accredited schools. While the standards give autonomous institutions wide latitude in the identification and implementation of particular goals, the standards are normative, and institutional goals should be evaluated in light of the expectations expressed by the ATS standards. The second question is contextual: Are these goals the right ones for this institution, at a particular point in its history, in the context of the issues confronting the particular religious communities it serves, and in light of the institution's broader mission and purpose? Periodically, good schools ask, for example, if their goals for degree programs are the ones most important for religious leadership, in a particular tradition, at a particular time. Accreditation evaluation committees need to review the school's own analysis of its institutional and educational goals.

Once goals are properly established, the second task of the evaluation process is identifying the kind of qualitative or quantitative information that will be needed to assess the attainment of those goals. If a school has a system of information-gathering in place, the self-study should review comprehensively the information that has been collected to determine: (1) if the right kind of information is being collected; (2) if the information is being collected in usable forms; and (3) if the school is using the information effectively in the evaluation process. For many ATS schools, which have not developed an overall process of information-gathering, the self-study will need to begin by auditing the information that is available to determine what data will inform the self-study evaluation. In addition, the self-study should lead to recommendations about (1) the kinds of information that should be collected and (2) the institutional system necessary to collect the information over time. In the effort to identify appropriate forms of information-gathering, schools should not give priority to quantitative forms of information over qualitative ones. Numerical information is not necessarily more helpful or valuable in determining the extent to which goals have been attained than qualitative forms of information. Numerical information may be preferable for the evaluation of some goals (i.e., efforts to keep student debt at reasonable levels), and qualitative information for other goals (i.e., the extent to which the M.Div. program has contributed to students' growth in the theological understanding and moral sensitivity). "Good" information is the kind of information that provides an appropriate resource for the thoughtful evaluation of the goal to which it is related. Accreditation evaluation committees have the responsibility to determine whether or not a school has sufficient and appropriate information to support its self-study conclusions and recommendations, and to provide a basis for determining the attainment of goals in the future.

The third task in the overall evaluation model is assessment, the task of analyzing and interpreting the information that has been collected. The term "assessment" refers to the activities involved in determining what the information or data mean, and asks the question: To what extent, and in what ways, have the goals been attained? Information alone, no matter how rich or sophisticated, cannot answer this question. The important goals in theological education are complex and require human judgment and reflection, based on reasonable patterns of information. In many ways, assessment should be the primary activity of the self-study. Self-study subcommittees should use much of their time assessing the ways in which, and the extent to which, the institution is achieving its goals. Accreditation evaluation committees have the responsibility of confirming or not confirming the assessment made by the school in its self-study. One of the committee's primary evaluative functions is assessment: reviewing the conclusions the school has reached about itself on the basis of the goals the school has identified and the information gathered related to these goals. Does the external peer review of the accreditation committee lead to the same conclusions as the school's self-evaluation?

The final phase of the evaluation process involves making decisions about the goals and the activities that have been devised to achieve the goals. This is the process of translating the results of the assessment phase into appropriate plans of institutional action. In the context of the self-study, this task typically takes the form of recommendations regarding refining or establishing goals, or designing or revising institutional or educational programs. Effective schools can identify appropriate actions or revised goals, and over time, demonstrate the capacity to implement them. Accreditation evaluation committees have the responsibility to review the capability of schools to implement the plans they have made in the past, and, based on institutional information and ability, reasonably to implement the recommendations proposed in the self-study.

Cautions about the Use of the General Model of Evaluation

The general model of evaluation in the ATS standards describes an ongoing institutional activity that accredited schools must implement. The model, however, must be used thoughtfully and, in many ways, cautiously—both by schools and accreditation committees.

First, this model is orderly and linear, and life in theological schools (described as "communities of faith and learning" in the standards) is not always orderly; and more likely non-linear than linear. A compulsive and unreflective use of this model could turn the work of theological schools into technology-driven, cause-and-effect performance that would not serve well the theological vision or the most profound goals of a theological school. Technology, whether electronic or evaluative, is a necessary support system for complex institutions, but an ineffective system of leadership.

Second, the general model of evaluation places a premium on goals and the information that is needed to determine the extent to which the goals have been attained. One temptation in goal-oriented systems is to set goals at readily attainable levels instead of the levels truly required by the institution's purpose, or to set goals for which information can be easily obtained. The necessity of information for the evaluation process should not dictate the character of the goals.

Third, a good evaluation system should have some open space in it because some important institutional or educational effects may occur without intentional planning. The evaluative model, while it focuses on goal attainment, should be able to account for unintended positive outcomes of institutional and educational life.

With due caution, schools accredited by ATS need to implement comprehensive, continuous evaluative efforts, even though it is difficult work. The primary task of a theological school is theological scholarship (understood in the standards as learning, teaching, and research), and the school cannot spend more energy on evaluation than on its primary task. However, evaluation is the only way the school will know if and how it is accomplishing its primary task, and evaluation is sufficiently important that it merits institutional energy and resources. Evaluation, in a school that understands its primary task theologically, is an aspect of stewardship. Evaluation helps a school to understand if it is accomplishing its important tasks: Have students learned what needs to be learned? Has the teaching contributed to the formation and knowledge of religious leaders? Is the school using its scarce resources in the ways that most effectively help it accomplish its purpose?

ATS Resources for Use in Evaluation

In addition to the emphasis that the 1996 accrediting standards have placed on evaluation, and the effort of the Pilot School Project to begin the development of adaptable models of evaluation, ATS has developed several resources that institutions may use in their evaluative efforts.

Resources for Educational Evaluation

The ***Profiles of Ministry Program*** has a long record of use among ATS member schools. This resource assesses first-year and graduating students on a variety of personal and ministerial characteristics, identified by clergy and lay people across North America as important or potentially detrimental to the work of ministry.

The ***Student Information Project*** includes a questionnaire for entering students that provides helpful background on their sense of call, the reasons for choosing a particular school, and related recruitment, enrollment, and financial aid information. A graduating student questionnaire asks students to evaluate their theological education in such areas as personal growth, development of skills related to their future work, and the level of satisfaction with the services and academic resources they received.

Resources for Institutional Evaluation

Institutional Peer Profile Reports are computed annually for each ATS member school. The report compares the school to its self-selected peers in areas such as applications, admissions, and matriculation; enrollment by degree program; income and expenditures; and salaries. This information can be used as a resource in the evaluation of several institutional areas of work.

The ***Strategic Information Report*** was jointly developed by the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education and ATS. It focuses on key strategic indicators that provide helpful resources for both evaluation of institutional effectiveness and strategic planning. The ***Strategic Information Report*** will be computed for each ATS member school every third year.

These various resources are services of the Association, and they provide information that can assist institutions in the development of appropriate patterns of evaluation. Some are offered without charge as a member benefit; others are offered on a fee basis. None is required of ATS schools; schools should develop overall models for assessing institutional and educational effectiveness that are appropriate to their own missions and goals and implement the standards effectively. Many schools will find one or all of these resources uniquely helpful.

These resources have been developed in a variety of projects, largely with funding provided by Lilly Endowment Inc.

The ATS Commission on Accrediting and the ATS membership as a whole are indebted to the eight schools for engaging their self-studies in a process of asking complex educational questions, groping for appropriate responses, and implementing them in preliminary ways—all in a theologically reflective frame of reference.

Developing New Evaluative Structures and Procedures

Susan E. Davies
Bangor Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT: Informal evaluation systems that had served Bangor Theological Seminary well in the past were considered insufficient in light of changes in the culture, theological education, the ATS accrediting standards, and in the school's institutional context and forms. Two new degree programs were designed with specified goals and competencies, and evaluative structures specific to each program. In the process of redesigning the Master of Divinity curriculum, structures of evaluation and a statement of measurable goals and objectives were integrated into the program design. In the process of creating more formal mechanisms for evaluation, there also evolved a recommitment to think more theologically about the core values of the theological education offered at the seminary.

> *Bangor Theological Seminary is an ecumenical seminary in the Congregational tradition of the United Church of Christ.*
>
> *It is committed to:*
>
> - *Equip men and women for the work of Christian ministries;*
> - *Serve as an intellectual center for the continuing sustenance and transformation of the church and the world;*
> - *Provide for the study of religion; and*
> - *Embody a public ministry within the local communities of northern New England.*
>
> *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth."*
> *Rev. 21:1*

One of the most important benefits of Bangor Seminary's self-study process has been the recommitment to the mission of the institution and a renewed sense of the value of the seminary's mission statement. The statement with which this report begins was revised through the self-study and serves us very well. It reflects our life and our institutional commitments honestly and faithfully. By its brevity and specificity, it permits and encourages regular assessment of any program or structure.

The revised statement incorporated three substantive changes: (1) It made the word "ministries" plural in the description of equipping for Christian ministry; (2) it added the words "and the world" to the statement about an intellectual center; and (3) it added the phrase "provide for the study of religion."

The first of these changes emphasizes the seminary's commitment to training people for a variety of ministries, both those requiring and not requiring ordination. This reflects no lessening of the school's commitment to training ordained ministers. Rather, the plural language better reflects the school's interest in training people for many forms of Christian service, including but not restricted to ordained pastoral leadership.

The second revision reflects the seminary's strong commitment to providing an intellectual center that has an impact on the world, as well as the church.

The third revision reflects the seminary's expanding understanding of the Master of Theological Studies degree. Our experience with this degree suggests that there is a broad interest in Maine in the study of religion, and that the seminary can help meet this need, including through continuing education. Historically, Bangor Theological Seminary has educated people who already had made a faith commitment or were seeking such a commitment. This addition to the Mission Statement does not reflect a change in the seminary's commitment to educating these persons. However, other people express an interest in and desire for gaining greater knowledge of religious traditions, both their own and others, in order to function effectively in a multicultural society and multicultural church. This revision underscores the seminary's pledge to work with such persons.

Congregationalists founded Bangor Theological Seminary (BTS) in 1814, in what was then the northern part of Massachusetts, in order to provide a learned clergy for the region. The school understands itself as an ecumenical institution with multiple communities of accountability. Its trustees, administration, faculty, staff, student body, and alumni/ae reflect the broad spectrum of centrist Protestant Christianity.

Bangor is one of the seven seminaries of the United Church of Christ. Like its ecclesiastical covenant partner, the seminary is committed to a style of church life that promotes dialogue between people of faith and society. To serve within the United Church of Christ context requires a social as well as a personal vision. At the same time, the Congregational tradition in which the seminary stands looks back to the Reformation emphasis on the minister as pastor and teacher, stressing intellectual skills and ability as keys to effective ministry. Because the school has had such a high regard for the demanding canons of scholarship, it has been able to encompass and thrive upon considerable intellectual and ecclesiastical diversity.

It was among the first American seminaries to offer courses featuring the historical-critical study of the Bible, the newer theologies inspired by Schleiermacher and Bushnell, and a historical understanding of the development of Christian doctrine. The school continues that tradition of openness to newer scholarship by its welcoming attitude toward theologies that reflect and inform the cultural experiences of people of color, women, and gay and lesbian persons, as well as critical new biblical, theological, historical, and ethical perspectives.

Historically, Bangor Seminary has had a student body of approximately 100, with a faculty that has ranged from six to nine. The current roster of full-time teaching faculty is eight, with the president and librarian completing the faculty. The present enrollment is 181 full- and part-time students, with 86.11 FTE. In 1991 the school added two new degrees, the Doctor of Ministry and the Master of Theological Studies, bringing to three the number of degrees offered. In addition, the seminary has a unique program in its Bangor Plan, which allows students without undergraduate degrees to enter a two-year Liberal Studies program of preparation for theological study. Upon completion of those two years, students enter the three-year M.Div. program, at the completion of which they receive the Seminary Diploma. When they have finished their undergraduate degree at another institution, they receive their M.Div. degree.

Bangor Seminary presently has two locations, in Bangor and Portland, Maine, and a third service area in New Hampshire and Vermont, where a new program of continuing education is shaped by the needs of ecumenical congregations and clergy in the region. One faculty member currently resides in Portland; the other faculty have Bangor as their primary campus location. All faculty teach on both campuses in courses that are offered during the day and evening in three-hour time blocks. When the D.Min. is offered in the New Hampshire/Vermont region, all faculty teach in that program as well, on a rotating basis. The M.T.S. and Doctor of Ministry degrees are approved at both campuses; the M.Div. is approved at the Bangor location.

The Self-Study Process

The basic structure for the Bangor self-study was determined in 1995-96 during President Ansley Coe Throckmorton's first year. The first committee meetings were held in January 1996. That summer, the seminary accepted an invitation from The Association of Theological Schools to become part of a pilot project for its redeveloped standards.

In the context of the Pilot School Project and the extension of time for the self-study that it provided, we decided to make the review process as broadly inclusive and comprehensive as possible. Trustees, students, and alumni/ae were invited to serve on committees, including the self-study Steering Committee. A faculty member chaired or co-chaired each of the self-study committees, and five faculty served on the Steering Committee. The three co-chairs were two professors and the chair of the Board of Trustees, who is an alumnus. Other members of the committee included trustees, the president, the academic dean, two other professors, a student, and an alumna. As a Pilot School, we also had access to two consultants: Penina Glazer, a professor at Hampshire College, served as an educational consultant and Jane Smith of Hartford Seminary served as a theological consultant.

Overall the process worked well. The Steering Committee worked with the various chairs, and there was a lively and critical dialogue among the various components of the school. The process yielded few surprises, some formal recommendations, and a wealth of suggestions for improvement. The most serious problem we encountered was the length of time required by the self-study and the subsequent cost in energy and focus. We began our work in January 1996 and delivered the completed study to our accreditors in the summer of 1998. From this experience we would strongly recommend that schools devote no more than one to one and a half years to the self-study.

Overall Findings: Change

The decade and more between 1986 and 1998 marked significant changes in the culture, in theological education generally, and in the shape of our own programs and institutional patterns. Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students identified the following ten major events and changes that continue to affect the "what" and "how" of our institutional life:

1. ***Changes in church and culture***. The "sidelining" of mainline Protestant churches has accelerated during the last decade. Evangelical Protestants now equal in number mainstream Protestants, after trailing mainstream Protestants for most of the century. Generally speaking, one trend is toward conservative religiosity. Another is the accelerating secularization of the culture. Increasing numbers of students arrive at seminary without either significant church experience or even a formal church connection. Many are influenced by New Age movements, as well as by twelve-step recovery programs. All these shifts affect a centrist seminary at a time when the center—culturally, politically, economically, and religiously—no longer holds.

2. ***Increasing complexity of theological education everywhere***. Signs of this complexity abound: (a) Paperwork demands have increased dramatically (more record-keeping, more stringent requirements about confidentiality, more regulations about handling student course papers); (b) The processing of student aid requires more expertise. Previously, one staff person handled both housing and student aid. Now a specialist is needed rather than a "learned amateur"; (c) Marketing and public relations have become essential. It is no longer possible to count on the "old church network" to keep the seminary's name in front of the public; and (d) There have been significant changes in the cost and financing of theological education. Government loans have been a blessing for students, but an unintended consequence is that congregations and, to a great extent, denominations have felt relieved of their obligation to fund the training of clergy. In addition, the cost of an M.Div. degree has increased significantly, as has the total accumulated student debt.

3. ***Changing student (and faculty) profiles***. During this past decade BTS has shifted from a residential to a commuting school. In the 1980s almost all

students and all faculty lived on campus. Today, nearly all students and all faculty live off campus. Some students travel six or seven hours round-trip to attend a day of classes. Others stay on campus one or two nights per week in order to attend classes, but fewer and fewer students live full-time as residential students in seminary housing. The teaching members of the faculty commute regularly to teach courses in Hanover (D.Min.), Portland, and Bangor. Increasingly, the faculty shares the work pattern of a largely nonresidential, commuting student body. The formation of a seminary community requires new and intentional strategies.

4. ***Loss of a distinctive niche***. Bangor enjoyed a special niche in theological education with its Bangor Plan. The Plan combined graduate and pre-graduate education so that the M.Div. was awarded upon a student's completion of a baccalaureate degree, subsequent to completion of requirements for the M.Div. The 1996 ATS standards clarified previous practices about inclusion of persons without a baccalaureate degree and, subsequently, BTS no longer had a unique educational track. Several consequences have followed. First, we have lost our competitive appeal for some prospective students. Second, we have lost some financial stability because we can no longer count on the predictable tuition revenue generated by Bangor Plan students over a given five-year period.

5. ***School in Three Places***. In 1991, two new educational sites were opened in Portland, Maine (at State Street Congregational Church) and in Hanover, New Hampshire (at the Church of Christ at Dartmouth). The decision to move the seminary into these new settings was driven in part by mission and in part by financial considerations.

The foremost reason for this new model was the commitment shared among trustees, administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni/ae to the mission of this seminary. This model has made it possible for us to provide theological education for ministry throughout southern Maine, as well as in New Hampshire and Vermont in ways unimagined only years before. The development of the School in Three Places was spurred on by considerations inspired by mission (equipping changing congregations in northern New England), by demographic assessments (Portland had a large population base and no theological school), and by desire to expand the donor base in areas not yet tapped for development. The Hanover location has since been closed.

6. ***Two new degree programs***. In 1988, the seminary began offering course work toward an M.T.S. degree in Bangor and Portland. By 1991, we were offering the M.T.S. and the D.Min. in three locations (Hanover, Portland, and Bangor). In 1998 the M.T.S. is no longer offered in Hanover, although the D.Min. will continue to be offered in the region.

7. ***Computerization***. In 1991, the grant from Lilly Endowment that supported the development of the new model of a School in Three Places also funded the computerization of the school and the linking of faculty and staff by electronic mail and the Internet. A subsequent grant from the Henry Luce Foundation in

1997 has made possible a major upgrade of the computer system, including seminary-wide access to the World Wide Web.

8. ***Numerous shifts in personnel and in academic and administrative structures***. During the past twelve years, there has been a considerable turnover in staff and faculty as well as significant reorganizations of work. These changes have left fewer people doing more work.

9. ***Shift from a tenure to a contract system.*** In 1986-87 the trustees voted to move the institution from a tenure to a contract system for faculty. Like many changes, its consequences were not apparent when the decision was made. Its impact has been real, although not necessarily visible immediately.

10. ***Intensification of the "Two Maines."*** The national economic recovery in the 1990s has been slow in New England generally, slower in southern Maine, and slower still in northern Maine. An economic, social, and cultural division exists within the state that is frequently described in terms of "Two Maines": a prosperous southern Maine oriented toward Boston and a northern Maine mistakenly caricatured as uniformly rural and poor. In his 1998 State of the State address, Governor Angus King inaugurated a "One Maine" program designed specifically to overcome this growing gap.

Academic Planning and Evaluation

In the face of these changes in the culture, in theological education generally, in the redeveloped ATS standards, and in our own institutional context and forms, the self-study process provided an opportunity to examine our academic planning and evaluation. Our primary finding has been that the complex systems of informal evaluation, which had been central to the faculty's regular review of program effectiveness, were no longer sufficient in the changed environment.

Previous Academic Planning and Evaluation Processes

M.Div. Curriculum Review. When nearly all the approximately 100 students and all faculty lived on campus and there was only one degree program, curriculum review was facilitated by the faculty's intimate awareness of the academic, spiritual, and personal situation of each student. Time was regularly devoted during weekly faculty meetings to review concerns about any student. The curriculum was regularly examined in faculty meetings for its effectiveness in assisting each student toward the goals of the degree. Class schedules and sizes were adjusted by the dean based on regular review by the faculty in meetings. Curriculum outcomes assessment regarding student learning was regular and ongoing. The loop was closed through committee work and faculty discussion.

Liberal Studies Review. Before the increased litigiousness of the '90s, faculty often served as pastoral counselors for students, giving faculty personal knowledge of student situations, spiritual growth, and academic progress. The only adjunct faculty were those teaching in the Liberal Studies program of the

Bangor Plan, and they met each semester with the entire resident faculty to review and evaluate the progress of each student in the program. Information gained from those meetings went to faculty advisors and to the dean, who then worked with the students on their progress. The dean and faculty made any necessary adjustments to the Liberal Studies curriculum based on these regular reviews. The assessment loop was closed at the next joint meeting of the resident and adjunct faculty.

M.Div. Program Outcomes Assessment. Intimate knowledge of the congregations served by student pastors, of many churches served by graduates, and continuing contacts with alumni/ae enabled the faculty to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program as preparation for ministry. Individual alumni/ae were followed in faculty discussion, and when problems arose for graduates that seemed systemic rather than individual, consideration was given to changes in the curriculum. Thus was the planning and evaluation loop closed.

The Need for New Forms of Planning and Evaluation

These simpler forms of outcomes assessment served the school well for many years. Times have changed, and with them, the structures required for effective planning and evaluation of academic programs. Faculty and students no longer live with one another on the Bangor campus. No longer does the entire community assemble at least weekly for common worship or for social occasions and service opportunities. The faculty now meets monthly in a daylong session, no longer allowing regular consideration of individual student progress. The faculty continues to meet each semester with adjunct faculty teaching in the Liberal Studies and M.Div. programs, but the increased complexity does not allow the same regular review of all students.

Until the 1990s, the seminary was, in the language of congregational studies, a "family-size institution," and it operated effectively in the manner of such institutions. With the onset of multiple campuses, the addition of two new degree programs and the near doubling of the student population, we have moved to a "program-size" institution and have been developing accompanying systems to permit effective planning and evaluation.

Two New Degrees: Doctor of Ministry and Master of Theological Studies

Doctor of Ministry—Description. The entire faculty spent two years, from 1989-1991, designing the Doctor of Ministry degree with five specified goals. The first class began in 1991 in Bangor and Hanover. The program requires 36 graduate hours completed during three years, during which candidates study together as colleagues and are expected to integrate their studies with their ministry. Each candidate develops a Site Team composed of members of the congregation they serve as well as community members. The Site Team is responsible for common study, analysis of the ministry site, and the development of a ministry project that addresses the life of the congregation in its context. The colleague group meets six times a semester for two years, with a third year devoted to the D.Min. project and the written report of the project, which serves as the final evaluative tool. The entire faculty teaches in the D.Min. program on a rotating basis, one semester at a time.

Initial D.Min. Planning and Evaluation Structures. These include:

(a) evaluation of candidates' work at the end of each semester and at the end of the project year;

(b) review by the entire faculty of the syllabus for each semester of the program; and

(c) regular oversight and review by the Graduate and Continuing Studies Committee of the faculty, composed of three faculty members, one representative from each of the D.Min. groups and M.T.S. students.

In addition, the entire faculty reviewed the effectiveness of the program during the 1993-1994 academic year, using the program's five goals as a yardstick. As a result, changes were made in the structure and the teaching rotation. During the 1991-1994 D.Min. offering in Bangor and Hanover, we used directors at the site of each program to monitor and evaluate the program. That role was eliminated in the 1994 revision, which also included the assignment of two faculty members to each semester's work in the 1994-1997 offering. Those three new D.Min. groups (one each in Portland, Hanover, and Bangor) were taught by two faculty members, or one resident and one adjunct faculty. When this intensive use of regular faculty put too much strain on the M.Div. and M.T.S. programs, the Graduate and Continuing Education Committee analyzed the overall effect of such faculty resource allocation and recommended reducing faculty involvement to one per semester except for the first semester.

In each case of evaluation in these initial structures, the faculty continued its "family-size" process through reviews based largely on personal interface, whether with candidates themselves and/or their Site Teams, in faculty committee, or in the faculty as a whole.

Master of Theological Studies—Initial Evaluative Structures. The M.T.S. was designed with five specific goals for students and three competencies to be demonstrated at the end of the program. Evaluative structures included:

(a) A mid-term review by a committee composed of faculty and the M.T.S. student. The review includes analysis of progress toward attaining the educational competencies, clarifies the student's educational needs, and encourages the student to develop an educational plan for completing the remaining degree requirements.

(b) A final review by the same committee that analyzes the student's entire work in light of the educational plan, assesses the student's various competencies, discusses continuing educational goals and strategies, and considers ways to strengthen the M.T.S. program itself.

(c) Regular review and oversight is provided by the Graduate and Continuing Education Committee, composed of faculty and students in the M.T.S. and D.Min. programs. The committee was charged with systematic assessment of the effectiveness of the M.T.S. program.

The expectation of the redeveloped ATS standards that M.T.S. programs have a concluding exercise that allows for a summative evaluation has led the faculty to require a "Summative Experience" for the M.T.S., for students entering in 1999, which may be a portfolio, a final project, or a thesis.

The Master of Divinity Program

During the ferment of change at Bangor during the late '80s and early '90s, several new M.Div. curricula were constructed. The faculty is presently reevaluating and redesigning the M.Div. curriculum, and the redeveloped standards have provided significant support to our process. Once again, the shift from "family-size" to "program-size" academic programs shows itself. As we reconstruct the M.Div., we have supplemented the personal interface structures of evaluation with a clearer statement of measurable goals and objectives for the program and are integrating them into the program design.

Unlike earlier curriculum construction, in which the purposes and goals for an M.Div. program were tacitly assumed, the faculty as a whole has developed a specific set of measurable goals and objectives for the M.Div. The process took an entire year and has led to fruitful and revealing faculty conversation about theological principles and pedagogical convictions. We are finding that setting goals for the program as a whole, as well as for the various constituent parts of the degree, have allowed faculty members (each of whom represents a "department") the opportunity to clarify their own educational goals and responsibilities in relation to the whole.

Developing New Academic Planning and Evaluation Procedures

The redeveloped standards, and the new complexity of our institutional life, have made clear that we need to develop evaluative structures that more fully reflect our new "program-size" academic realities:

Our planning and evaluation need to be more site- and program-specific and to rely less on personal interface.

We need more written data gathered through questionnaires.

We need clearer, measurable definitions of what constitutes "success" in our degree graduates as well as in the programs themselves.

We need to include denominational representatives in our evaluation of "success."

Information gathered through these evaluative mechanisms needs to be analyzed by the faculty in light of the degree program goals, the seminary's mission, and the long-range strategic plan.

The results of the assessment then need to be fed back into the faculty's planning for the work of all three programs.

Specific examples of such tools are the following proposals for the M.T.S. program:

Essay questions on the application form that relate directly to the specified goals of the program.

A mid-term review portfolio, that addresses the three competencies specified for the program. Faculty members of the mid-term review committee would complete a questionnaire in which they would indicate perceived areas of weakness in the curriculum as revealed by the work of the student.

The Summative Experience, whether portfolio, final project, or thesis, which addresses the specified competencies. The Review Committee would complete a questionnaire in which they would indicate perceived areas of weakness in the curriculum and suggest possible corrective actions.

An exit questionnaire for M.T.S. students, based on the specified competencies and the five goals of the program, would be part of the final review process.

Regularly scheduled questionnaires, based on the goals and competencies, would be mailed to M.T.S. graduates and appropriate judicatory officers on a three-year rotation to discern the effectiveness of the program for their current ministry and to seek evaluative suggestions for altering the program.

The faculty would analyze the results of all questionnaires and reviews in light of the goals and competencies of the degree program, the school's mission statement, and the long-range academic plan. Adjustments to the program, its goals, and required competencies would then be made, thus closing the loop.

An additional proposed change in our academic assessment process is a slightly altered student course evaluation form. The form would have a common section, and then a final section related directly to the goals of the specific degree program for that area of the curriculum. No faculty or staff work would be affected, because the same processes would be used, but we would gather more information related directly to the curriculum area goals set by the faculty.

Changes in Other Institutional Areas

Student Services. As one result of the self-study process, increased emphasis is being placed on debt management and planned borrowing in an effort to prevent unrealistic repayment options upon graduation and conclusion of the grace period. These efforts toward increased awareness are made through financial aid handouts, mailings, presentations, and workshops. The director of student services and the business office inform students that they are available for loan counseling, budgeting assistance, and planned borrowing sessions.

Enrollment. The enrollment office has been helped to determine areas that need attention: questions of retention, vocational outcomes, recruitment strategies, and applicant quality assessment. The office has also revised faculty interview forms for prospective students and changed both the application process and forms.

Registrar. The registrar's office has been encouraged to develop a policy regarding safe and permanent storage of student records, and a committee is developing a process for that purpose. Moreover, the registrar is now working in cooperation with the enrollment office to integrate new students earlier into the overall life of the school. Formerly, students had been admitted months before the beginning of the semester, only to receive no further contact from the seminary until their invitation to orientation. The registrar now receives the files as soon as the tuition deposits arrive so that an advisor can be assigned immediately, and the students are notified within a month. Another letter of welcome goes out from the orientation committee in August, followed by a letter from the academic dean inviting them to orientation in September. The president also writes a letter of welcome to new students. Thus they are invited into relationship with the school as soon as they are accepted.

Library. The process of self-examination brought to the fore the need for further integration of the library and the librarians into the planning and review process. In our small institution, the changes in the last decade made it far too easy to allow one part of the whole to function independently, away from much-needed support.

Governance. Perhaps the most important matter uncovered in the area of governance was the lack of a formal institutional statement on academic freedom and professional ethics. This school has upheld that freedom with such vigor for so many generations that everyone assumed the freedom was specified by board action. The self-study allowed us to remedy that oversight. In addition, the trustees have developed a process for self-evaluation and will establish a trustee Commission on Governance to review that vital area of the seminary's life.

Conclusion

The self-study process gave us the opportunity to take stock of and evaluate the many changes we have experienced in the last ten years. Institutions need to pause periodically to look inward, to assess themselves. The self-study has required that we make that assessment, and we have benefited from the experience.

We have discovered that the bar has been raised regarding planning and evaluation by both our accrediting agencies. Whereas more informal means of assessment were previously both appropriate to our context and acceptable to external evaluators, we need now to pay much more careful attention to creating and retaining written records of all work throughout the seminary. Long-range strategic planning must be explicitly based on the mission statement and developed throughout with specific reference to the mission statement. It must integrate every part of the institution and be reflected in planning for every decision, including the purchase of phone systems, the redesign of courses, and the hiring of staff. Many larger institutions have long since operated in such a fashion. Most small institutions are only now beginning this process, and Bangor Seminary is one of those.

By no means the least important result of the self-study has been a recommitment by the faculty to think through in a theological way the core values of a theological education. We have begun to look anew at the work of each of our disciplines, at their interaction with one another and with the life and purpose of the church. Our development of and discussions about the theological curriculum have moved us into deeper grappling with our fundamental theological commitments.

Our self-study took at least two and one-half years, and by some accounts a longer period of time. When we were finally finished and the accreditation visiting team arrived, it seemed that the school had been in an evaluative mode for an eternity. Reaccreditation is not intended to so consume a small community. Nevertheless, the experience has moved us to understand the need for structured systems of accountability throughout the work of the school. If we can now continue creating the evaluative feedback loops described in the redeveloped ATS standards, the next reaccreditation experience should be much simpler. Only, dear God, let it not come too soon!

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Evaluation: Context, Lessons, and Methods

James A. Meek
Covenant Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT: Covenant Theological Seminary has experienced extraordinary growth since its last self-study in 1987. In seeking to manage this growth, the seminary has clarified its mission and developed an institutional climate of continual evaluation and improvement. The major challenge of the new ATS standards and the recent self-study has been to understand, evaluate, formalize, coordinate, and (where necessary) supplement existing processes of evaluation and improvement.

Introduction

Covenant Theological Seminary is pleased to share with other theological schools our recent experience with institutional self-study under the new ATS standards and our efforts to improve processes of educational and institutional evaluation. We are not writing out of any sense of special accomplishment—we know that other schools are ahead of us in many of these areas. We hope, however, that our efforts might encourage others in the difficult task of assessing effectiveness in theological education. We also believe that other schools may be encouraged by our positive experience with the new accrediting standards. We found that, although demanding, the new standards prodded us to greater insight and effectiveness. Both our visiting team and the Commission on Accrediting had reasonable expectations in applying the standards and genuinely sought to use them to make Covenant better.

Our report has three main sections. The first outlines some of Covenant Seminary's distinctives and recent history to set the context in which we began our self-study and our efforts to improve evaluation processes. The second section summarizes some of the key lessons we have learned along the way. Finally, because we have learned so much about evaluation from other schools, the third section describes some of the particular ways we have attempted to evaluate educational and institutional effectiveness, using the major sections of the ATS standards as a guide.

Covenant Seminary would like to thank ATS for the opportunity to participate in the Pilot School Project and the Pilot School consultants to our school Kenneth Mulholland of Columbia Biblical Seminary and James F. Lewis of Wheaton College for insightful questions and counsel (particularly in the area of globalization).

Distinctives

Covenant Theological Seminary is a freestanding denominational seminary. Founded in 1956 to serve a small Presbyterian denomination, Covenant became the national seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) through a 1982 denominational union. The seminary is governed by a board of trustees elected by the General Assembly of the PCA. The PCA has grown rapidly in recent years, now numbering 280,000 members in 1,350 churches across the U.S. and Canada.

Covenant Seminary stands in the evangelical and Reformed traditions. Distinctives include a Christ-centered focus (frequently expressed in a statement that "A seminary education is successful only if—at its end—the student knows Jesus Christ more intimately than at its beginning."). Closely related is an emphasis on God's grace, an "absolute confidence in God's acceptance provided through his redemptive work as the supreme motivation and enablement for love and holiness." As an evangelical institution, the seminary believes "that the Bible is the Word of God and thus it is our only infallible rule of faith and practice. We believe in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit." As a confessional institution, Covenant Seminary seeks to remain "true to the Westminster Standards and the historic distinctives of Presbyterian orthodoxy, while equipping the next generation of Christian servants for effective church leadership and outreach in a changing world." (Citations from the seminary's Mission Statement.)

While recognizing the wide variety of ministry roles in which our graduates may serve, Covenant has consciously sought to keep our primary focus on training for pastoral ministry, with a traditional theological curriculum heavy on Bible, biblical languages, theology, and history. This training takes place in a relational context, in which "the relationship between students and faculty assumes a meaningful place alongside teaching content, to affect the entire character of the student for ministry" (Mission Statement). To accomplish this, Covenant has sought to assemble a faculty of pastor-scholars characterized by love for the church and the ministry as well as by academic distinction. While it is difficult to find talented scholars with pastoral experience and outlook, we have found that doing so has enhanced the quality of training, produced a unique degree of faculty unity and morale, and given Covenant a growing reputation for academic excellence. Viewing the Reformed faith not simply as something to be defended, but something to be communicated to an unbelieving world, the seminary actively seeks to engage the broader culture. These distinctives, together with growing enrollment and faculty recognition, have given Covenant a unique opportunity for influence, both in and beyond its own denomination.

Growth and Change

Covenant experienced rapid change since its 1987 self-study. Head count enrollment more than quadrupled (from 149 in 1987 to 734 in 1998) and full-time equivalent enrollment (FTE) more than tripled (from 117 in 1987 to 376 in 1998). The seminary now enrolls as many auditors and continuing education students as the entire 1987 student body. While much of this growth has been in evening, extension, and D.Min. programs, traditional daytime enrollment has surpassed 400 students. The video-based extension program enrolls more than 100 credit students each semester (138 in the fall of 1998), with courses offered in nine cities and by an independently mentored format. The M.Div. remains Covenant's largest degree program with more than 300 students (200 FTE). The seminary offers the M.Div., M.A., M.A. in Counseling, Th.M., and D.Min. degrees, as well as a Graduate Certificate, and awards more than 100 degrees and certificates to graduating students each May.

The seminary's student body is increasingly diverse. Half of all students (sixty percent of M.Div. students) belong to the PCA. Forty percent of all students (thirty percent of M.Div. students) do not come from Presbyterian or Reformed backgrounds. Students come from every section of the United States and from more than a dozen countries. One-quarter are women. Efforts to reach beyond the seminary's historically white constituency have drawn an evening student population that is twenty percent ethnic, although ethnic and international students compose only about twelve percent of the overall student body.

Other important changes have taken place since the 1987 self-study. In 1994, Paul Kooistra assumed leadership of our denomination's world mission agency and was succeeded by Academic Dean Bryan Chapell. Most senior administrators are new since the last self-study. Ten new faculty have been added. Two new academic programs were begun: the video-tape-based Seminary Extension Training program (SET) that was begun in 1989 now enrolls more than 100 credit students (and almost as many noncredit students) each semester, and a Master of Arts in Counseling program opened in the fall of 1993.

This rapid growth demanded constant evaluation and change. The seminary's leadership (both the board and the seminary's administrative leadership) has been committed to evaluation and improvement, particularly in improving the training of students for ministry. This process has been assisted and informed by accreditation requirements, but has not been prompted by them. The challenge before Covenant in this self-study was to regularize and improve these existing processes of educational and institutional evaluation.

Accreditation and Self-Study

Covenant has been accredited by the North Central Association (NCA) since 1973 and by The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) since 1983. The seminary's last comprehensive visit was in 1987. The seminary received a focused visit to evaluate its extension program in 1990.

Dean of Administration James Meek was already responsible for accreditation matters generally before being formally appointed coordinator of the self-study in 1994 and had regularly attended ATS and NCA meetings and workshops to become familiar with the accreditation process. He was also responsible for preparing the seminary's assessment plan (approved by NCA in 1995).

Work on the self-study began in earnest in the fall of 1996, following adoption of the new ATS standards. The Steering Committee chose to direct the self-study to the new standards and to use them as the outline for both the self-study process and the report.[1] President Bryan Chapell outlined key goals for the self-study and was consulted frequently throughout the process. Committees (some existing and others specially formed for this purpose) prepared initial drafts of individual chapters of the report. The faculty, administration, and board extensively reviewed these chapters in the spring of 1997. The entire report was revised before being made available in the fall of 1997 to the entire campus community for comment. It was reviewed extensively by the faculty, administration, and board before receiving final approval in December 1997.

The seminary enjoyed a very positive team visit in March of 1998. Following the team's recommendations, both ATS and NCA reaffirmed the seminary's accreditation. The seminary has been asked to report by 2002 on progress in four areas of concern noted in the team's report.

While the accreditation process has concluded, the process of evaluation and improvement continues. The seminary is completing a major yearlong review and revision of its long-range plan. We are seeking to strengthen areas of concern noted in the visiting team's report. The seminary is also looking ahead to the next self-study. The seminary is seeking to refine its annual processes of evaluation and planning in a way that will provide appropriate documentation of ongoing evaluation and improvement that the new ATS standards require. Our hope is to institutionalize this process so thoroughly that the next self-study will not require special data-gathering or evaluative efforts, but will be able simply to summarize and evaluate the seminary's assessment processes and the documented changes these processes have produced.

Key Lessons

Positive Lessons

Mission Statement. A major contribution to Covenant's ability to evaluate and improve in the context of rapid growth has been the clarification of the seminary's mission as expressed in its Mission Statement. The seminary has long articulated a simple statement of purpose: "The purpose of Covenant Theological Seminary is to train servants of the triune God to walk with God, to interpret and communicate God's Word, and to lead God's people."

Three factors prompted a significant expansion of this purpose into a fuller Mission Statement. First, the seminary's board undertook a major evaluation of the seminary's purpose and goals. This process, including an extraordinary three-day meeting of the board in October 1993 that included representatives from the faculty, students, and alumni in working groups with trustees, clarified many of the seminary's distinctives and commitments. (This major review was facilitated by a Lilly Endowment grant for trustee development. It also resulted in a major revision of the seminary's bylaws and a major revision of the seminary's long-range plan.) Second, in order to ground its plan for assessment of student learning in the seminary's mission, the competencies or characteristics sought in its graduates were related to and included in the Mission Statement. Finally, accreditation materials (particularly NCA General Institutional Requirement #1) raised specific and helpful questions that the seminary's Mission Statement should address (e.g., the constituency the institution seeks to serve, the purposes of its various degree programs).

The administration began to summarize these discussions in a concise form. Some portions were adapted from language already found in other institutional documents. The administration and faculty discussed successive drafts before the board adopted a final version in May 1995. The resulting statement expresses the core values and objectives that the entire seminary community recognizes as Covenant's calling.

One of the most gratifying aspects of the team's visit and report was its finding an "extraordinary breadth and depth of understanding of institutional mission and purposes . . . throughout the entire institution, including trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students." Clarifying the seminary's mission and purpose in its Mission Statement has been a crucial factor in communicating institutional mission and purpose to the entire seminary community, as well as in facilitating and guiding institutional planning and evaluation.

Institutional Orientation to Evaluation and Improvement. A second key factor in Covenant's ability to manage growth and change has been the development of an institutional orientation to evaluation and improvement. Evaluation has genuinely become second nature. In their travels, the president, dean, and other administrators regularly ask alumni, "What did we give you that was particularly helpful?" and "What didn't we give you that we should have?" Evaluation and suggestions for improvement take place in the president's weekly meetings with senior administrators and in administrators' regular meetings with staff in their respective areas. Covenant's relational atmosphere creates a climate in which faculty, staff, students, and alumni regularly offer and receive feedback on effectiveness and suggestions for improvement.

Because of this institutional commitment to improvement, the faculty and administration attend carefully to informal indicators of the seminary's effectiveness. A request for prayer from a recent graduate forced to resign his position as an assistant pastor prompts questions about how well we prepare students to serve in staff positions. Comments and questions by trustees in the course of a board meeting indicate how well they understand the seminary's purpose and programs. Concerns picked up from the student or staff "grapevine" are noted and considered carefully by faculty, staff, and administrators.

This orientation to evaluation and zeal for improvement in the ongoing course of institutional life has made formal evaluative processes at Covenant much more effective. At the same time, we struggle to know how best to regularize and supplement this informal data. As we gather more comprehensive data through formal processes, we want to preserve the attentiveness and initiative in which evaluation and improvement is everyone's responsibility.

Theological Perspective on Planning and Evaluation. Another key factor has been the development of a theological perspective on planning and evaluation. This important document from the seminary's long-range plan articulates our understanding of planning and goal setting under the sovereignty of God. It reminds us that:

> We must always undergird such plans with the humble affirmation, "Lord willing" (Jn 4:13-15). We should not act as though our human goals are God's definite plan (Ps 2:1-4, Is 55:8, Ro 8:26). He may correct our plans through adversity we cannot anticipate (Acts 16:6-10) or by abundance we cannot estimate (Eph 3:20). Our goals should give us some basis for evaluating the appropriateness of our plans, our mission, our means, and our giftedness for the tasks we have assumed, but numbers alone remain an insufficient means of determining the faithfulness, diligence, or correctness of our endeavors.

In other words, responsibilities are ours, but results come from God.

> We must plant, water, and prune as God gives us these responsibilities, but God gives the increase as he determines (1 Cor 3:5-7). Our responsibility is to care for the plant God grows rather than tell God what the plant should be. As we affirm the goals in the Long-Range Plan, we must resolve to remain responsive to the kind(s) of growth God intends to bring, while remaining accountable for responsible cultivation of that growth (Pr 19:21; 21:31).

This recognition does not free us from evaluating our efforts. On the contrary:

> Our experience has been that as we seek to communicate this vision to those we supervise, the most frequent result has been greater productivity as people recognize they will primarily be evaluated for the work they can control rather than the results that are in God's hands.

This approach to planning has provided both structure and flexibility during the changes of the past ten years. Some of our plans have not been fulfilled as we expected, and God has done things at Covenant that we did not expect. At the same time, there has been a fundamental integrity to the growth of Covenant Seminary, as we continue to strengthen core values and carry out our mission.

Administration. We have found that effective evaluation requires presidential leadership. The commitment of our president to evaluation and the improvement of training for ministry has been an essential ingredient of Covenant's growth over the past decade. Support and encouragement from senior leadership guarantees follow-through on the findings from evaluation.

Effective evaluation at Covenant has also required administrative support. Faculty and administrators are more ready participants when they do not have to gather and collate data themselves. We seek to assist decision-makers by gathering and collating data for their use.

Effective evaluation and planning must be collegial processes that communicate respect and build consensus. At Covenant, the administration initiates evaluation and planning discussions with the Administrative Council (president's cabinet), the board's Executive Committee, the faculty, and sometimes with external constituencies, before presenting specific proposals to the board for approval.

Self-Study Report. By clarifying its purpose, we were able to make our self-study report beneficial to the seminary community. First of all, we prepared our report to help the seminary celebrate the grace of God and his remarkable work among us since the last self-study. Other purposes (in order of priority) were: to assist the board, administration, and faculty with the continued improvement of the seminary; to give an account of our stewardship to those who support the seminary, to students and prospective students, and to the General Assembly of the PCA; and to satisfy the requirements of our accreditors. Because we wrote our report in this way, the report has been an encouragement to the seminary community, as well as a guide for planning and a tool for orienting new trustees, faculty, and staff.

Challenges

Evaluating Outcomes. We have learned that evaluating outcomes in theological education is hard. The most important things about theological education are the most difficult to evaluate—the personal, spiritual, and ministerial development or formation of our students. Covenant's purpose is "to train servants of the triune God to walk with God, to interpret and communicate God's Word, and to lead God's people." The first two elements are foundational: "servants of God . . . to walk with God. . . ." How can we measure a servant heart? How can we assess a student's walk with God? While there are nationally recognized exams that certify accountants, engineers, and surgeons, there are no such standards for evaluating the most important part of the work of a theological school. Nonetheless, because we are committed to the absolute importance of these aspects of our training, we must attempt to evaluate them, even if we are sometimes less than fully satisfied with the ways in which we do so.

It is difficult to focus on outcomes instead of intentions, processes, or resources. We have counted the books in our library, but had never sought to measure how much (or how appropriately) students actually make use of them. We know that our faculty has experience in ministry in other cultures, but we had never attempted to find out how this affects teaching or in what ways (or even whether) our students benefit from this. When we asked faculty to identify *graded* components in their courses that would measure student development in each of our competencies for graduates, faculty often responded that "I emphasize this." It is difficult to develop the mindset of measuring actual outcomes or results.

We have also found it difficult to find ways for external, objective evaluation of our graduates. While some forms of church government provide for oversight of those in pastoral ministry, it is difficult in presbyterian or congregational churches to determine whom to ask for an evaluation of a solo or senior pastor. We currently rely primarily on alumni self-assessment, but continue to seek appropriate ways to corroborate this information through external evaluators.

In order to evaluate well, we have learned that we need clearer goals. While the seminary's Mission Statement has clarified core institutional values, its objectives are too general for accurate assessment of student learning. We are now seeking to employ these values in developing specific goals for student achievement in each degree program we offer.

Evaluation Processes. We have learned that we need to formalize and regularize processes of institutional evaluation and planning. The seminary's rapid growth and other factors have prompted a great deal of evaluation and change. Evaluation and improvement have become a consistent part of institutional culture. The relational climate of the seminary has encouraged frequent, if informal, feedback from students, staff, faculty, alumni, and friends. Faculty and staff are attentive to concerns that they hear expressed or observe, and they take initiative to improve the seminary in the light of them.

While such evaluation has been extremely helpful, it must be improved. It has tended to be informal rather than systematic, piecemeal rather than comprehensive (e.g., we evaluate individual courses, but not the whole curriculum), and anecdotal rather than quantitative or broad-based. As a result, we have more often made minor adjustments than major ones. These changes have been made so quickly and naturally that it is difficult to document these later for a more systematic assessment of institutional processes of evaluation and improvement.

We have also learned that there is a lot of data available. We have resisted the temptation to begin special data-gathering efforts for the self-study, preferring "simple and sustainable" evaluative instruments that we could maintain for the long term. (During the self-study, committees were given only two rules: [1] don't spend money without authorization from the appropriate departmental supervisor and [2] don't start any evaluative efforts that you don't want to continue doing for the long-term.)

In order to make evaluation more regular and systematic, we are seeking to develop a more consistent evaluation and planning cycle. The seminary's bylaws require that the long-range plan be reviewed annually. We have built on this requirement by developing a three-stage process for planning and evaluation that corresponds to the three regular meetings of the board: evaluation of the prior year (September); budget for the following year (January); long-range plan (May).

At the same time, we must maintain the climate of ongoing evaluation and improvement that has sustained the seminary through years of growth and change. We have learned that the more systematic data we have collected have generally confirmed our anecdotal data and our hunches. Formal and regular processes must supplement (not replace) the continual attending of trustees, faculty, and staff to students, to one another, and to our institutional environment.

Educational and Institutional Assessment

At Covenant, we have learned much from other schools. This has been particularly true as we have sought to improve evaluation of educational and institutional effectiveness. We have gratefully adopted and adapted many ideas we learned from others. In the hope that other schools may in turn be able to learn from us, this section of our report describes some of the particular ways we have attempted to evaluate effectiveness at Covenant Seminary, following the general outline of the ATS standards.

1. Purpose, Planning, Evaluation

We know that our mission is clear when we hear it (and the values in it) cited by students, faculty, staff, trustees—and even by some outside the seminary who disagree with it. We know that our mission is effective when we see it used to facilitate evaluation (assessment of student achievement and readiness for ministry), hiring (values and experience of prospective faculty), and planning (capping enrollment to preserve a relational climate and quality of pastoral training). We know that we are taking appropriate steps to make our mission clear when we see the above, and when we see it printed in the seminary's *Catalog*, staff and faculty handbooks, and hear it expressed each semester in new student orientation. The Mission Statement itself is reviewed at least every three years in conjunction with review of the seminary's long-range plan.

We know that our long-range plan is effective when we see it used in guiding annual and long-range budget processes. Long-range planning statistics project progress toward goals in such areas as enrollment, faculty and staff size, tuition rates, and overall budget growth. These projections shape each year's budget and indicate long-term development needs. While our theological perspective on planning and evaluation (see above) expresses our understanding that God may do other than we plan, we know that our plan is effective as we see a general congruence between our goals and the things that God has done in and through us.

The seminary's bylaws require annual review of the long-range plan. The president initiates this process in discussion with administrators, faculty, and the Executive Committee of the board. The board formally approves the revised plan. The long-range plan, as all other board actions, is reviewed by a committee of the denomination's General Assembly.

Covenant uses a variety of comparative data to assist in evaluating many areas. Data from the ATS *Fact Book* and institutional peer profiles have provided benchmarks in such areas as admissions, budgeting, library, salaries, and student-faculty ratio. Data from other studies of seminaries and other institutions of higher education have been consulted. Local and regional studies of compensation assist in determining the appropriateness of salaries and benefits.

The seminary has evaluated and improved its effectiveness through extensive use of outside consultants to assist in evaluation and planning in the areas of admissions, computing, public relations and fund-raising, planned giving, capital campaigns, library, facilities and maintenance, student services, board effectiveness, and the President's Office. Other external advisors include financial and legal auditors, legal counsel, insurance agents, architects, engineers, and presenters at meetings of professional organizations

2. *Institutional Integrity*

The primary means for evaluating institutional integrity is institutional watchfulness and adherence to recognized principles of good practice. Public documents (such as the *Catalog*) are widely reviewed before publication. Full disclosure to the board provides external oversight, as does the oversight of board actions by the denomination's General Assembly, and institutional evaluation by accrediting agencies. External audits of operational and financial aid expenditures validate the integrity of financial practices. Attentiveness to informal data as well as to formal grievance procedures helps ensure that students, faculty, and staff are treated fairly. Friends and alumni regularly provide feedback on the seminary's reputation and effectiveness.

3. *Learning, Teaching, Research: Theological Scholarship*

Each faculty member reports annually on contributions to the academy (e.g., publications), the classroom, and the church, and on goals for the coming year. This report is the starting point for the instructor's annual review with the vice president for academics. The collected annual reports, with a summary report of faculty publications, are submitted to the Academic Committee of the board for review. The president's annual report to the board and to the General Assembly may also summarize some of these accomplishments.

The seminary monitors and seeks to facilitate opportunities for students to be exposed to diverse points of view. Some courses require students to interact either personally or in research with those holding other views. The seminary provides extracurricular opportunities for students to be exposed to other views and publicly celebrates student-initiated ministries to those of other beliefs. The intentional denominational diversity of the student body facilitates interaction with believers from other traditions.

The seminary monitors and seeks to facilitate student engagement with those of other cultures. Our efforts include course requirements, field education and counseling practicum placements in diverse communities, and both summer and permanent placement in traditional mission settings.

4. *The Theological Curriculum*

The competencies for graduates listed in the seminary's Mission Statement are the foundation of the seminary's assessment of student learning.

The seminary uses a variety of traditional measures to assess student learning, as may be appropriate for each course. These include tests, quizzes, research papers, presentations (e.g., sermons), reflection papers, notebooks, and special projects. Student course evaluations, summative projects, and exit surveys are used in all degree programs. In professional degree programs (M.Div., M.A. in Counseling), we also use evaluations by staff and field education or practicum placement supervisors, self-evaluations by students themselves, and alumni surveys and focus groups. Faculty who assign self-evaluative exercises to students are asked to summarize trends or themes for institutional assessment purposes.

Other measures include placement rates, students' success in ordination exams (data collected informally, but taken seriously), and acceptance to graduate programs for further study. While assessment of the affective areas is more difficult, the seminary's relational climate allows faculty and staff to know and evaluate students through informal contacts on campus, in area churches, and in other contexts.

5. *Library and Information Services*

Responsibility for evaluating library and information services lies with the Library Director, assisted by the faculty library committee and in consultation with the vice president for academics. We again find that, in this area as in others, some of the most fruitful data comes simply from attending to student and faculty concerns, which then creates a climate in which feedback flows readily to those who need to hear it. Faculty regularly recommend materials for acquisition. When staff observe that reserve materials are in too great demand, additional copies are ordered.

Formal review processes are also employed. Each year the faculty library committee reviews the proposed budget, evaluates plans and policies, reviews the list of periodical subscriptions, and helps assess other aspects of library operations. The library staff uses a survey to evaluate the library orientation offered students in selected first-year courses. Statistics for circulation and interlibrary loan yield valuable data about the collection and student needs.

6. *Faculty*

The most persuasive evaluation of the quality and character of Covenant's faculty comes from students. In both informal comments and formal evaluative formats (course evaluations, exit interviews), students express appreciation for the pastoral orientation, academic competence, and spiritual maturity of our faculty. Covenant's relational atmosphere makes it comparatively easy to hear these comments, as well as to monitor faculty unity and morale. The seminary monitors comparative data (from other seminaries and from pastoral salaries), as well as expressed faculty concerns, in assessing the adequacy of faculty compensation, load, and support services.

7. *Students and Student Services*

Covenant carefully monitors its recruitment and admissions processes. We regularly review the numbers of inquiries, campus visits, applicants, acceptances, and matriculants in each degree program and evaluate these figures in light of historical patterns and enrollment goals. Comparative data and internal goals help evaluate admissions cost per matriculant and percentages of applicants and acceptances that enroll. Detailed enrollment reports each fall analyze the student population by such factors as degree program, gender, ethnicity, age, denomination, geography, and marital status. Faculty and staff provide regular (albeit informal) feedback on the academic, personal, and spiritual quality of applicants admitted.

The seminary regularly and systematically evaluates services to students for appropriateness, adequacy, and use, in keeping with the seminary's purpose. This evaluation includes exit interviews, regular meetings with Student Council representatives and other students, statistical information, faculty and staff assessments, focus groups, and a great deal of accessibility to students. Statistical data include results from a survey of all graduating students, student participation in community and spiritual formation activities, levels of student debt, and attrition. In connection with the self-study a campus survey was taken to determine student satisfaction with various services and seminary offices.

The most important source of data comes from being open to students. Faculty and staff regularly hear the concerns of students. Student workers in seminary offices and Student Council officers are in touch with and share concerns of many of their peers. Covenant's relational climate facilitates the flow of information to the offices and administrators who need it.

Spiritual development is perhaps the most difficult to evaluate. Covenant's relational climate facilitates relationships between faculty, staff, and students, which enable faculty and staff to assess the maturity and development of individual students and of the student population as a whole. Faculty are asked to provide anonymous summaries of trends or concerns that arise in assigned papers that require student self-evaluation in areas of personal weakness or struggle.

Placement services are evaluated primarily by the number and percentage of students who are placed within six months of graduation. Placement efforts focus on graduates of professional degree programs, the M.Div. and M.A. in Counseling. Placement statistics are regularly reported to the Administrative Committee, to the board of trustees, and in the seminary's *Catalog*. Student satisfaction with placement assistance is evaluated through student comments and observation of student use of the placement system and available materials. The seminary reviews admissions, other policies, and curricular requirements in light of trends in placement.

8. *Authority and Governance*

The board of trustees evaluates the governance of the seminary. The Executive Committee of the board evaluates the board's effectiveness annually, using a questionnaire that helps monitor key evaluative processes (e.g., periodic review of the Mission Statement, annual review of the long-range plan, annual review of the president) and assists in evaluating the membership and operation of the board, the work of various seminary departments, and the seminary's relationship to its denomination. Trustee knowledge is apparent from comments and questions from individual trustees. The loyalty of trustees is evident in giving, years and quality of service, and assistance in making the seminary known in their spheres of influence. Board actions are reviewed by the PCA General Assembly. The seminary's bylaws recommend that at least every five years a consultant be engaged to assist the board in evaluating its effectiveness.

The seminary's administration is reviewed globally by the board in its evaluation of the president. The president, in turn, evaluates senior administrators in formal, annual performance reviews. In practice, review of performance and goal setting by administrators take place much more frequently in regular (often weekly) meetings with the president and in regular departmental reports to the board. Annual faculty reviews provide the opportunity for faculty members to comment on ways the administration might better care for the faculty. Other feedback on effectiveness arises naturally as senior administrators meet together as the Administrative Committee, as departments work with one another, and as the president and dean of students meet regularly with Student Council.

The faculty's primary roles in governance are its leadership of the seminary's academic and instructional programs and its work in recruiting and recommending to the president candidates for faculty appointment. The faculty's effectiveness in these roles is evaluated as the seminary evaluates the effectiveness of its academic programs (sections 3, 4, and 6 above) and in the regular reviews of faculty appointed (section 3 above).

Although Covenant establishes and carefully monitors communication channels between students and the administration, as well as between students and the board of trustees, students have no formal role in governance at Covenant Seminary.

9. *Institutional Resources*

The seminary uses both quantitative and qualitative means to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of human resources. Quantitative measures include staff FTE, staff-to-student ratio, and ethnicity statistics. Qualitative and informal assessments are probably more influential, as administrators monitor work load and attend to questions, issues, and problems that arise in daily work and in annual performance reviews. In conjunction with the self-study, the seminary conducted two formal surveys, one to assess student satisfaction with seminary policies, staff, and services, and one to assess staff attitudes and concerns (the latter collated by an outside consultant for the sake of confidentiality and impartiality).

Covenant has a comprehensive approach to evaluating and improving financial effectiveness. Key financial data are collected in a comprehensive spreadsheet of key statistics including historical, current, and a rolling five-year projection of future data (from the long-range plan). These statistics include comparison of income and expense categories with key indicators, many derived from comparative data (such as the ATS *Fact Book*). This data is provided regularly to administrators and trustees as part of the annual and long-range planning processes. Endowment performance is compared to targets approved by the board. Investment policy is proposed and monitored by a board subcommittee, whose members have extensive experience in investment management. Administrators and the board's Finance Committee receive monthly financial reports. All trustees receive quarterly statements.

The simplest means of assessing development efforts is whether the institution meets its annual fund and overall financial goals. Covenant also monitors the number of gifts and donors, the number of gifts and donors at various giving levels, the number and amount of gifts from churches, giving by trustees, foundation grants, the number and value of anticipated estate gifts, the number and value of charitable trusts administered, the number of recipients of seminary publications (prospective donors), and responses to focused appeals. Recipients of publications and the number of gifts between one thousand and ten thousand dollars are important indicators of future giving.

The primary means of evaluating facilities are usage patterns and condition of facilities. The long-range plan and the Campus Master Plan determine priorities for development of the physical plant.

We are in the process of developing a long-range plan for technology, which has to date received comparatively little attention in the seminary's overall long-range plan. A standing administrative committee is seeking to clarify technology needs and coordinate resources.

The institutional environment at Covenant Seminary is extremely important to our mission. Students are shaped, not only by what takes place in the classroom, but also as one life touched by the grace of Christ touches another. We continually monitor this relational environment by attending carefully to comments and actions of students, faculty, staff, and trustees.

10. Extension Education

Background. Covenant began its Seminary Extension Training program (SET, pronounced "set") in 1989. The original SET program sought to provide students with as much as one year's worth of course work (thirty units) toward the M.Div. or M.A. (General Theological Studies) degrees by extension. Groups of at least five students view and discuss video tapes of actual seminary classes under the direction of an approved mentor, most often using the facilities of a local church. Classes typically meet on Saturdays or on a weeknight for two to three hours, much like evening courses on campus in St. Louis. Assignments and examinations are identical to those on campus. The seminary makes formal arrangements allowing students access to appropriate library facilities in their communities. Students enjoy the benefit of learning while remaining part of their home churches, which already provide structures for spiritual and ministerial formation. Faculty are in telephone contact with on-site mentors before and during the course. Faculty visit most SET sites once during the course to lecture and answer students' questions, often staying to preach in the host church that Sunday.

To meet needs of students who are unable to be part of an existing SET site, Covenant began a program of Individually Mentored External Training (IMET, pronounced "EYE-met"). Using the same course lecture tapes and syllabi, IMET students work closely with an on-campus faculty assistant approved by the instructor. The student and assistant are in phone contact for at least twenty minutes every two weeks (or in similarly substantial contact by email) to assist the student in working through course material and provide a community learning experience. Students living at least sixty miles from campus may earn up to twenty semester hours of credit toward an M.A. degree or up to thirty hours toward an M.Div. degree through IMET.

Although Covenant remains committed to residential training for pastoral ministry (M.Div.), we find a growing number of students who cannot relocate to St. Louis but are eager to complete a theological degree. Whether seeking personal fulfillment or to enhance their work in a non-ordained ministry role, these students are very eager to complete a degree and are not content simply to take a number of courses. To serve these students, the seminary has sought and received approval to offer the complete M.A. at three extension sites.

SET now enrolls more than 100 credit students at as many as ten sites each semester. Seventeen courses (forty-seven credit hours) are available to students.

Assessment. Covenant uses essentially the same means to evaluate its extension programs as it does to evaluate its on-campus programs. Student learning is evaluated by completion of the same assignments as students on campus. In discussions with the Extension Office, faculty indicate that student performance on these assignments is comparable to that of students on campus. This subjective evaluation is confirmed by course-by-course comparison of grades received by extension and on-campus students. These same assignments indicate that students obtain the bibliographic and other materials required for their courses. Students complete course evaluations that are identical to those used on campus, with additional questions asking for evaluation of the mentor and other distinctive aspects of the extension course environment.

Informal comments and observations from students, mentors, and faculty are noted and taken seriously. There is considerable informal student feedback. Extension students write, call, and email the Extension Office regularly to tell us about their experiences. Because of the nature of the program, the Extension Office is in particularly close touch with IMET students. These contacts provide feedback on policies related to students and on services such as academic advising, as well as course content and delivery

Additional means of evaluation are also employed. Faculty report formally to the Extension Office following each visit to a course site, helping assess student interest in the program, understanding of course materials, and the effectiveness of the mentor and the learning environment. Mentors complete formal evaluations of each course and assist in evaluating the program as a whole. The Extension Office evaluates global issues such as mentor training and student retention.

The seminary carefully monitors the growth and activities of the extension program through its regular channels of administrative oversight and review. The extension program is an integral part of the seminary's annual and long-range planning and budget processes.

Conclusion

Covenant Seminary has found the emphasis on assessment and change in the new ATS standards to be of assistance in helping the seminary clarify, improve, coordinate, and document its existing processes of educational and institutional evaluation and improvement.

James A. Meek is dean of academic administration and assistant professor of Bible at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. His responsibilities include accreditation issues and educational and institutional assessment. He served as coordinator of the seminary's self-study and editor of its self-study report.

ENDNOTE

1. Each chapter was cross-referenced to NCA requirements. An introductory table collated these references. The summaries to each chapter and to the report as a whole specifically addressed each of the Criteria for Accreditation. An appendix summarized responses to the General Institutional Requirements.

Assessment and Institutional Improvement: A Case Study

David Hogue
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT: This essay describes an approach to self-study and institutional assessment that is grounded in the mission statements of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and that represents the school's efforts to articulate and assess questions of significance to the seminary's students, faculty, board, and church constituencies. The description includes the development of five guiding questions, the inventorying and collection of data, interpretation, and preparation of the self-study report. The roles of the self-study coordinator, the steering committee, and consultants are also briefly examined.

Introduction and Setting

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary is one of thirteen graduate schools of theology of the United Methodist Church, and it is located on the campus of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Chartered as Garrett Biblical Institute in 1853, the school united with the Chicago Training School in 1885 and with Evangelical Theological Seminary in 1974. In the fall of 1997, 452 students were enrolled in all degree programs (M.Div., M.C.E., M.T.S., M.A.M.M., D.Min., Ph.D.) or as special students. United Methodist students comprise approximately two-thirds of the enrollment in master's degree programs.

The seminary was involved in several important processes at the same time that the faculty and administration were undertaking self-study. The seminary has for several years also been involved in carrying out a strategic plan that resulted from the previous self-study. The faculty had committed themselves to begin the process of curriculum redesign and began exploring the possibility of moving from a quarter system to a semester (4-1-4-1) system. In addition, the faculty has been in the process of restructuring two degree programs, both of which were pending approval from ATS. The Ph.D. degree, which has been offered jointly with Northwestern University for more than sixty years, will be replaced by a Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary degree, with support from the university and from the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS). Finally, the seminary has also been involved in developing strengthened connections with denominational annual conferences and churches and was preparing grant proposals in the hope of implementing these long-held desires.

We also sought approval for a new Master of Arts degree in five specializations in order to respond more effectively to the increasing number of students preparing for specialized ministries rather than for ordination as elders (primarily parish pastors) in the United Methodist Church. This request was in part a response to the fact that the United Methodist Church had recently redefined the nature of ordained ministry in ways that would directly affect the type of students coming to Garrett-Evangelical and the educational needs they would bring. Two ways open to students preparing for ordination as deacons now include either the three-year M.Div. degree or a two-year M.A. in a specialized ministry area.

Approach to Assessment

The faculty and staff of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary took seriously four important directives that came from the seminary's two accrediting agencies, ATS and the North Central Association. The first directive concerned evaluating our effectiveness within the context of the seminary's mission, vision, and identity statements. The second called on us to approach our assessment from the standpoint of the questions we need to ask about ourselves, rather than to focus on a "checklist" of standards. A third directive focused on assurance that assessment results were regularly made available to decision-makers, and that they influenced decisions that were being made. The fourth directive from both associations was that assessment should be considered an ongoing task of the seminary, rather than a once-every-ten-years event.

Another dimension to this self-study process emerged as the work unfolded. We recognized that institutional assessment is at least as much a *future-directed* enterprise as it is a historical one. That is, the seminary is planning for at least ten years ahead, and both accrediting associations would (hopefully) be approving our work for the next ten years. An institution must, of course, understand its history well in order to envision its future, but attempts must also be made to anticipate what ministry will be like in the next decade and what kind of spiritual leaders will be called for in those changing circumstances. The seminary's self-study, we concluded, must focus intentionally and seriously on what theological education must be like in the future at the same time that we look at its recent history in our setting. Throughout the self-study process, we were careful to be asking questions that looked ahead as well as those that looked back. Interviews, questionnaires, denominational documents, and alumni surveys each asked respondents about the shape of ministry in the future.

The seminary had completed a Student Academic Achievement Assessment Plan for the North Central Association and received approval for it in 1995, when the school was invited to participate in the Pilot School Project of ATS. As a consequence of serving as a pilot school, we were provided with the valuable services of Erskine Clark of Columbia Theological Seminary as a theological consultant. Larry Braskamp of the University of Illinois at Chicago, School of Education, (now at Loyola University, Chicago) and founding director of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation served as educational consultant.

Later the seminary hired a research consultant at Northwestern University to assist in the development and interpretation of the alumni survey questionnaire. A steering committee was formed, consisting of faculty (including the previous self-study coordinator), staff, students, and the chair of the Board of Trustees. The size of the committee was large (sixteen members) and not all were present for every meeting. However, the seminary's various constituencies were well represented and much information was readily available to the committee.

The steering committee undertook several important activities at the beginning of its work. First, the committee reviewed the North Central Association's (NCA) assessment plan and the new ATS and NCA standards. Second, the committee reviewed the seminary's mission, vision, and identity statements that had been developed about the same time as the preceding self-study and were approved in 1989. The committee was determined to evaluate programs and outcomes within the context of the seminary's articulated commitments. An unexpected consequence of regrounding our work in the mission statements of the seminary was that nearly half of our faculty had come to the school after those statements were developed and approved. While these documents were discussed as part of all potential faculty members' interviews, in this process the faculty were able to grapple with and achieve more complete ownership of those important documents. The board of trustees also reviewed and reaffirmed the mission, vision, and identity statements during the self-study process. (Review of the mission, vision, and identity statements occurs at least every five years according to the seminary bylaws.)

Undoubtedly the most complex and time-consuming task involved focusing the questions that the seminary most needed to be asking itself and others during the self-study process. While the ATS and NCA standards served as background to the study, we chose to invest our energy in framing our work around questions that would go beyond the minimal meeting of external standards. In order to be worth the time, energy, and financial commitment that self-study involved, we concluded that the study needed to inform the significant issues with which we were grappling as a school. This approach required a significant shift in the thinking of the committee and prompted much early conversation and debate. As the committee's approach emerged and consensus developed, however, there was a high degree of ownership of, and investment in, the self-study process.

Steering committee members were charged with the task of meeting with selected groups of faculty, staff, administration, and students to develop a pool of questions of importance to us. Those questions and responses were forwarded to the steering committee, who reviewed them and narrowed the list to five. From that set of observations and questions, the committee selected the following five guiding questions that would help to determine which data was needed for the study and which would ultimately serve as a structure for the self-study report:

1. What is the nature of this teaching/learning community?
   What do we do that teaches about ministry?
   What are the administrative structure and processes, decision-making functions, relationships, classroom procedures, and faculty modeling that constitute the life of this community?

2. What distinguishes our community relative to our mission?
   How coherent are we with what we say we are?
   Which aspects of our mission statement are most prominent in the way we actually operate?
   (Note: During the writing of the self-study report, this chapter became focused more specifically on the institutional resources of the seminary in carrying out the school's mission.)

3. What are the church and world asking of us, and how do we participate?
   What kind of graduate is the church seeking (knowledge, skills, being)?
   What other services do the church and world need from us?
   How do we interact with the church in ways that shape what they think they can expect of us?

4. For what profile of student are we currently structured?
   What are the ethnic, national origin, theological position, and gender of our students?
   What issues will affect the future student profile, including external developments in the church and the world?
   To whom do we want to make ourselves most accessible?

5. What happens to students as a result of their experience here: including intellectual, theological, spiritual, emotional, social, and behavioral development?

All these tasks of the planning and consultation took approximately eighteen months from start to finish.

Data Collection

Inventory of Available Data

A next step in the assessment process involved an *inventory* of the data that the seminary was already collecting or already had available. The committee discovered early in its process that a number of small but significant assessment projects had been completed or were ongoing. Unfortunately, many others in the seminary were unaware of them, had forgotten about them, or were not authorized to see them. These included such varied data as student questionnaires, a marketing survey, and course evaluation questionnaires. Also available to the committee were formal and informal data sources such as the ATS *Institutional Peer Profile Report*, exit interviews, reviews by other agencies such as Northwestern University and the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, development office information, admissions office data, and reports from the dean's ongoing conversations with church judicatory leaders. Throughout the study, efforts were made to attend to the perceptions and feedback of constituencies outside the seminary itself. A particularly valuable source of information about the church's expectations for our graduates (questions 3 and 4 above) came from *Agenda 21: United Methodist Ministry for a New Century*, a report of a nationwide study involving clergy, laity, and judicatory officials of the church.[1]

After the inventory of these data, the committee determined which information was still needed in order to answer more thoroughly the questions we had set for ourselves. We determined that we would make use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of assessment so that we could cast as wide a net as possible. We also decided that we would use as many measures as we could afford during this intensive time of self-study, and, within one to two years, evaluate which of those measures contributed information helpful enough to warrant our continuing them during subsequent years. That is, as a follow-up to our initial evaluation, we will assess the assessment. That stage of assessment will include the cost-effectiveness of each measure.

The seminary already had in place a rigorous system of student evaluation in each of its degree programs. For instance, in the M.Div. curriculum, students are evaluated during each of their three years in the program. The most rigorous of these three evaluations is the second-year (or Level II) evaluation, which includes two faculty members and a field education supervisor. Recommendations are made concerning the student's advancement and course recommendations for the final year. While the focus in these evaluations is on student development, we realized that they potentially provided significant information about the strengths and weaknesses of the seminary's curriculum as well. Three years ago the faculty began dedicating a portion of one faculty meeting each spring to a review of issues that had arisen in the course of conducting these evaluations. This conversation is scheduled shortly after most Level II evaluation conferences are held, so that the data are fresh in the minds of faculty. This process has been designed to serve as a regular component of institutional self-evaluation, and has often focused on the effectiveness of theological education around the core emphases of the seminary's mission statements.

Additional Procedures for Gathering Information about the Seminary's Effectiveness

Focus groups were used for faculty, students, judicatory officials (generally United Methodist), and alums. Occurring in a variety of settings and formats, these focus groups provided rich and generally congruent images of the seminary and its effectiveness. The dean and president have specifically had intentional visits with judicatory officials in order to hear their evaluations of our graduates and our programs. Other focus groups were facilitated by a variety of persons, including the self-study coordinator, faculty members, administrators, and marketing consultants. The results were made available to the steering committee as well as to appropriate seminary constituencies.

The seminary's development office has long maintained a database of graduates from all degree programs, but that information had not included employment histories, current work settings, or their evaluation of their seminary experiences. This information was considered important in the process of curriculum redesign and as an expression of the seminary's ongoing interest in the changing needs of ministry in the church. Therefore, we began developing a *graduate database* that will help us know more precisely where our graduates are working.

Because we were already investing time and resources in a survey of our graduates for the database, we chose to develop and include one of two different forms of a *graduate questionnaire*. One form included a list of ministry competencies that respondents evaluated twice: First they were asked to evaluate the importance of each for ministry, and secondly they evaluated the contribution that their seminary education had made to the development of that competency. The list of competencies was developed from the mission statement, several faculty focus groups, the steering committee, and the school's previous self-study. In addition, a joint meeting with the faculty of neighboring Seabury-Western Theological Seminary produced a list of Qualities of Excellence in Ministry. Two important conclusions were drawn from these data. (1) Graduates had clearly been influenced by the seminary's commitments to cross-cultural theological education, the Church and the Black Experience, and to women's issues in the church. (2) Former students documented a need for more emphasis on the practical disciplines of ministry.

A second form of the questionnaire solicited the same demographic information, but used a more open-ended answer format and invited reflections on graduates' experiences and on their predictions of the needs for ministry in the next ten years. It is not surprising that the two forms produced two very different types of data. The quantitative form provided a concise evaluation of specific dimensions of the seminary's work, while the qualitative form offered a rich and occasionally passionate description of students' experiences of the seminary and the outcomes of their ministries.

An important discovery in this process was that Caucasian women were more likely to complete and return the questionnaires, so that men and persons of color were underrepresented in this quantitative data. We have speculated that targeted focus groups and phone surveys might be more helpful in gathering information from men and from persons of color, and these approaches are planned for continuing assessment steps.

Measuring students' development during their time in seminary (question 5 above) was the most difficult evaluation task that the committee faced. Formation as spiritual leaders has been a central concern of the seminary, and yet documenting the changes that occur in students is a demanding and often slippery enterprise. Anecdotal data were available for current and former students as well as for notable graduates. Student and graduate interviews and surveys were helpful and reliable sources of data. In addition, a number of students had taken the *Hall-Tonna Inventory of Values*[2] (Values Technology, Santa Cruz, CA) during a first-year course in pastoral care. As those students graduated, they were contacted and asked to complete the inventory a second time, enabling us to make comparisons between "pre-test" and "post-test" scores for the same group of students. We were also able to make some preliminary comparisons of these value shifts with the mission statements of the seminary.

While the sample size was small, the results from the inventory were informative, and they encouraged both further use of the instrument and deeper exploration of the meaning of the findings. A number of important shifts occurred in the values of these students. For instance, the value of "Self Worth" ranked first among entering students and dropped to fifth among graduating students, while "Service/Vocation" ranked first among graduating students after ranking tenth during the first year of seminary. These results seemed to suggest a shift from a focus on self-fulfillment and interpersonal relatedness to a sense of vocation and mission. This finding was encouraging support for the seminary's stated intent to help develop spiritual leaders for the church and world. Students also appeared to develop greater respect for a variety of viewpoints. These results were understood to be congruent with the seminary's focus on cross-cultural perspectives as well as ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. These data will continue to be collected for the next year or two in order to test these initial findings and to evaluate the contributions of this inventory to our assessment program. Faculty members have suggested that they also take the inventory so that comparisons can be made between students' values shifts and the values of faculty.

Data Analysis

Analysis and interpretation of the assessment data was, and will continue to be, an ongoing process. As initial information was brought to the committee, members raised further questions and offered possible interpretations. "Brainstorming" meetings of the committee provided a variety of useful conclusions or directions for further assessment. The committee determined in each case whether more data were needed and, if so, whether they could be collected during this self-study or whether they should be addressed as part of the seminary's ongoing assessment program. This process has been by nature a dynamic one as the committee developed a clearer picture of its strengths and weaknesses and made plans for further work in the future.

The dynamic quality of assessment has resulted in a commitment that the seminary will develop methods of assessing the effectiveness of new programs and changes in the educational enterprise as they are developed. That is, not only will current assessment methodologies be continued and evaluated for current programs, but future changes in curriculum, programming, or seminary life will be evaluated to assess their impact on overall outcomes of the seminary experience.

Only after the first draft of the document was written did the self-study coordinators revisit the standards of the two accrediting agencies. We had intentionally focused our work to that point on the questions we determined we should be asking for ourselves. At that time we carefully reviewed each of the standards to determine to what degree we had also addressed the concerns of ATS and NCA. As a part of that process we began developing an index for each of the commissions, noting sections and page numbers that addressed the standards. These final indices were included at the beginning of the report for the benefit of visiting team members.

In a sense, at this stage in the process, the standards served the purpose of checking our own assessment against the collective wisdom of ATS schools regarding the nature of a good theological school, as well as the guidance of NCA in higher education and assessment. Nearly all the issues raised by the standards were addressed in the work we had done to date. The process did however highlight some gaps in the assessment process that were addressed before subsequent drafts of the report was written.

The self-study report itself was analytical as well as descriptive. A final chapter summarized the seminary's findings; outlined the school's strengths within the context of our mission, vision, and identity statements; and proposed directions for refining and improving the work of the school in the years ahead. This chapter received particular attention from the entire faculty and the board of trustees, because it represented not only a summary of the self-study, but outlined commitments we knew ourselves to be making for the coming years. Further, we knew that we would be evaluated at our next accreditation visit on the steps we will have taken to address these issues.

The work of assessment and the writing of the self-study report were coordinated by a faculty member, but involved the work of nearly all faculty, staff, and trustees of the seminary, and of many students, alumni, and denominational officials. The steering committee worked creatively to develop and implement the larger assessment plan. Two faculty development days and a faculty meeting were committed to hearing and revising the report. The board of trustees' academic affairs committee was involved in the project from very early in the process.

The Self-Study Coordinator, Consultants, and the Steering Committee

The role of the self-study coordinator and the steering committee evolved over the course of the self-study process. The coordinator maintained contact with staff at NCA and ATS, and helped the committee interpret the standards of both accrediting agencies. In addition, he provided a structure for developing new approaches to assessment, with particular emphasis on encouraging the committee to develop its own set of guiding questions before focusing on the accrediting standards. Because this approach was significantly different from the ways in which self-study had been conducted before, it required frequent reiteration and reassurance, particularly at the beginning of the self-study period. Preparing for an accreditation review is likely to produce a degree of anxiety, even among strong and effective schools. Consultation with the ATS office in particular was helpful and reassuring at this time, as was the support of key administrators. In addition, the coordinator (a faculty member experienced in quantitative measurement) provided guidance in the selection and development of measurement instruments, including exit interviews and focus group protocols.

The self-study structure itself emerged from significant time and effort invested by the steering committee early in the process. Outlining the overall approach to assessment and designating the tasks to be accomplished within the allotted time required extensive discussion and careful reflection. Wherever possible, the steering committee made use of existing offices and committee structures to accomplish its work, rather than developing an extensive subcommittee structure. This approach risked "burying" self-study within the schedules of busy committees, but in the end it served to make data more readily available to the committee, limited start-up time, and ensured that information and implications from the study would be immediately directed to appropriate decision-makers within the institution. In fact, the process encouraged more analysis and reflection at every level of the seminary community, rather than limiting that reflection to the steering committee.

Steering committee members collected data in their particular areas of responsibility and contacted other members of the seminary community for input. As information was collected, the committee participated in initial interpretations of that data. Committee members and other members of the faculty, staff, and administration wrote major sections of the first draft of the report, using some preliminary editorial guidelines developed by the coordinator. Following the initial draft, the self-study coordinator and associate coordinator assumed primary responsibility for further development and editing of the report, with ongoing input from the steering committee.

An early draft of the first six chapters was reviewed by the faculty in an all-day retreat and by a committee of the board of trustees in a specially called meeting. The committee reviewed input from those discussions and suggested revisions for the report. The final chapter was drafted by the self-study coordinator as a summary statement of findings and implications for the further development of the seminary's work. This draft was then reviewed and revised by the steering committee and presented again to the faculty and board for approval in principle. Final editing and indexing was completed before the report was submitted to NCA and ATS.

The regular consultations of Erskine Clarke and Larry Braskamp provided significant guidance at all stages of the process. The committee was encouraged in its efforts to approach self-study within the context of theological reflection and received helpful guidance regarding overall approaches to assessment and in the selection of measurement instruments used in the study. It was particularly helpful to have informed persons visit our campus and offer us their views as "interested outsiders." These experiences not only provided guidance for development of the self-study project, but also offered us opportunities to describe ourselves to others and to hear ourselves described by others.

Conclusions and the Future of Assessment at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

The timing and structure of self-study at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary helped make this process significant to nearly every constituency of the seminary. Coming as it did in the midst of several important and simultaneous tasks, the self-study both benefited from and contributed to the life of the seminary. The study has already informed the curriculum redesign process by helping to hear and interpret the experiences of students and graduates, of church officials and faculty, and ultimately of persons served by churches and agencies. In its emphasis on assessing student outcomes, the results of the study are informing faculty deliberations about such crucial dimensions of the school as curriculum, composition of the student body, worship, family, and the financial impact of theological education. Building as it has on the work of the previous self-study, this period of intensive self-review provided continuity with the seminary's earlier efforts at institutional improvement and engaged newer staff and faculty in critical reflection on the mission and purpose of the school, as well as on our effectiveness in defining and accomplishing the tasks that we engage in to carry out the seminary's mission. A recent grant from Lilly Endowment will enable the seminary to engage more actively in congregational research, and the results of these studies will also be reviewed and coordinated with other institutional research.

All the assessment instruments we are currently using will be continued for at least one more year, and the questionnaires, database development, and focus groups will continue for at least five years. The seminary is committed to naming a faculty member to oversee ongoing institutional evaluation, to consult in developing the assessment program, and to coordinate such research within the institution. This commitment will be reflected in the seminary's budget and in the naming of an ongoing advisory team to ensure wide ownership of the institutional research endeavor. A critical task of this team will be to ensure that research results are forwarded to decision-makers who most need the information, and to solicit feedback from the broader seminary community about emerging or ongoing needs for institutional and outcome research.

Engaging in a more reflective, self-directed study has been both difficult and engaging for faculty and administration. It has involved time, effort, planning, and dialogue from many persons. At the same time, there is a sense of wider ownership of the self-study process and of theological education at Garrett-Evangelical, as well as a sense of the importance of assessment in the ongoing life of the seminary and the church.

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ENDNOTES

1. *Agenda 21: United Methodist Ministry for a New Century*, The Association of United Methodist Theological Schools, October 1995.

2. Brian P. Hall, Rel.D., *Values Shift: A Guide to Personal and Organizational Transformation* (Rockport: Twin Lights Publishers, 1994).

Under Review: Comments on the Reaccreditation Process Using the New ATS Accrediting Standards

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McMaster Divinity College

ABSTRACT: Using the institution's mission statement as its starting point for evaluation, McMaster Divinity College developed a matrix through which each key word in the statement could serve as a focus for measuring performance in specific areas. As the school undertakes new initiatives, the matrix will be updated as appropriate. This thematic process proved to be both helpful and renewing to the school's various constituencies.

The Heritage of McMaster Divinity College

McMaster Divinity College is a mid-sized theological school located in southwestern Ontario, Canada. It is historically related to the Baptist denomination and is an affiliate college of McMaster University, on whose campus in Hamilton, Ontario, the college is located.

McMaster's history in theological education dates from 1838 when Canada Baptist College was founded in Montreal, Quebec. Later, in 1861, another phase of its history began when Canadian Literary Institute was formed in Woodstock, Ontario. An arts program was united with theological studies in Toronto in 1881, and in 1887 this school was chartered as McMaster University. From 1928 to 1932 the University moved to Hamilton, Ontario. It became a part of the provincial university system in 1957. At that time the divinity school was separately chartered as McMaster Divinity College and was integrally related to the University. It is therefore both a parent and a child of the university.

McMaster was the first university in Canada to admit women and the first Canadian theological faculty to appoint a woman to a full-time position. A number of internationally recognized faculty served the theological program at McMaster in its early years, including William Newton Clarke, Albert H. Newman, George R. Cross, and Douglas C. Macintosh.

As a church-related institution, the college is governed by a board of trustees, ten of whom are elected by the Baptist denomination. The academic affairs of the college are managed by a senate, over which the principal of the college presides. The decisions of the College Senate are in turn reviewed by the University Senate. There are presently eight full-time faculty and twenty adjunct teachers, both men and women whose average age is fifty-three. The student body is composed of women and men, approximately forty percent of whom are Baptist, with others coming from more than twenty other Christian groups. The college focuses on professional education, offering the M.Div., M.R.E., M.T.S., D.Min., and Th.M. degrees, as well as a Diploma in Ministry and a Certificate in Christian Studies.

The college maintains relationships with several important institutions in the region. McMaster is an affiliate member of the Toronto School of Theology and participates in its basic and advanced degree programs. Additionally, there are cooperative agreements with Conrad Grebel College (Mennonite) and Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. Since its inception, the college has participated in the Canadian Association of Pastoral Education (CAPE) and other clinical programs in the area. The college has been accredited by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada since 1954.

In the past ten years, McMaster has experienced significant growth and expansion of its mandate. Not only have student enrollments increased, but new programs and opportunities have emerged for several constituencies. Recently, the Doctor of Ministry and Master of Theology programs have been added to the curriculum. Included in the annual calendar are the John Gladstone Festival of Preaching, the Generation Next Youth Ministries Institute, and the H.H. Bingham Colloquium in New Testament. The faculty produces the *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry*, North America's first on-line theological journal; the McMaster New Testament Series; and with Conrad Grebel College, the *Studies in the Believers Church Tradition*.

The Divinity College has also experienced significant transition in the past decade. Formerly almost exclusively Baptist, it is predominantly ecumenical. What was essentially a Master of Divinity program in the eighties, now involves strong second-degree and lay-training degree and certificate programs. The gender ratio of the college has been better balanced, moving from a basically male student body to almost equal numbers of men and women. Perhaps most significantly, of a faculty of ten in 1989, seven persons have left the college staff (retirements and transitions to other positions) and twelve have been hired to fill vacancies or new positions. To accompany this renewal of human resources, three endowed chairs have been created (two fully endowed), and new emphasis has been placed on the practical areas of the curriculum and special outreach programs, several of which have brought new funding and/or endowment.

In 1998, the many assets of McMaster Divinity College include a vibrant worshiping community, growing financial aid resources, growth in relationships with new constituencies and other institutions, and an aesthetically attractive campus within an outstanding research university.

Being part of the ATS Pilot School Project to gain a fuller understanding of the new standards for accreditation has proven most useful to the college at a time when we are planning for a number of opportunities. The following material describes some important parts of our reaccreditation self-study and represents our sense of the value of the new standards.

Our Mission Statement

Obviously, the first step in any evaluation is a clear and measurable goal. For us, the goal or mission statement that has been in place since the incorporation of the college was good for many purposes such as showing that we shared terminology and interests with the *Christian community*. We did not want to lose that important statement of our heritage, nor did we want to invest in the time and expense of moving a bill through parliament to change our terms of incorporation. However, we needed a working statement of our mission that would require us to look carefully at specific areas of management and particular kinds of outputs.

Therefore, we drafted a more "evaluation-friendly" and educationally oriented version of our mission. This was discussed in several meetings with the faculty and, when all the faculty were satisfied, with the senate and board of trustees of the college. The final working statement of the mandate of McMaster Divinity College is:

> *McMaster Divinity College is a graduate, professional school dedicated to helping prepare people for ministry with and through the Christian community in Canada and internationally.*

In addition to faculty, senate, and board being satisfied with the statement, the following matrix was presented and agreed upon. The grid below shows what we mean by each of the key words in the mission statement and what we might use to measure our performance in each area. From time to time, we can return to the matrix and update it in the light of new strategic initiatives and the changing character of ministry, student backgrounds, and the best results of graduate professional education.

CHARACTER	MEANING FOR McMASTER	MEASURES, RESULTS
GRADUATE	Students are expected to be scholarly, self-directed, involved in collaborative study. Programs build on an academic base.	Nature of learning experiences, admissions standards, faculty scholarship measures
PROFESSIONAL	Emphasis is on applied disciplines, supervised experiences, and breadth. Students have varied backgrounds and directions. The integration of functional areas is important.	Demand for graduates, character and quality of special events, evaluation by grads, record of leadership in our fields

CHARACTER	**MEANING FOR McMASTER**	**MEASURES, RESULTS**
SCHOOL	We are part of the University. We have limited influence in non-curricular areas. We emphasize teaching in contrast to a research institute.	University support, the reputation of faculty in academic circles
HELPING PREPARE	We are a committed to Biblical and theological reflection leading to theologically informed practice and experience. We are concerned with skill development, broadening appropriate knowledge bases, providing worthwhile experiences, encouraging spiritual formation, and providing continuing professional education	Demand for graduates; evaluation by grads 1, 5, 10 years out; satisfaction in ministry; recognition of graduates in the Christian community; involvement of grads (and others) in professional education programs
MINISTRY	We want to affirm and encourage a variety of ways for people act as servants in the name of Christ, including ordained and lay ministries and academic positions.	Nature of placements
WITH AND THROUGH THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY	We are part of a larger community, supported by it, accountable to it, and provide resources for it to strengthen its service in the Kingdom. The community is defined by a common commitment to Christ as understood in biblically based and historically supported beliefs, behaviors and values.	Breadth and depth of awareness of our programs, support for programs, placements, national and international links (both quantity and quality)

CHARACTER	MEANING FOR McMASTER	MEASURES, RESULTS
CANADA AND INTERNATIONALLY	The locus of practice is primarily in Canada. International ministry is viewed in its own right and as informing Canadian ministries.	Geographic extent of awareness of our programs, support for programs, placements, national and international links

Other benchmarks used were ATS statistics; statistics from our university for workloads, salary levels, and library support; and our own policy statements in the faculty, staff, student, and governance handbooks to ensure that our stated procedures, benefits, and services were being followed or provided.

Curriculum Review and Other Data

Concurrent with the process of exploring our mission statement, we undertook a major curriculum review. A key part of this review was an empirical study of the experiences with our programs. A questionnaire was distributed to current students and graduates of the last five years. (It was considered inappropriate to go back farther because only recent graduates would have experienced the current faculty, courses, etc.) A comprehensive questionnaire was developed, distributed, and analyzed by a McMaster University professor of marketing, familiar with the analysis of behavior. The results provided comments on each program's content, teaching styles, and extracurricular experiences. The results were an important part of our curriculum review and provided indicators of performance for our self-study.

In addition to the survey which was part of the curriculum review, we looked at all the data we had on trends that we thought we had experienced (e.g., changing proportions of male and female students, full- and part-time students, and students from various denominations). We were particularly interested in the changing sources of funding. Again, we expected to see changes, but to have the data for a longer period of time documented our impressions, defined the magnitudes, and provided empirical evidence for planning purposes.

Data Problems

Clearly, the new ATS standards of accreditation are more evaluation-oriented than were the earlier, resource-oriented standards. Consequently, we found that we had much of the material that we wanted, but not in a form that was easily accessed and interpreted. Toward the end of our self-study, a proper management information system, adequately supported, began to take shape.

This will be a definite asset in the ongoing management of the college and in the next ATS accreditation evaluation.

Our self-study revealed our tendency to collect and store data that are useful now or in the life of a graduating class, but not easy to access for longer-term trend data for strategic planning, evaluation, and accountability. The self-study showed that while the data were available in some form, they were difficult to access from earlier than two years ago, involved anomalies because of changing definitions in the ATS reporting process, and incomplete data in our own files. For our own needs and, not incidently, with the spur from the new standards, an appropriate management information system is under development.

Small Faculties

Small faculties offering a fairly wide range of programs are common among Canadian theological schools. This means that the preparation for events such as an ATS accreditation review is placed on a few already busy people with very little flexibility in the system to accommodate the extra demands on their time. The new standards, by the nature of their newness, make the burden even greater, particularly for the first time around. The task takes longer; it requires some familiarity with management systems; it involves more group interaction, if done well. Our experience proved the value of consultants from outside the college, and even outside theological education, to lighten the faculty loads and to gain the advantages of fresh thoughts on the topics in the self-study.

Smaller faculties like McMaster will work away at improvements over a longer period of time than will larger faculties. Resources, particularly the limited number of human resources, are part of the problem. In addition, smaller faculties use and, indeed, rely on informal systems to a much greater extent than larger faculties, who know informality will not work as well for them. Smaller faculties, like smaller organizations of all sorts, depend on everyone being moderately proficient in a wide range of areas; no particular degree of specialization is possible. Consequently, the development of a new management information system is a more daunting task, for example. Furthermore, it is difficult to free a colleague from other work; there are fewer people to cover an already heavy workload. Nevertheless, the characteristics of good management embedded in the redeveloped standards, and appropriately applied to our smaller faculty, have led to an exciting and useful agenda for the college.

McMaster used four consultants in its self-study process: an administrator in another professional school context (business education); a Christian theologian from outside our tradition, Robert Schreiter of Catholic Theological Union in Chicago; an ethicist from a university context, and a senior faculty colleague from a university program in consumer affairs. Three were available through the ATS Pilot School Project. The fourth was the coordinator of the self-study. Two were familiar with theological education and functioned as valued colleagues in their areas of expertise. They functioned in ways similar to the consultants used by other Pilot Schools. As our educational consultant, we wanted someone who knew the Canadian scene in higher education, and we wanted someone who would bring a fresh look at theological education as graduate level, professional education. For this kind of input, we enlisted a dean of a business school, who is chair of the council of deans of schools of business in Ontario. He also has qualifications and experience in the professional field of higher education.

All consultants, but particularly the coordinator of the self-study, made a difference in the work load of a small faculty. The faculty were supportive of having someone outside their number serve as the coordinator. Beyond that, there seems to be consensus that the coordinator was able to add to the self-study from his experiences in other academic settings. The relation with our board and senate was facilitated by his previous service on those bodies. It may be worth noting that some strengths of this arrangement, questions that might not be asked otherwise, and a detachment from the day-to-day demands of the college, meant a coordinator with some degree of naivete about the life of a theological school and a physical absence from the routine activities of the college.

Nevertheless, the arrangement worked well enough to be worth considering for other, similar situations. We found that all the educational consultants brought to McMaster fresh perspectives that made particular sense to our Board and Senate members, almost all of whom are involved in professional work of some kind. This brought the two senior bodies in the college into greater appreciation of what the college is doing and why. The impact of all the consultants will carry well beyond the immediate ATS review.

Reflections on the Experience

The emphasis of the redeveloped standards is on vision, outcomes, resources, and evaluation. This approach makes for a more comprehensive review. Such a self-study is more helpful to the school under review than the earlier style of review with its emphasis on resource inventories. The new style self-study requires more time and effort by the school and by the visiting accreditation team, but our experience is that the effort brings valued insight and direction. Of particular note for our faculty was the opportunity to step back from day-to-day operations and look ahead. The process should be seen as a thematic process around the school's mission statement. As one faculty member put it, it was a chance to dream big dreams—a future focused on mission is the key to a sustainable ministry. The effort also is helpful in team building and renewing for the staff, faculty, board and senate members. The process leaves the school with its own recommendations for planning as well as the suggestions of the accreditation team members.

Because the self-study was more complex than earlier self-studies appeared to be, our first effort, while adequate, will be to improve the second time around. We believe we measure up to the expectations of a good graduate, professional school preparing people for ministry. However, documenting our view was less straight-forward. The next time we engage in a self-study, we will have been collecting data and conducting our own ongoing reviews. The ATS review will be able to build on an established management information system to capture necessary data, and we will enter the process with an understanding of the creativity, time, and energy required to work with the accrediting standards.

Stimulated by our consultants, we began the process of developing a model of theological education that would help all in the college community to understand what we do and why. That process is ongoing. Our view that we are a professional, graduate school is requiring us to think through the balance between a concern for professional or ministry outcomes, and traditional discipline-based studies. The balance is not just a matter of curriculum, but has an impact on the areas of scholarly research, faculty recruitment, and development.

Can the old style of accreditation visits do justice to the new standards? We were very appreciative of the work of our visiting committee members. In some ways they reflected the tensions between the old and new standards. As noted earlier, their task, under the new standards, requires them to have independent positions on more complex topics than the previous standards required. Given our small faculty and dependence on volunteers in key areas of management, such as finance, a proper site visit probably required more lead time to arrange for a wider circle of people to come together during the site visit. The lead time does not alter the need for flexibility to pursue discovered topics, but it does free people to respond, and respects the need for people not regularly employed by the college to be available to the visiting team.

Conclusion

The new standards and the resulting investment of time and energy by a school under review support the work of that school and, therefore, contribute to its success. The process is both more time-consuming and more useful than the previous approach to ATS accreditation. Other institutions contemplating the self-study process should take care to provide for adequate time, human resources, and broad institutional commitment that go far beyond the previous expectations.

William H. Brackney is principal of McMaster Divinity College. R.E. Vosburgh served as self-study coordinator.

Set in Motion: The Story of Transitions at Memphis Theological Seminary

Mary Lin Hudson
Memphis Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT: The model of educational evaluation at Memphis Theological Seminary began as the faculty undertook a study of the seminary's mission statement and articulated anticipated educational outcomes related to each degree program. This process led to the identification of nine "Goals of Theological Education," which subsequently resulted in a reordering of the mission statement to reflect better the goals of the institution. An assessment plan was developed to address these nine goals with entering students, at the mid-point in their programs, upon graduation, and five years after graduation. An ongoing program for evaluating institutional effectiveness was also developed, in which each administrative unit developed a mission statement for its individual program and annual goals that relate to its mission.

"Think of a mobile," suggested Dean Donald McKim, "as a model for planning and evaluation." If one thinks about it, one may discover that he is right. An institution effectively engaged in planning and evaluation is always an institution in process. As if suspended from its sense of purpose or mission, the process of planning and evaluation creates a tension that requires constant balancing in order for its various elements to remain effective. The process of assessment is the constant breeze that drives that movement of the institution. Upsetting the existing balance, assessment moves the institution to evaluate and plan in order for its life to remain in graceful motion.

Introduction and Background

Memphis Theological Seminary (MTS) is the only theological seminary of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Located in the urban center of Memphis, Tennessee, the seminary has an enrollment of approximately 280. The student body is diverse, representing thirty different denominations. More than one-fourth of the students are women; more than one-third are African American. The seminary offers the M.Div., M.A.R., and D.Min. degrees, and its programs accommodate the needs of a high percentage of commuting and part-time students. MTS is accredited by ATS and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

MTS was chosen to participate in the Pilot School Project because of its freestanding, urban character and its diverse, commuting student population. In preparation for its accreditation review by ATS and SACS, the seminary engaged in an institutional self-study beginning in the spring of 1996 and culminating in the review of the visiting team in early March 1998. In order to comply with the existing criteria of SACS and the new standards of ATS, the seminary was required to develop, within a relatively brief period of time, a comprehensive program of assessment for measuring institutional effectiveness.

Institutional Issues Affecting Assessment Design

The development of a program for assessing educational effectiveness was influenced by a number of factors: a transition in leadership, a commitment to diversity among students, and the limitations of resources and experience.

During the course of the institutional self-study, MTS experienced a change in presidential leadership. The former president of the seminary retired after twelve years of service. During his tenure, the process of planning and evaluation resided largely in the office of the president, in consultation with the board. Since August 1, 1997, MTS has been guided by a new president whose leadership style is more participatory in nature. A new administrative structure has been established, and deeper levels of involvement are required of all employees of the seminary. All constituencies are represented in the current planning and evaluation process.

Since its move to Memphis in 1964, MTS has worked intentionally to accommodate the needs of a diverse student population. The majority of current students commute regularly, with a growing number commuting long distances of 100 miles or more. In response, MTS has shifted to a three-hour block schedule and has increased its course offerings during the evenings and on Saturdays. The development of assessment models for educational outcomes at MTS has been complicated by a desire to accommodate the cultural and theological diversity of students while respecting their individual gifts and desires. There is no single prototype of an MTS graduate. Therefore, the desired educational outcomes must be flexible enough to provide opportunities for students to pursue individual goals. Assessment methods must model that same flexibility.

During the past decade, MTS has experienced growth. The student body has doubled, as has the budget. A Doctor of Ministry program has been added. Administrative and staff positions have increased significantly. At the same time, the faculty has increased by one. The institution is also underfunded, given its current size. As the student population has increased, so has the faculty load. Given the increased responsibilities of the faculty and staff during this period of time, the introduction of a new process of assessment for educational effectiveness has been perceived as an additional burden on top of an already difficult load. The model of assessment has had to take into consideration the limitation of resources—human, financial, and temporal—available for the task.

Another significant factor in the process has been the level of frustration generated by the new requirements for educational planning and evaluation.

Persons holding Ph.D. degrees in various theological disciplines generally are not prepared during their graduate programs for this aspect of institutional life. In addition, the intended outcomes of theological education (e.g., spiritual formation, compassion, courage, skills, etc.) are difficult, if not impossible, to measure in quantitative ways. At different points in the process, the frustration of trying to identify ways of assessing the intangible elements of an educational program has led participants to extreme reactions of anger, withdrawal, or tears. The consultants that were provided through the Pilot School Project of ATS played a significant role in alleviating some of the frustration and offering practical suggestions that fit the distinctive institutional setting. During the self-study, Nancy Erickson of Erskine College served as an educational consultant, and Jack Rogers of San Francisco Theological Seminary served as a theological/globalization consultant. The presence of consultants provided some comfort and much needed confidence as the process began to unfold.

Developing a Model of Educational Effectiveness

The process of developing the program of educational assessment has taken place in stages. To some degree, the program is still developing as each new level is implemented.

Beginning: Identifying Educational Goals

Early in 1996 the faculty engaged in a study of the seminary's mission statement, revising it to reflect more clearly the aims of the MTS community. At a retreat in 1997, the faculty—working with the new mission statement—struggled to articulate the outcomes expected of MTS students, especially as they related to the various degree programs. Because of the diversity represented among MTS graduates, the faculty first identified various graduates who had demonstrated qualities that reflected the values of the educational program at MTS. From this list of graduates, the faculty identified those qualities that would be desirable in any graduate of our degree programs. Finally, the group generated a list of seventeen outcomes that represented the concerns of the seminary's educational program. Later, a subcommittee reflected on these stated outcomes in light of the revised mission statement. Their work resulted in a statement of the "Goals of Theological Education," which the faculty and board of trustees subsequently adopted. They are:

Scholarship

- To gain an enhanced body of knowledge and skills for theological research.
- To increase abilities to reflect theologically on the practice of ministry.
- To develop competent leaders who provide resources for the church's life and witness.

Piety
- To promote the knowledge and love of God.
- To increase awareness of Christian spirituality and the need for a balanced life.
- To cultivate a desire for the healing of the world.

Justice
- To expand ecumenical cooperation, awareness, and experience.
- To support the ministries of persons of all genders, races, and cultures.
- To increase a sense of interdependence in relation to human need.

These goals provide the foundation for educational assessment.

As part of the institutional self-study, MTS questioned students and alumni about the seminary's effectiveness in meeting these nine goals. Their feedback affirmed the faculty's assessment of these goals as adequate expressions of the institution's expected outcomes.

The identification of these nine "Goals of Theological Education" led to a reassessment of the adequacy of the mission statement. The Planning and Evaluation Committee of the board, consisting of administrators, students, faculty, alumni, and board members, discovered that by rearranging the order of the mission statement, it would better reflect the intended goals of the institution. Thus, the following mission statement was revised and adopted by the faculty and board:

> *Memphis Theological Seminary, an ecumenical Protestant seminary serving from the mid-South region, is committed to providing theological education for church leaders throughout the world. The seminary is an institution of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. As a Christian seminary, we seek to cultivate a love for scholarship, piety, and justice. Intentionally, we foster ecumenical cooperation, support the full ministry of women and men of all races and cultures, and provide resources for the church's life and witness.*
>
> (adopted by the Faculty on October 13, 1997)

Developing a Plan of Assessment

As part of the institutional self-study, graduating seniors of the M.Div. and M.A.R. programs were surveyed about their educational experiences in relation to these specific goals. The registrar, who met with each graduating senior every year, prepared the surveys.[1] Based upon the statement of the "Goals of Theological Education," the survey consisted of three questions that corresponded to the three primary concerns of *scholarship, piety,* and *justice.* The questions were designed intentionally to provide freedom for students to respond in ways that were most consistent with their own educational goals and experiences. The qualitative results of this survey provided helpful information that was fed back into the planning process. The success of this instrument in producing qualitative data made it a viable model for use in the developing plan of assessment for M.Div. and M.A.R. students at various stages of their seminary careers. D.Min. students have been evaluated separately, but the methods of evaluation have been altered to reflect the "Goals for Theological Education," as well.

In order for the assessment to be comprehensive and measurable, several levels were included in the design of the process. Students will be introduced to the "Goals of Theological Education" at the time they enter the degree program. They will be asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their educational experience halfway through their program and at the time of graduation. Finally, five years after graduation, each will be invited to evaluate the effectiveness of their educational program.

More specifically, the process of assessment will follow these stages:

- As part of the admission process, prospective students will be asked to reflect on their own personal goals for theological education. This will be included in the student's personal file.
- During new student orientation, the dean will introduce the "Goals of Theological Education" and explain the process of educational assessment.
- The *Profiles of Ministry* inventory is given at the beginning and end of a student's M.Div. and M.A.R. career. The director of institutional research will use specific results of this inventory in assessing educational effectiveness in relation to particular goals.
- M.Div. and M.A.R. students will submit a statement of how their educational experience has fulfilled these "Goals of Theological Education" at the mid-point of their degree programs. This statement must be submitted prior to preregistration for the semester following the completion of 42 or 24 hours respectively. The statement is read by the faculty advisor, discussed with the student, and submitted to the dean's office for evaluation by the director of institutional research. A copy will be kept in the student's permanent file.
- During their final semester, all students will be required to prepare essays on how their seminary education has assisted them in meeting the "Goals of Theological Education." Their essays will be submitted to the faculty advisors and the dean, and will be evaluated by the director of institutional research.
- Five years after graduation, alumni will be invited to participate in focus groups to discuss the effectiveness of their educational preparation at MTS for their work of ministry. These focus groups will be held during the fall lecture series and the spring graduation events when alumni are normally present on campus. The director of institutional research will coordinate these groups and provide results to administration and faculty.

Completing the Circle: Evaluation and Planning

This program of assessment serves two purposes. First, it enhances the relationship between the faculty advisor and the student advisee by assisting in the ongoing conversation about educational goals and curriculum planning. It increases students' awareness of the intended outcomes of the educational process at MTS, and it creates opportunities for more student feedback about the educational curriculum. Secondly, it provides data that can be fed back into the process of evaluating and planning the educational program of the institution. The director of institutional research will prepare the report of the findings. The Curriculum, Educational Development, and Community Life committees of the faculty will use this report to engage in planning and evaluation. The results of student evaluations of courses and professors are shared between the dean and the individual professors. The dean reports a general summary of student comments to the faculty through the Curriculum Committee. With the introduction of the new model of assessment, the results of the prior year will be reported and discussed annually at the faculty retreat. Major changes in curriculum may be recommended to the board of trustees through the Instruction Committee and the Planning and Evaluation Committee of the board for purposes of strategic planning. The faculty will engage in a comprehensive review of the curriculum every five years.

Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness

In addition to developing a program for educational assessment, MTS has worked to develop an ongoing program for evaluating institutional effectiveness. Strategic planning has been formalized, using the mission statement revised by the faculty and adopted by the board.

The process was stimulated by a revision of the Faculty/Staff/Administration Handbook, completed in August 1997, that required a two-year study by a committee of faculty and board members to create a more collegial style of governance. The new handbook requires regular evaluation of all employees and introduces a "Promotions and Peer Review Committee" for the annual evaluation of faculty members. A revision of the Student Handbook is being completed, and the board of trustees has engaged in a major revision of its handbook during the past year.

The development of an institutional calendar has allowed for the intentional scheduling of routine assessment in all areas of seminary life. These include the use of student satisfaction surveys, student surveys of courses and professors, evaluation of personnel, lecture evaluations, assessment of curriculum and mission statement, and other activities.

In addition, each administrative unit has developed a mission statement for its individual program and annual goals that relate to its mission. These goals will be used for assessing the effectiveness of that unit on an annual basis. Each administrative unit is represented by its director on the Seminary Administrative Leadership Team, which is responsible for the ongoing evaluation of these programs. The results are reported to the Planning and Evaluation Committee of the board.

In light of the revised mission statement, the Planning and Evaluation Committee has focused its strategic planning to support the three major areas of institutional concern: Scholarship, Piety, and Justice. This has resulted in a Strategic Plan that is centered in the educational program of the institution, while projecting plans for all areas of institutional life. The logo of the seminary has been changed to reflect this same emphasis.

Since the adoption of the revised mission statement, the "Goals of Theological Education," and the Strategic Plan, all persons involved in the MTS community have begun to communicate and claim the mission of the institution. The mission statement has become the identifying and enabling document for the life of the institution.

Reflections

The process of developing a model of assessment at MTS has been both challenging and rewarding. Engaging in an institutional self-study during the time of a major transition in leadership often left participants feeling as if the life of the institution was spinning out of control. At the same time, the study provided grounding for many changes, while allowing the entire seminary community to be involved in shaping the future identity of the institution.

Administrative Style

The work of assessing institutional effectiveness has led to several changes in the administrative structure and style. A new administrative team has been established to coordinate the planning, implementation, and assessment of the various administrative units of the institution. The development department has been strengthened to provide more leadership in the area of planning and evaluation. A part-time director of institutional research has been employed to coordinate the program of educational and institutional effectiveness, with plans to increase gradually the scope of this position in the coming years.

As a result of these changes in administration, there is greater accountability at all levels of the administration and staff. Governance is much more democratic. An institutional calendar is used to coordinate planning and evaluation. Communication among the various offices has been improved. The presence of the director of institutional research has raised awareness of the need for more consistency between planning and evaluation and the stated mission of the institution.

At the same time, the program of assessment has introduced an added level of bureaucracy that is time and energy consuming, especially for the Seminary

Administrative Leadership Team. Some consider this a symptom of a growing institution. Others identify the program of strategic planning and assessment as the source of greater bureaucracy.

Educational Outcomes

The model of assessment of educational outcomes is still developing. The model demands greater involvement of faculty as advisors to M.Div. and M.A.R. students. Although the deeper relationship between advisors and advisees has the potential to enhance the educational experience, it also creates a greater hardship on the faculty's already demanding load. Students have related both positively and negatively to the new assessment requirements. Some have found the process helpful in developing clear goals for their seminary experience. Others resist the added paperwork that is required.

The development of good instruments for assessing educational effectiveness remains a challenge for the director of institutional research and the faculty. Surveys must be flexible enough to allow for a variety of responses. At the same time, questions must be clearly focused on the specific educational goals as outlined in the "Goals for Theological Education." Students at the beginning of their seminary careers will be less equipped to discuss the goals of the educational program. In addition, the faculty advisors, the dean, and the director of institutional research must assess these responses in order to derive qualitative data for evaluation and planning. Faculty advisors who have had experiences in qualitative assessment in the classroom will have to adapt their skills to the advising process.

Although it is too early to determine whether the model of assessment has enhanced the quality of the educational program, it has affected the curriculum planning process. In light of the development of the "Goals of Theological Education" and the entrance of four new faculty members since adoption of the goals, the faculty is engaging in a review and partial revision of the existing curriculum. The faculty hopes to develop a curriculum that more clearly reflects the concerns of scholarship, piety, and justice that are prominent in the mission statement of MTS.

Because the plan of assessment involves comparative analysis of student perceptions at the beginning, middle, and end of their educational programs, the plan cannot be fully evaluated until the majority of students in the entering class finish their degree programs and graduate. Until that time, the model will be implemented by the faculty and staff, with modifications being made for clarity and efficiency when needed. By 2002, the Educational Development Committee will revisit the plan and propose revisions as needed.

Conclusion

This case study began with the image of a mobile in motion, driven by the breeze of institutional assessment. In some ways, I prefer instead the analogy of a fishing boat on a placid lake suddenly finding itself rushing with a mighty current down a river of white water, trying to stay afloat. Such is the experience of moving toward a comprehensive program of planning and evaluation in which life becomes rushed, a balancing act, always in flux, continuously changing. That is the nature of the process of assessment, planning, and evaluation. Once an institution meets the challenge of developing a process, it is as though the earth has shifted and nothing seems stable anymore. At first, the changes are difficult to negotiate, but eventually that motion becomes a way of life. The seminary community must quickly learn new skills to handle this process of change, but once it has, the ride becomes more enjoyable and less strenuous.

The process of developing a new model of assessment has had its benefits at MTS. Exploration of existing programs has given way to dreams of the future. Dreams of expected outcomes have produced clear statements of the mission of the institution. The focused statements of mission and goals of the institution have provided a common language for discussion by the entire seminary community. The decisions of the president, faculty, staff, and board are funded by a shared vision of the identity of Memphis Theological Seminary. In spite of the rough ride that accompanied the transition into the assessment of institutional effectiveness, the concentrated movement of the seminary toward new, appropriate horizons demonstrates the importance of this transition in the life of MTS. The change has produced significant results for our institution.

Mary Lin Hudson served as the chair of the Steering Committee for the Institutional Self-Study at Memphis Theological Seminary. She is an associate professor of homiletics and worship at MTS.

ENDNOTE

1. Evelyn McDonald, "Educational Assessment for Future Consideration," *Theological Education*, 34:2, Spring 1998, 85-92.

Evaluation and the Educational Effectiveness Circle

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Oblate School of Theology

ABSTRACT: In the context of its self-study, the Self-Study Steering Committee at Oblate School of Theology established an Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee. The committee was charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing assessment instruments for use with entering and graduating students and with graduates who had been in ministry for several years. Subcommittees were formed to address each of the three identified groups. Appropriating an "educational effectiveness circle," the subcommittees, using the school's Statement of Purpose as their starting point, evaluated each of the degree programs and their expected educational results, designed and administered the assessment instruments, analyzed and summarized the data, and used the results to revise and improve the programs. The instruments designed in this process will be used for a period of three years to provide consistency over time before any revisions will be made to the process.

Oblate School of Theology, founded and sponsored by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, describes itself as "a Catholic graduate and professional school which provides education for the church's mission and ministry in the world. . . . The pastoral orientation of the school requires practical and reflective engagement with the multicultural, global reality of church and society. Drawing upon Oblate School of Theology's location and historical dedication to the Mexican-American presence in the Southwest, the learning, teaching, and research of the School pay particular attention to the diverse and rich Hispanic reality of the Americas."[1]

Oblate School of Theology (OST) prepares men for priesthood from dioceses across the United States and a number of religious communities. Roman Catholic men and women and those from other Christian traditions are present on campus as the school prepares men and women religious as well as laity for a variety of ministries. Students' countries of origin include Colombia, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Korea, Mexico, the Philippines, Republic of the Congo, South Africa, and Zambia as well as the United States.

The degree programs of study offered by Oblate include the Master of Divinity, the Master of Arts (Theology), the Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry, and the Doctor of Ministry. The self-study has given Oblate an opportunity to review the Master of Divinity program in light of our revised Statement of Purpose and the needs we see evidenced by our various constituencies. The new Master of Divinity, finalized in May 1998, consists of an 80-hour curriculum. In order to satisfy the requirements of the *Program for Priestly Formation* of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (4th edition, 1992), presbyteral candidates complete a Certificate in Advanced Studies for Presbyteral Ministry in addition to the Master of Divinity degree (M.Div.: 80-hour curriculum; Certificate: 24-hour curriculum).

As one of eight ATS schools in the Pilot School Project, Oblate School of Theology engaged in developing a model for assessing the effectiveness of our educational programs in the context of our self-study and in anticipation of the comprehensive accreditation review by The Association of Theological Schools and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in February 1999.

A summary of our work is presented in three sections: (1) the history of the work of Oblate's Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee; (2) Oblate School of Theology's appropriation of the "educational effectiveness circle"; and (3) proposals for the ongoing process of evaluation and assessment of Oblate's academic programs.

History of the Work of Oblate's Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee

In the fall of 1996, the steering committee for Oblate's self-study established the Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee and assigned to it the following task: develop an instrument(s) to assess the effectiveness of programs of mission and ministry of students, ordained and lay, on entering the school, leaving OST, and after a number of years in ministry. The membership of the committee included representatives from Oblate School of Theology (the president of OST, two degree program directors, full-time and adjunct faculty) as well as representatives from the formation teams of the archdiocesan seminary and religious houses of formation that send students to Oblate.[2] The board of trustees was also represented.

The committee began its work with a study phase that included a review of Oblate's revised Statement of Purpose, the goals of Oblate's degree programs, the "institutional effectiveness paradigm,"[3] and existing forms of evaluation of programs at Oblate.

In relation to the master's level programs, various evaluative efforts go on in the life of the institution, e.g., course and instructor evaluation forms, evaluations of the Theological Field Education program, evaluations of the Pastoral Formation Seminar and Learning Covenant in the Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry program, and faculty evaluations conducted by the academic dean. On the Doctor of Ministry level, several forms of program assessment are in place. The program is evaluated by the on-campus participants at the end of each session through a questionnaire that asks the student to evaluate the course as well as housing, facilities, library, communication, and the advising system, among others. At the end of each course, a specially designed evaluation with specific goals for that course is used with participants. Also, each student's supervisor, representing the "Community of Accountability," completes an evaluation form that addresses how Oblate's program is perceived by the supervisor.

While various evaluative efforts are ongoing in the institutional life of Oblate, we discovered that we did not have a comprehensive, systematic, formal assessment process to evaluate academic programs which, in turn, leads to increased institutional effectiveness. The task for the committee was judged important in the overall effort of evaluating institutional effectiveness.

As part of its participation in the Pilot School Project, Oblate was provided an educational consultant, Marilla D. Svinicki, director of the Center for Teaching Effectiveness at the University of Texas at Austin. She attended committee meetings in order to offer suggestions and critique the work of the committee. She also conducted workshops for the committee on assessment design and data analysis. Timothy Weber, dean at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Chicago, served as a theological consultant regarding evaluation and globalization.

Appropriation of the "Educational Effectiveness Circle"

In its work, the Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee was guided by the basic components of the educational effectiveness paradigm that include: (1) Oblate School of Theology's Statement of Purpose; (2) program goals and expected educational results for the educational degree programs; (3) assessment instruments designed and administered to evaluate the extent to which educational goals are being achieved; (4) data summary and analysis; and (5) results used for revision of goals and/or program improvement. Once completed, the institution begins to move through the educational assessment process again.

1. Oblate School of Theology's Statement of Purpose

The first point of reference for the committee's work has been Oblate's revised Statement of Purpose, the institution's foundational document.

2. Program goals and expected educational results for the educational degree programs

The committee studied the academic degree program goals as stated in the 1997-1999 academic catalog. While the committee based its work on these stated goals, we recommended that goals and objectives be reworked in order that they might be more easily converted into questions that serve the assessment process.

3. Assessment instruments designed and administered to evaluate the extent to which educational goals are being achieved

Before beginning the task of instrument design, the committee identified the theological and educational values and assumptions upon which the design of the assessment instruments would be based:

- The overall purpose of Oblate School of Theology is kept in mind, that is, we provide education to support the church's mission and ministry in the world.
- The process of assessment of programs must serve our needs as a small school with a diverse student body.
- The process of assessment must be reliable and relevant as well as easily understood and administered in order to encourage participation of administration, faculty, and students.
- Our concern is twofold: (1) the design and effectiveness of the assessment instruments and (2) the reliability of data gathered and analyzed leading to program improvement.
- The design of instruments on each level must be appropriate for those participating on that level.
- Both qualitative and quantitative data are necessary in order to evaluate educational programs responsibly.
- Relational models of assessment are important. Personal contact, which is possible because of the size of our institution (letters, phone calls, interviews, focus groups), conveys our regard for our constituents.
- The instruments designed will give us opportunity for contact with both those students preparing for ordination and those already ordained, as well as the lay students who attend or have graduated from OST.
- The instruments involve our constituents who are associates and colleagues of graduates (bishops, provincials, formation personnel, vocation directors, supervisors, pastors, employers, etc.). Including these voices can be a creative aspect of Oblate's assessment process.
- Environment is an important consideration. Attention should be given to creating conducive and comfortable environments for interviews and focus groups. Well functioning equipment should be available and easily used to avoid distractions while conversation is going on.
- Attention should be given to creating a climate in which participants are free to give open feedback, noting both strengths and weaknesses in the programs at Oblate.
- Anonymity of participants is assured in the final reporting stage. Once a participant agrees to an interview, that person is agreeing that material can be used for the purpose stated, with the understanding that the material cannot be directly linked to the participant in the final report.

- In the future, the relationships among the various instruments used on different levels should be kept in mind. The responses to the entrance survey can be compared to responses to the exit survey when these participants reach the point of graduation in order to see how expectations of participants have changed through the course of the program. Further, the exit interview may turn around and "drive" or direct the entrance interview.

The committee formed three subcommittees in order to divide the work according to level: entry, exit, and alumni/ae and their associates. Each subcommittee designed an assessment instrument to gather qualitative and quantitative data, brought them to the full committee and our educational consultant for discussion and critique, and began to administer the instrument to representative groups.

Entry Level

Design of instrument. The entry level instrument form is designed for students to list what for them, upon entering Oblate, were primary expectations in the areas of theological studies, pastoral/ministerial skills, and spiritual development. Students are asked to list these primary expectations guided by Oblate's Statement of Purpose. Following this, in light of their experience to date at Oblate, students explain how or whether their initial expectations have changed in the areas of theological studies, pastoral/ministerial skills, and spiritual development.

Administration of instrument. A letter of invitation to participate and a copy of the entrance survey are sent to students who are beginning their program during the first semester of study (approximately two and one-half months into the semester). Fifty-two percent (52%) of entry-level students participated in the fall of 1997.

Suggestions and questions regarding entry-level assessment instrument:

- Invite students who begin a program in the second semester to fill in the assessment form midway through the second semester.
- Discuss ways to encourage a higher percent of student participation for the future.

Exit Level

Design of instrument. The composition of the exit assessment instrument is based on Oblate's Statement of Purpose and the goals of the academic degree programs. The instrument includes three phases: (1) In the spring semester of the year of graduation, participants are asked to begin the assessment process in writing by ranking answers to questions provided (quantitative data). Opportunity is given to students to include examples, illustrations, and elaborations in written form (qualitative data). (2) Each participant is asked to interview another participant using the same questions as a guide. This step is designed to remove any pressure that "authority" may play in leading or biasing responses. (3) Participants are invited to participate in interviews conducted by an assessment committee member (qualitative data). During this interview, the student can present his or her response to the questions as well as that of the peer interviewed earlier. This approach safeguards the freedom of the response and encourages openness.

Administration of instrument. In early January, a letter of invitation and a copy of the questionnaire are sent to members of the upcoming graduating class. Response cards are returned by mid-January indicating a willingness to participate. A meeting with all prospective graduates willing to participate is held in early February to explain the assessment process more fully. The three phases of the process commence. During phase three, the interviews are taped with the permission of the participants, and the discussion is transcribed to aid in the analysis of the data. A summary of data gathered is prepared for the chairperson of the committee by the end of April.

In the spring of 1998, fifty percent (50%) of the students in the master's level programs participated. In 1998, we did not yet have students ready to graduate in the Doctor of Ministry program.

Suggestions and questions regarding the exit-level assessment instrument:

- Discuss ways to encourage more upcoming graduates to participate.
- Reevaluate the importance of conducting a group interview compared to interviewing one person at a time.
- Review directions given to participants and be sure that directions are clear, e.g., description of peer interviews.
- Review clarity of questions. Facilitators of interview sessions may have paraphrases of questions ready that might help students understand the question more clearly without leading them in answering. Asking participants to provide an example or illustration helps students to clarify and focus.
- During spring 1999, the president of Oblate will begin to conduct interviews with each student preparing to graduate. This interview is not a formal part of the exit assessment process described above but this visit will serve to augment and support the process as well as enable the president to have personal contact with the graduates.

Alumni/ae and Associates

Design of instrument. At the present time the use of focus groups is the primary means of gathering data on this level. Questions used in the focus group are derived from Oblate's Statement of Purpose and the goals of the degree programs. Qualitative data can be gathered in the focus group interview. Following the group session, a synthesis of the discussion in the form of perceived representative statements (ten to fifteen of them), as a "reality check," is sent to participants. Each participant ranks his or her agreement or disagreement with each statement. This element in the process provides quantitative data. The focus group sessions are taped and results transcribed for the sake of the summary and analysis of data.

Administration of instrument. In December of each year, focus groups are conducted at the annual meeting of bishops, provincials, formation personnel, and vocation directors sponsored by Assumption Seminary and Oblate School of Theology. These persons are primarily decision-makers in the lives of M.Div. alumni. In December 1997, twenty-one participants (95%) took part in three focus groups with members of the assessment committee serving as facilitator and recorder in each group. The sessions yielded broad observations and perceptions, at times, rather than direct experience with graduates, because some of those attending did not know graduates personally or did not have recent graduates in their dioceses/communities. However, the value of these sessions with associates was affirmed and focus groups will be scheduled annually as a part of this meeting.

In the spring semester, letters of invitation are sent to master's level alumni/ae of specified degree programs and years of graduation who live in the San Antonio area. During spring 1998, thirty-one percent (31%) of those graduates invited participated and completed the process.

In spring 1998, groups of pastors of San Antonio parishes were invited to Oblate to discuss how the school is serving the church in the San Antonio area. Although the focus of these meetings was not limited to Oblate's degree programs, some of these pastors offered helpful insights and recommendations.

Suggestions and questions regarding the alumni/ae and associates instrument included:

- Consider ways to encourage fuller participation. Personal contact is important in inviting and encouraging persons to participate. Initial letters of invitation with response forms were in several cases not acknowledged, and phone calls by the focus group organizer followed.
- In the future, plan review of degree programs on a regular, rotating basis.
- Consider effective ways to engage the associates of alumni/ae.
- In spring 1999, the Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee will turn its attention to alumni/ae and their associates living outside the San Antonio area who will be included in the assessment process. This assessment will be accomplished through a written instrument.

4. Data summary and analysis

Data are gathered from the use of the assessment instrument on each level and a summary report is prepared. The summary report includes general identifiers of participants, types of data gathered (qualitative and quantitative), and a summary of the data. The final report is prepared by the chairperson of the committee and submitted to the administrative team (president, academic dean, and associate academic dean) by the end of the spring semester. The report highlights questions, concerns, and weaknesses of the program that could lead to program improvement under the direction of the administrative team. Following the reception of the summary report, the administrative team analyzes the data in order to determine: (1) what points are already being addressed and (2) what points call for action in order to revise goals and improve elements of the programs, for example.

5. ***Results used for revision of goals and/or program improvement.***
A report indicating the administrative team's response and plans for improvement is written by the academic dean.
By September 30, 1998, Oblate's first effort to complete the "educational effectiveness circle" described above was realized. During the fall of 1998, the Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee began to move through the educational effectiveness paradigm for the second time.

Proposals for the Ongoing Process of Evaluation and Assessment of Oblate's Academic Programs

At the end of the first year of a systematic approach to academic program evaluation, the Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee is confident that the assessment instruments and processes of data gathering are working well. Two goals are important for consideration in establishing an ongoing, annual process of evaluation and assessment of academic programs: (1) institutionalize the processes of administering the assessment instruments, gathering and summarizing the data, and reporting to the administrative team and (2) institutionalize the processes of studying and analyzing the data summary, responding to the data, and reporting the actions taken for program improvement. The following proposals are offered to facilitate the realization of these goals:

- Members of the Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee will complete the assessment process for the academic year 1998-1999. Overall responsibility for the ongoing, annual assessment of academic programs will be assumed by the office of the academic dean in fall 1999 following the visit of the accreditation team and the dissolution of the Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee. Members of the current self-study committee will be available as resource persons in the future.
- In order to achieve the institutionalization of the processes of administering the assessment instruments, the gathering and summarizing of data, and reporting to the administrative team at the end of each academic year, various approaches are being considered by the administra-

tive team: (1) appoint a director of program evaluation and assessment who would carry out the tasks as administrative functions and be accountable to the academic dean; (2) establish a standing committee of faculty members who would execute the tasks; (3) request that each director of a degree program carry out the steps of administering the assessment instrument, gathering and summarizing the data, and reporting to the administrative team.

- The annual tasks of receiving the summary of data report, studying and analyzing the data, responding to the data through program improvements, and the reporting of actions taken to the faculty (normally at the August faculty business meeting) become the responsibility of the administrative team.
- An explanation of the assessment process will be given to new students each year during the orientation program in order to educate the student body regarding the overall goals and design of program evaluation.
- The entry and exit instruments will be used with all students willing to participate on these levels each year. The assessment instruments developed for alumni/ae may be used on a rotating basis, focusing on different degree programs each year.
- The committee acknowledges the labor-intensive nature of the assessment processes designed and requests that staff and secretarial assistance be provided in the future. Many aspects of the assessment process can be assumed by a staff member, e.g., writing of letters, phone calls to confirm interview dates, preparation of assessment instruments, transcription of interviews, etc.
- For the sake of consistency and continuity, the instruments designed by the Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee will be used with minor adjustments for a three-year period. At the end of that time, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the instruments and overall process of assessing programs will be conducted by the office of the academic dean.
- As necessary, the school will continue to seek consultation with an educational consultant in order to improve the design of the assessment instruments and develop skill in accurate analysis of data that leads to program improvement.
- Overall, Oblate will continue to seek ways to make the process of assessment of academic programs effective and reliable in order to encourage participation of administrators, faculty, students, graduates, and their associates.

Sarah Ann Sharkey, O.P., served as chairperson of the Evaluation and Assessment of Programs Committee. She is associate professor of biblical studies at Oblate School of Theology.

ENDNOTES

1. Excerpts from Oblate School of Theology's Statement of Purpose.

2. Oblate has a unique relationship with seminary and formation personnel that provides an opportunity for feedback to Oblate on the effectiveness of its academic programs. These opportunities occur through informal meetings between Oblate's administrative team, faculty, and formation personnel; monthly meetings of formation personnel with Oblate's academic dean present; and one meeting each semester between the full Oblate faculty and the formation personnel from Assumption Seminary and the religious communities who send students to Oblate.

3. James Nichols, *A Practitioner's Handbook for Institutional Effectiveness and Student Outcomes Assessment Implementation*, 3rd ed. (New York: Agathon Press, 1995), 8.

Assessment and Planning in a University-Related Theological School

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses the challenge and the place of assessment and planning processes within the life of a theological school. Based on the experience of conducting a twenty-month self-study process from December of 1996 to July of 1998, the author describes a selected number of assessment methods and evaluates the strengths and limitations of assessment processes designed to increase the school's attentiveness to the quality of its education.

Assessment and evaluation of a theological school is a search for truth about the quality of the education offered. The politics involved in this search for truth should not be underestimated. Those within and outside the school need to be persuaded of the value of the various assessment practices that the administration and faculty try to implement.

In this article, I will provide basic information on our school and then describe selected methods of assessment that either proved valuable in our self-study process or hold promise to be of some value to other schools. In the third and most significant part of the article, I will provide a general assessment of our school's experience of working with the new ATS standards, which includes reflections on the interplay between assessment and planning and the challenge of creating and sustaining interest in assessment activities so that they might eventually become practices.

Background on Saint John's

Our school of theology/seminary is the sole graduate program of Saint John's University, located in Collegeville, Minnesota, eighty miles northwest of Minneapolis. The undergraduate program operates in partnership with the nearby College of Saint Benedict with a combined enrollment of 3600 students. Saint John's University was founded by the Benedictine monks of Saint John's Abbey in 1857. Our school of theology/seminary has a student enrollment of 80-100 FTE, consisting of diocesan and monastic seminarians, students from religious orders, and lay students in ministerial and academic tracks. The headcount for our faculty is twenty-three, which translates into a full-time equivalent of 10.7.

The mission of our school is stated as follows:

> *Saint John's School of Theology/Seminary, rooted in the Roman Catholic and Benedictine traditions and the ecumenical and liturgical heritage of Saint John's Abbey, fosters study and prayer in a community of learners.*
>
> *Saint John's is committed to the academic, spiritual, and pastoral preparation of students for service to the Church in ordained and lay ministries, for further theological study, and for service in religious communities.*
>
> *Integral to this preparation is dedication by faculty and students to theological research and to spiritual and professional development toward a lifelong pursuit of wisdom.*

As a monk of the Abbey and as dean of the school of theology, I undertook the task of directing the self-study of our theological school as one who was heavily invested in the school as a member of the sponsoring religious community, an administrator, and a faculty member. At key points in the self-study process, our school was assisted by Louise Rolston, an educational consultant from British Columbia, and Donald Senior, president of Catholic Theological Union, as part of the Pilot School Project for implementing the new ATS accreditation standards.

Selected Methods of Evaluating Educational and Institutional Effectiveness

The single most valuable exercise in the self-study process for me was the articulation of an overall institutional plan for evaluation and assessment. Handbooks on assessment recommend that the self-study director chart all the forms of data available to the school in planning and day-to-day operations. In retrospect, I would have been better served if I had not delayed charting out a comprehensive assessment plan until the end of the self-study process. Because I had been dean of the school for almost ten years, I felt that I knew ninety percent of the data gathered and used by our staff and faculty and by other university administrators. Yet at the conclusion of the eighteen-month self-study process, I discovered that charting in greater detail all of our assessment and planning processes, evaluating them, and recommending ways to improve them had provided me with an better vantage point for discerning an appropriate investment of time and resources in various forms of assessment. To have charted a preliminary comprehensive plan at the outset would have helped me and the rest of the faculty and administration to be more strategic in the use of our time and energy.

Assessment is a critical step in the planning process that includes: (1) setting goals, (2) assessing progress, and (3) revising goals in light of what has been learned in the assessment. The diagnosis and prescription inherent in planning increase in effectiveness when the right kind of data are available and when good communication takes place among the stakeholders in the school.

In our overall institutional plan for evaluation and assessment, I listed fourteen categories, reflecting those of the ATS standards: (1) planning, (2) administration, (3) faculty, (4) recruitment of students and admission, (5) institutional advancement, (6) governance, (7) degree programs, (8) financial resources, (9) physical resources, (10) globalization, (11) library, (12) institutional data resources, (13) student services, and (14) advising and placement of students. Within each of these categories, I charted goal-setting processes in which I identified: (1) who established the goals and by what process, (2) what kinds of assessment data were gathered, and (3) what feedback loops had been established, or what routine procedures were in place to ensure that the data gathered informed deliberations on current operations and future goal-setting. The next step in developing the overall institutional plan was to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the planning that was occurring in each category and then to recommend ways to improve.

An overall institutional assessment plan can reveal how methods of assessment can serve more than one category or area within the school. For example, student opinion surveys of courses can include questions about the workload of the students in relation to other courses taught by other professors. This information can be helpful not only in terms of faculty development but also with regard to curricular reform. Surveys of alumni/ae and of current students have the advantage of being able to include questions on all fourteen of the categories listed in the previous paragraph. Yet to prepare an effective survey, the particular needs for data in each category must be in focus so that the right questions are effectively posed. If such particular needs for data are not known, the survey will probably lean too heavily on standard questions drawn from surveys prepared by other theological schools or national organizations; in such cases, there is a missed opportunity to maximize the time and effort of the alumni/ae and students who complete the survey. On the other hand, the standardized ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire can provide helpful data on an ongoing basis concerning the majority of the fourteen categories listed above. This questionnaire also allows one to compare the results of one's own school with a national profile. Surveys, as a method of data-gathering, have the advantage of processing the opinions of a large number of individuals and revealing patterns in the way the school's programs are perceived by key constituencies.

Focus groups can provide feedback in a more open-ended, dialogical fashion. We gathered small groups of ten to fifteen alumni/ae on three occasions for a day-and-a-half retreat in order to offer them theological talks, spiritual conferences, and time for liturgical prayer and reflection. We also included a two-hour listening session in the schedule where we posed a series of questions to get their opinions on how they have been served by our educational program and what improvements they would recommend. We kept detailed minutes of these listening sessions in which the alumni/ae provided their views of the current needs for ministerial and theological education, affirmed and criticized existing programs in the school, and offered creative ideas on ways to improve the school. This retreat format also provided the opportunity for our alumni/ae to continue their education and for us to renew and strengthen our ties with them.

Each administrator and staff member in our school sets annual goals in June, which form the basis for a performance appraisal covering the subsequent twelve months. As part of this goal-setting process, the administrator or staff person is expected to state the ways that he or she will carry out the mission, vision, and strategic goals of the school of theology/seminary and of the university. Although this effort at alignment of individual and institutional efforts has been under way for the past two years, we still have work to do in gaining widespread consensus on the value of promoting such alignment through the annual performance appraisal process. If this additional step in the performance appraisal process raises consciousness of our common purpose as a school, it will be a success; if it is perceived as manipulative, it could lead to resistance and fragmentation of our efforts.

The annual evaluation of seminarians requires each seminarian to set annual formation goals, to review progress throughout the year with a formation adviser, to write a self-evaluation near the end of the year, and to discuss this self-evaluation with faculty, seminary staff, and a formation advisor. The formation advisor then writes a final summary report. The content of the discussions and written materials are confidential and cannot be released without the student's permission. The general outline of this process is used in many seminaries. We have extended the process to include lay ministry students. The substantial time commitment required of staff and faculty, and the resistance that can arise against such evaluation, are factors that can derail the evaluation process. In extending this process to lay ministry students, we have learned that it is essential to be clear that such an annual evaluation of ministry students is an expectation of the program. We also know that we must make adequate provision in the workload of faculty and staff to carry out this important, yet time-consuming process. The goals of our pastoral degree programs include expectations on spiritual and personal growth, which cannot be consistently and effectively assessed apart from this annual evaluation process. Yet in providing an assessment of our pastoral degree programs to an outside observer, we can only attest that these processes have been carried out; we can hardly measure how much personal and spiritual growth has occurred in each student in quantifiable terms.

The assessment of tenured faculty has been addressed within the university of which we are a part. Within the past year, the university faculty voted to adopt a process of post-tenure review whereby each tenured faculty member is asked to reflect on his or her teaching, scholarship and creative work, and service activities, and to plan a course of professional development for the future. A faculty member is required to begin participation in this process ten years after receiving tenure. The process includes: (1) setting goals for oneself in consultation with peers and a faculty coordinator of the review, (2) identifying strategies for meeting these goals, and (3) submitting a final report two years after the beginning of the process. Additionally, within the school of theology/seminary, each tenured and nontenured faculty member is required to submit an annual report on scholarly and service activities and on pedagogical concerns, which are then reviewed by the dean.

Within this selection of assessment methods, one can begin to see the breadth of the assessment process and the diversity of the methods and techniques required. I believe that the complexity of the assessment process can be countered through the development of a comprehensive assessment plan that evaluates the assessment processes themselves.

Evaluation and Reflection on Our School's Experience of Working with the New ATS Standards

The experience of conducting a self-study according to the ATS standards is somewhat like an extended, intense working retreat in which the school steps back from a number of its usual patterns of activity to take a closer look at itself so that its mission might be carried out with greater care and understanding. In the self-study, the comprehensive examination of what we typically do is introspective from the vantage point of the institution, but for individual administrators and faculty it is a form of reaching out to understand more fully the ways that the parts of the school connect with the whole. On an effective retreat, participants shed old ways of doing things and expand their vision. At its best, the self-study process is likewise renewing. It builds community by strengthening relationships within and outside the school; it sharpens the vision of the school by grounding its activities in the traditions and purpose of the school and in the needs of its constituencies. The resolutions for a new way of looking at life and acting which typically emerge from a retreat are also outcomes of the self-study process. But it is important to remember that celebrating and gratefully acknowledging one's strengths is at least as important as identifying one's areas for improvement, for those strengths are usually living relationships that will diminish if not cultivated.

In the new ATS standards, the purpose of the institution describes the dynamic that brings together the faculty, administration, students, trustees, and other constituencies to pursue theological education and ministerial training in a particular place. The purpose of a school is intertwined with particular traditions and commitments, and it contextualizes the distinctive activities in which the school engages. At Saint John's, we define the purpose of the school as the "pursuit of wisdom" which means for us: " 'Prefer nothing to the love of Christ Who brings us together to everlasting life' in service of one another." The quote within this definition comes from chapter 72 of the Rule of Saint Benedict;

Benedictine values have shaped the history of our school since its beginning in 1857. The "pursuit of wisdom" guides or contextualizes our primary work of training for lay and ordained ministry and educating for careers in theological teaching and study and for service in religious communities. Scholarship and professional development of both students and faculty are integral to holistic theological and ministerial education guided by the "pursuit of wisdom." I understand "the purpose of the institution" as the dynamic that calls forth and provides a focus for the passion and energy of all the constituencies of the school. This dynamic can wax or wane depending upon the people, the quality of relationships, the availability of resources — in short, the full range of factors addressed in the ten ATS general institutional standards. The purpose of a school is not a static entity; its effectiveness and level of understanding depend upon the extent to which the purpose is engaged and exercised.

The ATS standards expect that the purpose of the institution will inform and guide the setting and attaining of goals in the full range of activities in the school. This emphasis on goal setting and evaluating progress toward these goals is the typical practice in such widely different areas of the school as strategic planning and spiritual formation. The realization to which the ATS standards awakened me was the need to be goal-directed in every area and program within the school. It is not sufficient that the administrator of a program has individual performance appraisal goals; the program itself should have goals. So, for example, the school needs to have goals for areas such as student life and advising and placement, and not simply goals for the directors and staff who provide these services.

The "assessment movement" in American higher education has been "at war" with the attitude that a school can *assume* that it is doing a good job. Government and accrediting agencies have been asking schools to *demonstrate* that they are doing a good job. In business terms, the question would be framed as, "how do you know you have a good product?" Fortunately, ATS is sensitive to the particular character and history of each school and to the distinctive nature of theological education that is shaped by the ethos not only of the academy but also of the church. So it is important not only to question whether a goal will sustain the institution, but also to ask what is *theological* about the goal. The institution, with all the competing demands and complexities involved in surviving and growing, can easily become an end in itself. Theological schools need to resist such idolatry. Our theological consultant advised us that acting upon fundamental theological convictions and values will lead to "good things happening." Such attentiveness to the character of a theological school can be liberating, for it speaks the truth and acts in faith.

Goals need to be reviewed and rearticulated on a regular basis. For example, formation goals for individual students are typically revised and restated each year, whereas goals of degree programs are expected to last a number of years with periodic readjustments. ATS expects us to articulate what we aspire to in the various areas and activities of the school. We are encouraged to stretch ourselves and strive for excellence even if our goals take the form of aspirations that are not readily measurable. The excellence that we try to achieve should not be curtailed by our incapacity to measure our progress. I am encouraged by the ATS advice in this regard because I would rather set idealistic goals and then accept compromises, if necessary. By contrast, another may prefer to be more realistic in goal-setting and then be more demanding in producing specific outcomes. In my opinion, the idealist acts as if there is an abundance of time and energy, whereas the realist regards time and energy as limited, finite, and therefore must be strictly apportioned in order to succeed in carrying out commitments. I think the "assessment movement" tries to be realistic and pragmatic, but I wonder if such an approach works as well in theology and ministry as it does in other disciplinary or professional areas. An inspiring vision can generate energy for growth in spirituality and theological understanding and so create conditions that far exceed one's expectations.

How then can we persuade an outside observer that students have learned and grown as a consequence of our programs? By what processes and information can we convince someone that we have achieved what we promised? Because I find most engaging that which cannot be measured, the task of charting the progress of a large group, a program, or multiple programs can be daunting. Measuring progress necessarily involves a measure of quantification, even if this means, for example, counting how many times students in their second year of ministry studies delivered reflections at liturgies. The more intriguing question for me at these liturgies would be how many of these reflections inspired the worshipers to praise of God and to act generously. But how would we be able to find out if the reflections had this effect? Perhaps such data could be gathered from the participants in the liturgy through focus groups or liturgy evaluations. Trying to find the right mode of evaluation for a goal should follow the articulation of the goal rather than vice versa; to invert the process would argue in favor of striving only for what one can deliver. ATS encourages us first of all to set goals appropriate for our program and then to devise ways to measure progress toward these goals.

In our self-study process, the advice of an educational consultant and a theological consultant was invaluable. Their experience of working with a wide range of theological schools gave authority to their questions, concerns, and advice. It was helpful to have wise conversation partners not familiar with our school because it forced us to find clear and effective language to describe ourselves and to address issues that might not otherwise have occurred to us.

For me, the real challenge of assessment is, first, the need to demonstrate to an outsider what I intuitively believe is there and, second, the need to articulate goals and provide data on things that seem to be working and thus seem to be taken for granted. For example, in our degree programs I think students are able to read texts critically after two semesters of study in areas such as church history, Scripture, and systematics. If I am acquainted with the courses and the professors, I can predict with a fair degree of accuracy whether the students will gain this critical skill. I know that these professors will challenge a student until the student's critical skills reach an acceptable level. But if I must explain to an outsider, who is not acquainted with these professors and courses, how I know that students are gaining critical interpretive skills, then I need to find a way to demonstrate the consistent level of attention that professors and students pay to the development of skills for reading texts critically. I can save examples of student research papers and examinations; I can review student opinion surveys on courses where students are asked to assess their growth in their ability to read texts critically; I can interview alumni/ae to determine whether they believe such skills were fostered in the program and to what extent they were well served in this regard by our program. Often, anecdotal data on our graduates are more influential in decision-making than statistical data that indicate the average achievements of our program. Although anecdotal data usually offer only a limited perspective and can distort one's imagination about the total picture, such data are focused on real individuals who tie into the fabric of the particular life of the school and can trigger important insights about the program. Assessment data then need to include not only survey data, which are gathered systematically and scientifically, but also narrative data from individuals and groups through interviews and small-group discussions. The interplay between these two types of data can be communicated to an outsider so that a persuasive case can be made for stating how much progress has been made in achieving particular goals.

It seems to me that ATS urges schools to pay attention not simply to outcomes of student learning and outcomes of particular programs but even more so to the interplay between these types of outcomes to see how they work together to shape a coherent program for theological and ministerial education. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. We all have no doubt noticed that the marginal student who is determined to be ordained will say, "Just tell me what I need to do in order to get your approval for my success and I will do it." Formation for ministry involves shaping a vision, internalizing values, and developing habits or ways of living that will sustain the minister in service to others. Jumping through hoops does not promote growth. A typical survival tactic for students whose sole aspiration is to be ordained is to compartmentalize areas of growth and to have an evaluator clearly state the minimal expectations. Lip-service is paid to the more important goal of growth and development as a pastoral minister. The challenge, of course, is to be attentive to the specific aspects of personal growth and at the same time to keep them tied into the bigger picture of growth as a minister. Analogously, the well-being of a theological school depends on understanding the various aspects of its program within the context of the whole school and its purpose. Fragmentation and compartmentalization can undermine the quality of the program.

Data on progress in achieving goals should be gathered from multiple perspectives and then systematized. Just as student opinion surveys should be conducted in every course, so also should opinions of alumni/ae on the long-term outcomes of their education be sought on a regular basis. As mentioned earlier, we piloted a project of gathering groups of ten to fifteen alumni/ae for small-group discussions in which we asked them open-ended questions about our programs. We are also developing an alumni/ae survey that will be sent to each alumnus/a five years and ten years after graduation. If the pattern for getting feedback from alumni/ae becomes routine, the voice of this important constituency in the school should regularly find its way into the discussions and deliberations about the school. To make routine the collection of data, to develop the habit of inviting feedback from alums, and to incorporate this voice of alumni/ae into deliberations rather than simply stockpiling the data are forms of data-gathering about which we have become much more intentional as a result of the self-study process.

We realize that training for ministry, theological education, and the pursuit of wisdom is a lifelong task. Our data collection on the long-term impact of our education could be aided by regarding our incoming students in the various degree programs each year as a "developmental cohort" whose progress we can track during their time in the program and at five-year intervals after graduation. This profile of our students and alumni/ae would provide us with information to demonstrate to an outsider how well we are preparing our students for ministry. The basic reason, of course, for gathering data in order to persuade an outsider of our level of achievement is not the persuasion per se, but rather the fact that we have in place the practice of articulating our understanding of the quality of our education.

Collecting data takes time and resources. The process of data collection must be goal-directed so that the right types of data are gathered, made accessible, and used in planning and decision-making. The ATS standards call for an overall institutional plan for assessment and evaluation. As noted earlier, I found that charting out the goals, assessment data, and feedback loops (i.e., the steps by which assessment data are used in planning) for each area allowed me to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our data-gathering and to recommend ways to improve. One of the important benefits of such an overall institutional plan is its capacity to estimate how much time and energy are devoted to assessment and to what extent these are well spent.

The articulation of an overall assessment plan can help in gaining the support of faculty and staff for the assessment process. Faculty are already evaluating students. Reading and responding to student essays and correcting examinations are examples of taxing responsibilities for faculty, which repeatedly require the faculty to make judgments about the quality of the students' thought and reflection. Faculty come to know the students and their capacities with a depth and concreteness that statistics cannot convey. Assessment activities in the school need to build on this faculty investment in the evaluation of students. In our school, we have also found helpful a faculty forum on applicants for merit scholarships in which faculty can collectively confirm or qualify our understanding of the academic and leadership qualities of particular students. Such discussions need careful preparation and structure so that the process is fair to the students and at the same time does not consume inordinate amounts of faculty and administrative time. In a similar way, faculty who are reviewed throughout their first six years of service toward tenure, must prepare a file for their third and sixth year reviews. The entire faculty reads the file and discusses the performance of the faculty member under review. These discussions have helped to bring perspective and depth to the letters that individual faculty write to the university's rank and tenure committee on behalf of their faculty colleagues under review. But perhaps even more importantly, these discussions have created a common understanding among faculty of what we expect from one another as colleagues, instructors, scholars, and members of the larger academic and church communities.

I think assessment captures the interests of faculty the more it respects their professional judgment and invites them into a dialogue that will lead to the improvement of the school. One faculty member noted that her subcommittee in the self-study process was energized by taking their analysis of problems the next step toward possible solutions: if such and such is the case, then what can we do to remedy it. In the self-study process, the deliberations of many of our subcommittees oscillated between diagnosis and prescription. When faculty are able to complete the loop from "what is" to "what might be," they are more apt to find their creativity engaged and so to invest in the process.

Assessment methods that do not articulate a connection with the purpose of the school run the risk of being an assessment exercise for the sake of assessment. Such exercises demoralize faculty and generate resistance. The challenge of designing assessment exercises involves engaging the diverse interests of the faculty, administrators, students, and alumni/ae. When workable assessment practices have been developed, then they must be maintained and adapted. A basic purpose in such assessment practices is to create substantial dialogue on how we are achieving goals in the various parts of our program. I believe that thoughtful, substantial dialogue on how well we are educating and forming our students is the most important practice in creating a good theological school. Assessment is not an end in itself; rather it should be seen as a constellation of practices that will help us improve.

The ATS standards can assist in this dialogue by identifying key values held by the member schools of the Association. The standards raise important questions that guide a school's self-evaluation. The standards (apart from the "shall statements" that signal minimal expectations of quality and practice) are an authoritative voice that engages and guides dialogue in the school rather than one that dictates the course of such dialogue. The subdivisions within each standard are intended to spur on reflection on the standard as a whole, rather than to chart a normative direction that dialogue on the standard must follow. In the end, it is good to know how our practices and values compare with those that our peers believe are essential to the character of a good theological school. We are all part of a larger church, society, and world in which we try to find our place.

Conclusion

I hope that the selected methods of assessment that I have described in this article and my reflections on working with the new ATS standards will prove helpful to schools that are facing the self-study process. Assessment includes not only techniques and methods but also communication and discernment. Searching for the facts and developing strategies for improvement are one aspect of assessment, but another equally important aspect is the political one where commitment by all the stakeholders in the school to a common purpose is essential to success.

Attitudes toward assessment are critical. Humility, honesty, and desire to improve will carry one farther than a defensive, anxious, ego-centered attitude that seeks praise as an end in itself. The resistance to evaluation that we sometimes encounter in ministry students also surfaces in administrators and faculty and in the institution as a whole. The more we can learn how to accept criticism and focus on ways to become a better theological school, the more we will value the assessment process. As in any human activity, misdirected wills, short-sightedness, poor judgment, fear, and other pitfalls will complicate the process. But for those of us administrators and faculty involved in theological education, we know that we stand in need of transformation at the same time we are encourage the transformation of our students. The dialogical process at the heart of assessment is a good place to learn more about ourselves and to come to greater self-awareness. We might ask, "What is theological about the assessment process?"

When we examine the mission and purpose of our theological school in light of its place within the coming of God's reign or its impact upon the Body of Christ, we will see the wisdom of not regarding our school's programs as ends in themselves, no matter how noble the service such programs provide. A theological approach to our mission will allow us to be more daring and will urge us to make bolder long-term commitments than utilitarian or pragmatic values would permit. If we are committed to mutuality in the Body of Christ and act on it, then good things will happen in our school.

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Mission-Focused Evaluation: A Work in Progress

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ABSTRACT: The invitation to develop a model for assessing institutional and educational effectiveness as a pilot school was opportune for Wartburg Theological Seminary. Our regional accrediting agency, the North Central Association, redeveloped its standards at about the same time as the ATS and in the same general direction. At Wartburg, the first students of the revised Master of Divinity program—our central degree program—were about to graduate. For these and other reasons, the time was right to talk about assessment. This article highlights our experience: the reformulation of our mission statement, the development of a tool to help us document educational effectiveness for the sake of program improvement, and our look at institutional effectiveness in terms of the accrediting standards. We thank our project consultants for their valuable assistance: our theological consultant, Mary Elizabeth Moore of the Claremont School of Theology, and our educational consultant, David Payne of Sam Houston State University. We have come a long way in appropriating the ATS standards into our seminary life and still have a long way to go.

Introduction and Background

Wartburg Theological Seminary is one of eight seminaries of the more than five-million member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), an entity created through merger in 1988. The roots of Wartburg go back more than 140 years to the vision of Wilhelm Loehe, who established a large deaconess program and a seminary to provide pastors for German emigrants to the United States and elsewhere. These institutions, especially the seminary, became the center for mission work in many parts of the world. Loehe established these institutions in the rural Franconian village of Neuendettelsau, thus wedding local and global needs.

Wartburg's student population is approximately 200, nearly all of whom are full-time and live on the campus. A close community life, centered in worship, is important to Wartburg's educational framework. A significant part of the education takes place informally within the community, which includes a faculty of approximately seventeen members. The primary educational focus is the preparation of women and men for ordained ministry in the ELCA through the Master of Divinity degree program. Wartburg also offers the Master of Arts and Master of Sacred Theology degree programs as well as a new Master of Arts in Theology, Development, and Evangelism, which is oriented particularly to Third World students whose ministries require integration with development work. Wartburg also is committed to the preparation of people for ministry in the convergence of cultures in the Southwest through the M.Div. program in Austin, Texas—the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest (LSPS).

Thus, the setting for self-study in preparation for our February 1998 reaccreditation team visit included a mission heritage and a worship-centered community forming the context for education, plus a ten-year-old church merger that had ushered in many changes. Fortunately, Wartburg was anchored in its development efforts and its curriculum by its 1988-90 long-range planning process and could absorb and contribute to ELCA changes. The mission statement that was developed through this long-range planning process focused the seminary's identity and history and has been used by the development office, the academic community, the administration, and the board. The planning process and mission statement stressed the need to orient curriculum toward globalization, mission, and the need to articulate the Gospel in conversation with religiously plural contexts. The M.Div. curriculum was revised in the light of this mission statement, and the first class of students graduated in the spring of 1998.

The self-study had to come to terms with process in motion. The ATS standards, adopted in 1996, necessitated another look at the mission statement as central to self-evaluation, a look at the M.Div. with assessment considerations in mind, and a look at the M.A. and S.T.M. with changes indicated. The M.A. in Theology, Development, and Evangelism was developed with the redeveloped standards in mind.

Methods of Evaluating Educational and Institutional Effectiveness

The 1996 redeveloped standards represent a paradigm shift oriented toward assessment of outcomes in relation to a seminary's purpose statement and the development of feedback loops for continuous program improvement. One of the surprises in our self-study was the effort it took to move into the new paradigm, to *processes* away from *resources* as the center of the paradigm. What do our processes tell us about the outcomes we desire? We know how our students perform. We also hear how our graduates perform. We make changes in the seminary program and sharpen our mission statement accordingly. So what is new here? "New" is the self-consciousness of the effort. "New" for Wartburg is documenting the process. "New" is finding ways to talk about outcomes and goals, what they ought to be in terms of our mission and purpose, how well they are met, and the loop to program improvement. For Wartburg two questions are based on the new paradigm: How does the seminary perform in its efforts to form students for ministry in relation to our chosen outcomes and goals and how do we use our findings to improve our program and modify our goals and desired outcomes to accomplish our purpose?

The Mission Statement, Prelude to the Assessment Form

The Wartburg mission statement is reviewed regularly and reworded when the need arises for clarification or for sharper focus of the distinctive purposes of the seminary. The mission statement developed in the 1988-90 long-range planning process guided the revision of the M.Div. degree program. Its reexamination in the self-study process using the 1996 ATS standards was a valuable exercise in helping us focus on what we want to accomplish in students. For those closest to this effort, wrestling with the 1996 ATS standards in terms of the mission statement facilitated movement to understanding and living out of the new paradigm of the redeveloped standards.

The ATS standards use the term, "purpose statement," instead of mission statement. In our self-study, we decided to label the first paragraph of our mission statement, "mission/purpose statement"; the second paragraph, "mission for academic program"; the next section, "commentary"; and the last section, which lists our degree programs and centers, "programs."[1] For us, the term "mission" suits who we are and who we want to be. The term "purpose" is a good ATS word that helped us keep our focus on the shift in paradigm. We needed to state our mission in less confessional and more goal- oriented ways.

The mission statement with all its parts was reformulated into the current 1997 statement by a committee composed of the three academic division heads, student representatives, and the academic dean who met often over lunch away from the seminary and who worked in consultation with the faculty and with some input from LSPS. This effort was informed by our experience with the new M.Div. curriculum. The statement was reformulated specifically toward the "purpose" concept of the ATS standards and with a goals and outcomes orientation that could be tested against information from our processes.

While not changing the missional orientation of the mission statement, Wartburg modified it to organize its vision of the formation of a mission-oriented ministry around a set of bipolar unities:

- Formation for pastoral ministry takes place in a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection.
- Learning takes place for the sake of worship and mission, and it is informed by them.
- Justification and justice belong together at the heart of the gospel, for God's redeeming love for the world in Jesus Christ is communicated both in the proclamation of the gospel and in the struggle for life against the powers of death in the quest for justice.
- An effective understanding of our biblical and confessional heritage entails exploring the power of our traditions to create new meaning in new contexts, including the culturally and religiously plural contexts of the present.

- The church is essentially a global community manifested in local congregations assembled around word and sacrament.

The Wartburg faculty approved the statement in April 1997, the president's cabinet affirmed it by consensus, and the board approved it in May 1997.

So then, the mission statement that had guided conversation on curriculum, globalization, searches to fill faculty positions, and assessment prior to the ATS redeveloped standards continues to guide in these areas. During the self-study process, however, the conversation on assessment, due to the new standards, became far more self-conscious.

The Assessment Form

The committee that spearheaded the mission statement reformulation also guided the establishment of a simple assessment form. The form was inspired by one in an article in the NCA 1996 collection of papers on self-study and institutional improvement, entitled "Catching the Vision: Assessment of College Mission through Essay Writing."[2]

The mission statement was used to identify seven integrative curricular categories around which outcomes could be assessed. The faculty determined three formational outcomes for each of the seven curricular categories. In the curricular category of Biblical Interpretation, the faculty identified these outcomes: some students have difficulty understanding the point of biblical texts, others demonstrate sound exegetical insight into the meaning of texts, and others effectively interpret texts with creative insight into their meaning for life. A scale from 1 through 9 across the three outcomes was established for each of the seven curricular categories: 1, 2, and 3 for the first outcome shows the goal unattained; 4, 5, and 6 for the second, the goal is attained; 7, 8, and 9 for the third, the goal is attained with creativity and integration. The seven curricular categories chosen were Biblical Interpretation, Theological, Global Horizon and Mission, Justification and Justice, Ecclesial and Pastoral Identity, Skills for Ministry, and Theological Integration. At the end of the assessment form, space was provided for a narrative summary.[3]

The philosophy undergirding this approach came from Elliot Eisner. The critic's task is to render the "essentially ineffable qualities constituting works of art into a language that will help others perceive the work more deeply."[4]

Because of the community character of the seminary, faculty know students well. They learn to know them through community activities, curricular activities, and the ELCA candidacy process. Broad student learning deficits are noted; courses and curriculum are adjusted accordingly. This creates a kind of rolling evaluation of courses and curricular outcomes that is largely built into the fabric of the school, imbedded in its conversational style. This kind of evaluation is directed at formational as well as intellectual learning goals and outcomes. The assessment form presents a way to capture on paper the rolling evaluation that is part of the fabric of the school. Because it is built from the mission statement, it applies to some degree to all the degree programs, because all the degree programs stem in one way or another from the mission statement. The assessment form applies directly to the M.Div. and M.A.

Characteristic to the processes long in place for program improvement is their conversational style. The community character of Wartburg gives students easy access to faculty. While informal conversations between students and faculty are not documented, they help faculty think about the impact of the seminary's programs. Concerns may be brought to a faculty meeting or committee for discussion, and adjustments may result. The ELCA candidacy for ministry process includes faculty and students, as well as synod representatives, in evaluation of students at several points in their student careers. As part of the final step of the candidacy process, the faculty evaluates students during their senior year and makes recommendations for approval for ministry of candidates, based on the faculty's experience of the students during their time of study at Wartburg, also taking into account the internship of M.Div. students. The conversational style is evident here and valued. The assessment form takes this style into account.

Wartburg did not add to the extensive evaluative efforts already in place, but rather incorporated its assessment effort with its other evaluative efforts. The assessment form allows for this use of it. Evaluating program based on what faculty see in students proved overall to be difficult.

Faculty use the form with second-year students and seniors in their fall semester candidacy evaluations. These two evaluations, which involve both faculty and synodical representatives, have always served as an informal form of assessment of the curriculum's performance. The assessment form makes that more explicit and conscious. In light of material and interviews for the evaluations, the faculty develop a profile on each student on the assessment form. Often, in this process, faculty become most conscious of program short-comings revealed in their own field.

We began asking seniors to fill out the assessment form at the end of their senior year. We compared the responses of the 1997 graduating class to the responses of the 1998 class on the ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire. (These students were the last graduates of the old M.Div. curriculum.) The comparison showed a correlation between the two instruments. The correlation is strong enough to suggest that the annual use of both instruments by seniors would be useful to the program improvement efforts of the faculty.

The assessment form is also used with alums at an annual continuing education event for graduates in their third year of ministry. This includes responses, using the form, from the bishops of the synods where graduates serve. The first time graduates used the form, it generated useful conversation in the hour devoted to it. The second time, the form was given to graduates at the beginning of the conference, and it influenced conversation for the duration of the conference.

In asking students and alums to think evaluatively about Wartburg's curriculum, the new orientation toward assessment requires a shift from evaluating the student in relation to goals for ministry to an assessment of the seminary program and its outcomes.

The visiting accreditation team noted in the report of their February 1998 visit that "the challenge for this school is twofold: (1) to formalize what occurs informally without creating a quantitative data flow and/or standardization of efforts that obscures a holistic endeavor and (2) to complete the evaluation loop by developing means for analysis and critique of evaluative data information that feeds back into systemic adjustments." At this point, we believe that our assessment form is key to both. The faculty developed similar forms for the assessment of courses and for semesters in relation to semester objectives. LSPS developed similar assessment forms for the M.Div. program and courses in Austin.

As a course evaluation form, the assessment form is changed to relate to a particular course. Curricular categories are replaced with course objectives, and the curricular outcomes are replaced with course outcomes. All course evaluation forms have three outcomes identified for each course objective and employ the 1 through 9 scale. Similar to the assessment form, the numbers, 1, 2, and 3, apply to the objective unattained; 4, 5, and 6, apply to the objective attained; and 7, 8, and 9 apply to the objective attained with creativity and integration. Students are asked to think of the form as evaluating the course, not themselves. This form, like the others, calls for individual narration.

The faculty has forums in which the results of assessment and its meaning for program changes are discussed and improvements decided upon: the semester planning groups (cross-disciplinary), the division meetings, and the annual faculty retreat. In these settings, the assessment process has already sparked improvements. However, Wartburg has not yet formally completed the loop between assessment and improvements in the sense of creating paper documentation. For one thing, the first graduates of the revised M.Div. entered rostered ministry in 1998. Also, the M.A. was reformulated and the S.T.M. revised during the self-study in connection with changes in the ATS standards and ELCA expectations and, in particular, with the reformulated mission statement in mind.

The S.T.M. presumes an M.Div. for admission. Its purpose and aims, revised through the self-study in light of the mission statement, provides a focus for faculty and student research that explores the meaning of our biblical and Lutheran tradition in the present global context with its multicultural and religious pluralism. This research will explore how this tradition generates new meaning in new contexts and how it is illuminated and transformed by those contexts. The degree program aims to provide a setting for the cutting edge of faculty research embodied in courses that engage students. It also aims to continue to offer the opportunity of advanced academic work to qualified international students, M.Div. honors students, and M.Div. graduates of non-Lutheran seminaries doing a year of study at a Lutheran seminary. It is clear that the assessment form needs to be modified for this degree program if it is to be used here. This question has not been studied yet. Conceivably, the contribution of the research envisioned to the conversation of the seminary would be part of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the S.T.M.

The goals of the two-year M.A. degree program, approved by the faculty in August 1997, are in keeping with the mission statement. The orientation of the M.A. is toward providing understanding in theological disciplines that students integrate with their individual purposes for the degree. The M.A. satisfies the theological academic requirements for service as diaconal ministers or associates in ministry in congregations, agencies, and institutions of the ELCA. This degree does not lead to ordination, but it does often involve the ELCA candidacy process. Some courses offered for the M.Div. are also offered for the M.A. The assessment form is applicable here and also as a course evaluation form.

The new M.A. in Theology, Development, and Evangelism is aimed at students from Third World settings whose ministry requires skills in development and evangelism integrated with theological reflection. Conceivably, an ongoing measure of the success of this program involves implementation in their home countries of the projects the students put together at the seminary.

Parallel with Mission Statement Reformulation and Assessment Form Development

In building background for self-study, Wartburg sent representatives to ATS and NCA workshops and conferences. Reports on these gatherings were made to our administrators and faculty, including information on NCA and ATS changes that had been made recently or were coming. We circulated the standards of both accrediting agencies, putting the ATS standards into the hands of faculty and administrators of Wartburg in Dubuque and LSPS. The standards were given to board members, student representatives, the self-study steering committee, and some copies were made available in the Wartburg library.

In November 1996, faculty, administrators, and the self-study steering committee met together to discuss a proposed framework of a self-study plan and to decide upon self-study assignments. One person wrote the proposal. Elements of the seminary discussions, occasioned by the workshop and conference reports, were brought together in the proposal. The proposed framework, "Tentative Self-Study Assignments," was built on the organization of the ATS standards. The NCA standards were integrated into the ATS organization of the standards. Some NCA and ATS literature, and the Wartburg Academic Assessment Plan filed with the NCA Commission, were also taken into account. The self-study plan framework called for assignments to be shepherded through existing committees. The existing committees, taken into account, included the board and board committees that draw from Wartburg's larger constituencies, thus ensuring a breadth of constituency representation. Decisions were made on who should be responsible for what.

With information gathered at the November 1996 meeting, focused self-study assignments were written, e.g., the director for student services was asked to be responsible for addressing the applicable standards in the area of student services. Individuals were assigned applicable standards for each area of the seminary. The value of focusing assignments is that each part of the seminary considers the appropriate standards and also looks at the processes that provide outcome information used for improvement.

A variety of methods was employed in writing responses to the standards. Committees critiqued responses written by one of their number, and some responses were formed in meetings such as those of the president's cabinet, faculty division meetings, and the annual faculty retreat. Records of processes were brought into the self-study. Of these, particularly helpful were the reports to the board by administrators, faculty, and students, and the board minutes.

Institutional Effectiveness

The standards call for identification of desired goals. The first two sentences of our mission statement say that:

> *Wartburg Theological Seminary serves the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by being a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning. Within this community, Wartburg educates women and men to serve the church's mission as ordained and lay leaders.*

Administrators considered the application of the mission statement to their activity and saw the words *"being"* and *"educates"* as operative. They saw administrative offices and staff as *enabling and facilitating* "being" and "educating"; such was the consensus of the president's cabinet. Administrators understood too that while thinking about "enabling" and "facilitating" was useful, thinking about the entire mission statement was necessary. For example, our development people know that giving to the seminary has to do with its mission, not seminary need. Our admissions people know that the mission of the seminary is important to potential students. Also, our administrators know that our mission statement is inclusive, global, and ecumenical. This has implications for hiring and admitting practices. When the president's cabinet gives support by consensus to the mission statement, the cabinet gives assent to the statement's implications for their work.

The standards ask that we have a system of gathering information related to our desired goals. Our administrators began using the ATS *Entering and Graduating Student Questionnaires* of the Student Information Project in 1997. They compared the results of our 1997 survey of graduating students with the total profile of all ATS participating schools in the areas of student satisfaction with services and resources. This first use, compared with the total profile data, showed general satisfaction with the services Wartburg offers and less satisfaction with services available elsewhere and not provided by Wartburg. We plan to use the *Graduating Student Questionnaire* annually. It will give us not only the total profile as a basis for comparison, but we will be able to compare our results from year to year. The questionnaire does not take into consideration our particular mission statement. It does not take into consideration the intentions of Wartburg that are unique to itself. What the results do is contribute to our conversation about our effectiveness.

We also decided to use the ATS *Institutional Peer Profile Report* annually. It compares Wartburg's data with those of schools we identified as "peer" institutions. The report informs the work of the president, the director of strategic planning, the director of business and finance, the director for admissions, the academic dean, and director of libraries. This tool also does not take into consideration our mission statement or the intentions we have that are unique to us and that serve our mission. The value of the *Peer Profile Report* is in its contribution to our thinking and conversation.

In addition to the ATS *Graduating Student Questionnaire* and the *Peer Profile Report*, we gather information through a number of in-house processes such as the employee evaluation process, exit interviews, regular staff meetings conducted by the director of personnel, and surveys such as the annual student debt survey of graduates in their third year of ministry. The results of this student debt survey are used in advising current students. In the area of development, we have forums such as the development council, with its clergy and lay membership, and the board development committee. A new annual survey was begun, the library satisfaction questionnaire, which was circulated to both students and staff. While the *Graduating Student Questionnaire* had not indicated any problems with the library, faculty and student conversations relative to the self-study made it clear that we had some library issues to address. This underscores the usefulness of our in-house processes.

We are asked by the standards to assess our performance based on the information gathered. Where information gathered through our various processes is tested by our mission statement is in Wartburg's committee system. Students and other constituencies have access to faculty and administrators by their representation on these committees. In meeting together, situations revealed through our processes are discussed and solutions found. The community of Wartburg with the easy access students have to faculty and administrators facilitates the committee system. Minutes attest to the function of the committee system as do reports to the board and resultant board policy decisions. The ATS *Graduating Student Questionnaire* also seems to support the conclusion that the committee system works.

The standards ask us to establish revised goals or activities in light of information gathered. We have various ways of achieving improvement. Each office has developed a procedures manual so that changes can be recorded and employed. Recommendations for significant changes are taken to the board, which then may become policy. All our manuals were brought up to date in the course of the self-study. They are normally changed in accord with policy changes.

In looking at processes in place, we decided that Wartburg had too many committees, and we folded essential work into fewer committees while maintaining their cross-constituency character. We also saw that where we did not have a strong committee functioning, issues were not being resolved. This was the case for the library issues. We now have a functioning library committee of faculty, staff, and students. More student representation was added to the student services committee to obtain a clearer student view of the adequacy and appropriateness of student service policies.

We see reason to value our in-house processes that are in place for thinking about and using the information that we gather. We want to be extremely cautious about any claim of "having arrived." We want our processes to be continually effective and so we will change our ways of gathering information and implementing change as we determine the necessity based on the information we gather. We made some changes in the course of the self-study to our processes and as a result of our processes. Over time, the two ATS tools may give us help here, adding to our in-house processes for gathering information.

The Board's Role in the Seminary and in the Self-Study Process

The board elects and retains faculty and senior administrators who carry out the work for which the board has ultimate responsibility and approval. The board confers degrees, enters into contracts, approves budgets, supports development activities, manages the assets of the seminary, and establishes policy. Administrators, faculty, and students report to the board semi-annually in writing and in person. The board has five advisory members who are of three seminary constituencies: administrators, faculty, and students. The board committees oversee the work of the seminary. The board links us with the ELCA and provides a forum drawn from our larger constituency.

In the self-study process, the board approved the self-study effort, Wartburg's pilot school role, and the self-study steering committee on which a board member served. It approved the reformulated mission statement and the degree program changes, and in a meeting that included board advisory members, discussed the self-study report, which contributed to the final version.

The redeveloped standards call for boards to evaluate the effectiveness of their procedures and to evaluate their members on a regular basis. This is a project that we have not yet begun, but not due to any reluctance of board members. We have begun using the redeveloped standards, but our work is not finished. Conceivably, we could build an assessment form for use by board members on the six competencies that are characteristic of an effective board according to the study, *The Effective Board of Trustees*, by Richard P. Chait, Thomas P. Holland, and Barbara E. Taylor.[5] The assessment of board effectiveness that we develop will speak to the question posed by the standards concerning the use of the mission statement in reaching decisions.

Evaluation and Reflection

The evaluation of Wartburg progressed unevenly through the self-study process in preparation for the 1998 reaccreditation visit just as catching the vision of the redeveloped standards progressed unevenly among us. Learning to understand and live out of the new paradigm did happen in the struggle. The seminary progressed in its use of the redeveloped standards. We found that not all faculty, board members, and administrators needed to make the shift to a full understanding of the new paradigm for this to happen. As progress was made in the use of the standards and in the struggle with the new paradigm, the standards delivered. They helped us focus more clearly on what we are doing and what we intend.

Because the standards call for an institution's purpose statement to guide the institution in its comprehensive planning and evaluating procedures and in making decisions regarding programs, allocation of resources, constituencies served, relationships with ecclesiastical bodies, global concerns, and other comparable matters, Wartburg saw its mission statement to be the starting point of its self-study. Changes in degree programs, documenting assessment, institutional enabling and facilitating of the program all have as their center the mission statement. Thus the mission statement is the beginning and the ending. Because the mission statement is both the starting and ending points of assessment, careful attention is required to how the pieces fit together into the whole. Therefore, faculty interdisciplinary semester groups grew in importance alongside the established faculty division groups. A cohesion between the degrees and between the degrees and the mission statement now exists to a remarkable degree not previously experienced. There is a new fluidity to the answer that Wartburg can give to the question, what should we do? The assessment form is providing answers to the question, what can we say we really do? The movement on these two questions is answering the resource question. We do not have the resources to do everything; hence, what should we do?

Among the things learned through the self-study process in relation to the revised M.Div. were:

- Small-group conversations inside and outside the explicit curriculum now play a much larger role in students' theological development. This arises from a greater emphasis on small groups in classes and the students seeing faculty work together in team-teaching to think through and debate issues in the classroom. As a result, students quickly gain greater confidence and ability to handle more difficult material earlier in their academic program, and their ability to integrate disparate elements of the curriculum develops rapidly.

- With regard to globalization, those who come with a commitment to globalization develop it and leave with deepened commitment and insight; those who come without such a commitment leave with increased awareness of globalization and multiculturalism, but it has not deeply shaped their own approach to questions.
- In like manner, those who come with a clear understanding of the Gospel and the meaning of Jesus Christ for faith and life, significantly develop their ability to interpret the Christian message in engagement with the multifaceted dimensions of human life. Others grow significantly in this ability. But a disappointing number of students still have difficulty clearly articulating the Gospel and the meaning of Jesus Christ. Both for better and for worse, we shape students less strongly than we often would like, and the past they bring with them retains strong forming power.

Wartburg intends to educate women and men for ordained leadership in such a way that they live and act within the horizon of a clear vision of God's love for sinners and all people in Jesus Christ. We seek to form graduates who are able to relate creatively our biblical and confessional heritage to the contexts in which they serve with all the religious, cultural, and social pluralism of those contexts and with the global horizon that belongs to them in such a way that the Gospel of Jesus Christ creates new meaning and new life. It is desirable that such a curriculum use evaluative structures informed by the Gospel and open to the Spirit's surprises. The assessment form developed in the self-study is proving to be a useful step on this path. It has yielded surprises and has encouraged the desire to find ways to become more successful at our mission.

The 1998 graduating class, the first class to graduate under the new M.Div. program, have been cheerful participants and have engaged with the seminary in regular evaluation at each step along the way. The seminary would like to follow them in the first years of their ministries to see whether Wartburg provided them with what they need in order to be effective as leaders in congregational ministry. The seminary would like to follow them and the succeeding classes, consulting with them, with their parish lay leaders, and with their bishops, to see how the curriculum might be improved. The annual continuing education event at Wartburg for graduates in their third year of ministry is a helpful venue for this follow-up. At this point, no graduates of the revised M.Div. have attended, but the conversation at this event encourages the desire to learn more.

We have just begun working with the new standards. By the time we write the next chapter, our self-study report ten years from now, we will have judgments on the assessment activities we have put into place at this time as well as judgments on ones envisioned but not yet established. We will have more to say on institutional enabling and facilitating. We will have judgments on the purposes we voiced for our degree programs at this current point in time. We may have other reformulations, restatements, and sharpening of our mission statement as a result.

Duane A. Priebe is the academic dean for Wartburg Theological Seminary and a professor of systematic theology. He has been with Wartburg through three comprehensive accreditation evaluations. Kathleen L. Priebe was the self-study coordinator and has been with Wartburg through two comprehensive evaluations.

ENDNOTES

1. The first two sections of the Wartburg Mission Statement are printed below. We labeled the second two sections, "Commentary" and "Programs."

Mission/Purpose Statement

Wartburg Theological Seminary serves the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by being a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning. Within this community, Wartburg educates women and men to serve the church's mission as ordained and lay leaders. This mission is to proclaim and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing.

Mission for Academic Program

In light of this mission Wartburg endeavors to form students who

(a) claim a clear sense of their confessional identity as Lutheran Christians and a commitment to explore its meaning for our multicultural, religiously plural context,

(b) understand that justification and justice stand together at the heart of the gospel as the church bears witness to God's justifying love for sinners in Jesus Christ and expresses that love by working for freedom and justice in society, and

(c) envision the church as a global community manifested in local congregations assembled around word and sacrament.

2. Ken Bussema and Paul Moes, "Catching the Vision: Assessment of College Mission through Essay Writing," *A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement 1996* (Chicago: North Central Association, March 23-26, 1996): 177-182.

3. Wartburg Seminary Assessment Form (To date, faculty, alumni/ae, students, and bishops have used the form.)

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Has difficulty understanding the point of biblical texts	Demonstrates sound exegetical insight into the meaning of texts	Effectively interprets texts with creative insight into their meaning for life

THEOLOGICAL

1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Lacks a clear grasp of the essentials of Christian and Lutheran theology	Clearly articulates and interprets Lutheran and Christian theology	Creatively explores the meaning of the gospel as it engages new contexts

GLOBAL HORIZON AND MISSION

1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Demonstrates little awareness of the global horizon of the church's message and mission	Appreciates the global horizon of the church's message and mission	Creatively engages our global and pluralistic context in interpreting the gospel

JUSTIFICATION AND JUSTICE

1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Has difficulty articulating the appropriate distinction between justification and justice or their unity	Articulates and lives a clear understanding of God's justifying love in Christ for personal and social life	Insightfully interprets God's justifying love in Christ for personal and social life in open dialogue with alternatives

ECCLESIAL AND PASTORAL IDENTITY

1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Struggles to identify a clear vision of their own ministry or the church's mission	Sees ministry within the church gathered around word and sacrament and bearing witness to the world	Serves with a clear vision of the church as a global institution manifested in local congregations

SKILLS FOR MINISTRY

1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Limited development of skills for ministry	Solid growth in confidence and skills for effective ministry	Significant growth in the creative development of their particular gifts for ministry

THEOLOGICAL INTEGRATION

1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Theological understanding and practice of ministry function as separate activities	Ministry clearly informed by the theological issues implicit in a given situation	Habitually integrates biblical and theological insight into the practice of ministry

(Space is left at the end of the form for narrative summary by the groups using it.)

Narrative Summary - Faculty

How effectively is Wartburg Seminary achieving its curricular mission? What is Wartburg doing well? Where is Wartburg falling short? What are the surprises? Disappointments? What are the reasons you think this set of graduates will be effective pastors? Narrative Examples - Student a: Student b:

Narrative Summary - Seniors/Alumni/ae

How effectively is Wartburg Seminary achieving its curricular mission? What is Wartburg doing well? Where is Wartburg falling short? What are the surprises? Disappointments? In what ways has Wartburg prepared you or failed to prepare you to be effective pastors?

Narrative Summary - Bishops

How effectively is Wartburg Seminary achieving its curricular mission? What is Wartburg doing well? Where is Wartburg falling short? What are the surprises? Disappointments? Why do you think these graduates are or are not effective pastors? Narrative Examples - Graduate a: Graduate b:

4. Elliot W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination* (New York: MacMillan College Publishing Company, 1994), 213.

5. Richard P. Chait, Thomas P. Holland, Barbara E. Taylor, *The Effective Board of Trustees* (College Park: University of Maryland, 1991).