

Theological Education

Volume 39, Number 2
2003

ISSUE FOCUS

***Institutional Assessment and Theological Education:
"Navigating Our Way"***

**Holding Itself Accountable:
The Board's Responsibility for Self-Assessment**
Rebekah Burch Basinger

Presidential Assessment: The Delicate Balance
Vincent Cushing, O.F.M.

Faculty Evaluation: Conversations with Colleagues
Richard Benson, C.M.

Assessing Spiritual Formation in Christian Seminary Communities
H. Frederick Reisz, Jr.

Student Evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology
Lawrence C. Brennan, S.T.D.

Formational Initiatives at Wycliffe College
Merv Mercer

A Call to Growth: The Potential of the Profiles of Ministry Program
Francis A. Lonsway

The Pragmatics of Assessing Master of Divinity Students
William R. Myers

Assessing a Doctor of Ministry Program
Barbara Horkoff Mutch

**Serendipity or Grace? What Evaluation Has Taught Us about
Education and Ecclesiology in Distance Learning**
Charles E. Bouchard, O.P.

Assessment of Student Learning: Some Perspectives
John H. Erickson

Assessment of Ministry Preparation to Increase Understanding
John Harris

OPEN FORUM

***The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Education in 2002:
What Program Directors Think***
Timothy D. Lincoln

**Weaving Garments of Grace: En-Gendering a Theology of the Call
to Ordained Ministry for Women Today**
Joy Ann McDougall



The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

ISSN 0040-5620

Theological Education
is published semiannually by
The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA
10 Summit Park Drive
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15275-1103

DANIEL O. ALESHIRE
JEREMIAH J. McCARTHY
NANCY MERRILL
LISA KERN

Executive Editor
Editor
Managing Editor
Production Assistant

For subscription information or to order
additional copies or selected back issues,
please contact the Association.
e-mail: giehll@ats.edu
website: www.ats.edu
phone: 412-788-6505
fax: 412-788-6510

© 2003

The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by means of any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act, or in writing from the publisher.

Permission is hereby granted without charge for the reproduction and distribution of this work, or any of its parts, for educational purposes by the faculty or administration of member institutions of The Association of Theological Schools, provided that no fee or compensation is charged for copies, use of, or access to such information beyond the actual cost of reproduction or access, and that the copyright notice is included intact.

Requests for permission for all other uses of any part of this work should be addressed to the author(s).

Views expressed in the journal are those of the writers. Publication does not necessarily signify endorsement by *Theological Education* or The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Drive, 16th Floor, Chicago, IL 60606; E-mail: atla@atla.com; WWW: <http://www.atla.com>

Theological Education

Volume 39, Number 2
2003

Editor's Introduction	iii
<i>Jeremiah J. McCarthy</i>	
ISSUE FOCUS	
<i>Institutional Assessment and Theological Education: "Navigating Our Way"</i>	
Holding Itself Accountable: The Board's Responsibility for Self-Assessment	1
<i>Rebekah Burch Basinger</i>	
Presidential Assessment: The Delicate Balance	13
<i>Vincent Cushing, O.F.M.</i>	
Faculty Evaluation: Conversations with Colleagues	23
<i>Richard Benson, C.M.</i>	
Assessing Spiritual Formation in Christian Seminary Communities	29
<i>H. Frederick Reisz, Jr.</i>	
Student Evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology	41
<i>Lawrence C. Brennan, S.T.D.</i>	
Formational Initiatives at Wycliffe College	53
<i>Merv Mercer</i>	
A Call to Growth: The Potential of the Profiles of Ministry Program	65
<i>Francis A. Lonsway</i>	
The Pragmatics of Assessing Master of Divinity Students	75
<i>William R. Myers</i>	
Assessing a Doctor of Ministry Program	85
<i>Barbara Horkoff Mutch</i>	
Serendipity or Grace? What Evaluation Has Taught Us about Education and Ecclesiology in Distance Learning	97
<i>Charles E. Bouchard, O.P.</i>	
Assessment of Student Learning: Some Perspectives	107
<i>John H. Erickson</i>	
Assessment of Ministry Preparation to Increase Understanding	117
<i>John Harris</i>	
OPEN FORUM	
The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Education in 2002: What Program Directors Think	137
<i>Timothy D. Lincoln</i>	
Weaving Garments of Grace: En-Gendering a Theology of the Call to Ordained Ministry for Women Today	149
<i>Joy Ann McDougall</i>	

Continuing the Conversation

Theological Education invites responses, of up to 1500 words, to articles published in the journal in order to foster conversation among its readers. Reader responses may be e-mailed to the Managing Editor at <merrill@ats.edu>. Responses are published at the discretion of the editors and may be edited for length.

2002-2004 Editorial Board

Glenn T. Miller, Chair
Bangor Theological Seminary

Lawrence Brennan
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary

Christopher Lind
Toronto School of Theology

Sherwood Lingenfelter
Fuller Theological Seminary

Martha Stortz
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

Emilie Townes
Union Theological Seminary

Editor's Introduction: Institutional Assessment and Theological Education: "Navigating Our Way"

Jeremiah J. McCarthy

When I was first learning to fly, my otherwise charming instructor used to take great delight in having me close my eyes while she flew the aircraft for several minutes, and then innocently declaring, "Gee, we're lost—how are we going to get home?" It was, of course, a test of my navigation skills, based on the realization that no matter how "lost" one can become, there are ways to assess the situation, use available information, identify a strategy, and then implement a plan of action to get back on course. This navigation image strikes me as an apt metaphor for the task of "institutional assessment," the focus of this issue of *Theological Education*.

The art of assessment, like that of navigation, is a coordinated activity enlisting the skillful application of information derived from a variety of sources. A "lost" aviator needs to focus, take stock of the situation, and begin using data—on-board charts, visible landmarks, and triangulation by using on-board navigation radios—acting on the data, and correcting course as needed. The ability, of course, to keep all these variables together, is the desired outcome, but linking all of them is the capacity to "see the big picture."

In the world of higher education today, we are inundated with the importance of the practice of assessment and evaluation as essential skills to enable us to "see the big picture" in our institutions. Assessment is a multifaceted process to help us maintain our situational awareness. How are we achieving our mission as theological educators, and how do we know that we are being effective in achieving our mission? These questions are at the heart of the assessment enterprise, and I am pleased that this volume of *Theological Education* draws upon the expertise of wise practitioners in the ATS community to assist us with the understanding of assessment as an integral dimension of the life of a theological school.

To speak of "institutional assessment" is to identify the key role of the institution's mission and ethos in framing the goals and outcomes that are essential to the development of the particular expressions of this mission in all facets of the school's life. The essays in this volume of *Theological Education* examine particular components of institutional life, such as presidential evaluation, faculty evaluation, or programmatic reviews of M.Div. and D.Min. degrees, distance education, and the complex issues of personal/spiritual formation, with a view to clarifying the important linkage of each of these specific components with the assessment of institutional mission.

*Editor's Introduction: Institutional Assessment
and Theological Education: "Navigating Our Way"*

The agency charged with the fiduciary responsibility to ensure the welfare and integrity of the school is, of course, the board of trustees. Rebekah Burch Basinger, an expert in board design and development who has worked with *In Trust*, provides a practical guide to board assessment using the framework of the ATS standard on governance. Vince Cushing, a former president of the Association and a long-tenured (now retired) president of the Washington Theological Union, offers concrete strategies for conducting effective presidential evaluation, as well as avoiding some of the pitfalls in this process. Richard Benson, an experienced academic dean, identifies the relationship between "formative" evaluations of faculty members with "summative" evaluations that guide the direction of institutional assessment strategies.

Three essays in the current volume attend to the complexities of assessing personal and spiritual formation capacities in candidates in degree programs. The "Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation" project, a partnership between ATS and Lilly Endowment to assist ATS schools with the development of skill and expertise in this most important dimension of the work of theological education, is well under way. The previous issue of *Theological Education*, reporting the results of the first phase of this research, has received widespread affirmation, and subsequent issues of *Theological Education* will report the findings of current research. Nonetheless, the essay by Frederick Reisz on the formation program at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Lawrence Brennan's reflections on the process of student evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology, and Merv Mercer's thoughts on formation initiatives at Wycliffe College illustrate the essential connection of each of these crucial activities within the larger context of the institution's mission and the constituencies served by the school.

Francis Lonsway of the ATS staff shares the cumulative knowledge gleaned from more than thirty years of the ATS *Profiles of Ministry* program and also indicates how the data from this instrument can be beneficial for institutional planning and evaluation. William Myers, ATS staff member and former dean at Chicago Theological Seminary, shows how an effective M.Div. assessment strategy requires solid institutional evaluation and planning strategies. On the curricular front, Barbara Horkoff Mutch, long-term D.Min. director at Carey Theological College, analyzes issues and strategies for effective D.Min. program evaluation, and Charles Bouchard, president of Aquinas Institute of Theology, reflects on his school's venture into distance education, what was learned, and how good evaluation processes enabled them to make effective changes and improvements in their program. John Erickson, deputy executive director of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, provides readers with a view of assessment from a regional accrediting agency with practical observations about effective assessment using Middle States's newly developed handbook of assessment (an editorial aside: the handbook is a very useful tool and accessible via website information John provides in his essay).

John Harris, a prominent expert on assessment and educational effectiveness who oversees quality assessment at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, provides an insightful analysis of tools and strategies to assist in the complex task of assessing the four interrelated goals of the Master of Divinity degree program: knowledge of the religious heritage; understanding of the cultural context; growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity; and capacity for ministerial and public leadership. His intriguing foray into “assessing the ineffable” is anchored in the conviction that the only enduring value of assessment is improvement of the institution and its programs, and that it is crucial to ensure a cohesive “buy in” to this value by all the key stakeholders in the school, especially faculty members.

In the *Open Forum* section of the journal, Timothy Lincoln, of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, shares his research on the quality of D.Min. programs from the vantage point of D.Min. program directors. Joy Ann McDougall of Candler School of Theology offers a theological reflection on strategies to enhance the sense of ministerial vocation and identity for women called by their faith traditions to ordained service.

As we in theological education continue to “navigate our way” in this new terrain of assessment and evaluation, I think ATS readers will find in these thoughtful, practical, and insightful essays, valuable tools to integrate particularized assessment activities (curricular, programmatic, governance, and administrative) with institutional assessment that highlights the importance of a school’s mission and ethos to “close the loop” in this process.

Holding Itself Accountable: The Board's Responsibility for Self-Assessment

Rebekah Burch Basinger

ABSTRACT: Although trustees are the usually forgotten players in the assessment movement, the ATS standards include the work of the governing board among the aspects of institutional life targeted for periodic evaluation. This article looks at the benefits that derive from a regular, formalized process of self-assessment by the governing board, both to the membership itself and for the betterment of the theological school. Using the wording of Standard 8, Statement 8.3.1.11 as a starting point, the author explores the who, why, how, and what of a successful board assessment process.

Introduction

Over the past thirty years or so, assessment has grown in importance within the world of academia, including graduate schools of theology. Early on, the assessment movement was driven mainly by pressure from external bodies—accrediting associations, governmental agencies, and foundation funders—for greater accountability on the part of educational institutions. It was something schools did because they had to and the resulting reports were usually relegated to a dusty shelf in the president's office. However, as the movement has matured, institutional leaders have come to appreciate the importance of regular evaluation to mission fulfillment and a school's economic vitality. While it's the unusual person who revels in the process, assessment is no longer a bad word in academic circles.

When educators discuss assessment, the focus tends toward teaching and learning, with an occasional nod to institutional finances and other matters of organizational effectiveness. Perhaps because most players within the academy have limited interaction with governing boards, trustee performance is seldom mentioned in the assessment literature. As was suggested more than twenty years ago and remains true today, "of all the issues that have been studied about higher education, the activities of boards of trustees is probably the least understood—and one of the most important."¹

It is encouraging to note then, that the ATS standards include the work of the board among the aspects of institutional life targeted for periodic assessment. Specifically, the standards state:

The board has the responsibility to hold itself accountable for the overall performance of its duties, and shall evaluate the effectiveness of its own procedures. It should also seek to educate itself about the issues it faces and about procedures

*Holding Itself Accountable:
 The Board's Responsibility for Self-Assessment*

used by effective governing bodies in carrying out their work.

The board shall evaluate its members on a regular basis."²

For those of us who believe an effective board is a prerequisite to an effective theological school, these are welcome words. It is gratifying that board members are invited, along with administrators and faculty, into the discovery of "how and in what form might questions be framed that lead us to deeper insight into the effectiveness and improvement of theological education."³

An apologetic for board assessment

When a board is giving attention to its own performance, it is inevitable that others within the institution will notice that something different is happening in the board room. The likely benefits of regular, formalized evaluation of the board's work include:

Heightened board-esteem

The feelings of belonging and being appreciated that result from knowing they are "making the grade" encourage trustees to give their best volunteer efforts and their most generous financial support to the institution. As board members are affirmed in their work—both in and out of the board room—they are more likely to seek to make even greater contributions. "Behavioral psychologists and organizational learning experts agree that people and organizations cannot learn without feedback. No matter how good a board is, it's bound to get better if it's reviewed intelligently."⁴

Thoughtful and regular assessment of the board's work is a crucial step in moving trustees from the sidelines of institutional life into full participation in advancing the theological school. As a board chair reported at the conclusion of a weekend retreat, "We've learned that satisfaction arises from substantive work on vital challenges facing the school rather than the trivial, perfunctory, insubstantial, and marginally-related issues that we've sometimes been stuck with." To this, every one of the more than 8,000 members of the boards of ATS accredited schools should add a hearty "So may it be for us!"

Greater clarity about the board's role

There's considerable unanimity within the governance literature concerning the "job description" for the boards of nonprofit organizations, and in fact, this list of usual responsibilities is repeated in the ATS Standard 8.⁵ There is less clarity, however, about how a board should organize for and carry out its assigned duties. Board members are frequently warned away from meddling in management issues and told to confine themselves to setting and policing operational policies. While there's something to be said for keeping the board at arm's length from day-to-day operations, a too-narrow definition of acceptable board behavior can leave trustees wondering why they even bother to show up for meetings. It's no surprise that students of nonprofit governance are beginning to ask if "it is time to revisit our assumptions about what boards

do and should do.”⁶ A carefully crafted assessment plan allows a board to do just that.

By focusing on their own performance in the light of the challenges and priorities confronting the school, trustees are able to assess the appropriateness of the duties assigned to them. The assessment process also helps identify differences in understanding that may exist between staff and trustees regarding the proper role of the board. As one researcher warns, “When these expectations are implicit, or buried beneath layers of assumptions and values, they can lead to conflict over priorities, assignments, and roles.”⁷ In a tight-knit seminary community, where shared governance and collegiality are deeply held values, it is all the more important to seek agreement about the roles of the various partners in institutional governance. Board assessment is one aspect of that seeking. In the words of a veteran trustee: “A part of our assessment work has been to articulate the board’s vision of where we fit in relationship to others—to bring new hope and energy for carrying forward improvements that are within our control.”

Affirmation of value added by the board

Nothing saps the energy and enthusiasm of volunteers faster than a sense of futility in their work. Board members want to know that their efforts count for something more than simply filling time in the board room. Regular assessment helps assure board members that their work, both individually and as a group, is adding value to the institution. Self-assessment also sends a clear message to the campus community that trustees are serious about their responsibilities and this, as the chair of a Committee on Trustees, explained, helps to “bolster confidence in the board by all stakeholders.”

As trustees review a year’s worth of decisions and activities, they are able to assess the usefulness of their work to the institution and when that happens, “members begin thinking and acting differently . . . bringing more thoughtful questions to the table, seeking relevant and focused information on problems before them, breaking into small discussion groups to brainstorm alternative directions and formulate recommendations, encouraging critical thinking about issues before the board, and getting feedback on board performance.”⁸

Recognition of assessment as learning

The assessment process creates teachable moments in the midst of the board’s busy schedule, encouraging trustees to learn from both the good and the not-so-good of their recent work. It is ironic that boards of academic institutions must be counseled to give attention to their own learning, but in practice, “the fact that board education and development need to be ongoing processes seems to have escaped even boards that have had good educational experiences.”⁹ As the boards’ *need to know* is put ahead of what external agencies *want to know*, assessment becomes a powerful means of continuing education for trustees. Assessment also enables board members to test the usefulness of their learning plan to the life of the institution.

*Holding Itself Accountable:
The Board's Responsibility for Self-Assessment*

Better governance

As stated in the preface comments to Standard 8: "Good institutional life requires that all institutional stewards know and carry out their responsibilities effectively, as well as encourage others to do the same"¹⁰ and therein lies the definition of quality governance. If a seminary is to advance and thrive in today's turbulent times, every unit within the school—including the board—must operate in top form. Unfortunately, when academics talk about shared governance, the tenor of the conversation is usually on limiting the board's role rather than on enhancing the quality of its contribution to institutional planning and decision-making.

The wise board uses the assessment process to monitor the quality of shared governance on campus, and then moves ahead with confidence as a full player in the life of the institution. Data collected through a well-designed assessment can dramatically change how a board uses its time, how it works with the president, and how the board, administration, and faculty work together on critical issues facing the school.

Opportunity to focus on faith

Consistent with the God-centered purposes of a theological school, the assessment process should challenge board members to consider the interplay of faith and governance. Malcolm Warford, a former seminary president and continuing board consultant, writes: "Trustees are called to watch (to care for) the institution they serve and to discern God's presence in the midst of institutional life. If this sense of an institution being claimed by God's new reign is not part of the consciousness of trusteeship, then all of our rhetoric about faith and values really makes no difference at all. . ."¹¹

Good governance in a seminary setting is more than a legal requirement; it is a practice of faith. Theological school trustees have been given an exciting and unique role in the life of the church, and when approached with a ministry heart, board work can be an instrument for God's action. At its best, the assessment process should encourage trustees to reflect upon and testify to the ways in which the school's theological heritage, mission, and commitments to the church are reflected in board room decisions.

Parsing the standard

Statement 8.3.1.11 provides helpful direction as trustees take up the challenge of self-assessment. While leaving ample room for interpretation across the wide diversity of institutional settings and governance structures present within the ATS membership, the statement is a useful starting point from which a board can construct an acceptable assessment plan.

The board has the responsibility to hold itself accountable for the overall performance of its duties. . .

The ATS standard is clear as to where the buck stops when it comes to board assessment. It is the board that bears ultimate responsibility for evaluation of its own effectiveness. Trustees may look to the president for assistance in

designing and carrying out assessment activities, and his or her understanding of and advocacy for regular evaluation of the board's work is crucial to the success of any effort. Indeed, encouraging boards in their assessment activities is one way that presidents can show their respect for their boards, but in the end, assessing itself is board work.

Trustees must be willing to cast a critical eye on themselves and ask hard questions about the value-added aspects of their work, both individually and as a group. "It is a key responsibility of the board to make optimum use of all the resources entrusted to it, including the time and energy of its members—valuable and scarce resources of any organization—to accomplish the organization's mission and purpose."¹² A board has no one to blame but itself if the membership is disengaged, underperforming, or failing to provide adequate oversight of the institution.

That said, the idea of trying to squeeze one more thing into already jam-packed meeting agendas can be too much for trustees to contemplate, but in the wake of recent corporate scandals in the U.S. and continuing leadership problems within the nonprofit community, a board's attention to its own performance has never been more important. "Board members sometimes fail to recognize that their responsibilities are just as great as, and perhaps greater than, those of their for-profit counterparts because of the social good represented by their organizations and the public trust implicit in their nonprofit status."¹³ If a board fails to live up to constituency expectations, it takes a long time for the institution to recover the public's trust, especially for religious organizations. In contrast, seminaries that are blessed with strong and self-reflective boards are better positioned to attract the financial resources, goodwill, and quality people necessary for long-term success and vitality.

The particulars of assessment are usually assigned to a specific trustee committee (e.g., Committee on Trustees, Board Development Committee, or Governance Committee), with the board chair and president acting as resource persons to the process. In many places, this will not be an easy assignment and committee members should be prepared to respond to nay-sayers. However, board leadership dare not give in to members who think assessment is a waste of time or who may be cynical due to bad experiences with botched assessment efforts. "A governing board that is serious about its role in fostering change must live up to the values it espouses. That means being ready to change itself—its membership and the way it does business."¹⁴

... and shall evaluate the effectiveness of its own procedures

Over the years, I've encountered many presidents who are disappointed in the board members with whom they must work. The myth that every other board is stronger, wiser, richer, and more engaged is alive and well within the world of theological education and while the myth is repeated most often in schools where all or a majority of the membership is appointed by denominational authorities or a religious order, presidents of freestanding seminaries do their share of complaining as well. It seems that underperforming boards can be found in theological schools of every kind, size, and theological stripe and this suggests the problem with boards isn't with

*Holding Itself Accountable:
The Board's Responsibility for Self-Assessment*

the people serving on them, but rather the policies and practices that shape trustee service. In the words of organizational guru Peter Drucker: "To build a successful team, you don't start out with people—you start out with the job. You ask: What are we trying to do?"¹⁵

It is appropriate then that Standard 8 encourages boards to evaluate the effectiveness of their procedures. As is true for most groups, seminary boards tend to fall into familiar patterns of doing things. Committee structures are maintained without much thought, meeting agendas differ little from one meeting to the next, and board room protocol can discourage a true exchange of ideas. There is a basic uniformity in the way a board works, regardless of changes in the operating environment, within the institution, or in the board itself.

In contrast, strong boards understand that a one-size-fits-all set of board practices isn't likely to serve the institution well over time or in every situation. Just when a board hits its stride, a shift in administrative or board leadership, a sharp decline in funding or a new direction in the seminary's programming can challenge "business as usual." However, "when trustees habitually appraise what they do, they are likely to take the next step and suggest changes in structure or procedure."¹⁶ Regular assessment allows the board to check whether its procedures are working for or against its best efforts and to make changes as needed. Trustees may think of their board's life as a given, but it can be examined and questioned.

It should also seek to educate itself about the issues it faces. . .

A well-informed board is a more effective board, and to this point, the standard urges trustees to educate themselves about the issues facing the seminary and theological education at large. The board should look first at information related to the current situation of the institution, including data specific to top priorities of the seminary. In all cases, the information provided to board members must be germane to institutional priorities and the board's concerns. Boards don't need to know (nor can they know) everything, but what they do know must be accurate, easy to comprehend, and conducive to governance decisions.

Even as they watch over the present, trustees should also keep an eye on the future. Strong boards are constantly scanning the institutional horizon, ever alert for the small cloud that could become tomorrow's storm. If there's trouble outside the board room and if trustees themselves are in a state of high anxiety, it's not likely they will have the energy or patience for thoughtful evaluation and planning. As a seasoned board member observed, "It's tough to be reflective when you're living in the eye of the storm." The vigilant, educated board is ready and able to assist administrators toward strong, decisive action in response to early signs of danger.

By taking advantage of periods of relative calm to prepare themselves for the next crisis down the pike, board members can stave off institutional panic and seat-of-the-pants decision-making. "In lieu of formal board training events at long intervals, boards could construe learning about their communities or constituencies as vital, continuous preparation for governing. Instead of

merely recruiting members who appear to be well informed, organizations could use their meetings to promote learning by all board members."¹⁷

A regular schedule of board assessment encourages trustees to ask questions, seek out information, consult advisors, and develop orderly plans for the future of the school. As board members focus on educating and equipping themselves for their leadership role, they're also better able to identify and make use of individual talents and connections. In this way, the board models for the rest of the seminary community what it means to be a learning organization—a place where people at all levels of the operation are empowered to make their best contributions in support of the mission and ministry of the school.

... and about procedures used by effective governing bodies in carrying out their work

Interest in institutional governance is strong these days and as a result, there's no shortage of helpful information from which trustees of theological schools can select. A search of Amazon.com under the words "governing boards" turned up 31,771 entries, and even when the search was narrowed to "trusteeship," the on-line bookseller showed 1,774 titles. Add to this the numerous magazines "just for boards" (e.g., *Board Member* (BoardSource), *Trusteeship* (AGB), and *In Trust Magazine*), along with journals such as *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Leadership and Nonprofit Management*, and it's obvious there's a lot to be read. In addition to the usual print sources, there's also a wealth of excellent resources available via the Internet.¹⁸ It would seem there's no excuse for board members to be uninformed about procedures used by effective governing bodies.

Ready availability doesn't necessarily mean board members are taking advantage of the resources that are out there though. Indeed, it's the rare trustee who takes the time to track down materials on his or her own. For the most part, it's up to the Board Development Committee, the board chair, and/or the president to seek out and make available materials and experiences that help educate trustees to the procedures used by effective governing boards. The leadership can also encourage trustees who serve on boards of other nonprofits to share best practices and good ideas encountered in their other "leadership lives." While there are unique aspects to governance of a theological school, there's a lot about good board work that translates well from one organizational setting to another. Effective boards are constantly seeking out new models, testing cutting-edge information about academic governance, and are open to insights from other board situations.

As the ideas just listed suggest, it's possible for board members to educate themselves to good board practice within the confines of their own board rooms or in the comfort of their own homes. However, it has been my experience that there's nothing quite as invigorating to trustees as the opportunity to meet face-to-face with their counterparts from other seminaries. In the early 1990s, I was privileged to direct a Lilly Endowment-funded project for the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities that included as one of its many activities the opportunity for bringing together board members from

*Holding Itself Accountable:
The Board's Responsibility for Self-Assessment*

several institutions for conversation around a topic of shared interest. Initially, there was concern whether board members would give up an extra weekend to participate, but in the end, the regional gatherings were well attended and trustees went away enthused by the opportunity to learn from and be with board members of other church-related colleges. More recently, I've seen this same enthusiasm in the president/board teams that have participated in *In Trust's* Good Faith Governance Seminars.

The good news is, presidents and board leaders don't have to wait for someone else to plan (and fund) these sorts of events. Any board can extend an invitation to trustees of neighboring theological schools to come be part of an evening, day, or weekend of conversation and shared learning.

The board shall evaluate its members on a regular basis

While it's true that the whole of a good board is greater than the sum of its parts, the performance of each member is crucial to the overall effectiveness of the group; it is important that regular assessment activities include an evaluation of individual board member performance. On the face of it, this may seem an uncivil thing when talking about volunteer work, but in reality, it is the most civil and grateful thing we can do. Besides, there's nothing like old-fashioned peer pressure to keep board members on their toes. "Directors who take their duties seriously and let their fellow directors know they're expected to do the same, are the best insurance against a board whose first question, upon receipt of the quarterly earnings report is, 'When's lunch?'"¹⁹

No one accepts a board position with the intention of doing poor work, yet complaints about the quality of board performance continue to surface and too many trustees report feeling dissatisfied with their board service. However, as was noted previously in this article, when there are problems with board members or when performance of the board fails to live up to what is desired, it is usually the system that's the culprit. In places where expectations of the board are high, where trustees are treated with respect, and where attention is paid to the system within which the board operates, it's amazing how board members grow in their enthusiasm for and understanding of their work.

Methods of board assessment

Up to this point, the focus has been on the requirement for and the benefits of regular assessment of the board's work. However, for the majority of board leaders and presidents, the sticking point is not why assessment is important, but rather, how to do assessment. The general impression of newcomers to the assessment "game" is that it's a complicated, costly, and too often futile exercise. Fortunately, evaluation can be done—a lot can be learned—without upsetting the board's schedule, the school's budget, or trustee tempers. As Daniel Aleshire suggested in a previous issue of *Theological Education*, "... the road that leads to good assessment is a wide one. Good assessment uses many indicators in many ways to arrive at nuanced judgments about educational effects."²⁰

Small beginnings

If a board has never engaged in self-assessment, it may be best to ease into the process beginning with some fairly simple activities. For example, the board chair might end each meeting with a ten to fifteen minute discussion of “ideas for improving our board” or committees can be encouraged to report to the full board the “clouds” they see on the institutional horizon and what they feel the board should be doing to prepare. At another time, board members might be asked to jot down short responses to questions such as:

- ♦ Looking back over the past year or so, what two or three things make you most proud of the board’s work? Conversely, with what issues do you think we might have done a better job?
- ♦ To what issues do you think the board needs to give more attention, and how would you like to receive information regarding these issues?
- ♦ What do you need from board leadership to help you be even more successful in your service to the school?

The Committee on Trustees collects the cards, tabulates the responses, distributes a summary report to board members even in advance of the next meeting, and most importantly, uses the information in shaping a learning plan for the board.

It’s also a helpful practice for the board chair, chair of the committee on trustees, and the president to screen the agenda for the upcoming meeting with an eye to issues such as: What is the purpose of this meeting? What specific things do we want to accomplish? How will doing those things move us toward a major goal that will strengthen the school in the future? The board chair or president should then prepare and attach an executive summary or meeting primer to the agenda to guide trustees as they prepare themselves for the upcoming gathering of the board. These advance comments help remind trustees of the goals the group has set for itself and how their efforts fit within the wider work and plans of the institution.

Taking the next step

For boards ready to dig a little deeper into self-understanding, *In Trust’s* new Governance Audit is a useful mid-level assessment tool. Drawing upon the language of the ATS standards, the audit highlights specific qualities and capacities of a good theological school. This easy to administer, easy to score instrument provides boards with a “snapshot” overview of trustee awareness in five operational zones: authority structures, enrollment management, resource development, educational systems, and economic vitality. The audit report identifies gaps in trustee understanding of the school’s operation and programs, and serves as the basis for an annual learning plan for the board.

A comprehensive approach

While activities such as those just described can serve a board well in the short run, it’s necessary from time to time to undertake a more extensive and formal assessment process. Many nonprofit boards conduct a comprehensive

*Holding Itself Accountable:
The Board's Responsibility for Self-Assessment*

review of their performance every other year. Others, because of the time and expense involved, include a formal assessment as part of a three-year cycle of board development activities. A few standard issues are usually part of a formal assessment. These include questions about the composition of the board, processes for identifying and recruiting prospective members, committee structures, and attendance patterns. Pre-packaged survey instruments are a ready source of good questions addressing these routine issues, and it is usually a waste of time for a board to create their own questions on these subjects.

However, when it comes to measuring the effectiveness of a board's contribution to the current and future effectiveness of a theological school, boilerplate surveys aren't as helpful. Trusteeship of a theological school, while in many ways similar to service on the board of a college or other nonprofit organization, is different because of the churchly aspects of the board's work. Theological schools have the dual mission of preparing men and women for pastoral and other Christian ministry, and of encouraging scholarship to undergird the community of faith in North America and beyond. Decisions made in theological school board rooms about program renewal, enrollment management, financial vitality, and myriad of other issues profoundly affect the future leadership of the church.

It is important, then, that the assessment instruments used by seminary boards address the unique aspects of theological education. Fortunately, most of the major suppliers of board assessment tools (e.g., BoardSource, the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities, and *In Trust*) are now able to tailor their off-the-shelf assessment instruments to the evaluation needs of a specific board. In some cases, surveys can be completed on-line, with the scoring done by the vendor in addition to preparation of a report of the findings and recommendations. Many boards choose to work with an outside facilitator who assists in shaping evaluation activities and provides written and verbal feedback on the process. Here again, it's important that board leaders seek out counsel that understands and appreciates that theological schools are different from other educational institutions.

In the end, there's no one right way of assessment. It's up to each board to "seek the kind of help that best fits the unique configuration of personalities, organizational culture, and external pressures."²¹ The mechanics of the process are far less important than the learning that can be gained and the change that can result from whatever method a board chooses in evaluating its work. For the most part, boards already have at hand much of what they need to evaluate their own performance, and that's the combined wisdom of their own membership. Standard 8 gives boards the nudge they need to act on that wisdom.

Conclusion

When board leaders grab hold of the amazing potential present in the assessment process, trustees will be better equipped to exercise faithful

leadership on behalf of the purpose of the theological school. In so doing, I believe trustees will see that holding themselves accountable for the overall performance of their duties is well worth the effort, ATS standards or not.

Rebekah Burch Basinger is an independent consultant specializing in fundraising and board education. She is also a member of the In Trust Good Faith Governance Seminar faculty. Prior to starting her own business, Basinger served on the administrations of three private colleges and two educational associations. Her publications include numerous articles on fundraising and board work, and she is the co-author with Thomas Jeavons of Growing Givers' Hearts: Treating Fundraising as Ministry (Jossey-Bass, 2000). She also contributed a chapter titled "The Trustees' Role in Advancement: Beyond the Bottom Line" in Advancing Small Colleges (CASE books, W. Willmer editor, 2001). Basinger currently serves on the boards of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability and MAP International and is a member of the editorial board for Seminary Development News.

ENDNOTES

1. Victor Baldrige, *Policy Making and Effective Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1978), 218.
2. Standard 8: Authority and Governance, Statement 8.3.1.11, Bulletin 45, Part 1 (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools, 2002), 72.
3. Jeremiah J. McCarthy, "Editor's Introduction: Unraveling the 'Mysteries' of Assessment and Evaluation," *Theological Education*, Volume 39, No. 1 (2003), iv.
4. Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld, "What Makes Great Boards Great," *Harvard Business Review*, September 2002, 113.
5. Although there are slight variances in the wording and rank ordering of board responsibilities, for the most part, the content of the various lists can be summarized into five primary functions: set the organization's mission and overall strategy; monitor management and hold it accountable for performance; hire, support and if necessary, fire the CEO; provide fiduciary oversight; and serve as a bridge and buffer between the organization and its environment.
6. William P. Ryan, Richard P. Chait and Barbara E. Taylor, "Problem Boards or Board Problems," *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, Volume 10, Issue 2 (2003), 53.
7. Kevin P. Kearns, "Effective Nonprofit Board Members as Seen by Executives and Board Chairs," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Volume 5, No. 4 (1995), 338.
8. Thomas P. Holland and Douglas K. Jackson, "Strengthening Board Performance: Findings and Lessons from Demonstration Projects," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Volume 9, No. 2 (1998), 130.
9. Melinda R. Heppe, "Teaching Boards How To Clarify Priorities: Making Education and Reflection an Ongoing Process," *In Trust Magazine*, Volume 8, No. 4 (1997), 10.
10. *Bulletin 45*, 70.
11. Malcolm L. Warford, "Stewards of Hope: The Work of Trustees," in *Building Effective Boards for Religious Organizations*, edited by Thomas P. Holland and David C. Hester (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 14.

*Holding Itself Accountable:
The Board's Responsibility for Self-Assessment*

12. Thomas P. Holland, "The Duties and Responsibilities of Boards of Religious Organizations," in *Building Effective Boards for Religious Organizations*, edited by Thomas P. Holland and David C. Hester (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 25.
13. Jack C. Green and Donald W. Griesinger, "Board Performance and Organizational Effectiveness in Nonprofit Social Service Organizations," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Volume 6, No. 4 (1996), 399.
14. Barbara Hill, Madeleine Green and Peter Eckel, "Navigating the Currents of Change," *AGB Trusteeship Magazine*, Volume 9, No. 5 (2001), 29.
15. Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 152.
16. Cyril O. Houle, *Governing Boards* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1989), 157.
17. William P. Ryan, Richard P. Chait and Barbara E. Taylor, "Problem Boards or Board Problems," *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, Volume 10, Issue 2 (2003), 52.
18. Two on-line resources I've found to be particularly helpful are Board Café, an e-newsletter available at compasspoint.com and the e-newsletters available at charitychannel.com. The In Trust website (intrust.org) provides a more complete listing of Internet sites of interest to governing boards.
19. Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld, 113.
20. Daniel O. Aleshire, "The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation: M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites," *Theological Education*, Volume 39, No. 1 (2003), 9.
21. Jeffrey L. Brudney and Vic Murray, "Do Intentional Efforts to Improve Boards Really Work? The Views of Nonprofit CEOs," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Volume 8, No. 4 (1998), 346.

Presidential Assessment: The Delicate Balance

*Vincent Cushing, O.F.M.
Washington Theological Union*

ABSTRACT: Assessment of the work of the president is a major responsibility of the board, and a successful process depends upon agreement and cooperation between the president and the board on the value of the assessment and on the key components of the process. Good presidential assessment determines how well the president is doing in leading the school in fulfilling its mission. This article describes methods for preparing for presidential assessment, suggested activities for conducting the assessment, and appropriate follow-up at the conclusion of the assessment.

Perhaps the practice with the most potential for difficulty in a school is presidential assessment. Witness the recent meltdown at Boston University where a mishandled presidential appointment process has thrown the institution into turmoil. One does well to approach presidential assessment with caution. The whole network of relations with the board is involved in this process, and the professional reputation of the president as well as the professionalism of the board are subject to review and comment. Careful planning and design are essential in every step of presidential assessment and sensitivity must be the overriding characteristic of implementation.

The first step in assessment is to be clear on working assumptions. Authors writing on presidential assessment emphasize the need to anchor presidential assessment in the following understandings:

- ♦ the prime responsibility of the board of trustees is the appointment, support, review, and compensation of the president;
- ♦ presidential assessment will be an integral part of a larger assessment process of president and board assessment; and
- ♦ the entire process is based on securing agreement and cooperation wherein board and president agree on the value of assessment and on key pieces of the process: how it will be carried out, when it will be completed, by whom it will be performed, the level of confidentiality, and to whom the final report will be given.

Tom Ingram of the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) notes that about eighty percent of presidents find presidential assessment a helpful process that both improves performance and yields institutional benefits.¹ Less than five percent report disappointment about presidential assessment. The reasons for disappointment are numerous: poor criteria used in judging presidential performance, academic politics poisoning the atmosphere during the assess-

Presidential Assessment: The Delicate Balance

ment, mishandling of the process by unskilled persons, or delivery of the final report in ways that impede the president and his or her administration. In any case, we should be clear that presidential assessment is an exercise that has to prove its value as a worthwhile endeavor.

To write this article, I first spoke with board members of *In Trust, a Journal for Leaders in Theological Education* at a board meeting in October 2003 at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore. I later gathered material by e-mail correspondence with them (most of whom are current or former presidents of ATS accredited schools) and the professional staff of *In Trust*. I later followed up by phone and additional e-mail. In addition, I reviewed material available from the AGB. What follows is my understanding of our conversations and communication. Although this article reflects the wisdom of people experienced in presidential leadership and assessment, the views contained herein are my interpretation of our conversations.

Christa Klein, executive director of *In Trust*, believes that assessment begins in the act of hiring a president; that is the time for board and president to lay out mutual expectations and discuss accountability for achievement. President and board are a leadership team working together for the good of the school. She notes that the president's capabilities will be well-tested as communicator, gatherer of research, guide for strategic choices, nurturer (and occasional referee) of top level administrative staff, while also acting both as the public spokesperson for the school and as its chief fundraiser. Klein's chief concern for a president, one that reflects her broad experience in offering *In Trust* seminars to presidents, is whether a president can both get a school moving in the right direction and be able to institute mid-course changes in direction when needed.

It is clear that the president needs feedback and advice from wise trustees and observers about how things are proceeding. Klein makes a telling point in concluding her thoughts: presidential assessment is more than a report card; it is an organic process—a way of living that has to do with learning by those charged with leadership. This highlights a basic truth: schools of theology for ministry are always best understood as centers where *all* are learners—students, presidents, faculty, and boards of trustees.

David Tiede, president of Luther Seminary and currently serving as president of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), writes that good presidential assessment answers one question: how well has the president done in leading the school in fulfilling its mission? All other questions flow from this one question. Tiede helpfully points out that assessment itself changes in light of different stages of a presidency and in light of whether assessment is annual or every three to five years. He suggests that annual assessment is best done in a conversation between president and board chair and then reported to the entire board in executive session. In the case of a comprehensive evaluation carried out every three to five years, it is best to employ an outside consultant to aid in the process.

Many parties have both a stake and a role in the assessment of a president. I noted above that presidential assessment is primarily a board responsibility. However, this process will be accurate and helpful in proportion to the depth of consultation it carries out with senior staff, faculty, students, alums, and other interested publics. This recognizes that the presidency of a school is necessarily a public office within the school and society; there are no private presidencies. The board's assessment responsibly fulfills its duty to the school and to society and carries out a public trust.

Assessment is characteristic of effective educational institutions, and healthy schools thrive in a culture of assessment. Every semester we grade student performance and each year we evaluate students. Faculty assesses its performance mutually with the dean in accordance with professional standards and suitable criteria. Indeed, faculty assessment is the basis for promotion and a prime means of enhancing academic quality in an institution. Finally, every ten years ATS schools voluntarily participate in peer assessment of the entire academic and institutional enterprise. Assessing a president's performance is a normal activity within a "culture of assessment" characteristic of graduate higher education in Canada and the U.S.

Ingram and Weary insist that presidential assessment goes hand-in-glove with board assessment.² They see both entities—board and presidency—as a team and presume that one cannot assess one without assessing the other. Presidential assessment symbolically acknowledges that the first duty of a board is always to select, retain, support, and review presidential leadership. In my experience as an accreditation visitor, whenever I found what was allegedly a "president's problem," I found a board dereliction of duty. There is no way to assess presidential performance without looking carefully at board performance.

In this article I outline a process to assist in presidential assessment and do so under three general headings:

- ♦ preparation for presidential assessment;
- ♦ the assessment itself; and
- ♦ the period after assessment.

Preparation for presidential assessment

The most basic question is the best question: why do presidential assessment? We do it because it tells us how the chief executive officer of the school is performing, thereby enabling a board to come to important judgments about the president and itself. Good assessment looks at the basic direction the president is pursuing. Is this a direction that the board agrees with and supports? What needs to be done to strengthen the president in leading the school? Can the board help the president? Shall the board continue to employ the president? What compensation shall be arranged for the future? If there are

items to be corrected, how will that be done, by whom, and over what course of time?

I believe it is helpful to include the president in the design of the assessment process. This takes seriously the president's perceptions and sensibilities. It is important that the assessment process is as acceptable to the president as it is to the board. It is not a good practice to foist an assessment on a president who has reservations, differs about the need, the instrument, the total process, or the timing. Consultation should be part of normal preparatory work. Agreement about procedures should be hammered out: Who will do the assessment? According to what criteria? Who will be consulted? How long will the assessment take? How will results be distributed? Shall the president write an outline of items that merit inclusion in the assessment? Will the assessment report first be given to the president with the opportunity to respond to the final report to the board? Such inclusion precludes later complaints about the process from either board or president.

Douglass Lewis, former president of Wesley Seminary in Washington, DC, writes as follows:

I like the word assessment (for presidential evaluation); [it] has the character of ongoing process... [It] is best done when the one being evaluated helps design it so that the feedback focuses on those things that are mutually agreed on. They are best tied into the overall mission, vision, and goals of the institution and the particular role the president plays in achieving them.³

Candor and confidentiality are crucial in assessment, and trust must characterize the entire process if the enterprise is to go forward. When assessment is mutual and cooperative, it will overcome the isolation that frequently surrounds a president's task. Cooperation can achieve a result that can be owned by all and a report that is objective in approach, professional in execution, and sensitive to all parties.

An equally important question is who should carry out presidential assessment. Practices vary, but in most cases a committee of the board best performs the assessment. It does this, however, through a series of meetings with the president, senior staff, faculty, students, alums, and other publics who have a stake in the institution. Sometimes an assessment committee is composed of a cross-section of trustees, faculty, and students. Is that a good practice? I think not. That is not to say that all groups in the institution should not be consulted, but that the integrity of the process and the guarantee of confidentiality are more assured when the assessment committee is composed solely of board members.

In yet other cases, an outside evaluator is brought in and added to the assessment committee or performs the assessment for the board. This brings an outside perspective into the process and the assessment committee's performance is itself informally evaluated by the outside observer.

The frequency of presidential assessment varies in higher education. Many institutions evaluate annually—other schools evaluate triennially—and arrange for the president to set annual goals, whose achievement will be evaluated each year. Any longer period between assessments effectively renders assessment episodic and arbitrary, something that should clearly be avoided.

One of the wisest and most experienced presidents in higher education for ministry is Robert Cooley, emeritus president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He approaches presidential assessment with care. While clearly affirming the value of assessment, Cooley notes that poorly executed assessments can inadvertently, but effectively, diminish the role of the president. He makes a strong case that assessment is best carried out by the board, unless one chooses to use an outside facilitator or resource person. The reason for looking to the board alone in carrying out assessment is simple: the president is an agent of the board and is responsible to the board for the school.

In Cooley's judgment, a key board task is to put in place a system of ongoing presidential assessment. This system is achieved by annual agreement on presidential leadership goals that are then legitimized by the board. These become the basis for performance review. Ideally, the assessment process should correlate with board meetings. At such meetings, in addition to the assessment, goals can be modified or new goals set on an ongoing basis. The enduring value of this approach is that it keeps both board and president focused on what they have agreed on as key steps in achieving the mission of the school.

A significant advantage of this approach is that assessment becomes a two-way street. Cooley writes:

Such candor and trust can produce a very strong president/board relationship. At the same time, salary, benefits, time management, vacations, sabbaticals, and the general "care and feeding" of the president. ...I hope my bias comes through clearly. Short-term assessment is the key to strong presidential leadership and when presidential leadership is strong, the school community benefits and has little interest in evaluating the president.⁴

Cooley notes that some boards favor more formal assessment strategies. He then calls for an outside party to conduct such evaluations, reporting to the board in qualitative terms with suggestions and observations. He concludes, however, with an important admonition: whether the process is more formal or less formal, assessment results should never be made public. Communication should be between the board and the president solely. Only institutional assessments should be made publicly available.

On this latter point I agree with Cooley. My experience tells me that publicizing presidential assessment frequently causes second guessing of the assessment process. If the board assesses the president carefully and well by reviewing the achievement of agreed-upon goals, then the board can later speak forthrightly to the entire institution on the directions that it and the

president are setting for the school and interpret those directions within the mission of the institution.

Bill MacKaye, editor of *In Trust*, echoes much of what Cooley says but raises a different point about assessment. He believes that no board should take action (as opposed to discussion) that involves the president or the chief executive officer without the president present. In his experience, such a practice suggests that conducting a presidential review with the president absent privileges the sensibilities of the board in the process. I believe MacKaye has a point, certainly one that religious and Christian schools committed to justice and charity should take seriously. A difficulty, however, is this: a board needs to receive a presumably objective report with the assurance that it will be able to consider it as a board prior to discussion with the president. Clearly, the assessment committee is mandated to report to the board. The board needs time and space to address and consider the first draft of the report and then needs to suggest any changes in the report and how it will structure its communication with the president. After that, and only after that, should the report be discussed with the president. The more sensitive issue involves taking action in regard to the president. The board needs the freedom to discuss in private what action it might take; then it is in the position to discuss that with the president.

The assessment itself

The board's assessment committee needs to be as clear as it can reasonably be. It will help the assessment committee to write out its mandate. This shape of the procedure helps in carrying out the discrete phases of the assessment. This procedure is not to limit the committee, but rather to do what's needed to guarantee the integrity of the process. Which principles and policies will guide the assessment? Is there an overriding concern present or emerging in the institution that has occasioned the assessment? Is this a regular annual or triennial assessment? Is this assessment done in anticipation that the presidency will soon change?

Another issue in presidential assessment asks whether the assessment will extend to key offices in the presidential administration. I believe it is best to focus solely on the president. Issues about the leadership team will inevitably come to the surface, but the board's assessment committee should focus on the president and how the president works with colleagues in administration.

The board and the assessment committee need to be wary of unarticulated pet theories of presidential leadership or personal biases being played out in the committee's deliberations. It is difficult, indeed, for a president to perform up to unnegotiated expectations. It is only by recognizing such presuppositions as detrimental to the process that a careful assessment can be carried out. Putting aside prior theories and conducting a careful study enables the com-

mittee to produce an analysis reflective of the real situation and to suggest measures suited to the actual performance of the incumbent president.

It is important throughout the process to maintain good communication. Appointments need to be kept, schedules followed, and time commitments honored. It is helpful to meet with the president in her or his office. The interview should not be unduly prolonged, certainly not more than an hour and a half, and opportunity should be given for an in-depth conversation by all members of the committee, not solely by its chair.

The interview with the president is a key piece of the assessment process. The assessment committee comes to listen and learn from the president. The president's views, while personal, can provide perspective and lay out basic information to yield more complete knowledge of a situation. Presumably, the president will have previously drafted and distributed a written self-assessment. It will serve as the springboard for opening discussion, but in no way should limit the scope of the discussion. Substantive areas of executive administration should be patiently explored. Careful attention should be given to problem areas. The committee should seek ways of helping the president solve problems and discuss ways of avoiding crises.

Later on, shortly after the meeting with the president, the committee should gather and clarify its common understanding of the presidential meeting and what the committee's role is in the light of that meeting. While further meetings are occurring, the chair of the committee should put in writing the common sentiments that emerge. These responses will play an important role in the final report to the board.

There is an important addendum to note here. The interview with the president is the *first* of two presidential meetings. The door must be left open for a second, follow-up meeting, one that is conducted after all the other meetings, especially with senior administrators and faculty. This step provides the opportunity to clarify further issues raised in other meetings and provides the assessment committee with a more well-rounded perspective.

Other interviews need to be pursued in a timely fashion. It is important that this period not be unduly lengthened. Normally, it should be completed within one or, at most, two weeks after the interview with the president. All senior administrators should be interviewed by at least two assessment committee members working together. The value in having at least two members of the committee on the interview is that it both provides a safeguard for the committee should later allegations of misunderstanding arise and ensures the accuracy of the findings drafted for the report. Again, the proper stance here is one of listening and learning. Under no circumstances should the members of the assessment committee take sides in disputed issues and they should be very chary of inserting themselves into personnel issues.

Mature judgment needs to be exercised in regard to personnel complaints. The assessment committee will have to develop working guidelines about

personnel complaints, weighing reasonably what might be termed normal “griping” against what might indeed be a serious personnel issue that impedes presidential effectiveness in office. Personnel complaints are, perhaps, the hardest task for an assessment committee to grapple with and one for which there are no easy answers. Possible guidance comes from the working guidelines for an accreditation visit: *normally* it is not wise for a visiting team to get into personnel issues. I would provide the same advice to the assessment committee. However, sometimes the call for presidential assessment has arisen precisely because of personnel or staff concern about how the chief executive officer is performing as president.

The period after the assessment

The credibility and acceptance of the final report of the assessment committee will partly depend on the quality of the committee’s interviewing process and the care and attention it brought to the task. Credibility and acceptance will also depend on how far the interviewing process extended. If significant segments or concerned publics were ignored or excluded, one must presume that those groups will not believe that the assessment process was trustworthy and will not treat the entire experience as worthwhile.

Early on, a decision needs to be made about who will receive the final report and what the plan will be for implementation by both board and president. This step should not be postponed until after the report is drafted because it concerns the president’s future ability to continue to function effectively in the post-assessment period.

After all interviews are conducted, the material gathered should be assembled into the first draft of a report. This draft should be submitted for initial discussion to the members of the board, with a reminder of the need for total confidentiality. The board should also be given sufficient time to read the report and respond to it. Normally, responses should take place in a board meeting so that other trustees can hear what their colleagues have to say. Responses by e-mail or phone are less desirable, but sometimes necessary.

The value that must surround all sides of presidential assessment is confidentiality. The assessment committee itself must be committed to total confidentiality and it must assure persons and staff members interviewed that their views will be kept in professional confidence. To ignore this foundational virtue of confidentiality places the entire process at risk of becoming a malevolent exercise of settling scores and effectively undercutting the value of the entire assessment process. In reporting out to the board, no specific persons should be named as the sources of particular concerns; such revelations have a tendency to leak out and professional relations inevitably suffer.

Perhaps because of the small scale of our institutions, there is ever-present a desire for all to be informed about everything. No one wants a culture of

secrecy, but questions of justice, charity, and confidentiality must be carefully thought through. I have yet to meet a president who complained that her or his assessment was not released to the entire institution for open discussion and debate. Experience suggests to me that Robert Cooley's approach is the soundest, namely that the presidential assessment should be delivered to the president and solely to the president.

The period after the assessment marks the passage from analysis and assessment to reporting and implementation. The final report should first be delivered for review and discussion to the board of trustees. After they have had the opportunity to discuss it in depth it should be given to the president by the chairperson, preferably with committee members present to help in interpreting it. Salient aspects of the report should be described and implementation discussed. Agreement should be reached on expectations embedded in the report and how the president intends to follow up and in what time period.

This meeting provides the opportunity for the president to hear first-hand what the report says and gives a first opportunity to outline her or his response and a final opportunity to help shape the report. While I realize that some may think this process involves the president excessively in the shaping of the report, I believe that concern is countered by an attempt to avoid surprises when the report is released.

It is expected that the president will take the assessment seriously and implement recommendations from the report. To that end, the president should draft a statement of actions proposed for the future and a schedule for the actions. That statement should be delivered in person at a board meeting and should serve as the basis for future annual discussion about presidential performance.

A more intricate process is needed when it comes to communicating with faculty and senior staff about the president's assessment. Once again, the president should be consulted because clumsiness in this area can do serious harm to presidential relations with key personnel. Ideally, what is reported, to whom, and when are best addressed in the planning and deliberations that take place prior to beginning the assessment process. That plan should now be reviewed for suitability and fit. When agreement is reached, then reporting to colleagues and faculty, alums, and students should go smoothly. Should tensions arise, every effort must be made to calm concerns and keep the benefits of the process on track.

The one aspect of assessment that I do not touch on in this essay is the issue of compensation. It is not that I chose to ignore it, but in none of my correspondence with numerous experts in the field did the issue arise. I note, however, that in the written literature in the field it is never ignored. Clearly, it is related to assessment and is a practical measure of achievement realized. It remains an important issue and should be factored into the assessment processes.

Presidential Assessment: The Delicate Balance

Vincent Cushing, OFM, is president emeritus of Washington Theological Union in Washington, DC, where he currently teaches ecclesiology and ecumenics. He is a board member of In Trust and a consultant to the National Catholic Educational Association on Roman Catholic seminaries in the United States. He has served ATS as an educator of theological school leaders on issues of governance and administration, and he has been a mentor to numerous theological school presidents over the course of his career.

ENDNOTES

1. *Presidential and Board Assessment in Higher Education* (Washington: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges), 2000, 5.
2. *Ibid.*, 2.
3. E-mail correspondence with author, October 2003.
4. E-mail correspondence with author, October 2003.

Faculty Evaluation: Conversations with Colleagues

*Richard Benson, C.M.
St. John's Seminary*

ABSTRACT: This article asserts the value of a consistent and institutionally embedded evaluation of the faculty by the chief academic officer. It profiles some fundamental differences between two evaluation philosophies. It suggests that an institutional ownership of both the vision and goals of faculty evaluation are essential to the success of the endeavor. Finally, it outlines some methods of evaluation that have proven themselves useful in achieving a successful outcome of the faculty evaluation process at one institution.

In many seminaries and schools of theology it is not unusual to find an academic dean who was previously a full-time member of the teaching faculty. Many of us have found ourselves in the challenging position of moving from a purely collegial relationship with our colleagues to a new relationship that includes institutional leadership of that same faculty. This can be further complicated by the fact that many of us may remain to a greater or lesser degree in the classroom while we perform our administrative duties.

Among the many administrative duties required of the academic dean are the various institutional assessments and evaluations under the supervision and/or implementation of the dean. The accreditation standards of both The Association of Theological Schools¹ and our regional accrediting agencies² are clear in their expectations regarding such evaluations. Often, one of the dean's greatest challenges is that of evaluating faculty colleagues. It really cannot be emphasized enough that it is essential for the dean to be convinced of the value of faculty evaluation both for the good of the institution and of the individual professor before engaging in the project. Designing and implementing an evaluation process either "to please the accreditation agencies" or because "I'm supposed to" is a recipe for disaster. A simple, consistent, and straightforward evaluation process embedded into the annual academic calendar will prove to be an invaluable asset and will yield bountiful data for continuous quality improvement. Below is a brief outline of the philosophies and practices I have found valuable in helping to mold the faculty evaluation process into one that is institutionally driven and mutually beneficial to everyone involved.

Faculty evaluation

Developing an effective strategy for evaluation of faculty involves at least five steps³:

*Faculty Evaluation:
Conversations with Colleagues*

1. Identify the “desired outcomes” of the evaluation process.
2. Plan your strategy so that it produces data that helps you evaluate your stated outcomes.
3. Build your strategy into your academic calendar year.
4. Implement your strategy in a consistent manner, usually annually.
5. Assess your strategy for its effectiveness.

Building a “vision” of faculty evaluation

Perhaps the most important, but often most underestimated, task of developing an effective program of faculty evaluation is to construct an evaluation “vision” before doing anything else. This involves asking yourself and your faculty “what you want to accomplish through your ongoing faculty evaluation process.” It might be helpful to start by asking if the goal of the evaluation process is “summative,” “formative,” or both. In other words, are the administration and faculty interested in finding an answer to the question: “*How does the professor see her own areas of strength and weakness (effectiveness) regarding her institutional responsibilities?*” [formative], or to the question “*How does the institution see her strengths and weaknesses (effectiveness) regarding her responsibilities?*” [summative], or both?

Formative evaluations would yield an outcome designed almost exclusively to help each professor, among other things, become a more effective part of the institutional mission. The purpose of formative evaluations is to assist professors to discover and implement personal strategies that increase the effective learning in their courses, improve their collaboration with colleagues, enable a richer engagement in personal scholarship, and provide for increased outreach to the local community. A formative focus is chosen by institutions that want to focus on each individual professor and provide institutional support through the academic dean for the professional development of each professor. The underlying belief is that a formative evaluation will be an effective way to encourage, support, and challenge faculty to develop and use their talents to increase the effectiveness of the school’s mission. Generally, this focus may help a dean develop a more “pastoral” relationship with the faculty.

Summative evaluations yield information designed primarily for use by the institution and only secondarily for that of the professor. These assess a professor’s effectiveness in light of the institutional mission for the purpose of hiring, tenure, or career advancement. On the personal side, it might be oriented to merit increases, promotion, or a contract offer, among other things. Summative evaluations can be limited by the institution to hiring, to specific moments in a professor’s career, e.g., applications for promotion or sabbatical, or they can be a part of regular and ongoing processes. Summative evaluations may result in an “us” versus “them” relationship between administration and faculty. As such, they might be listed among the least anticipated aspects of the dean’s job. Training for summative evaluations is as important as careful planning. Because summative evaluations involve careers, salaries, and repu-

tations, they must be approached with consummate professionalism that often includes developing appropriate boundaries between a dean and the faculty, and pastoral sensitivity. Every dean deserves the support of the president/rector in such an endeavor and should receive the kind of training in legal and professional management appropriate to the personnel or human resource managers who deal with staff. Deans often berate themselves for their lacunae and weaknesses in this area of their responsibilities without recognizing that a doctorate in biblical languages hardly qualifies one for all the intricacies of personnel management, no matter how many years one has worked at the institution as a member of the faculty.

Developing strategies

Faculty evaluation is often best accomplished by incorporating a variety of opportunities for the dean to assess a professor's effectiveness in helping the institution achieve its goals. Among the most common are: an annual interview with the dean, course evaluations, self-evaluation, departmental assessments, and classroom visits. It is often best for the dean to work with the appropriate faculty committee(s) to agree upon which evaluation strategies will be integrated into the academic life of the institution. I have found that our faculty is very open to a variety of formative evaluations. I have incorporated an annual interview, an annual self-evaluation, course evaluations, and departmental assessments into my regular faculty evaluation protocol. I believe that if the evaluations are accurate and provide a genuine opportunity for mutual dialog and are an occasion for both commendation and recommendation, then they are most effective and almost always welcomed by mature faculty.

I plan to interview the faculty every January. I generally see each faculty member for thirty minutes. I ask faculty members to prepare a self-evaluation and deliver it to the academic office at least one week prior to their scheduled interviews. The administrative assistant in the office prepares a portfolio for me prior to each interview. The portfolios include a faculty member's self-evaluation and their most recent course evaluations by the students. During the interview, we review the student course evaluations and any comments from the annual exit interviews of graduating students directed at the particular interviewee. The goal of these interviews is twofold: to lift up areas of affirmation and perhaps look for areas that might need attention. I normally ask two questions: (1) What three targeted goals do you have for the next year? and (2) What are three of your major accomplishments of the past year? If there are particular areas of interest that have been identified by the faculty for development (e.g., technology, diversity, or assessment), I may ask for goals and/or accomplishments vis-à-vis these topics.

A regular written self-evaluation can prove to be very valuable for a number of reasons. It is an excellent way to stay abreast of every faculty member's activities and growth. It allows faculty members the opportunity to provide a full picture of their professional activities and participation in

*Faculty Evaluation:
Conversations with Colleagues*

effecting the mission of the institution. A self-evaluation can include any number of topics. I generally ask faculty to include the following: a list of all the courses they have taught since their last interview, a list of all their recent publications, a list of the workshops they have conducted or papers they have delivered, a list of conferences they have attended, a list of the committees they have been assigned to and been active in, a list of student advisees assigned to them, and finally, two or three professional goals for the coming year. It is often a wonderful opportunity for the dean to recognize all the hard work and professional outreach accomplished by a very busy and often overextended faculty.

I return the tabulated results of every course evaluation to faculty according to a schedule mutually agreed upon by the faculty and the academic office. Faculty have asked that course evaluations be conducted as close to the end of the academic term as is practical because we have learned that students' analyses can be more accurate when they have experienced almost the entire course. However, this means that tabulation and feedback of the results cannot happen easily when the academic office is heavily committed to the end of term and the beginning of new term business. We promise to have course evaluation responses to faculty by the end of January for the previous fall term and by the end of June for the spring term. We have also designed a "Course Evaluation Response Sheet." Every faculty member is asked to review the tabulated results of each of their course evaluations and then respond. These response sheets must be returned to the dean within two weeks of receipt. There are a number of values to the response sheet—it demonstrates that everyone on the faculty is paying attention to what the students are saying, tracks what responses faculty are choosing to make in response to student feedback, and allows the dean to assure the students that the course evaluations are more than "paperwork." This is one very concrete way of helping to close the assessment loop and using the data we are generating to effect a positive change in the learning environment.

Calendar your strategy

It is very important, after deciding on an evaluation vision and implementation strategy, that all aspects of faculty evaluation be integrated into both your personal and institutional calendar. I believe that assessment strategy is most effective when it yields accurate and usable data and when that data is generated on a regular basis. The use of any assessment tools or strategies on an occasional basis will not be effective. Not only will individual faculty benefit from their annual formative evaluations, but the institution can use some of the data for longitudinal studies of institutional effectiveness. Integrating the faculty assessment process into the institutional calendar helps ensure that the process happens in a professional manner, that people can be held to deadlines, and that both dean and faculty can prepare their calendars for the necessary

meetings. We have the deadlines for faculty to return their self-evaluations and their course evaluation response sheets and to sign up for their annual interview printed into the academic calendar. Since these are a part of our regular institutional expectations, I find compliance close to one hundred percent.

Implement your strategy

After planning and calendaring your evaluation strategy, it is important to carry it through. The academic office can create a database that helps keep track of the various reports and forms that are asked of the faculty. Gentle reminders can be sent to ensure that there is compliance. Ultimately, the dean must demonstrate both a commitment to the process and the usefulness of the process to the growth and development of the faculty and the institution. If the strategy involves instruments that are valid, friendly, and useful, the dean can expect that integration of the faculty evaluation process will flow smoothly and not involve undue tension or lead to useless confrontation.

Evaluate your strategy

Finally, it is essential that we assess our faculty evaluation strategy. I integrate this into the annual evaluation by asking each faculty member what they find valuable about the annual interview, the course evaluations, the response sheets, and the departmental assessments. I also ask them what could be improved in the process. In addition, I find data on faculty development by reviewing the responses generated by the annual exit interviews with our graduates and from the corporate tabulations of the course evaluations from the students. In evaluating a strategy it is important to ask two questions—both valuable but essentially different: (1) What do faculty think of the evaluation strategy employed? and (2) To what extent is the strategy effective in accomplishing the goals set for it? In other words, if the evaluation strategies are generally acceptable to the faculty but don't yield productive data, then they need to be reassessed, and if they yield productive data but are too arduous or time-intensive, then they may ultimately not be effective if faculty buy out of the whole process one way or another.

You may have noticed that I have not addressed the issue of peer evaluation or classroom visitation as strategies for evaluation. That is not because I do not necessarily value them, but because they are not a part of my experience. Our Faculty Affairs Committee considered the option of peer evaluation, but ultimately proposed that I not integrate it into our faculty evaluation strategy. Moreover, after some consideration I have chosen not to do either scheduled or unscheduled classroom visits. I prefer to rely more on the student comments. Why? Scheduled visits may be too artificial to use for objective evaluation purposes. Having participated in other forums, in scheduled visits I often wonder about the value of time I have spent in classes that too often seem scripted. Similarly, there may be costs with unscheduled visits that outweigh

*Faculty Evaluation:
Conversations with Colleagues*

whatever benefits might be accrued from their use. Most significantly, such visits may give the unintended and unwanted impression to both the students and faculty that the dean is “out to catch the professor.”

In the end, setting an evaluation vision, planning a strategy, calendaring, implementing, and evaluating the process cannot but result in more effective learning and therefore, a more effective institution.

Fr. Richard Benson, C.M. has been the academic dean at St. John’s Seminary in Camarillo, California for the past nine years. He served at the institution as a full-time faculty member for two years before accepting the position of chief academic officer. He serves as the institution liaison officer for St. John’s Seminary to both the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and to The Association of Theological Schools.

ENDNOTES

1. “Schools shall develop and implement mechanisms for evaluating faculty performance, including teaching competence. These mechanisms should involve faculty members and students, as well as administrators.” Statement 6.2.5 of The Association of Theological Schools, General Institutional Standards, *Bulletin 45, Part 1*, 2002, Pittsburgh, PA; 64.
2. “Faculty....evaluation practices are aligned with institutional purposes and educational objectives. Evaluation processes are systematic, include appropriate peer review, and for instructional faculty and other teaching staff, involve consideration of evidence of teaching effectiveness, including student evaluations of instruction.” Standard 3.3 *WASC 2001 Handbook of Accreditation*, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Alameda, CA.; 25.
3. A clear outline of the general steps required of any evaluation process is found in Statement 1.2.2 of The Association of Theological Schools, General Institutional Standards, *Bulletin 45, Part 1*, 2002, Pittsburgh, PA; 48.

Assessing Spiritual Formation in Christian Seminary Communities

H. Frederick Reisz, Jr.

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

ABSTRACT: In this article, the author articulates what would be involved in assessing an intentional spiritual formation program in a Protestant theological education community. The author presents several definitions of "spirituality" and then outlines a current spiritual formation program at a Lutheran seminary. He uses this program to outline elements and characteristics of an assessment and evaluation program. Finally, he raises questions about the comprehensive nature of spiritual formation programs on theological school campuses and the manner in which they are integrated into the vocation of being a student and the mission of higher theological learning.

Stepping into the briar patch seeking a clearing

Spirituality has become such a cultural fad that its relationship to religious belief is often threatened. In theological contexts, the word "spirituality" itself only dates from around the seventeenth century. Its widespread use in the Christian community is much more recent, in the last thirty-five years. Culturally, its prominence in secular bookstores where there are shelves labeled for "spirituality" is even more recent in the last fifteen to twenty years. Thus, faculty members and others can be rightly suspicious of seminaries and divinity schools jumping on a cultural trend just when it is about to bottom out. In fact, in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, we know that spiritual formation has been a centuries' old variety of traditions. In the broad Protestant tradition, piety and devotional disciplines have also been around for hundreds of years particularly expressed in hymn singing and prayer. Because this is a short article, I am restricting my thoughts primarily to Protestant theological education schools, with an emphasis upon theological schools preparing candidates for ordained or other "credentialed" lay ministries. I have in mind primarily theological schools in which faculty members teach on a campus rather than through distributed learning.

Even among theologically literate schools, it is not uncommon to have proposals to initiate "spiritual formation" virtually identified with "forming community." Then, spirituality is spoken of in terms of the growing "closeness" of the community, or in terms of the maturing of students in the faith. Holistic approaches to theological education and the education of the "whole student" become ways of talking about a campus' concern for the spiritual. A growing assurance in one's call for ministry and an advanced appropriation of

tion. Now all of this is not bad and certainly worthy of reflection. However, discourse about “spiritual formation” can lead us down different paths. These paths need not contradict other things that we are doing in theological education, but they can lead us to a deepened fulfilment of our calling and a more sustaining educational experience for our students. In some cases, these discussions have been differentiated as discussions about “formation” and discussions about “education.” I think that such a separation is not productive. I hope that the discussions can be more commonly informative and contribute to a fuller notion of the vocation of theological education.

Broadly, within the Protestant tradition, there has often been a suspicion of “spirituality,” especially as it is expressed in classical spiritual disciplines beyond corporate or individual prayer and hymn singing. I recall a married Lutheran couple who were on internships in parishes close to one another. They would gather as a couple once a week at lunch time at one of their congregations to pray together in the chancel. One day, as they exited the sanctuary into the narthex, a church lay leader who saw them asked what they were doing. They explained that they were praying together. “We do not pay you to do that,” he replied with all seriousness. Openness to spiritual formation practices and spiritual formation as an intentional effort on many Protestant theological school campuses is a relatively new phenomenon.

At Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, South Carolina (LTSS), in my presidential inauguration banquet speech in November 1992, I laid out some directions for the strengthening of excellence in theological education at our seminary. One need to which I pointed was the need for a “Lutheran” seminary to think more deeply about spiritual formation and to examine what our heritage has to bring to the table of contemporary discussions. I advocated the more intentional teaching and usage of the classical spiritual disciplines as a prominent part of seminary formation. I also urged that the seminary utilize the deep traditions of other Christian communities and their spiritual disciplines, many developed by the Roman Catholic Church, to enrich our own practices of spiritual formation.

Knowing more than we know to be what we are in Christ

Because of the proliferation of secularized spiritualities, I begin with some definitions. I am concentrating on the spiritual formation of theological education students in the Christian tradition. The faculty at LTSS has written a paper on “Spirituality and Spiritual Formation” (1998).¹ The paper formed the basis for a strengthening of our seminary’s emphasis on spiritual formation. In that paper the following definition was articulated:

“Spirituality” has many meanings in contemporary culture, not all of them theologically acceptable. In this paper, “spirituality” will be taken to mean intentional practice of the Christian faith, both corporate and individual, insofar as it seeks to build up Christian identity and

nurture “life in the Spirit” in the multiple dimensions of personal existence.²

For this essay, this definition has the virtue of tying the term “spirituality” to the Christian tradition and the community which remembers, represents, and renews that tradition. It points to practices and disciplines as formative for identity. It notes that “life in the Spirit” must be nurtured. It intimates that spirituality is this upbuilding of the “whole” person and community. Thus, this definition of spirituality can serve Christian theological education communities in focusing on the remembrance, formulation, perpetuation, and development of appropriate disciplines to sustain and nurture the faith. Both individual and corporate practices are necessary as one inspires, sustains, nurtures, and leads the other in a symbiosis within the life of a theological education community. Assessment must be attentive to both the individual and corporate dimensions of the nurturing of Christian identity.

Eugene Peterson has defined spirituality in another manner:

Spirituality is the attention we give to our souls, to the invisible interior of our lives that is the core of our identity, these image-of-God souls that comprise our uniqueness and glory. Spirituality is the concern we have for the invisibility that inheres in every visibility, for the interior that provides content to every exterior. It necessarily deals much with innerness, with silence, with solitude. It takes all matters of soul with utmost seriousness.³

This definition of spirituality is particularly focused on interiority. It speaks of a concern for the generative core of the “soul.” Again, obviously, this short definition leaves much unsaid. It is a helpful perspective in lifting up the value of silence, solitude, and contemplative “being in the presence” of God. Assessment of these dimensions of a discipline or practice becomes more complicated and dependent upon self-assessing.

In his book, *Reaching Out*, Henri Nouwen delineated aspects of this interiority in what he termed “three movements” of the spiritual life:

The first polarity deals with our relationship to ourselves. It is the polarity between loneliness and solitude. The second polarity forms the basis of our relationship to others. This is the polarity between hostility and hospitality. The third, final and most important polarity structures our relationship with God. This is the polarity between illusion and prayer . . . The spiritual life is that constant movement between the poles of loneliness and solitude, hostility and hospitality, illusion and prayer. The more we come to the painful confession of our loneliness, hostilities and illusions, the more we are able to see solitude, hospitality, and prayer as part of our vision of life.⁴

Now, theologically interpreted, we may have some relatively, but not absolutely, objective correlatives for assessment: solitude, hospitality, and prayer. As these aspects of one’s spiritual life are defined theologically, how

may they be measured, with what accuracy, and what would be their optimal manifestations? Now the task of assessment reveals its complicated face!

To the above definitions, I add the experiences and convictions of a deepening awareness of the presence of the Holy with us, and a living out of that Holy accompaniment. As I am using the concept of “spiritual formation” in this article, Christian spirituality is rooted in God’s Word, centrally our living Lord Jesus Christ, and then, the Bible, Creeds, and Confessions of a Christian tradition. The tradition is enacted, celebrated, renewed, and reformed in worship, theological reflection, and reflection upon the life of living within the faith. Thus, our spirituality is inherently communal through time and space. In disciplined, attention to this rootage in ourselves and our community, in contemplative reception, we are “read.” We discover God present with and working in us, within and through the tradition’s community. However, solipsism may be avoided by a paradoxically broadened openness to the world of nature and culture, including other religious traditions. This openness seeks disciplines of outward-looking awareness and reflection. These disciplines are attentive to the resonances of God’s grace present beyond ourselves and our community. Increasingly, they are observant of the interpenetrations of exterior and interior as well as those interpenetrations of community and wider world. The disciplines help us gather matter for reflection and integration as we explore the fullness of God-with-us. Inevitably, these outer-directed spiritual disciplines broadened our awareness of God and our apprehension of self and community.

Christian spiritual disciplines assume active presence and participation in a community. We draw upon the past wisdom of the community for orientation and training in those disciplines which have enabled consciousness of the presence of God in Christ with us, the conviction of Christ for us, the generative spiritual power of challenge, call, and mission to us from the Spirit, and the healing and renewing spiritual energy which enables new life in Christ.

Through exercising spiritual disciplines, our living is enlivened by the Spirit in the depths of ourselves and in the cosmic environment of grace. This spirituality is actualized in disciplines. It is expressed in fuller life as the people of God in Christ. As Christians, the effects of these disciplines are actualized in preparatory waiting in the Word, and anticipatory active being in God’s world under the mandates, call, and disciplines of the mission of God and the coming Kingdom of God.

In recent years, increasingly Protestant theological education communities have investigated how the interest in and concern for spiritual formation might be integrated into our missions. So much has it become part of our common parlance that in 1999, Anne Reissner could begin to analyze and question how we could do formation now in conducting distance learning.⁵ Yet, we hardly are of one mind how or if we need to add additional components of “spiritual formation” on our resident campuses. The Association of Theological Schools expects some manifestation of spiritual formation to be evident and assessable

in our schools, yet there is no commonly agreed upon model for either spiritual formation or its assessment.

An example and not yet a model

Through the generosity of a Lilly Endowment grant, for the last four years at LTSS, we have called a “Pastor to the Seminary Community for Spiritual Formation,”—the Rev. Mr. John Largen, D.Min. During that period, we have raised funds to continue this position. At first glance, this might seem like a marginalizing of the concern for spiritual formation, however, that is far from the case. Previous to initiating this Call, some of our faculty members were already teaching courses related to the history of spirituality and spiritual disciplines, monastic movements, and the history of pietism. Our campus has a long-standing daily chapel tradition with faculty, staff, and students attending. Every year, retreats of various sorts were held, although Lutherans seem to fill up their retreat with “business!” Some faculty members pray at the beginning of their classes or have student prayers. Occasions for campus families are celebrated with worship: baptisms, prayers for healing, the blessing of pets, marriages, occasional ordinations, blessings of homes, anointing for healing, confession and absolution, welcoming rituals, signing with the sign of the cross the minds, lips, ears, hands, and hearts of new students as they commit themselves to this journey of discernment, and washings of the feet of seniors by the president and his wife on the day of graduation as a model of service and sign of sending. We use student assessment instruments such as the *ATS Profiles of Ministry* programs with our first-year students and seniors. These instances begin to build a context for the student to experience and grow into thinking about and practicing the presence of Christ in all life occasions. One aspect of assessment to which I will return at the end of this article is how disciplines and practices of the Spirit mark and are integrated into the whole life of the community.

We began an intentional effort to increase our attention to spiritual formation through a faculty-student task force appointed by the president to begin to increase opportunities for intentional spiritual formation for students. This group initiated workshops on spiritual disciplines, lectures about spirituality and spiritual practices, and some retreats. During this period, the faculty agreed upon a common statement defining “Spirituality and Spiritual Formation.” All these developments helped to define a fuller more intentional program for spiritual formation at LTSS.

One element of assessment can be if the campus has a coherent notion of spirituality and spiritual formation which is written and has broad consent. Does spiritual formation at this place have a defining core and sufficiently broad intentionality and actuality to be a “communal” enterprise?

We determined that we would create a position “pastor to the seminary community for spiritual formation.” This was not a “move” to place that

Assessing Spiritual Formation in Christian Seminary Communities

concern and responsibility in one person and move on, rather it was for the purpose of intentional focus and a broadening of spiritual formation to encompass the entire campus. After a national search, Pastor John Largen was “called” to this responsibility. Another element of assessment must be whether there are sufficient members of the faculty and higher administration who understand and support a campus-wide intentional emphasis upon spiritual formation. Are the leaders and the program supported at the highest level of the institution? Is there leadership with advanced and appropriate training in the history of spirituality, spiritual direction, and spiritual formation disciplines? If not, can these resources be recruited from the surrounding supporting constituencies? A support committee was gathered around Dr. Largen consisting of representatives from the faculty, students, staff, spouses, and an external parish pastor. One aspect of assessment can be to determine if sufficient sub-segments of the community are involved in planning, evaluating, and supporting the school’s program of spiritual formation.

In our structure, the pastor to the seminary community for spiritual formation is an appointment of the president and reports to the president. We located this position structurally to give it priority and to give the pastor access to all subgroups in the community. We wanted a comprehensive program of spiritual formation. Assessment of spiritual formation in theological schools should give attention to the institutional location and scope of this mission.

As we decided to call a pastor with responsibility for spiritual formation, students were adamant that this person should have no connection to any evaluation processes related to their academic work or candidacy for service in their denominations. Thus, we decided that the pastor would not teach regular courses, although he might lecture for sessions. The pastor would not serve on any candidacy review panels on the campus. These judgments were specific to having a “director” for spiritual formation who was a pastor. However, the more general matter is worthy of reflection. Is it the case that spiritual directors, and persons who assist students in deep processes of discernment and confession should not be involved in other evaluation or judgment processes? I do not think that this necessarily should be a principle. It seems again to draw the walls between the personal and communal, the inner and the outer, the soul and the mind. Theological education communities need to think carefully about such distinctions and boundaries such as these. Assessment should be aware of these issues and seek to have clear principles articulated for any model of spiritual formation for a campus.

In any program of spiritual formation involving spiritual direction, counseling, and confession, there is an issue of confidentiality. From the start, we were very clear that we would respect pastoral confidentiality. Thus, anything disclosed by a member of the community to the pastor for spiritual formation that is of a confidential nature will not be disclosed to others. In our case, because the pastor serves under the president, this principle was made very clear by the president, and the president with the pastor assures that it is not

violated. Such confidentiality can be difficult. Thus, assessment of spiritual formation programs must examine how confidentiality is being observed, what its understood limits are, and if there are appropriate safe guards for participants in the program.

In our case, both students and, to a lesser extent, faculty felt that elements of the program being added to the campus life and schedule must be voluntary and not required. As time passes and the program is evaluated, this principle will be examined. In the Protestant context, there may be more of a tendency toward considering spiritual formation as it is ministered and administered in spiritual direction, retreats, *lectio divina*, and workshops of spiritual disciplines as most effective if they are participated in “voluntarily.” I am suspicious of this as a principle. We are testing it in our seminary context. However, I feel that a comprehensive commitment to spiritual formation is most comprehensively realized through some required or “expected” elements, at least of all students. Assessment of spiritual formation programs in theological education communities should address the issue of communal comprehensiveness.

In our case, the pastor to the seminary community for spiritual formation does not work alone, but coordinates efforts with faculty, students, staff, spouses, and others. The mission of spiritual formation is to be carried out not just for students, but also for spouses, children, staff members, and faculty. Thus, opportunities to exercise spiritual disciplines, receive spiritual direction, participate in retreats, learn from workshops, and seek counseling is extended to the entire campus community. Assessment of a spiritual formation emphasis or program should analyze how comprehensively it is made available to the campus community and levels of participation. In this process, interviews and survey assessments will be helpful.

Spiritual formation also should be comprehensive in the sense of the extent of spiritual disciplines and educational opportunities which are made available. In our efforts, we provide spiritual direction for individuals and in groups. Certified spiritual directors are contracted to be on the campus weekly. We help students with some of the minimal expenses for this direction. Group spiritual direction is done through the seminary staff and students. Regular speakers and workshops enable persons to learn of a variety of spiritual disciplines and to practice them: Franciscan, Benedictine, centering prayer, labyrinth walking as meditation, types of prayer disciplines, *lectio divina*, and Taize worship forms. Besides our daily chapel worship, there are other services for anointing for healing, quiet contemplative services in the evening, etc. Retreats are held on a regular basis with an emphasis upon spiritual disciplines and prayer. These may be offered for subgroups within the community. In addition, as I have already said, there are elective courses dealing with the clear history of spirituality, monasticism, and others. Assessment should evaluate whether a program should have a more focused intentionality to engendered a certain form of spiritual formation and discipline or whether a model of diffusion is better seeking to present a richly spread feast of opportunities.

Assessing Spiritual Formation in Christian Seminary Communities

Then, it can be evaluated if the intention has been fulfilled and whether it has deepened the awareness of the presence of the Holy in a significant number of persons on a campus. The teaching and use of each of the forms of spiritual discipline also can be evaluated in terms of whether participants rightly understood the discipline, practiced it for a significant length of time, and had their faith nurtured in the process.

Annually, there is a pilgrimage to spend five to seven days at a location known for its fostering of spirituality: Taize, Iona, Holden Village, et cetera. In these settings, we have our own disciplines, including prayer, Bible study, and quiet, led by a seminary leader and also participate in the life of the community visited. I believe it is important for the life of the world that pilgrimages not be just to exotic and quiet communities, important as they are as icons of spirituality, but also to places where we can learn of the sustaining spirituality of the poor and oppressed being in the midst of their lives and faith communities.

Assessment must boldly confront an evaluation of whether patterns of behaviors have been changed and if this change follows with the students into their ministries. Thus, longitudinal studies should be done and tracked with graduates. Do the efforts to “teach” and exercise spiritual disciplines actually “take hold?” Are they continued as students go into their ministries? Do they find them sustaining? Does intentional spiritual formation make any difference for the faculty and the staff? Does the campus community relate any differently and minister to one another in any different ways after these efforts in spiritual formation are initiated?

More than an ornament

As theological education communities who have not had intentional spiritual formation programs institute these efforts, it is important to ask questions regarding how spirituality “marks” the entire community and its life. Spiritual formation and the teaching of spiritual disciplines must not be merely an “add on,” an ornament for the purpose of good appearances. There must be a conviction within the community that this also is of the essence of quality theological education. Concerns for competence and quality almost go without saying. However, in planning and subsequent evaluation, it is important to articulate how this spiritual formation is related to the central mission of the school, and especially to theological learning.

For students, their vocation now is to be a student. The “life of the mind” must not be segregated from our deepest spirituality. There is a vocation for study, reflection, thought, and formulation. It can be very difficult to make this clear to students. Some will be tempted to think of the workshops on spirituality, the retreats, spiritual direction, and forms of prayer as their “real” spiritual life and the classes as necessary “evils,” or at least trials! Thus, it is important both that the faculty support the development of intentional spiritual formation, and that faculty members themselves are involved, indeed

leading, some of these practices and disciplines, even within classrooms. It is also important that the teaching of spirituality and the “staging” of spiritual formation disciplines within a seminary community are done in ways that are integrated into the education and learning mission of the school. Integration must be actualized and visible and not simply left to the “mind” and “heart” of the student.

I believe the integrating of spiritual formation into the regular life of a theological education community can be realized in part in the following ways:

- ♦ prayer in classes;
- ♦ the integrating of spiritual disciplines into the process of a course as aids to concentrated learning;
- ♦ the use of *lectio divina* in connection with biblical courses;
- ♦ the use of some faculty members as spiritual directors;
- ♦ the presence of faculty members at retreats as participants;
- ♦ the ability of the community to pray together regularly;
- ♦ the ability to articulate the disciplines of study as “prayerful”;
- ♦ the use of classical spiritual disciplines and rituals in responding to events in the life of the community;
- ♦ the ability of the community, as a whole community, to observe times of communal quiet and contemplation;
- ♦ the involvement of faculty and staff members in spiritual direction along with students;
- ♦ the appearance of artistic and visual helps for contemplation on the campus (such as icons and a labyrinth) and not just in the chapel;
- ♦ the sculpting of campus grounds for places of meditation and retreat in the midst of the day;
- ♦ the availability of the chapel at all hours for worship, meditation, and contemplation;
- ♦ the presence of appropriate bibliographical resources in the library and bookstore;
- ♦ evidence of an intentional effort to teach students how to teach aspects of spiritual formation and spiritual formation disciplines to others, particularly laity;
- ♦ evidence of opportunities for students to reflect upon and articulate their awareness of the presence of Christ with them;
- ♦ the presence of pastors and lay leaders on the campus regularly to speak about how they integrate spiritual disciplines into their lives as ministers; and
- ♦ evidence of concern for the spiritual health and formation of the staff, spouses, and campus families.

Assessments of whether a community’s intentional spiritual formation really is integrated into the community’s life can look at how many of the above possibilities are present in a particular theological education community, how intentionally they are practiced and evaluated, and how deeply they become

Assessing Spiritual Formation in Christian Seminary Communities

meaningful components for deepening spiritual disciplines and the awareness of God in Christ in the lives of students, faculty, staff, and others.

“Programs” of spiritual formation should engender sustained historical examination to deepen the possibilities for drawing upon the wisdom of the past. They should also generate thought and feeling about how spirituality can inform the world in a deep manner. These disciplines need to be world-encompassing. However, it is important that they not be just exercises of interiority, but those which generate and sustain loving ministry in the society and passion for justice.

Often in evaluation efforts, external evaluators will be more readily able to perceive if this integration of spiritual formation into the whole life of a theological education school is taking place and is evident to students and other members of the community.

And furthermore

A full assessment of an intentional spiritual formation effort at a theological school should include its salient impact on graduates, women and men in lay and ordained ministries over time. There are at least three major aspects of such an assessment: the graduate in ministry, the minister’s ability to teach others, and the congregation as a place of spiritual formation. A school doing these assessments probably will only be able to do them every few years. Longitudinal comparisons can be helpful. These assessments might be accomplished through survey instruments. A truly random sample of graduates tracked over time may give the best results. However, such instruments will give only partial results; the Internet and e-mail can make this assessment possible. In addition, personal interviews of pastors, ministers, congregation leaders, external observers of a congregation or judicatory officials and others will be very helpful, although labor intensive. These surveys and interviews will seek to determine the level of intentional spiritual formation being enacted in a graduate’s ministry and the ministry of a congregation.

In conclusion, let me suggest three areas for continuing postgraduate assessment:

1. Assessment can seek to determine if a significant range of students actually continue some spiritual disciplines on a regular basis in their ministries. How many continue to use a spiritual director? Are prayer and retreat disciplines being observed regularly? Do graduates feel sustained in their ministries by spiritual disciplines? Are there correlations between the use or non-use of spiritual disciplines and “clergy burn out?” Are graduates continuing to learn and explore different spiritual formation disciplines? What have graduates learned about spiritual formation that can be taught to the seminary community?

2. Assessment can help explore whether the theological school has successfully taught its students to teach spiritual formation in a ministry setting. Is there an intentional spiritual formation effort in the graduate's ministry setting? Has the pastor/minister been an effective leader and teacher in forming spiritual development for his or her faith community? Are laity trained to carry forth spiritual formation in this setting? Do the laity speak of their awareness of the presence of Christ with them each day? How is this "presence of God" meaningful for them?

3. For a theological school, assessment can investigate whether the ministry settings of its graduates give significantly more evidence of the practices of spiritual formation than other settings. Are there a significant number of ministry settings served by a school's graduates which are known by their members and by exterior observers to be spiritually formative in significant ways? In mission statements for congregations (or other settings) and in answers to questions put to members, is there evidence that intentional spiritual formation is central to these settings?

As old as it is new, but renewing

In this article, I have thought relatively "maximally" about elements in intentional spiritual formation and its assessment in theological education schools. Spiritual formation should be an important element of theological education. I believe that in many Protestant settings either this is a relatively new emphasis or a renewed emphasis. We are still seeking model or benchmark efforts. It is important that schools pursuing spiritual formation as an integrated element of their mission are in communication with one another. These can be formative times for this aspect of theological education.

In most, if not all, theological schools, worship, prayer, Bible study, theological reflection, and prayerful service ministries in communities have been a part of theological education for centuries. In Protestant circles recently, we have been learning from Roman Catholic and Orthodox theological education communities how spiritual formation might be more intentionally and integrally expanded in our schools. As we create "programs" of spiritual formation and seek to spiritually form our students, assessment of these efforts will add to their depth, breadth, utility, saliency, and validity. We trust that all will be to the glory of God in Christ.

H. Frederick Reisz, Jr. has been president of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, South Carolina for twelve years. He teaches in the field of contemporary systematic theology.

Assessing Spiritual Formation in Christian Seminary Communities

ENDNOTES

1. Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary Faculty, "Spirituality and Spiritual Formation," paper adopted October 9, 1998. This paper is available at the following URL: http://www.ltss.edu/web2001.data/spirstate_we.pdf (9/2003) or <http://www.ltss.edu>, then connect to "Publications and Forms."
2. Ibid., 1.
3. Eugene Peterson, "St. Mark: The Basic Text for Christian Spirituality," in *Crux*, XXIX (4, 1993).
4. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 18-19.
5. Anne Reissner, "An Examination of Formational and Transformational Issues in Conducting Distance Learning, including Issues related to Faculty Development," in *Theological Education*, XXXVI (1, 1999): 87-100.

Student Evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology

*Lawrence C. Brennan, S.T.D.
Kenrick School of Theology*

ABSTRACT: Student evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology involves an annual face-to-face meeting with a small faculty evaluation panel. The process begins with a formation contract that the student draws up, with consultation, at the beginning of each year. The evaluation session itself, held in the spring, considers the student's written self-evaluation, based on the contract, and a written recommendation by the formation team, both prepared beforehand. During the session, panelists interact with the student, and after his departure from the session, make their own recommendation to the rector. The process has evolved in significant ways over the past thirty years, but current assessment data show a general level of satisfaction with it.

The Standards of Accreditation of the Association of Theological Schools require the degree programs of member institutions to incorporate educational evaluation as an element of the theological curriculum (ATS 4.3.0). In the case of ATS Degree Standard A, the Master of Divinity, this requirement involves two dimensions: an ability to demonstrate the extent to which students have met the goals of the degree program (ATS A.5.1) and an ability to demonstrate the extent to which the degree program is both meeting the institution's overall goals for the program and meeting the needs of student and church constituencies (ATS A.5.2). The following article will focus its attention on the first of these evaluation components, and will describe the experience of student evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology, the graduate program of Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, the major seminary of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis. The article will unfold in four parts: an overview of Kenrick's current mission and degree program goals; a brief history of the student evaluation process; a calendar for this year's evaluation activities; and a summary of assessment data concerning the current program.

An overview of the program of Kenrick School of Theology

Kenrick School of Theology completed a revision of its educational programs in the 1996-97 academic year to take effect in the following academic year. The revision incorporated significant changes based on directives from four sources:

Student Evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology

- ♦ the initiative on program assessment from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), promulgated in the 1992-93 academic year and implemented at Kenrick in the 1995-96 academic year;
- ♦ the reformulated standards of ATS, approved in the 1996-97 academic year, to take effect by the 1998-99 academic year; and
- ♦ the recommendations of an ATS/NCA joint comprehensive accreditation visit to Kenrick in 1989, and of a focused visit in 1992.

The 1996-97 academic year revision of the program at Kenrick was holistic in scope, involving all aspects of the program, not simply the academic.

From the outset, the Ordination-M.Div. program was designed around outcome goals that could lend themselves to program assessment and then to any needed program improvement. An institutional assessment program was structured around such data-gathering activities as juried evaluations of videotaped homilies, critical-incident evaluations, exit interviews, and satisfaction surveys. A keystone course has been added this year. The same program goals were also intended to serve as the basis for a formation contract between the seminary and each student, by which the student would select particular goals as a personal focus for the year's activities and "operationalize" the goals with action steps and specific behaviors. This will be explored in more detail below.

As stated in the revised program, the mission of Kenrick School of Theology is to prepare men for the Roman Catholic priesthood in the Archdiocese of St. Louis and in other dioceses and religious communities. This preparation is focused on three elements: an abiding priestly identity; a cooperative priestly ministry; and an integrated priestly spirituality. Breakouts for each of the three elements yield a total of nine goals for the Ordination and Master of Divinity program at Kenrick. The program is thus structured in such a way that an ordained graduate of Kenrick School of Theology would have the following as he began his priestly ministry:

for priestly identity:

1. a sacramental configuration to Christ; and
2. an identity in the forefront of the Church;

for priestly ministry:

3. a ministry of teaching;
4. a ministry of sacraments; and
5. a ministry of leadership;

for priestly spirituality:

6. a consecrated priestly celibacy;
7. a simplicity of life;
8. an ecclesiastical obedience; and
- 9) a priestly life of prayer.

This mission and these goals have served Kenrick well. They are clearly formulated and they have a broad sense of ownership throughout the seminary community. On the whole, assessment of the new program has been positive. Although the Assessment Committee has experienced some difficulty in gathering data for the first goal (sacramental configuration), it has suggested that the first goal must be presumed met if the others goals are met; the faculty has accepted this suggestion. The committee has also found a weakness in the program's realization of the seventh goal (simplicity of life), and the faculty have taken steps to assure better coverage in that area. This latter case shows the institutional feedback loop to be working as designed.

In terms of process, the Ordination-M.Div. program at Kenrick was divided into three subprograms, following the structure of the PPF fourth edition: a human and spiritual formation program, an intellectual and cultural formation program (the academic curriculum), and a pastoral and practical formation program (supervised ministry). Each of these, in turn, was to contribute to the student's realization of the goals through its own specific subprogram goals. At the time the program was drafted, a subcommittee consisting of representatives from each subprogram proposed an extensive list of these subprogram goals, numbering ninety-nine total. They were seen to be indicators or signposts that pointed to the realization of the nine Ordination-M.Div. goals to which they were attached. Thus, for example, the goal of priestly celibacy was defined by indicators such as: a commitment to maintaining the healthy relationships of a personal support system, an understanding of the meaning of celibacy as a countercultural and eschatological sign, and a pastoral experience of the complementarity of marriage and celibacy as distinct states of life within the Church. From the beginning, the number of the ninety-nine indicators was thought to be excessive, but the principal weakness of the list has proven to be its *a priori* character. A current plan to simplify and reduce this list depends on two *a posteriori* strategies.

In the first place, the faculty agreed in the 2001-02 academic year to include in every syllabus a set of program interface goals that would describe how the course helps the student to meet as many of the nine overall program goals as it addresses. A syllabus of this type is also drawn up for the human, spiritual, and pastoral activities of each year. As a special project for this year the Assessment Committee will collate and review the interface goals from the syllabi to give the faculty an overview of how the actual practice of the curriculum is in fact addressing the nine goals. Thus the faculty will be able to see lacunae or overlaps, and the academic dean will be able to make suggestions to individual instructors about modifications or additions to the goals of particular courses. The dean of students will be able to do the same for human, spiritual, and pastoral activities. More importantly, the faculty as a whole can begin a process of revising subprogram goals to reflect a melding of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* approaches.

Student Evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology

In the second place, a similar strategy will be applied to the student formation contracts for this year. As will be seen below in greater detail, each student is asked to specify from the list of “the ninety-nine” a number of program goals to which he will devote particular attention for the year. If needed, he is encouraged to add particular goals of his own. Then he is encouraged to describe specific action steps: activities or behaviors by which he will realize the goal, and by which at the same time faculty and peer evaluators will be able to discern his progress in that realization. As this article is written, the students of Kenrick have developed their formation contracts for the current year in collaboration with the Formation Team, and have submitted them to be filed with the Dean of Students. In addition to serving as the basis for formation and evaluation activity for the year, these contracts will be collated and reviewed by the Assessment Committee (protecting student confidentiality), in order to determine which of “the ninety-nine” are being chosen in actual practice by the students, and which additional goals may be needed. This data will then be fed into the melding process described just above.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is currently preparing a 5th edition of the PPF, presumably to become effective at some point within the next two to three years. This new edition will serve as the opportunity for Kenrick to do another comprehensive curriculum review, and to incorporate into that review the data from this melding process as well as ongoing assessment data from alumni, from pastoral supervisors, and from interested others.

A brief history of student evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology

A little institutional history may serve as background for the current practice of student evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology. As late as the 1970’s, students at Kenrick, as in most Roman Catholic seminaries, were evaluated by the rector and faculty at a series of meetings held in the early spring. Students themselves were not present for these sessions, and usually did not even know on which date they were being evaluated. They were seldom informed of the content of the discussion concerning them. They were informed either that they were advanced in the program and could receive minor orders or ministries, that they were advanced but would delay receiving a particular order or ministry, or that they were dismissed. There was no provision for an appeal. Sometimes those students who were advanced would learn of their fate only by reading a posted list of those who had been called to orders or ministries.

The 1970s and 1980s were decades of renewal and unrest in the Roman Catholic Church. Pope John XXIII had announced in 1959 that he would convoke an ecumenical council and that he would initiate a revision of the Code of Canon Law. The Second Vatican Council met from 1962 to 1965 and

mandated dramatic reforms in the Catholic Church, including a reform of seminary education. The revision of the Code unfolded more slowly, concluding only in 1983. Against this background of change, a particular theme that was sounded with increasing urgency was the theme of canonical due process, the idea that canonical proceedings should be more open and aboveboard, that they should respect procedural rights for persons involved, and that they should include a process for appeals.

In Catholic seminaries in the United States, the concern for due process translated into an effort to create a more open evaluation procedure for students. At first at Kenrick, this involved simply asking the student to be present and to interact at the evaluation session concerning him. While this was an improvement in the process, it quickly showed some inadequacies. Neither faculty members nor students knew quite what to prepare for the sessions or what to expect from them. Faculty members had no training for face-to-face encounters with students on growth issues and sometimes handled the sessions in a less-than-constructive fashion. To address these inadequacies, in the early 1980s Kenrick turned to an early version of the ATS *Profiles of Ministry* program (then called *Readiness for Ministry*), to supply criteria and a context for an evaluative discussion of personal growth towards the priesthood. This too was an improvement, but the dean of students associated with this initiative died suddenly, and his successor was unwilling to continue the experiment.

Through the 1980s, six features emerged that remain a part of Kenrick's procedures at present:

- ♦ Student evaluation involves a face-to-face meeting with a panel of the faculty, with a vote of recommendation taken after the student departs the session.
- ♦ The number of faculty panelists is limited. No session involves the whole faculty, although responsibility for the sessions is divided among the faculty by groups.
- ♦ The basis for the face-to-face session is a written self-evaluation document composed by the student to which faculty evaluators address themselves.
- ♦ The dean of students submits to the panel a written report of the observations of the student by the Formation Team, including input from the academic office.
- ♦ The session itself involves a preparation of the student by the dean of students, such that the evaluation discussion itself contains no surprises for the student, nothing to catch him off-guard.
- ♦ The evaluation process concludes with a written recommendation from the rector to the student's sponsoring bishop, a recommendation that the rector reviews with the student before posting to the bishop. In this final session, the student is welcome to suggest changes in wording to add clarity to the rector's draft or to add his own content, but the final responsibility for the letter of recommendation rests with the rector.

Student Evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology

Even with these features in place, faculty panelists continued to experience a lack of clarity about what was expected from them in the process. To some extent, this problem was addressed in the curriculum revision of 1996, with its focus on goals and indicators. Students were asked to take ownership of the program by means of the formation contract, specifying from the outset their goals for the year and the activities through which they would realize their goals. Then in the spring, students were asked to write a self-evaluation describing their progress with respect to their goals. Faculty panelists were to verify the accuracy of this self-evaluation and to make recommendations on this basis.

Since the comments of faculty panelists at the evaluation sessions many times concerned the adequacy of contract goals, the Formation Team recommended that the faculty panel be involved with the student from the beginning of the academic year, not simply at the spring evaluation. The faculty agreed to this new step. Faculty panels are constituted at the beginning of the academic year, and faculty panelists meet with each student for whom they have responsibility, a first time to review the student's contract for the adequacy of goals and strategies, a second and third time at later intervals in the year to review progress, and a final time in the spring evaluation session itself.

At the end of the 2003 academic year, in response to a recurrent sentiment of the faculty, the Formation Team did a limited trial run for a process to gather peer evaluation data. Such a process had been tried by Kenrick in the late 1980s, but it had been discarded as more trouble than it was worth. The new peer evaluation process is designed to be more limited in scope with a hope to avoid the cumbersome character of the discarded process. The rationale for the process is to provide students with a forum for mutual accountability and an opportunity to use their knowledge and insights in a constructive manner, based on their responsibility to one another and to the common good of the Church. An instrument was generated and the entire experiment yielded helpful results. A peer component will henceforward form a part of the student evaluation process at Kenrick.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the 2005-06 academic year, Kenrick plans to implement a summative evaluation exercise—in the form of a comprehensive examination—for students in the Ordination program. This exercise would be required in addition to the annual formative evaluations just described. It was not originally contained in the program revision of 1996-97 academic year (it is not required by ATS Degree Standard A), but the faculty has concluded that it is needed to summarize and round off the holistic experience of education and formation at the seminary.

A calendar of student evaluation activity at Kenrick School of Theology

The calendar of evaluation activities at Kenrick School of Theology this year is planned to unfold as follows.

In September, faculty panels are constituted for each class cohort, consisting of the rector, the dean of students, an additional member of the Formation Team, and two faculty members drawn from the instructors of that cohort in either semester of that year. The dean also draws up a schedule of the evaluation sessions for the following semester. Students meet separately and individually with the dean of students (or a member of the Formation Team) and with each of the faculty panelists to discuss their formation contract. The contract is finalized and filed with the dean of students by the end of the month. Students are expected to schedule two additional meetings with the faculty members of the panel between the end of September and the beginning of March. They then write up a brief summary of these sessions and submit it to the dean of students.

In December, the faculty are polled as a committee of the whole for evaluative comments on the students. A form is distributed soliciting faculty input and a preliminary recommendation on each student. The dean of students collates the material, and reports it at the January faculty meeting. The faculty are then asked for additional verbal comments or suggestions about particular concerns that may have emerged in the December poll. Students are not present at this meeting and the faculty do not vote. The discussion, however, is often helpful to the faculty, especially when common concerns or commendations emerge. Any of this material may be included by the dean of students in his interview with the student or in his written report for the evaluation session.

In January, the new peer component of the evaluation process will be implemented at large for the first time. Each student will nominate five student peers from whom he would like to receive evaluative feedback; of these, the Formation Team will choose two peers to participate in the process and one additional peer at large. Participants will each be asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire, with comments, and to submit the completed form with their signature. The material will be collated by the Formation Team and incorporated into their interview with the student and their written report for the evaluation session, although the names of the participants will not be communicated to the student being evaluated.

Student evaluation sessions are scheduled on Tuesday and Friday afternoons through the middle part of the second semester. This schedule usually coincides with the liturgical season of Lent, and the irony is lost on no one.

Prior to the evaluation session for any one student, the following will have taken place. The student will have conferred with the dean of students (or the Formation Team member responsible for that particular cohort), and with the

Student Evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology

two faculty members of the panel. He will then have written up his self-evaluation and submitted it to the dean of students. The dean himself will have written up a report summarizing recommendations from the previous year's evaluation (if applicable), the input of faculty, site supervisors, and peers, and the Formation Teams's recommendation concerning advancement. In an effort at thorough communication, all of this material will have been reviewed by the student with the dean before distribution to the faculty panel.

Two to three days before the evaluation session, each member of the panel receives from the dean of students a copy of the student's self-evaluation and a copy of the dean's report. Panel members are expected to have studied the materials before the session and to have prepared their constructive questions and comments.

The student may invite his spiritual director to attend the session, but the spiritual director is not permitted to speak. For those unfamiliar with this role, the spiritual director is a type of counselor whose focus is the spiritual growth and vocational discernment of the student. In a Catholic seminary, every student is required to choose a spiritual director from a list of priests approved for that purpose and is expected to meet with him at least once a month. The content of their discussions is absolutely confidential, and a priest who is serving in the present or has served in the past as a student's spiritual director may not have input into the evaluation process concerning that student.

The evaluation session begins with a prayer offered by the student. The rector then thanks the student for his preparation for the session and asks him if he would like to say anything to the panel at the outset. Some students will use that opportunity to clarify or to amplify one or more themes from the written reports; others will simply thank the panel for their preparation. After this, the rector asks the dean of students for summary comments, then he asks each of the panelists. The purpose of the discussion is to review the past year's progress and to look to the future. Panelists seek to affirm, to challenge, and to give direction. They speak directly to the student in the second person, and avoid third-person comments to each other about the student while he is present. The student is free at any point to ask questions of a speaker or to interject his own comments. He is sometimes invited to summarize the input he has received. The rector concludes the face-to-face part of the session with his own observations of the student's year, and a summary of the final steps of the process. Then the student and his spiritual director are excused from the session.

After the student leaves the session, the panel may briefly discuss their recommendation, with the understanding that no new material is to be introduced. Finally, the panel votes by secret ballot, with each panelist choosing one of the following options:

- ♦ Yes, I recommend this student for advancement.
- ♦ Yes, I recommend this student for advancement, but with the following reservation(s): [to be listed].

- ♦ No, I do not recommend this student for advancement, for the following reason(s): [to be listed].
- ♦ I abstain, for the following reason(s): [to be listed].

It is understood that a vote of “no” must be accompanied by an explanation. It is also understood that panelists may abstain only for the most serious of reasons; they may not abstain to avoid casting a vote of “no.” The voting concludes the session and at the last session of the day, the rector thanks all the panelists for their contributions.

Within three to five working days of the evaluation session, the rector composes a draft letter of recommendation to the bishop or religious superior who sponsors the student at the seminary, summarizing the recommendations of the evaluation panel, giving the results of the vote, and offering his own separate recommendation of the student. He invites the student to his office, informs him of the result of the vote, and asks him to review the draft letter. The student is free at this point to suggest any changes. The letter with agreed-upon revisions is then posted to the bishop or religious superior.

The actual decision on advancement in the seminary program or on a call to ministries or orders is made by the bishop or religious superior, customarily but not necessarily following the recommendation of the seminary. Installation or ordination ceremonies are held late in the spring or early in the summer.

At the end-of-the-year faculty meeting, the rector announces the recommendations of all the evaluation panels. (Usually, however, if a student leaves the seminary program or is asked to leave as a result of the evaluation process, this development is announced to the faculty as soon as the decision is communicated between the student and the administration.) At this same meeting, the faculty has an opportunity to make observations and suggestions on the whole process of student evaluation, and ideas for new procedures or safeguards frequently surface at this time.

Institutional assessment of the student evaluation process

Over the years, institutional assessment of the student evaluation process has been somewhat episodic and anecdotal in character. The structure of the evaluation process has clearly evolved, but in an informal way. The seminary has shown an openness to trying new approaches to the task of evaluation and a willingness to improve or to discard what has not worked. In all of this, it has been guided principally by comments and discussion after-the-fact from student and faculty participants.

In the 2001-02 academic year, the dean of students conducted an institutional survey of all features of the formation program, including several questions on the student evaluation process. The survey showed a general satisfaction with the process, although two suggestions were made and acted upon. The number of at-large faculty was reduced from three to its present two, for the sake of saving session time and avoiding repetition. Also the faculty

Student Evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology

panelists become involved, as at present, in the process of the student's formulating the formation contract.

During the 2002-03 academic year, in the atmosphere of crisis attending the clergy scandals in the Roman Catholic Church, the faculty seriously discussed the adequacy of the student evaluation process. Two further changes to the process emerged at this time. The number of contract meetings between the students and faculty panelists was increased from one to three. Also, the Formation Team agreed to make itself available at posted times to give panelists information or feedback about particular students for whom the panelists might have evaluation responsibility. Both changes were instituted to assure that the faculty had sufficient information about students in order to make a recommendation.

In the 2003-04 academic year, the Assessment Committee conducted an institutional survey of the administration, the resources, and the programs of the seminary, including a specific item on the formation contract process and another on the student evaluation process. Numerical results for the contract item showed by large percentages a general student satisfaction with the process; for faculty it showed a smaller percentage of satisfaction and a greater percentage of neutrals and omits. Numerical results for the evaluation item showed by slightly smaller percentages a general student satisfaction, although one cohort was evenly divided between satisfied, dissatisfied and neutral. For faculty, numerical results showed satisfaction, although again there was a significant percentage of neutral responses. Only two critical comments were reported.

At the opening faculty meeting for the 2004-05 academic year, the dean of students announced that the entire student evaluation process would be assessed at the conclusion of the academic year. As this article is written, the Formation Team is in the process of determining what kinds of assessment information would be most helpful to them, and plans are in progress to consult students and faculty to elicit the kinds of concerns for which they might appreciate having a forum. The Programs and Policies Committee will conduct the exercise and report back to the Formation Team, to the faculty, and to the students.

Conclusion

Most evaluation recognizes that in the matter of human behavior, we are never dealing with a finished product. The evaluation of students for their suitability and readiness for orders recognizes that every ministerial vocation is a work in progress and that the assessment of seminary programs, including the student evaluation program, must deal with a similar flux. The process for the evaluation of students at Kenrick School of Theology has changed dramatically over the past thirty years. From the point of view of program outcomes, the changes have helped the seminary to focus its effort in all three subpro-

Lawrence C. Brennan, S.T.D.

grams to form students as zealous and effective priests. From the point of view of program process, the changes have helped the seminary to ensure more openness and fairness in its procedures, and have helped the student to take a more responsible role in the dialogue of accountability. All together, the changes have strengthened the programs and the community life of the seminary, and with results that contribute to a current high state of morale.

A complete description of the mission and goals of the programs of Kenrick School of Theology may be found at the Kenrick website: <http://www.kenrick.edu/home.html>. The seminary has also posted at a related website the instruments used in student evaluation, at <http://www.kenrickparish.com/forms>. Readers are invited to visit and to browse.

Rev. Lawrence C. Brennan, S.T.D., is professor of systematic theology at Kenrick School of Theology. He was academic dean from the 1989-90 academic year to the 2002-03 academic year, and is currently the director of assessment.

Student Evaluation at Kenrick School of Theology

Formational Initiatives at Wycliffe College

Merv Mercer
Wycliffe College

ABSTRACT: The challenges of forming students for pastoral leadership are made more difficult within an educational environment of part-time, commuting students and the waning of a communal seminary experience. The formational imperative requires institutional commitment in a climate of competing priorities and the requisite resources to offer a variety of formational opportunities. The author describes the varied resources offered at his institution to assist in the formation of candidates for ministerial leadership that include: worship, mentors, external counseling when indicated, guided retreats, short-term mission assignments to parishes and overseas, and fellowship and Bible study groups.

Wycliffe College is a founding member of the Toronto School of Theology (1970), a federation of seven denominational schools¹ on the campus of the University of Toronto, with four associated schools² all within one hour's travel. Wycliffe is a one hundred and twenty-five year-old, Anglican institution with an evangelical heritage and character. The school currently consists of a little more than 230 students³ distributed over several program areas; in general, up to one-half of our student body are Ph.D. or Th.D. candidates, one quarter are laypersons in assorted Master's degree programs, and the remaining quarter are Divinity students preparing for ordination in the Anglican church. It is to the Divinity portion that a high proportion of our formational⁴ effort is addressed.

Challenges: local and general

As a faculty, we've had several conversations about the changing trends that we've observed in students currently coming for Divinity studies. While our observations are far from scientific, I suspect that they do describe legitimate shifts in incoming classes. Many of our hunches have led to a much more complex reflection about how spiritual, theological, and vocational formation can be enhanced given the demands of the current student population. We are convinced, for instance, that entering students are less sure now of what they believe, less catechized, and maybe even less churched. While they are undoubtedly the product of our own Anglican congregations, they are at the same time more confused by issues of faith, and even less able to engage with the complex questions of our culture. This reality is often marked by the strongly

pluralistic quality of individuals who have come of age in a society with a multiplicity of faiths and an emphasis on individual rights. Instead of having three years in which to shape already formed Christians into leaders, we have students with less biblical memory to work with and discover that remediation is required in some instances; in fact there is now more to do in less time.

A word might be helpful at this point about the Canadian context and, in particular, that of Toronto. Toronto is the most multi-ethnic city in the world according to the United Nations; it has more cultural flavors (and consequently, faiths) than anywhere else. What was a few decades ago a predominantly white Anglo-Saxon majority has been substantially transformed, and the church that represented a significant portion of that majority (i.e., Anglican) is evolving much more slowly than its context. We find, then, a church that is much less sure of itself as it looks around and realizes it is no longer the church of power and privilege. Contrary to our good neighbor to the south that has emphasized the “melting pot” of immigrant cultures, Canada has always spoken more about its “cultural mosaic” and now must face the implications of that, especially in urban centers. This multi-ethnic reality not only alters our self-perceptions, it dramatically changes the missional context of our ministry.

Another Canadian phenomenon influences the formational challenge that we face, and that is the political emphasis that our country has placed, for more than two decades now, on the constitutional rights of the individual citizen. This development was a direct result of the patriation of our constitution (1982) freeing us from colonial British oversight. Our younger students have grown up and been formed by a climate in which individual rights were being defined with a consequent diminishment of conversation about the importance of shared, responsible community life. This misbalance will undoubtedly be addressed over time, but it does mean that students seem to be more focused on what they want in a “consumer” sense and more resistant, I feel, to being shaped by formational processes. One expression of this desire to self-define more is the pressure that has been put on the college to vary the delivery of its curriculum, to squeeze courses into three days of the week to accommodate commuting students, and to allow more and more part-time study.

As a national school in a big country, we are also being pressured for more on-line delivery of courses. What was, only a short time ago, a learning cohort that began and studied together for three years has now evolved into a much more haphazard and eclectic student body moving through the programs at varying rates and intensities. Add to these factors the long-term reality of a wide divergence of ages—twenty-four to sixty-five in our college—and the complexity of learning and formation has become extremely taxing. Certainly any structured communal life is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve, rendering the positive influence of peer relationships much more random. Nurturing, life-long ministry friendships have also become less likely because of this breakdown in seminary communal experience.

There are also some characteristics inherent in theological education that I argue can often work against the development of those preparing for leadership ministry in the church. One important factor working against effective formation and development resides in the phenomenon that most of our Divinity students are trying to prove themselves worthy within denominational assessment processes at the same time as they are completing a Master of Divinity degree program. The last thing they are comfortable doing is exposing those areas of their lives and faith that are in need of stretching and growth, or even revision. The kind of vulnerability that lies at the base of so much Christian growth—the recognition and confession of need before God—is the last thing that students feel free to show college or denominational authorities. They perceive the risks to be too high. Even the shifting of the personal, theological foundations that we know to be a healthy and even necessary part of an effective theological education is too often held inside and can then take longer than necessary to resolve, if in fact it ever is resolved.

The vocation of ministerial leadership is one of the most multi-layered and complicated callings entailing effectiveness in a wide variety of tasks. Consider a partial list: motivational and relevant public speaking; planning and implementing worship experiences for vastly divergent learners; administering the ministry of volunteers, offering pastoral counsel at the most difficult times of parishioners' lives; managing and sometimes stimulating conflict and its resolution; being an intelligent conversation partner for members of the congregation who are in widely different professional and work worlds; training members in the development of their own gifts; thinking strategically about the congregation's future; reading the culture and context of ministry; and modeling a healthy and spiritual lifestyle. This list is far from comprehensive. When you add to it the requirement that an ordained leader must exercise that ministry with integrity and holiness, it is almost impossible to contend with the scale of formation—spiritual, professional, and theological—required to prepare individuals effectively for their work of leadership.

There are two further factors that challenge the formation of ministers through theological education. I call them syndromes, the "rosy future syndrome" and the "postponed engagement syndrome." In my experience, many Divinity students resist any suggestion that what lies ahead in their lives in the Church could be difficult or even painful. The "rosy future syndrome" is connected to their conviction that God has called them to a ministry that will be uniformly blessed and wonderful. I suppose they may, to some extent, have needed that level of conviction even to get as far as the sacrifices of Divinity school, to get their nerve up, so to speak. The last thing they want to hear is that they need to arm themselves and prepare for challenges ahead, and so they can resist important conversations about real ministry and its difficulties in favor of maintaining a fantasy about the perfect faith community they will serve. To do less, they would argue, is to minimize God's power and misrepresent the

reason God has called them in the first place. They often come to seminary committed to being pastoral care givers, and certainly not as often as messengers of God's prophetic call for renewal in the church.

The other syndrome is related to this one. "Postponed engagement syndrome" describes the reality that seminary is not the same as ministry and a student is not yet an ordained leader. There is nothing a seminary can do, especially given the limited timeframe of a theological education, that can truly simulate the reality of full-time ministry, and that includes field placement as I have observed it. That means that large tracts of learning about and development for ministry remain unexplored because information and experience are not fully connected in any way that truly counts. Numerous students' questions, fears, and yes, hopes, are unexplored because they are "ministry context specific;" only the experience of ordained leadership releases or exposes them. It's my suspicion that student and institution often implicitly conspire that such learning and perspective will only come, or not come, with experience. In so doing, the seminary can breathe a collective sigh of relief that the learning in question is meant to occur after graduation and under the auspices of denominational life and life-long learning. The student, on the other hand, can blithely postpone certain kinds of learning (i.e., dealing with conflict) to a later date when it is more immediately necessary. This delayed encounter can mean that individuals find themselves "in over their heads in real ministry" when they are least able to address their learning needs. I confess that it is extremely difficult here to know what of this phenomenon is simply real and the way it must be, and what can be adjusted.

In spite of the challenges and limitations facing theological education in the area of formation, I do think there are many things that can actually help as students develop and prepare. Some decisions must be made first, however, to make formation a significant element of a seminary's priorities. Let me suggest four aspects of such a decision.

Institutional intention

An institution cannot back into a formational imperative; it must make a corporate decision to do so and apply resources to that goal. If the whole faculty and administrative team do not at least agree to this priority, it is extremely difficult to implement structures and policies to support the initiative. In small schools, certainly, there will be a need for at least some of the staff and faculty to participate in a variety of ways. If they are not supportive, they will resist taking their share of responsibility and there is a real sense in which formation is the responsibility of all.

Consistent oversight

It is also necessary for someone in the institution to have specific oversight of the formational initiatives in a seminary. It is too easy to lose the developmental focus in the pressure of academic goals and the delivery of the curriculum. It only makes sense that someone would give leadership to the implementation of an institutional commitment to formation in a climate of competing priorities.

Multiple and varied resources

It has become clear to us at Wycliffe College that only a variety of formational opportunities and modes of offering them will begin to address the diverse needs of our student body when it comes to spiritual, vocational, and theological development. The formational imperative is expressed throughout the program from chapel worship to small-group fellowship to spiritual mentors.⁵ As students sample the various options for growth, it is our prayer that some opportunities will take hold and draw them more deeply into their faith journey and experience of God.

Confidence in God's activity

The spiritual formation of every one of us is the work of God the Holy Spirit. At best, we can create instances when God can be heard, felt, and known more clearly. In what we recognize as a complex and difficult task, it is a deep relief to put the ultimate responsibility for students' growth in God's hands.

Formational and evaluative resources at Wycliffe College

Worship

Considering our Anglican character, it's not surprising that liturgy is one of the most significant resources in our formational endeavors. Through Word and Sacrament, we believe that the Holy Spirit shapes, corrects, and "finishes" the faith of all who truly worship God. To that end, we encourage our Divinity students to be regular in their worship practices; that means they attend at least one daily office at the college on days they are here, and the mid-week eucharist to which their families are also invited. The latter is preceded by an educational event and followed by a community dinner. Students have a variety of roles in worship and most students play their parts in implementing the liturgy; a highlight in the spring term is members of the graduating Divinity class preaching at the Wednesday eucharist. It is true that some of the pressures I named earlier, the larger proportion of part-time and commuting students for instance, are increasingly problematic in the maintenance of a regular worship life. Nevertheless, we continue to have expectations of students in this aspect of the college and try to do our best to provide a worship environment for those we can.

Fellowship and Bible study groups

Every student in our school, in all programs, is offered a fellowship group to join; these each have faculty oversight. Many students do become part of such a group. Groups are composed of students in the same class and year where possible; this arrangement permits the dealing with shared issues and pressures in prayerful and biblical ways. Although faculty members give oversight to these groups initially, it is a goal to see them student-led by some point in the year. Upper year classes usually take the initiative to meet in their groups themselves although the academic pressures sometimes mean that a gentle nudge is needed at start-up. To be fair, I think that these groups are uneven in their effectiveness sometimes; the mix of individuals does not always make possible the kind of meaningful development we might want. Also, serving part-time students in this way is difficult to organize. When they are effective, however, they are a home for both communal growth and individual development.

Spiritual mentors

One of the most important elements in the formation of students, by their own reporting, is the Spiritual Mentoring Program. This program is an attempt to foster the use of a spiritual director in future ministry for pastors, lay leaders, and academics. We hope the experience of talking regularly with someone about the spiritual realities of their lives will prove to be indispensable. To that end, we have a team of a dozen or so trained spiritual guides—some ordained and some not—who are available to students at no cost to them. The program is paid for by the college and is designed to permit a monthly conversation with a mentor while school is in session. These mentors represent a variety of traditions in spiritual direction, although there are probably more in the Ignatian tradition than any other. Each September, new students are introduced in a relatively informal format to our team of mentors; at that point they are free to make connections as they wish with the mentors with whom they feel some connection. We made some particular institutional decisions around the nature of this program. It was clear to me⁶ that what students were needing was, in a sense, a parallel world in which to reflect about their experience of theological education and its effect on their faith lives. It was also clear that this parallel world needed to be partitioned from the school's evaluative life. That is to say, they needed to talk with a mentor in a non-judgmental environment free from risk. The oversight from the school is indirect and I do not even know which students are seeing which mentors unless they disclose that information themselves, nor do I know who has chosen a mentor and who has not. Students feel much freer in this type of arrangement and can explore their relationships with a director at as deep a level as they choose. It is for this reason that we have avoided the strategy employed in some seminaries to place the formational enterprise within a curricular structure. Such an approach can tell students

about formation, but it is difficult for me to see how any personal growth can be imposed through a course mandate. Here, the clear advantage of being small is certainly a factor. Ultimately, I am convinced that, given opportunities, individual students still have to decide to be intentional about their own spiritual development.

Counseling referral

One of the unanticipated consequences of the mentoring program has been the increased demand for referrals to external professional counselors. There has always been a low-level need for such professional assistance for students. A year would not go by in a school of our size when some students wouldn't be in need of this kind of help. The institution has some financial support for such referrals, although it is not substantial. When the mentoring program was started, the demand for this service grew noticeably. I suppose we should have predicted that spiritual growth and personal issues are often related and planned for an increased demand for counseling. We have managed to absorb the increased costs of this and take some comfort in knowing that substantial personal issues are better unearthed in the seminary environment than later in one's ministry when faith communities could suffer in addition.

Guided retreats

Both fall and spring term have a half-day guided retreat, usually placed in the middle of the term before chaotic essay production goes into full swing. Wednesday afternoons at Toronto School of Theology are intentionally kept free of classes to permit local programs in each of the colleges. Every Wednesday we have an event—usually a visiting speaker on a particular topic of interest—followed by eucharist and the community dinner. One of our Wednesday events is dedicated to silence and spiritual reflection. It is often led by someone presenting a biblical or personal challenge (forgiveness, giving thanks, etc.) that students and faculty receive and prayerfully consider; it is also often given in parts entailing a repeating rhythm of input and reflection. I think we are slowly making progress in convincing students to stop and take time to reflect on their faith in this way, but it has not been easy.

The graduating Divinity class has an added daylong retreat off campus in its final term. This time apart is held within a particular course on parish leadership and I have seen it influence students greatly. We are blessed at Wycliffe with an ongoing relationship with L'Arche (Daybreak), a Jean Vanier inspired community north of Toronto. It serves individuals with multiple handicaps in a farm like setting. Some of its members work off-site in workshop environments while others stay on the property in a variety of daytime programs. It is always an interesting encounter for graduating pastors, so often intent upon proving themselves good enough, to meet God's "wounded ones" who serve others with selfless and open hearts so often. Students hear life

Formational Initiatives at Wycliffe College

stories, visit in the workshops, eat in the homes, and end the day in a shared eucharist, giving thanks for the holiness of the experience.

Short-term mission teams

Each term, a group of ten to fifteen students form a mission team with one or two faculty members to visit and serve a parish at some distance from the school; the most recent team spent twelve days (over reading week) on the eastern shore of James' Bay sharing life and ministry with a native Cree community.⁷ Most often, the teams spend a week with a rural and multi-point parish in which they share their own stories, preach, teach, and lead worship. The opportunity to share time and work with peers is an important building block of ministry for those who experience it. It is quite common for students to discover substantial areas for personal learning as they work together in the context of a team in a new and strange setting. In fact, there is a real advantage to these short but intensive ministry encounters in so far as students have no way of avoiding each other or their own anxieties and deficits. To be fair, they also discover that God empowers and they often have their gifts for ministry affirmed.

Overseas experiences

Every other August, a team of students travels to experience ministry in the Anglican Church of Kenya. For a month they absorb another culture and the global reality of our Anglican Communion. They generally find themselves stretched by this experience into an awareness of the gospel's power in new ways. They see a church committed to evangelism. Even in the hardest of circumstances sometimes, they encounter the Kenyan church's culture of thanksgiving. Students are required to stand and speak of their faith in unfamiliar ways totally counter to the reticent Anglican models of North America. They take hold of the gospel in new ways in my observation often losing a narrow and limiting parochialism in favor of a broad awareness of God's activity. I actually think it changes their understanding of ministry for their whole lifetime and several want to return; graduates who have participated in this program speak to me years afterward about its significance. Although the program involves relatively small numbers, its influence spreads throughout the school in conversations and presentations that follow and in the presence of African transfer students. There is already interest and anticipation in the next "Kenya trip."

A small number of students, one or two a year, participate in a cooperative program in the National Church, "Partners in Mission." This program gives students a summer internship in the Caribbean church and many similar benefits ensue from these placements. My one caveat here is that the student is often alone in these placements, and although there are orientation and debriefing opportunities, the experience is much harder to integrate because of

the solitary nature of the placement. There is much to be said for ministry done in pairs—there are even biblical models—because students help each other in these moments, with encouragement, prayer, and reflection.

Assessment of ministry readiness

There are several elements in our formational process that emphasize evaluation and monitoring of progress. Every year, our Divinity students participate in an Annual Review of Progress. This begins with the student's self-statement of progress responding to several key areas of development, such as "life in Christ," "vocational growth," and others. This self-statement is then discussed with a faculty advisor and a second faculty member and a short summary report of the student's sense of progress is generated. To this is added field placement reports, grades, peer assessment, and a *Profiles of Ministry* report; all of this material is discussed by a faculty board for each Divinity student in a day together, and a report is generated from that discussion that then goes to the student for approval. When the student signs off on that report, and there is sometimes negotiation around that, it is forwarded to the denominational authority he or she chooses. This review is a labor-intensive process overseen again by the person the institution has designated for formational oversight.⁸ I must say, however, that the bishops of our students—they are located from coast to coast—find the level of reporting and evaluation extremely helpful. Though they are far sometimes from their students, it gives them a window into the progress of their candidates.

Additionally, we participate in the *Profiles of Ministry* program offered by ATS and have done so for seven or so years now. We ask our incoming Divinity students to do *Stage I*, and at the start of their final year after a three-month internship, to do *Stage II*. *Profiles of Ministry* has a substantial database and provides a helpful point of reflection for students as they journey toward their ministry future. This vocational assessment tool has enabled us to move beyond the heuristic and anecdotal data that often prejudiced judgments about students in the past. After seven years, we now have our own database that informs our understanding of trends and progress. I have administered this program throughout its history at Wycliffe College and have seen it play a significant role in students' lives. It has allowed them to track strengths and areas for growth, to monitor the ways they have changed through their theological education, and to begin to forge a ministry persona. From the school's perspective, it is one of the ways we get an early warning about things that really need to be triaged. For the majority of students, though, it is a tool that encourages them to be reflective about the realities of ministry and their vocational roles.

Final thoughts

When it comes to evaluating formational efforts in theological education, it is clear to me that we lack clear and shared criteria for leadership ministry. This is not a criticism of the categories of *Profiles of Ministry*; it is just my hunch that the evaluation of qualities such as character and faithfulness is elusive. It may well be that expectations and settings vary too much across denominations and countries to be able to develop standards. Until we do, however, there will only be a “seat of the pants” sense to what is working and what is not. Wycliffe College commits a lot of time, energy, and resources to the formation of students as they prepare for leadership ministry and I think we do a good job. We have never tried to analyze, in a systematic fashion, the subsequent performance of the best of our graduates, or to develop a set of criteria to tell us what part we have had in someone’s development or readiness.

In conversations on the negative side with bishops, who now spend a significant amount of their time dealing with clergy dysfunction, we have often talked about some research effort in such cases and whether breakdown or failure could have been predicted or avoided. In most instances, though, such exploration is just not possible, partly because of the circumstances of the dysfunction and partly because files containing information pertinent to decisions about ordination are often destroyed. I suppose the value of a theological education may not really be assessable except in terms of effective, actual ministry. Perhaps we need to look at our five and ten-year graduates to discover how their seminary training aided them and how it did not. If we were able to develop criteria for our effectiveness in such an effort, then it might help us to improve the outcomes of theological education even more significantly. It may be that such research would fail to produce clear results, but without other guidance we can only rely on the discernment process that we have and apply as many resources to it as we can.

Another critical factor is that gaps can sometimes exist between the church we serve and the theological education institution. These gaps can be expressed in various ways: theological differences (the liberal-conservative axis), missional mandates (social justice, evangelism, or both), and even in terms of the quality of students delivered to the seminary for training. If a bishop or diocese is sufficiently diffuse about leadership ministry requirements, then it is not surprising that indistinct pastors will be the result. Three years in seminary can rarely undo a missed discernment at the beginning of theological education. Observing my own denomination, I find that its episcopal leadership is pressed on all sides, by theological division (if not eventual schism),⁹ by its shrinking size, and by clergy dysfunction, past or present. Such circumstances militate against a healthy view of a renewed ministry of leadership. We do need constructive conversations about the qualities of leadership needed for effective ministry and then be determined to call out such candidates and

resistant to settling for anything less. I believe the theological education community can prove to be a valuable partner in such a dialogue. It may need to be the initiator as well.

Merv Mercer is assistant principal, assistant professor of Anglican formation, and director, basic degree studies at Wycliffe College in Toronto, Ontario. He has served on the ATS Advisory Committee for Student Resources and is the coordinator of the Profiles of Ministry program at his institution.

ENDNOTES

1. The member schools are: Trinity and Wycliffe (Anglican); Emmanuel (United Church); Knox (Presbyterian); Regis, St. Michael's and St. Augustine's (Roman Catholic).
2. Associate schools are: Institute for Christian Studies (Christian Reform); MacMaster Divinity School (Baptist); Conrad Greibel College (Mennonite); Waterloo Lutheran University (Lutheran).
3. This represents a forty-three percent growth rate over the last five years.
4. For the purpose of this reflection I am using the word "formation" in the broadest possible sense. It includes spiritual, theological and vocational elements.
5. We use the term mentor and director interchangeably now, but in the beginning of that program we developed the more Protestant term "mentor" to optimize the initiative's likelihood of success. Spiritual directors themselves are unclear what to call themselves, so there's precedent for different titles.
6. I developed and now direct this program at the college.
7. This involved a caravan of three vans and a two-day drive.
8. Once again smallness helps.
9. The Anglican Church has always prided itself on the quality of "unity within diversity" although it is being sorely stretched at this very moment in history.

Formational Initiatives at Wycliffe College

A Call to Growth: The Potential of the Profiles of Ministry Program

Francis A. Lonsway

The Association of Theological Schools

ABSTRACT: The Association of Theological Schools provides a number of resources for institutional assessment and improvement. The Profiles of Ministry program, highlighted in this article, offers schools a Group Profile, in addition to Individual Profiles, of their entering students (Stage I) and of students as they complete their studies (Stage II). The instruments identify the strengths and weaknesses of individual students and contribute to the development of a plan for personal student growth to lead toward successful ministry. The author briefly discusses the importance of reasonable strategies and reliable instruments for measuring student growth and development. He then illustrates how the Profiles of Ministry program provides valuable data in relation to each of the goals of the Master of Divinity degree program.

The Association of Theological Schools has developed several critical resources to help member schools explore their strengths and identify areas of weakness. Among these long-standing aids are the *Institutional Peer Profile Report* (IPPR), the *Strategic Information Report* (SIR), the *Entering and Graduating Student Questionnaires* (ESQ and GSQ) of the Student Information Project, and the *Profiles of Ministry* program (PoM).

The first three programs are directed to the institution itself. The IPPR allows a school to compare its annual report form data with from five to fifteen other schools identified as its peers by selecting characteristics such as enrollment, denominational affiliation, or geographic location. The choice of the number of schools as well as the identification of what features would be important to the selection is in the hands of each member school of ATS. The SIR, on the other hand, provides a sharp focus for an individual school on indicators designed to help it assess its overall financial strength including such features as salaries, tuition pricing by degree program, operating capital and endowment, and enrollment trends. It includes some comparisons with other schools in the same denominational tradition and of like size. The two instruments of the Student Information Project, the *Entering Student Questionnaire* (ESQ) and the *Graduating Student Questionnaire* (GSQ), focus on students as they begin graduate studies and as they prepare to graduate. The ESQ explores why a student chose a particular seminary, who was important in that decision, the students' sources of income for graduate education, their educational and non-educational debt, and what they plan to do in ministry. The GSQ invites seminarians' perceptions about their growth during seminary, the importance of field education and internships, their satisfactions with

both curricular and extra-curricular services, and what they thought of their overall graduate theological preparation.

The fourth in the list of resources available to member schools is the *Profiles of Ministry* program. *Stage I*, administered as seminarians begin theological studies, and *Stage II*, as they complete their graduate work, have an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual student and on the development of a plan for personal growth leading toward a successful ministry as their principal focus. This program, in contrast to the first three mentioned above, is designed first with the student in mind and secondly as an aid to administrators and faculty members in understanding their student body.

It is the second benefit of the *Profiles of Ministry* program that is the focus of this article. A group profile is generated for each class of students with comparative profiles available for entering or graduating seminarians from prior years. The profiles enable user schools to highlight areas common to an entering or graduating class and, for first-year students, to identify the core of their strengths and mark areas for intentional growth through their seminary program. For senior seminarians, the school has a portrait of what has been accomplished and a way to measure some of the impact of their graduate studies, their formation programs, and the readiness of their graduates for ministry.

Background and evaluation

The *Profiles of Ministry* program (PoM) in its earliest form, the *Readiness for Ministry Project*, has been around a long time. The thirtieth anniversary study of the original project begun by ATS in 1973-74 continues the focus on “characteristics, traits, and sensitivities that clergy and laity across North America judged to be important for the beginning minister.”¹ As fruitful as that research has been, the practical importance on the development of instruments to assess the characteristics that were identified is the most significant outcome of the original project. The set of PoM instruments developed in the mid-1970s, revised in the late 1980s and again in the 1990s, has proved to be helpful for seminaries focused on exploring the growth and development of their students. *Stage I*, regularly administered as seminarians begin theological studies, and *Stage II* as they near completion of their studies and supervised field experiences or internship, are helpful both for the individual student as well as for assessing the overall mission of the seminary.

How can *Stage I* and *Stage II* of the PoM program fit into the mission of a theological school? More precisely, how can a group profile of entering or graduating students be helpful? One way would be to look at the standards member schools have adopted as indicators of a “good theological school.”

The accrediting standards of ATS are unequivocal about the importance of evaluation in theological education, its place, and the elements that comprise

good evaluative strategies. Tied to goals in Standard 4, *The Theological Curriculum*, the standard states that the over-arching goal of the curriculum is the development of theological understanding which includes “deepening spiritual awareness, growing in moral sensibility and character, gaining an intellectual grasp of the tradition of a faith community, and acquiring the abilities requisite to the exercise of ministry in that community.”² Direct measurement of much of these four characteristics is impossible and indirect measures, which is what remain, are not easily written.

The concept of effective evaluation must include a reasonable strategy for measurement. The discussion is generally scholarly to this point but it is herethat, often times, the first warring words of “reductionism” are flung. The issue is that part of the richness and texture of any topic marked for evaluation— whether about a subject matter or an individual—is circumscribed or bound in by trying to measure the outcomes. Most every effort designed to measure achievement, progress, or growth is so affected. Tests of whatever kind—fill-in-the-blanks, multiple choice, true/false, or essay—whether constructed by individual faculty members, church judicatories, or test-construction experts, all suffer the same fate. Only those questions that require the simplest response are not affected, for example, questions of age, gender, dates of events, places, or names of presidents.

In light of these remarks, it is clear that the issue of evaluation needs to be sharpened. Perhaps it might be stated this way: “How much loss of richness and texture is acceptable in any particular evaluation?” The response, awkward as it may seem, is “That depends.” This response is the issue we face at the beginning of each and every evaluative strategy. We must face it head on or, in failing to make the effort, end up with a potentially useless evaluation. Something has been done, but what is measured is of no consequence even though the reporting of the event is thorough.

This issue of the richness of the evaluative strategy was and has continued to be paramount for the interpretation of the individual and group profiles of the PoM program and the way to meet the reasonable concerns for a rigorous set of evaluative tools is to specify how the instrumentation was conceived and developed early on and refined through revisions over the years.

How, then, in the construction of the Casebook, the Interview, and the Field Observation form did the developers and researchers address the question of loss of richness and texture? The answer is by being attentive to the interplay between an individual’s achieved score and his or her true score.

Nettlesome distinctions

It is not helpful to parry words such as “test,” “questionnaire,” “survey,” or “assessment instrument” as if to clinch the argument that the kind of evaluative instrument answers the troublesome question of the score achieved. The issue, rather, is how reliable is the test that was given? Another way to

frame the question is, “To what extent did the grade achieved reflect what the student really knew?”

Tests report achieved scores—they may have a lot or a little to do with the true score. A test question can be misleading, it can be misread, the question may not pertain to the subject being tested, or the student can be ill, distracted, or preoccupied. All of these factors affect the reliability of the score. The test giver can tally the score, but that does not answer the question about how much the score reflects the understanding of the test taker.

To increase reliability in assessment, test professionals devote substantial effort to asking the same question in a variety of ways, scattered throughout the instrument. While this expenditure of time is not practical for the general fill-in-the-blank or essay test, it points to an inherent and glaring weakness in them. It should also be adequate notice that the use of any “quickie” instrument designed to provide information on seminarian’s gifts, learning or leadership styles, and the like are similarly flawed. Their numbers are without end as well as, unfortunately, their use, and there is too much credibility ascribed to the outcomes.

It is not satisfactory for any instrument designed to assess a characteristic, whether IQ, achievement, personality trait, or personal characteristic, to be so marred. These tests are designed for a particular population of individuals and may include a specific range of ages, a level of reading ability, and targeted geographic regions. This is precisely why Search Institute, the partner with ATS in the development of the PoM, spent so much time developing the most robust set of instruments it could. For example, a “Likelihood” score on the personal characteristic, “Fidelity to Tasks and Persons” for *Stage I*, depends on responses to nine different items in the Casebook. The reliability coefficient for this characteristic, measured most recently in 1994-95, is .69. Its reliability has been consistent over the years and, since the first major revision of the instruments in 1987-88, has risen slightly from .67. While that is far from perfect, as all other scores on the instrument are, it is considered a high reliability as are reliability coefficients greater than .60 are.

The natural consequence of this process, then, is that an individual trained to interpret the strength of this characteristic and other scores reported on the instrument can be confident in assigning meaning to the score. It is not accidental that a student achieved a score in the “Likely” range, for example. The task is to interpret what that score means by itself and in relationship to related scores on the Individual Profile.

Important generalizations about PoM scores

Stage I of PoM is designed principally to assess the strengths and areas for growth of the first-year student in the graduate programs of member schools. It can be used for those preparing for parish ministry, Christian education, and church music. *Stage II* explores the development of the seminary student over

time and examines specific strengths in areas allied with supervised ministry or internship. There is a good deal of overlap in the scores of the two instruments so that it is useful to look at *Stage II* in light of an individual's profile on *Stage I*. This presents a helpful map of changes over the course of graduate studies.

Our focus here will remain the scores presented on a *Stage I* profile. There are thirty-one measures from two instruments (Casebook and Structured Interview) reported on a student's profile. Two additional measures look at the same trait from the viewpoint of each instrument. The profile is reported on two pages, "Personal Characteristics" and "Perceptions of Ministry." The arrangement by these two broad categories is designed to facilitate the discussion of the traits and sensitivities more effectively than by strictly adhering to the importance of the characteristics identified by clergy and lay persons across North America in both the original research in 1973-74 and in the fifteen-year follow-up in 1987-88.

The scores on the profile are reported on a Likert scale from "Very Unlikely" to "Very Likely." Each band allows a score to fall from the low end of the band to the high end so that an individual can score in the "Low possibly," "Middle Possibly," or "High Possibly" range.

It should be helpful to look at a sample of scores from the total Group Profile of entering students (*Stage I*) for 2002-03 to see how a seminary might use PoM as a tool in its evaluative process. More than 2,500 seminarians completed the instruments last year. My focus will be on those attitudes, traits, and perceptions measured in the program that relate to the pivotal list from Standard 4 noted earlier. For an example, I have placed four scores within each goal that seem to fit within the language of the standards. The choices neither exhaust the meaning intended by the standards nor are they necessarily the choices each of us would make. My goal is to suggest the potential use of the PoM in any seminary program designed to evaluate an individual's call as he or she begins preparation for ministry.

For ease in reading the following four sections, I have set in italics the characteristics measured in PoM, *Stage I*, and cited a brief portion of the text that captures their meaning. That text is followed by a discussion of the meaning of the scores as they appeared on the total school profile in 2002-03. The goal, then, will be to look at this total profile as if it reflected the scores of a first-year graduate student in one of the ATS seminaries.

Deepening spiritual awareness

Growth in the life of the Spirit within us calls first for a *Belief in a Provident God* whose actions are, at times, beyond human comprehension and that a provident God "works, loves, and judges humankind with divine mercy and brings people to a saving knowledge."³ Allied with this belief is a *Commitment Reflecting Religious Piety*, which finds its expression differently by denomi-

A Call to Growth: The Potential of the Profiles of Ministry program

national tradition and person but reflects a consciousness “of God’s loving and sustaining presence at work in the Church, your life, and the lives of others today.”⁴ It should bring with it diminished evidence of any *Self-Serving Behavior* that can reflect a “need to be in control of situations and the willingness to use the authority of your office to achieve that control.”⁵ Likewise, a sensible understanding of self in relationship to others should be evident by *Fidelity to Tasks and Persons*, underscoring a belief that “all persons have value, their ideas and wishes should be heard and taken into account, and (that) we should be conscious of one another’s needs.”⁶

On average, the entering student classes of 2002-03 were in the “High Possibly” range on their belief in a provident God, “Likely” to exhibit a verbal commitment reflecting religious piety in the “Possibly” range of giving some evidence of self-serving behavior, and “Very Likely” to be faithful to tasks and persons. What if this were the pattern for your school?

Two comments are in order. The first, “on average,” means just that. The range of scores on the four characteristics noted in the prior paragraph and all others measured in the program is often very wide, frequently going from the lowest possible scores of “Very Unlikely” to the very highest scores of “Very Likely.” This means that there are probably entering students at any particular seminary who score either quite low or quite high on most of these measures. The interpretive process integral to the *PoM* program is designed to help seminary faculty and administrators identify the potential issues in a given student’s profile and to bring them to the attention of the student in the context of one-on-one or small group interpretive sessions. One cannot minimize the power of the opportunity to work with seminarians and help them with their understanding of themselves and to identify issues for growth during the years of their graduate studies.

That having been said, my second comment goes to the heart of the interpretation of the scores noted above. If this total school pattern were true for a single institution, one would be prompted to ask how belief might be strengthened in such a way as to more closely “match” the entering class’s verbal affirmation of its faith. Is there a class designed to explore spiritual growth? Are there seminary programs, spiritual direction, formation groups, and chapel events specifically designed to encourage reflection on a seminarian’s personal belief and its expression in his or her life?

An exploration of the indicators of self-serving behavior might reveal a tendency among the entering class to be “clericalized”—conscious of its call and the power attributed to the office of pastor by dress, clothing, or position within the community. Does the seminary in its mission statement, in its consciousness about the role of the minister, or in its structure reinforce the external signs of leadership? The score on self-serving behavior would prompt a potentially fruitful discussion of the challenges facing the seminary leadership with this class and how it might work on these issues in both class and extra-class settings.

Finally, the faculty and administration should be heartened by the score on *Fidelity to Tasks and Persons* because it reveals that, by and large, its entering class is “Very Likely” to complete tasks, relate warmly to persons, and handle differences of opinion.

Growing in moral sensibility and character

Key components of personal character would include *Personal Responsibility*, which involves keeping “commitments whether they are related to schedules, promises to other people, or to your own inner convictions,” and *Flexibility of Spirit*, which reflects a willingness to “adapt to what is required by the unique character of the situation.”⁷ At the same time, moral character would include a healthy dose of a personal *Acknowledgment of Limitations*, accepting “responsibility for mistakes whether in judgment or behavior,” and a conviction that *Conflict Utilization* can be productive. Arguments need not end in distrust or futility, but may well point us in a useful new direction. It reflects an understanding that conflict is “an inevitable part of group life that has the potential for good in it.”⁸ There is an interplay between *Personal Responsibility* and *Flexibility of Spirit* in the *PoM* program; it is evident in the scores of the entering class. Students in general were “Likely” to reflect an adaptive spirit and scored in the “Middle Possibly” range to exhibit personal responsibility. Both the willingness to acknowledge limitations and the understanding of the potentially productive nature of conflict were in the “Likely” range, the first “High Likely” and the second, “Low Likely.”

Experience in the interpretation of the profiles suggests that the relationship between personal responsibility and flexibility needs to be watched. It is entirely possible to score so high on personal responsibility as to suggest rigidity—an unwillingness to listen to new ideas or to change course. The same high score on flexibility presents an issue of being so quick to change that there never seems to be any course or direction to an individual’s life. The particular mix in the entering students in 2002-03 is likely healthy—a good measure of flexibility with a sense of following through on promises. A seminary can just as reasonably look for an overall mix in its entering students that would favor a higher score on personal responsibility and a slightly lower one on flexibility. This would certainly seem a plausible goal in those church traditions that emphasize their history and may have a hierarchical model of governance on the regional level.

A seminary would want to examine the high score on acknowledging limitations to check whether or not it is a reflection of the self-consciousness of students that they are inadequate or whether it is a good reflection of the realization of their gifts. Churches have often done too good a job in accentuating our sinfulness and lessening our gifts. Finally, a school would happily see that students perceive themselves to be able to work through conflict.

Gaining an intellectual grasp of the tradition of a faith community

We minister in a context not just within a particular congregation, but within the larger frame of fellow ministers, ministers within a geographic region, and within a particular denominational tradition. *Denominational Collegiality* measures, in part, “a feeling of belonging, both in one’s local Church and in broader Church settings.”⁹ *Building Congregational Community* and *Sacramental-Liturgical Ministry* explore two very different relational issues, namely, how an emphasis on fellowship and the development of community find expression and how important to the life of the community the formal liturgical celebration is. These need not be opposed, but rather suggest the texture and focus of the minister’s life with the congregation.

The first of these two characteristics reflects a dedication to fostering “activities in the congregation that are purely for the sake of community or fellowship” whereas the second, *Sacramental-Liturgical Ministry*, gives emphasis to “the liturgical aspect of worship over the preaching or fellowship aspects,” a hallmark of some denominations and a factor of little concern within others.¹⁰

Finally, the context of ministry moves beyond the boundaries of the local church and church polity in general to *Pastoral Service to All*. This characteristic measures a willingness to “personally offer or urge the Church to offer practical aid to non-members as readily as to a member of your own congregation.”¹¹

Entering students in 2002-03 were “Likely” to feel at home with their denominational or church family and “Likely” as well to support the building of congregational community. They were “Unlikely” on average, though the middle fifty percent of the scores ranged from “Very Unlikely” to “Possibly,” to reflect an interest or understanding of a sacramental/liturgical ministry, and “Likely” as well to foster pastoral ministry beyond their congregations.

Denominational Collegiality is important for seminaries to watch. It can be low enough for the school to wonder about the student’s aptitude to fit into the denomination comfortably or so high that it wonders if the seminarian has a real perception of the tradition. The score in the 2002-03 profile is a reassuring one. There is comfort, too, in the seminarians’ scores on dedication to building up parish or congregational life while at the same time being willing to reach beyond the church to those who behave and live their faith differently.

The challenge for seminaries within the Association remains what they judge to be the appropriate balance between the nature of worship and its celebration within the local church community. It is not enough simply to focus on the proclamation of the word and fellowship without some understanding of rite and ritual. While these do not need to be at the top of everyone’s list, a failure to include them suggests a willingness to disconnect oneself from the history of Christianity as well as to be blind to the impact of the sights and

sounds of an individual's worship in community. The "Unlikely" score should press a seminary faculty to explore its roots, style of worship, and goals for the worship life of the congregation.

Acquiring the abilities requisite to the exercise of ministry in that community

A willingness to be involved in the personal struggles of individuals is a key component of *Involvement in Caring*. A high score indicates that a minister is willing to "aid people with problems by helping them explore and evaluate their alternatives, make their own decisions, and act on them."¹² In the overall caring for the members of a congregation or parish is a willingness to "take an advocacy position toward youth and a ministry that meets their needs and problems."¹³ This attitude is measured in *Relating Well to Youth*. Both of these character traits are allied with an *Openness to Pluralism* which reflects "an interest in what others believe, what they are thinking, what motivates them, and how they go about making decisions or value judgments."¹⁴ All of these, I think, should result in a low score in the *Pursuit of Personal Advantage* that indicates a "tendency to try to get other people to do what you would like them to do without directly asking them to do it."¹⁵ Mid-range to high scores on this characteristic would suggest some discussion about the reality of the level of their caring for others, young or old, and their manipulation of people to achieve their own ends or wishes.

The entering students last year, on average, reflected just this discontinuity. Their scores on the first three traits of caring for people in their personal struggles, a willingness to be an advocate for youth, and being open to what others think and decide were in the "Likely" range, in fact, high "Likely" for the first two scores. These would be encouraging scores for any seminary and, in particular, that of concern for youth because, for many graduates, this role will be part of their first assignment.

On the other hand, the seminarians' scores on the pursuit of personal advantage was in the mid-range of "Possibly." This suggests some attention—not that the seminarians as a group are burdened with problems, but rather that they need to learn to respect and work with others more and be less concerned about getting their own way. One should not see virtue in manipulating people. The higher the score, the more potential harm there is if in their continuing to engage people in the worship and fellowship of the local parish of congregation, their goal is to have things their own way.

Final thoughts

The goals of this article were to first list some key resources developed by ATS member schools as they work on the important task of evaluation, to note

A Call to Growth: The Potential of the Profiles of Ministry program

cautions on the way to evaluation and, finally, to suggest the potential usefulness of the PoM program to measure the strength and facilitate the growth of the individual seminarian.

I have used approximately half of the scores on the Group Profile for *Stage I* to make the last point. While my observations have been based on the Group rather than the Individual Profile, I have tried to indicate some of the general questions that a faculty and administration might address when looking at this larger picture. Remember, of course, that the first and best use of the PoM program is for developing a personal plan for growth during the years of seminary. That goal, however, can be enhanced by the seminary leadership's understanding of the overall gifts, strengths, and weaknesses of its entering students. It can help a seminary, as well, to focus its courses and community life in light of the seminarians who come to it to learn and grow.

Francis A. Lonsway is director, student information resources of The Association of Theological Schools. He administers both the Profiles of Ministry program and the Student Information Project's Entering and Graduating Student Questionnaires. He also conducts a series of workshops each year for both programs to assist program coordinators in the schools in administering the instruments and in interpreting the data.

ENDNOTES

1. *Colloquy*, The Association of Theological Schools, 11: 4-5 (2003), 7.
2. *ATS Bulletin 45, Part I*, Standards of Accreditation, (2002), 54.
3. *Interpretive Manual, Stage I*, The Association of Theological Schools, (2003), 7.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Loc. cit.*, 5.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Loc. cit.*, 5 and 11.
9. *Loc. cit.*, 8.
10. *Loc. cit.*, 8 and 11.
11. *Loc. cit.*, 10
12. *Loc.cit.*, 6.
13. *Loc. cit.*, 10.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 7.

The Pragmatics of Assessing Master of Divinity Students

William R. Myers

The Association of Theological Schools

ABSTRACT: The pragmatics of assessing Master of Divinity students in ATS member schools often translate to three main concerns: (1) institutional or missional ethos; (2) devising the appropriate process to facilitate student assessment; and (3) which set of "tools" might be employed that make sense and "fit" with concerns one and two.

Institutional ethos

In a request to ATS member schools in spring 2003 for institutional cases for use in an upcoming association consultation on designing M.Div. curriculum, ten cases were selected. One of them, contributed from a self-described liberal institution, told the story of an elective Master of Divinity (M.Div.) curriculum within which a routine portfolio review of each student led to an ever-evolving, highly individualized course of study. A larger school might find such a process difficult, if not impossible. A denominational school with a large number of required courses might also be reluctant to engage in the process described. A university divinity school might wonder how any part of this process could work in its program. Institutional *ethos* plays a role in determining the pragmatics of student assessment.

Institutional ethos is one way in which a school incarnates its missional identity. Another way is by setting a particular set of goals for specific academic programs. In so doing, the school returns to its mission statement in order to embody a particular way of understanding the Gospel's claim on the educational process. In the case mentioned above, by working from its mission statement the school had determined a set of "thresholds" (its term) that each student had both to experience and to move into in more depth in order to be equipped and educated as an M.Div. student and eventual graduate within the school's tradition. In other institutions, "thresholds" are often described as "desired outcomes," "competencies," or "goals."

Presented below are four examples of "outcomes" from a larger set of outcomes that was included in one of the submitted cases for the M.Div. curriculum consultation:

- ♦ Christian Living—for example, "demonstrate the ability and willingness to conduct one's life in community out of confessed Christian faith";
- ♦ Skills and Attitudes—for example, "demonstrate the interpersonal and team skills sufficient to take on a variety of roles (including leadership) in a ministerial context";

The Pragmatics of Assessing Master of Divinity Students

- ♦ Critical Knowledge—for example, “demonstrate a willingness to use thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities to achieve personal, ecclesial, and societal goals”; and
- ♦ Self-Growth—for example, “demonstrate the ability and willingness to self-assess and act to improve.”¹

These competencies and abilities are subdivided by this particular school into levels or steps that could be developed and assessed over the three years of the curriculum.

Whatever the language, certain goals for student learning emerge from connecting the mission statement of the school to the “delivery system” known as the M.Div. curriculum. Here, a school defines what it hopes to accomplish as it contemplates a future graduate of its M.Div. program.

There is, however, a necessary dialogue between what a specific school intends and the particular vision of the ATS Master of Divinity degree program standard. Accordingly, “The goals an institution adopts for an M.Div. degree should take into account: knowledge of the religious heritage; understanding of the cultural context; growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity; and capacity for ministerial and public leadership.”²

This writer assumes, as in occasions when ATS standards are introduced into a conversation, that different mission statements will give rise to different understandings of curriculum. Schools not only devise different curricula, but they also accent the ATS requirements in different ways. One school emphasizes, for example, the “practice of ministry.” Another produces “learned pastors.” Still another is proud of how it teaches the “spiritual disciplines.” While such accents are important, the ATS standards suggest that ministry is never a one-note song, but rather something more akin to a well-integrated composition of music. It is, however, this interaction that necessarily creates vastly different curricula from school to school.

Thus, if a school has in place a clear *mission statement* and has used that statement (in conversation with ATS standards) to *identify competencies* that can be understood to define a graduate of this particular school’s M.Div. program, then we need a *process* for assessment and appropriate *tools* to facilitate the process.

The process of student assessment

In the case described briefly above (small, liberal, “threshold”/competency, mandatory portfolios), a small faculty committed to a particular educational vision might understand that its assessment process would regularly place the student and a portfolio into a conference with one or more persons where decisions would be reached with the student as to progress made or not made in each competency. Thus, faculty *and* student would make plans designed to effect student movement further toward these goals.

For such a process to work, there would need to be commitment on the part of both the student and the faculty. Their decisions might also be cleared through a committee and then recorded by the registrar. Whether the portfolio

is an actual entity or a virtual portfolio, and how often and in what way advisor(s) interact with each student, are questions that begin to emerge about how this process works. The process itself seems straightforward—a number of portfolio conferences resulting in specific decisions regarding what a student is to do to meet the competency goals of the school’s program (and to be “educated,” “formed,” “shaped,” and “trained” through such curricula).

Other cases for the consultation on M.Div. curriculum noted that schools had different assessment tools or procedures that were similarly applied in yearly “reviews.” One school had determined that advancement in the degree could only occur when a student successfully negotiated a first- and a second-year review. A senior “capstone” course also had to be passed before graduation. (This course attempted *integration* by each student of every goal/competency of the M.Div. program.) Another school had a slightly different process, in which all entering students took a mandatory course defining how each goal of the degree connected with the theological disciplines throughout a student’s course of study. A strong emphasis was placed upon self-assessment (helped by numerous tools). When a student neared completion of a second year, the “middler” review took place. Up until that review, everyone was defined as a *student*; following successful completion of the review, a student became a *candidate for the degree*. A senior integrative course with the obligatory defense of a “position-in-ministry” statement completed the assessment process.

Another school had moved from a more traditional understanding of schooling into a cohort “spiritual formation” model that was built not upon the disciplines of the academy, but upon the ATS M.Div. standard’s goals. Several of the submitted cases for the conference reported using some aspects of the cohort model and a moving away from a discipline-driven curriculum by taking seriously mission statements that emphasized *spiritual leadership* in the church and the broader community.

Again, no two schools arrive at exactly the same goals or process for assessment of a student in the M.Div. course of study. Each school understands that the goals, processes, and decisions that emerge from this process (e.g., whether a student can complete the M.Div. or should be removed) were necessarily published in the school’s catalog and manual for the M.Div. program, and were understood to apply equally to every M.Div. student.

M.Div. assessment tools

With a clear mission, an established set of competencies, and a carefully designed assessment process, the remaining issue is which *tools* might be used to gather the kind of information appropriate to the assessment task. Offered below is a chart of twenty frequently used M.Div. *student* assessment/evaluation tools that I have seen in ATS institutions. The reader will note that some of the tools can be administered as an independent assessment tool; others, however, suggest that a specific process must be in place (within which the tool is embedded).

The Pragmatics of Assessing Master of Divinity Students

- High Connection
- Lower Connection

[Persons who frequently use the tool]

Often used to assess/evaluate:

Tool	Description	Religious Heritage (A.3.1.1)	Ability to Read the Cultural Context (A.3.1.2)	Personal/Spiritual Formation (A.3.1.3)	Capacity for Ministerial and Public Leadership (A.3.1.4)
<i>Autobiographical Statements</i>	A written statement often required in the admission process; sometimes used as self-assessment baseline; added to/modified over time; reviewed with seminary advisors during regular assessment/evaluation meetings, sometimes individually, sometimes in small groups. [Spiritual Director/Small Group]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Initial Exams</i>	A series of easily scored paper exams, resulting in an assessment/evaluation of what content, writing skills, and other intellectual tools the student brings to graduate-level work. [Academic Advisors]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
<i>Psychological Tests</i>	One or more paper instruments often used with students one-on-one, sometimes used as a baseline for student evaluative/assessment conferences during orientation and then at the end of junior and middle years. Examples: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, California Psychological Inventory, Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis, Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument. [Spiritual Director/Field Educator Supervisor]			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Portfolios</i>	A physical repository of representative papers, videos, evaluations, transcripts, letters, project summaries, etc. Usually brought together by students and others, including field ed. supervisors, spiritual directors, CPE supervisors, academic advisors, etc. [Academic Advisors/Field Ed. Directors/Spiritual Directors]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

- High Connection
- Lower Connection

[Persons who frequently use the tool]

Tool	Description	Religious Heritage (A.3.1.1)	Ability to Read the Cultural Context (A.3.1.2)	Personal/Spiritual Formation (A.3.1.3)	Capacity for Ministerial and Public Leadership (A.3.1.4)
<i>Courses</i>	While letter grades remain a constant, a more nuanced assessment/evaluation sometimes occurs through papers, projects, threaded conversations, and exams; occasionally assessment/evaluation assumes a narrative form, as professor and/or the student interactively write about the course and the student's engagement and learning in the course. [Seminary Professors]	❖	☒	☒	☒
<i>Small Groups</i>	Often intentionally formed and usually consisting of 5-7 students with trained facilitators, such groups often meet in hospitable space and often focus on processing student formational learnings. [Small Group Leaders]	❖	☒	❖	☒
<i>Retreats</i>	Three or more days away from the institution, often focused on the self and spiritual formation/vocational concerns. Frequently a part of an initial junior seminar as well as an exiting senior seminar. [Spiritual Directors, Campus Pastors, Faculty]	☒	☒	❖	☒
<i>Field Education Placements</i>	With differing time requirements, but usually consisting of one and sometimes more than two years of required ministerial experience (with covenant/contracts and regular individual/group supervision). [Field Ed. Supervisors]	☒	❖	☒	❖
<i>Spiritual Direction</i>	Regular forty-minute sessions/meetings, often on-on-one, occasionally in groups, structured as an intentional and required reflective process (sometimes as often as weekly; more often monthly). [Spiritual Directors]			❖	❖
<i>Globalization/Cultural Immersion Experiences</i>	Students and faculty go somewhere, sometimes as part of a course, occasionally connected with field education requirements. Such trips frequently are designed to expose/engage students within a broader, global context (often lasting 10-12 days, frequently three weeks, occasionally a month or more). [Seminary Professors]	☒	❖	☒	☒

Often used to assess/evaluate:

The Pragmatics of Assessing Master of Divinity Students

- High Connection
 - Lower Connection
- [Persons who frequently use the tool]

Often used to assess/evaluate:

Tool	Description	Religious Heritage (A.3.1.1)	Ability to Read the Cultural Context (A.3.1.2)	Personal/Spiritual Formation (A.3.1.3)	Capacity for Ministerial and Public Leadership (A.3.1.4)
<i>Internships</i>	Extended full-time ministry experiences, usually for an entire academic year. The intern experience may meet denominational or specialized ministry requirements, or it may satisfy a field education requirement. [Field Ed. Directors]	❖	❖	❖	❖
<i>Mentor/Apprentice Programs</i>	These programs link students with trained, full-time professionals so that students observe, “shadow,” and theologically reflect on the practice of ministry and potential vocations with those who mentor. [Field Ed. Directors]	❖	❖	❖	❖
<i>Journals</i>	Routine written student observations of a close, personal nature on ministry, spiritual growth, etc. (Sometimes shared with supervisors and/or used in small group discussion as a reference point) often used in conjunction with retreats, Field Ed. units, or immersions. [Faculty/Campus Pastors / Spiritual Directors]			❖	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Clinical Pastoral Education Units (CPE)</i>	Ten to twelve weeks of full-time supervised ministry in hospitals, prisons, psychiatric units, parishes, etc. Often taken in summer, but occasionally as an “extended” unit over an academic year. Supervision occurs both one-on-one and in groups; written supervisory reports are shared with students and with the school. [CPE Supervisors / Field Ed. Directors]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	❖	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	❖
<i>Integrative Seminars</i>	These are courses designed to facilitate theological integration of learning. They are often held in the initial year or during each year. Occasionally they are a regular part of the entire middler and senior experience. [Seminary Professors]	❖	❖	❖	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Capstone Courses</i>	An “end” seminar for a course of study designed to integrate the student’s theological learning. [Seminary Professors]	❖	❖	❖	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

- High Connection
- Lower Connection

[Persons who frequently use the tool]

Often used to assess/evaluate:

Tool	Description	Religious Heritage (A.3.1.1)	Ability to Read the Cultural Context (A.3.1.2)	Personal/Spiritual Formation (A.3.1.3)	Capacity for Ministerial and Public Leadership (A.3.1.4)
<i>Critical Instance in Ministry Report</i>	As a collegial team, three students receive a critical instance to which they are asked to develop—over a two-hour period—a ministerial response; this response is then presented by the team to one or more faculty, who engage the students in a critique according to established learning areas. [Faculty]	❖	❖	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Exit Exams</i>	Sometimes schools require a series of content exams for graduation; some denominations hold ordination exams; these may become the focus of vocational reflection. [Academic Advisor]	❖			
<i>Parish/ Congregational Committees</i>	Occasionally, schools mandate the formation of parish committees as a regularized part of the field education experience; the committee is expected to meet with the student and to send a written evaluation to the school that is also shared with the student. [Field Education Supervisor]	❖	❖	❖	❖
<i>Student Self-Assessments</i>	Students are asked to complete written assessment tools regarding their own growth/learning. These papers are the focus of conversations with faculty advisors, field education supervisors, and spiritual directors.			❖	
<i>Position in Ministry Exams</i>	Often the end result of a senior integrative seminar, this paper names the warrants that support a theological position for/in ministry. An oral exam by professors is expected. [Faculty]	❖	❖	❖	❖

The Pragmatics of Assessing Master of Divinity Students

While not an exhaustive list, it does suggest which tools may be best at addressing specific goals within the M.Div. degree program standard. It is important to recognize that the use of tools is largely to be determined by *appropriateness*; that is, *is this tool useful in this particular situation?* A good tool in a good process is to be desired more than many tools not clearly chosen but placed within a less than clear process.

The student's role in the process

Adult learning models tell us that students who are active participants in their own assessment learn more than students who understand assessment as something done *to* them. The fact that assessment is part of the learning process is not debated among ATS schools; how much of a role a student has in that process is debated. This writer has come to believe that an assessment process open to student engagement holds considerable promise for theological education. Even though such processes take more time (for faculty and others), the results born of active participation in assessment procedures are uniformly better.

Perhaps this issue goes back to an institution's understanding of the *goals* of an M.Div. course of study. Are we to educate ("to lead out"), or to train, form, and shape students in ways that go beyond an intellectual "knowing" of the religious tradition? If this is so (and the M.Div. standard suggests that the ability to read context, to deepen one's personal/spiritual formation, and to have capacity for ministerial and public leadership are critical *goals* of the M.Div. program), then assessment as the (mere) assignment of grades by faculty who "know" (imposed on those who do *not* "know") is not enough. Students need face-to-face processes in which data gathered from all these M.Div. categories is brought to bear in conversations that ask for integration and promise an understanding of missional identity.

Summary

Good student assessment has a positive impact on an educational system. Student, programmatic, and institutional assessment overlap. A student assessment process that increasingly treats students as participants in their own educational journeys necessarily will have an impact on how faculty teach and how they come to understand their discipline and what "counts" in the rank, tenure (including contract and appointment), and promotion processes.

Multilayered assessment changes the ethos of an institution, even as particular academic programs are newly understood, and students come to recognize how it is that they are engaged in their own education. We, therefore, return to the mission of the school and begin to recognize that the process and the tools that lie at the heart of assessment grow from a faculty's willingness to ask what that mission might be about today.

William R. Myers

William R. Myers is director of leadership education and accreditation at ATS. Before joining the Association's staff in 1999, he was academic dean of Chicago Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois.

ENDNOTES

1. The examples were taken from a case submitted by Rosemary Chinnici (Starr King School for the Ministry, Berkeley, CA) and Patricia Dutcher-Walls (Knox College, Toronto, Ontario) to the ATS Consultation on Designing M.Div. Curriculum, held in Pittsburgh, PA in 2003.
2. Statement A.2 of Master of Divinity degree program Standard A, *Bulletin 45, Part 1*, 2002 (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools), 95.

Assessing a Doctor of Ministry Program

Barbara Horkoff Mutch
Carey Theological College

*ABSTRACT: The author proposes a method for assessing the Doctor of Ministry degree program comprehensively, that is, moving beyond evaluating individual program components, courses, students, and teachers. To assess less than comprehensively, the author states, captures neither mission nor strategic directions and reveals little about the effectiveness of the degree program in meeting goals for student learning. The goals of the program, as presented in the D.Min. degree program standard, are important aids for critiquing program design. The article addresses **what** should be assessed, **who** should be involved in the assessment, and **how** the assessment is to be carried out. It offers three specific assessment tools: benchmarking, matrices, and portfolios.*

The Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) is the highest professional degree for the practice of ministry. It is assumed that persons entering a D.Min. program have mastered a body of knowledge in their initial theological training, demonstrate proficiency as skilled practitioners, hold themselves accountable to a code of ethics, and are committed to a lifetime of learning. Men and women enter D.Min. programs for many reasons, some of which correspond with the specific D.Min. program goals of ATS accredited institutions. These goals include an advanced understanding of the nature and purposes of ministry, enhanced competencies in pastoral analysis and ministerial skills, the integration of these dimensions into the theologically reflective practice of ministry, and continued growth in spiritual maturity. By the words "advanced," "enhanced," and "continued," it is evident that the D.Min. degree is meant to extend previous knowledge, practice, and spiritual formation. The degree is intended to be professional in nature and advanced in understanding, competency, and rigor.

How can theological institutions offering the D.Min. degree know if these goals are being attained? In other professions, the path to advanced practice may be well established. There is a well developed and established continuum for professional formation in public education. Education councils set standards for teacher training, the licensing of new teachers, and the certification of accomplished teachers. Expectations increase in nature throughout a teacher's career and opportunities are provided for ongoing development. There does not appear to be a corresponding coherent system of ongoing professional formation assessment for those in ministerial leadership. In the absence of external structures of a professional guild, effective program assessment becomes increasingly important. In assessment lies the opportunity for theo-

Assessing a Doctor of Ministry Program

logical institutions to discern if their D.Min. program goals are being attained. Assessment also contains a religious invitation, for assessment may be practiced as an act of stewardship and care for the communities of faith affected by the men and women who enrol in these programs.¹

To many theological institutions, assessment may not appear to be either opportunity or invitation. Over the last fifteen years, requirements by accrediting bodies for program assessment have increased in both volume and insistence. Resources for theological program assessment do not appear to have increased at the same rate, occasionally leaving institutions feeling like the Hebrew nation when asked for bricks with precious little straw. Some institutions feel ill-equipped to respond adequately to the levels of organizational self-examination currently expected. Although institutions may sense the inadequacy of their approach, the way forward into effective program assessment is less than clear. The institution I serve, like a number of others, is in the early stages of developing its understanding of and approach to assessment. What I have been learning about assessment of a D.Min. program is offered here structured around three primary issues of assessment.

The first issue to address is precisely what is to be assessed

In some institutions, assessment of the D.Min. program is conducted principally on a course-by-course basis. Such a format is simple to implement, maintains the autonomy of the individual professor, and meshes easily with the highly specialized interests of the typical participant.² While course evaluation is essential to instruction, evaluating an individual program component, a course, student, or professor, should not be confused with the work of assessing an entire advanced degree program.

In other institutions, measurement focuses on those academically related variables that are most easily quantifiable. Student demographics, enrolment, acceptance rates, and retention rates are easy to calculate. They are also seductive in nature because these calculations can fool you into thinking that at least you are assessing *something*. The problem with this approach is that the product tends to be historical in nature and limited in predictive power. Capturing neither mission nor strategic directions, these data tell very little about the effectiveness of a program in meeting goals for student learning. They paint a clear picture of the limited assessment value of that which is most easily quantifiable. The figures are easy to obtain but do not tell you much.

Form without substance is always a temptation, and perhaps nowhere less than in the arena of ministry. The apostle, Paul's, warning metaphor of the noisy gong for those who are gifted but do not possess love is clear direction to resist satisfaction with externals. Novelist Anne Tyler's portrayal of Morgan, a character who moves through life passing himself off as a doctor or a minister just because he can, speaks to the issue of substance as well. "It was so easy—a matter of mere common sense. It was almost too easy. He'd have more trouble

sustaining the role of electrician, or one of those men who blow insulating material between the walls of houses.”³

In contrast to Morgan’s effortless assumption of the persona of a minister, the meaning of assessment may best be captured by the question of substance: What should graduates know, be able to do, and value?⁴ It is the overall learning, growth, and development of groups of students because of their educational experiences that is of primary interest in a D.Min. program. Competencies, integration, and spiritual maturity are less tangible than academically-oriented data, far less susceptible to quantitative analysis, and distinctly challenging as criteria for assessment. Nevertheless, learning outcomes such as these are most relevant to the mission of D.Min. programs.

The knowing, doing, and valuing of ministerial practice has a discernible character; it is a particular kind of knowledge. The work of Donald Schon (*The Reflective Practitioner*, 1983, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, 1987) clearly identifies the challenge that lies at the heart of assessing professional knowing. Schon highlights the epistemological tension that exists between the kinds of knowledge honoured in academia and the kinds of competence valued in professional practice. Higher education in the university context is committed to “a view of knowledge that fosters selective inattention to practical competence and professional artistry.”⁵ It gives privileged status to systematic knowledge and tends to assume that professional competence is simply the application of this knowledge to problems of practice. The kind of knowing with which D.Min. education is concerned is vastly different and needs to be evaluated by different methods.

Schon describes three kinds of professional knowing. The first is *knowing-in-action*, intuitive knowing of the first-order, which is understood in the doing. The second kind is *reflection-in-action*. In this, those with a particular knowledge, be it clergy or jazz musicians, respond to the actions of others and improvise their own practice in order to adapt to what is required in the moment. The third level of knowing requires the highest level of rigor and is called reflection-in-practice. This type of knowing moves beyond individual actions into that which is essential to the profession and a regular part of its practice. It is in its essence a reflective conversation with a particular situation of practice.⁶ This type of knowing is seen in the action of a mature professional who brings prior understandings to bear on an unfamiliar situation, chooses a particular response, and pays attention to the results. When this type of knowing occurs, the professional becomes a researcher in the practice context. This is the kind of advanced ministerial practice that a D.Min. program seeks both to nurture and to assess.

Professional knowing in ministerial practice is nurtured in programs and communities where ministers learn through reflective practice how to think like a particular type of professional and where they are coached to invent new rules, reframe problems, and make new sense out of uncertain, unique, or conflicted situations.⁷ Movement from a knowledge that is inseparable from a

Assessing a Doctor of Ministry Program

particular action to knowledge that is examined and researched in practice is the movement of advanced ministerial practice. It requires a particular mode of instruction, is facilitated by a reflective practicum, and best led by those possessing artistry in coaching more than proficiency in lecturing.⁸

One of the specific knowledge goals identified for approved D.Min. programs is the advanced understanding of the nature and purposes of ministry. In initial assessment of our program, it was identified that the two core courses in theological reflection were designed in such a way that reflection on actual ministry practice was occurring and that integration of theology and ministry formed the basis for discussion. Elective course offerings furthered participants' understanding in particular areas of expertise, and ministry reflection and group sharing gave new insight and vision. It was identified, however, that the Doctoral Orientation Seminar should include a component on the nature and purpose of ministry, and ongoing student reflection in this area should be collected to measure growth in understanding and reflection on practice throughout the program.

Reflection on practice is also identified as a key characteristic of professional knowledge by Diez and Blackwell.⁹ Many clergy enter D.Min. programs searching for language to express ministry that has been characterized largely by intuition. A practitioner's ability to reflect in practice must be developed as a way to "make visible the invisible," enhance competency in pastoral analysis, and enable clergy to examine both their practice and their theological rationale.

Diez and Blackwell point also to systematic inquiry into practice as one of the hallmarks of an advanced level of discourse. If advanced knowing can be described as reflection-in-practice, advanced doing might be understood as systematic inquiry into practice. A mark of advanced work is a focus on inquiry and learning to form questions that engender fruitful ministry. Doctoral projects that integrate theological inquiry with practice of ministry reinforce the value of systematic inquiry as an ongoing and integral dimension of ministry practice. The area of research in ministry appears to be the steepest learning curve in D.Min. curriculum for most practitioners. Systematic inquiry into practice represents doing of an advanced level. Assessment in this area in our program identified the design of a significant amount of the curriculum for the enhancement of diagnostic and analytical skills, both through core courses and elective courses in subject matter such as analyzing congregational systems. It was clearly observed, however, that the structure of the overall program devoted more evaluative weight to academic capacities than to skill competencies. In our program, attention needs to be given to evaluating growth in ministerial skill.

Issues of knowing and doing are clearly inseparable throughout the Gospel, most particularly in the writings of the apostle, John. "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). Obviously knowing, doing, and valuing cannot be compartmentalized. For purposes of assessment, however, the valuing component of learning out-

comes speaks to the overall goals of spiritual maturity and integration. In assessment of the program I serve, the absence of criteria for measuring continued growth in spiritual maturity is apparent. Despite the fact that one particular course in the curriculum is widely evaluated by students as having a renewing influence in their ministries, attention needs to be paid to the development of the whole person across the breadth of the program. The discovery that a significant number of graduates have replaced the practice of ministry with roles in the academy has led to the decision to monitor this development as a way of tracking values concerning vocation. Charles Wood raises the significance of this least tangible of all learning outcomes in his statement, "To internalize the relevant competencies, to make them a part of oneself so that one will not fail to exercise them in the relevant circumstances, is to combine ability and disposition, knowing and caring, into genuine aptitude... Ministerial leadership involves not only acquiring abilities, but also acquiring dispositions."¹⁰

What should graduates know, be able to do, and value? These are the issues of primary importance to assessment. In order to do this, assessment will need to be most closely connected to the professional knowing described as reflection-in-practice, to the doing that is characterized by systematic inquiry into practice and advanced competencies, and the valuing that integrates spiritual maturity and caring with knowledge.

A second broad question of interest is the matter of who is doing the assessing

In the initial stages of an institution's effort to develop a culture of assessment, it might be assumed that the director of the D.Min. program is responsible for the program assessment. D.Min. program directors often operate in semi-isolation, and D.Min. programs can receive considerably less involvement from theological faculties than Master of Divinity (M.Div.) programs. If that perspective persists, attempts at assessment will never reach maturity.

Effective assessment is a collaborative process and a key to assessment is involving faculty in the process. An assessment program driven by administrators or professional staff without a strong role of faculty has little chance for success.¹¹ Both the effectiveness and institutionalization of assessment are directly correlated to the degree of faculty ownership. Buy-in is not just a matter of being persuasive; it requires thoughtful, consistent attention to faculty development in the knowledge and skills required to engage assessment well. Faculty need defined roles, resources to learn about assessment, and rewards for their efforts whether the rewards take the form of stipends or service recognition. The interests of different faculty can interlink to provide a more coherent, growth-oriented educational experience for students. Faculty must believe that the assessment is "necessary, beneficial, or, at the very least

not harmful to the organization or to what they perceive as their domain and interest.”¹² Having a high degree of input into the change process is necessary to the engagement of most faculty members.

Good assessment draws on multiple sources. Students at different stages in their D.Min. studies will have different information to contribute and should be given defined roles and clear lines of input. Alumni/ae of the program have an integral role to play, as may the institution senate and board members. In order to embed the assessment process in the regular processes of the institution, information should be sought from a breadth of manageable sources: graduate surveys, formative assessment over the course of studies, feedback from students, use of focus groups, alumni surveys, and the skilful use of persons in the field of the D.Min. student. Field supervisors may not exist in a D.Min. program, at least not in the same way as in M.Div. education, but the effectiveness of a ministerial program may be evaluated, at least in part, by the constituency whom the students and alumni/ae serve. Self-assessment, peer assessment, and assessors from outside the classroom all have valuable data to contribute toward the accomplishment of the learning goals of the program.

The third significant assessment question to be addressed is the most elusive for many institutions: How is assessment to be done?

For institutions in the early stages of developing theories and practices of assessment, it may be valuable to think of assessment as innovation, a practice perceived as new, and then to make sure to treat it as such.¹³ As innovation, assessment is best facilitated by strong and consistent leadership and by a clear understanding of the change process. The understanding of assessment needs to move from something that is perceived as being new and responded to with resistance, to assessment being institutionalized and perceived as simply “the way we do things.” One way to achieve this transformation is to make assessment a priority over an extended period. The timeline for the change process must be long enough for the assessment to permeate all aspects of the culture with structures that make assessment self-sustaining. Assessment is a process rather than an event, and it involves developmental growth in feelings, skills, and knowledge. An institution’s expectations for assessment’s impact should be for gradual and continual improvement, rather than immediate and radical change. This is not unlike what we are looking for in the life and practice of the D.Min. student—growth in feelings, skills, and knowledge that lead to gradual and continual growth and development.

In order to facilitate the innovation of assessment and gain broad institutional commitment, four management competencies are necessary for leaders. Leaders must have the management of attention, through a set of intentions or vision, in the sense of outcomes or direction; the management of meaning, through the communication of this vision; the management of trust, through reliability and constancy; and the management of self, through the capacity to

know one's own skills and to deploy them effectively.¹⁴ As well as skilful leadership, innovation requires practical resources. "The change process should provide the necessary structures, including education to inform and orient people to assessment so that they can come to understand its meaning and its impact on their teaching. Training should be offered so that people feel prepared to manage the process and day-to-day tasks related to assessment, such as developing clear statements of student-learning outcomes, designing and implementing appropriate assessment methods, and using assessment information to improve instruction."¹⁵ As well, leaders must work closely with faculty to overcome any perceived disadvantages to assessment that may include low relative advantage over existing ways of getting student feedback and improving instruction; low compatibility with the culture and practices of higher education; low flexibility on the measurement of student-learning outcomes; and high complexity that assessment seems to add to the already difficult task of teaching.¹⁶

One of the first action steps is to identify learning goals and objectives. The accreditation standards provide the broad strokes of the learning goals expected for a D.Min. program, and each program's individual character and emphases adds detail and definition. Coherency requires that the learning goals for the program be related to the institution's values and mission. Early in the process, the faculty need to reach agreement about goals and objectives for learning and have an understanding of where and how they are addressed in the curriculum. Although faculty develop statements about what they want students to learn in specific courses, current statements about what students should know after they have completed the courses in a program may not exist.¹⁷ Assessment itself is a strong factor in pushing institutions toward clarity of purpose.

Once the learning goals for the program are clearly articulated and affirmed, the assessment team, often the faculty, needs to develop an assessment plan outline. Palomba and Banta¹⁸ suggest that such a plan should include seven steps. Program goals describe what the program intends to accomplish, how the program relates to institutional mission, and purposes for assessment. Learning objectives describe what students must know, do, and value. Techniques and target groups indicate how you will determine whether learning objectives have been met, including methods, target groups, and any impact on students. The timeline indicates when data will be collected and analyzed, when reports will be made available, and when recommendations will be made. Provisions for administration indicate who has the responsibility for seeing that the plan is carried out, who will collect and analyze data, and who will summarize and report results. Use of information describes provisions for sharing information with internal and external audiences, and for making recommendations and decisions. Assessment evaluation rating indicates how the assessment program itself will be evaluated.

Once the assessment plan is developed, the team must select and design

assessment methods. While there are many different approaches that have value for assessment, I will describe three that may be accessible for your program: benchmarking, matrices, and portfolios. Benchmarking attempts to answer the question: How well are we doing compared to others? It is fundamentally a process of comparison, the process of comparing the practices and performance of your program with that of external programs in order to improve your own program. It is a structured approach for looking outside the organization to study and adapt the best outside practices to complement internal operations with new, creative ideas.¹⁹ The thought of benchmarking can be threatening because it involves comparison with direct competitors, an undeniable tension between competition and cooperation that must be addressed. However, benefits include the value of learning from other contexts outside the usual frame of reference and being required to use a structured, formal approach. It helps programs make sense of their own data through the comparison of numerical responses. It is important to make appropriate comparisons because practices are context-sensitive and situation-specific.²⁰ The key is to choose institutions and programs that are comparable to your own through considering factors such as mission, location, structure, and procedures.

A theme that runs through benchmarking literature is the realization that best practices are not so much a set of actions, but a cohesive approach reflecting systems theory philosophies of interdependence, holism, and environmental influences. This approach manifests itself in patterns of communication with employees, continuous feedback, collaborating, and interdependence. Performance is human-driven, not system-, model-, or even resource-driven. High performance and best practices are the result of vision, aspirations, and skills of individuals who choose to be excellent performers. In order to adopt best practices appropriately, organizations need to embrace permanency in their strategies, recognize necessary additions to the infrastructure, and include teams that will endure beyond the benchmarking life span.²¹

A second assessment method that may be used to assess D.Min. programs is the matrix—a rectangle divided into rows and columns used to organize information. Described helpfully in Palomba and Banta and illustrated in Klimoski's article on assessment in *Theological Education*,²² a matrix can be used to break down each program learning goal into measurable subskills. Program goals and learning outcomes are translated into a comprehensive set of performance measures that provide a framework for evaluation. Creating these measures is a collaborative process and requires broad involvement and ample time. Clarifying what is being measured and having an established set of measures that operationally define "excellence" is an essential task of assessment. A clear set of measures using a matrix as an organizational tool provides the basis for a straightforward, accessible, and mobilizing answer to the question: "How are we doing?" as well as a context for interpreting data. The identification of the metrics alone may ultimately be less important than

the process by which organizational members come to value and engage in self-reflection and external comparison.²³ Faculty can work together to develop matrices that link content areas and skills areas. Working from the level of individual courses to the level of the program as a whole enables the process of assessment and can provide valuable gains in terms of faculty process.

A third assessment method is the use of portfolios. A portfolio is simply “a method of gathering a body of evidence of one’s learning and competence.”²⁴ In addition to examples of the work of D.Min. students that might include recorded sermons, case studies, or peer reviews, portfolios would include reflective statements by students in regard to their own learning and personal assessment. The longitudinal dimension of the portfolio provides for evaluation of growth throughout the D.Min. program and creates exceptional opportunities for students to communicate personal meaning. It also is a way for the students to make their practice visible for reflective purposes. As in every other format of gathering information, the ability to ask good questions and effectively discern the most valuable type of material to include is important. Ultimately, the faculty will want to develop a variety of assessment approaches that closely reflect everyday activities. Multiple assessments and performance assessments that require the synthesizing of knowledge and skills should be included. Learning outcomes and the means for assessing them should be developed concurrently.

Whether the chosen methodology is that of benchmarking, matrices, or portfolios, D.Min. program assessment must extend to behaviours displayed outside the seminar room. More focus needs to be placed on identifying the kinds of evidence that can be gathered to demonstrate the competencies and critical thinking skills necessary for effective ministry. Ideas applied in ministry contexts may indicate understanding of the nature of ministry and the ability to integrate advanced knowledge and ministry practice. Evidence of service in the community suggests continued growth in spiritual maturity and virtue. Regular reading of non-assigned texts could point to a commitment to continued growth in pastoral analysis. The D.Min. curriculum will benefit from assessments more closely connected to behaviours and skills than to pencil and pen performances.

The fourth step in assessing a D.Min. program is to report and use the results. The information must be shared with the appropriate institutional bodies. It is easy to become overwhelmed at everything that is required in responding to recommendations. It may be helpful to simply begin from the program’s strengths, picking a starting point from strength; not everything has to be done at once. Assessment is a process and every step requires time.

The final step in the assessment cycle is to assess the assessment. Evaluating the process by an agreed-upon methodology is an integral component of program assessment. The need to sustain change is supported by assessment of the process itself and adds to the development of a learning community

Assessing a Doctor of Ministry Program

committed to and knowledgeable about ongoing assessment.

Effective assessment of a D.Min. program asks clarifying questions, reflects institutional mission, and emerges out of a program's goals and objectives for learning. It is not designed after accreditation goals, but uses the goals to critique the program design. It thoughtfully plans the assessment process and affects the curriculum of the program. Effective assessment is a collaborative endeavour. It encourages involvement of individuals from on and off the campus, shares information with multiple audiences, and leads to reflection and action by faculty, staff, and students. Most of all, effective assessment is understood to be a process that requires patience and persistence and is, in its own way, an art, even as is the practice of ministry by the effective, reflective D.Min. graduate.

Barbara Horkoff Mutch is the Charles Bentall Professor of Pastoral Studies at Carey Theological College and Regent College, and the director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Carey Theological College in Vancouver, BC.

ENDNOTES

1. Daniel O. Aleshire, "The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation," *Theological Education*, 39:1, 2003, 14.
2. Mary E. Diez and Peggy Blackwell, "Improving Master's Education for Practicing Teachers: The Impact of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards," *Teaching and Change*, 6:4, Summer 1999, 361.
3. Anne Tyler, *Morgan's Passing* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1980), 49.
4. P. Hutchings and T. Marchese, "Watching Assessment: Questions, Stories, Prospects," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 22:5, 1990, 12-38.
5. Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner* (Basic Books, 1983), vii.
6. *Ibid.*, 295.
7. Donald Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (Jossey-Bass), 1987.
8. *Ibid.*, 66.
9. Diez and Blackwell, "Improving Education," 353.
10. Charles M. Wood, "Knowing and Caring," *Theological Education*, 39:1, 2003, 33.
11. Catherine Palomba and Trudy Banta, *Assessment Essentials* (Jossey-Bass, 1999), 7.
12. Peter J. Gray, "Viewing Assessment as an Innovation: Leadership and the Change Process," *New Directions for Higher Education*, Number 100, Winter 1997, 8.
13. *Ibid.*, 6.
14. *Ibid.*, 8.
15. *Ibid.*, 13-14.
16. *Ibid.*, 14-15.
17. Palomba and Banta, *Assessment Essentials*, 7.
18. Palomba and Banta, *Assessment Essentials*.

19. Marya Doerfel and Brent D. Ruben, "Developing More Adaptive, Innovative, and Interactive Organization," *New Directions For Higher Education*, Number 118, Summer 2002, 6.
20. Ibid., 9.
21. Ibid., 10.
22. Victor J. Klimoski, "Getting to the Question: Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry," *Theological Education*, 39:1, 2003.
23. Doerfel and Ruben, "Developing Adaptive Organizations," 23.
24. Palomba and Banta, *Assessment Essentials*, 131.

Serendipity or Grace? What Evaluation Has Taught Us about Education and Ecclesiology in Distance Learning

Charles E. Bouchard
Aquinas Institute of Theology

ABSTRACT: My perspective in this article reflects a broad rather than a specific view of our experience in distance learning. Our director of distance learning or the on-site coordinators could provide a much more detailed analysis of evaluative issues and outcomes assessment. I will focus here more on strategic and institutional issues.

Introduction

Aquinas Institute's entrance into the world of distance learning was serendipitous. We first encountered the possibility when another Catholic seminary closed abruptly, leaving a distance learning program in Oklahoma City without a sponsor. We don't even remember whether we contacted the closing seminary or whether they contacted us. What we do remember is a board/faculty session in the fall of 1992 at which the dean of St. Yesterday's Seminary came to convince us to take over this program. He made an impassioned presentation about the program, which he had helped develop. He talked about faculty, curriculum, courses, and spiritual formation. It was clear that the program had been developed carefully and that it was providing an essential service to a local church that had few resources in theological education. Although it was a fairly traditional program with little technology, it was based on a collaborative relationship between the seminary and the Archdiocese that made it unique.

In the end however, it was geography rather than statistics or theology that convinced us. At the end of his presentation, the dean drew a very simple map of the United States on the blackboard. He then put an "X" approximately where each Catholic seminary was located. Nearly all were the east coast and the west coast.¹ There were virtually none in the Rocky Mountains or Great Plains, and few in the south and southwest where there was rapid population growth. Indeed, some states lacked even a Catholic college. From a mission perspective, this clinched the deal. At the time, our faculty consisted mostly of Dominicans, members of an Order of itinerant preachers founded in the thirteenth century. Like Jesus Christ before them and John Wesley after them, they brought the Gospel to those who longed to hear. The starkly drawn map convinced our faculty and board that this new concept of "distance learning"

*Serendipity or Grace? What Evaluation Has Taught Us
about Education and Ecclesiology in Distance Learning*

was made for us. We accepted St. Yesterday's invitation to complete the cohort, and subsequently have begun two additional cohorts in Oklahoma City.

Aquinas Institute may have had itinerant roots, but it had no experience in technologically-enhanced, asynchronous learning, nor were there many precedents for what we were about to undertake.² Our lack of experience and mentors led us to make evaluation a priority right from the beginning. When we wrote the "Memorandum of Agreement" for the first full cohort of students in Oklahoma City, we stipulated that "before the completion of the program, the Archdiocese and Aquinas will ascertain the possibility of renewing this agreement for a third cohort." Scheduled for the last six months of the program, just as students were completing their studies, the evaluation plan called for the following:

- ♦ evaluation by students, including a written mid-term evaluation (completed), a final written evaluation, and an exit interview;
- ♦ evaluation by faculty, utilizing a questionnaire sent out to all faculty, regular and adjunct, who had taught in the program;
- ♦ administrative review of the design and content of the degree, pedagogy, course syllabi, library and information technology, admissions process, scheduling, student services, costs, and working relationships; this review would involve the academic dean, the director of distance learning, and the on-site director of the program; and
- ♦ evaluation by key persons in the Archdiocese, including the Archbishop, pastors, supervisors and graduates.

The results of these evaluations were passed on to the Aquinas faculty, which used them to formulate a recommendation to the administration about whether to begin another cohort and what changes ought to be made. I intend to show some of the things we learned from this process of evaluation and a few ways in which our understanding of distance learning has evolved. Let me note at the onset, however, that our understanding of distance learning is somewhat atypical. First of all, our programs are hybrid—they involve a combination of in-class and on-line learning. Although many universities have developed programs that are totally on-line, we are convinced that some personal relationship is necessary for professional education. Second, when we say "distance learning" we are really referring to "technologically-enhanced *cohort* learning." While we do use technology in traditional, once or twice a week on-campus classes, what distinguishes our cohort programs is that students form a permanent learning community and take their classes together, in sequence. We have two kinds of cohort programs: "distant course" programs (in which we offer courses in another geographic location) and "distant student" programs in which students from disparate geographical locations come to us for face-to-face class time. For example, in the Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry program that we offer in Kansas City and Oklahoma City, students do most of their learning on-line; faculty members from Aquinas fly to these cities for intensive weekends. In our D.Min in Preaching and our Master of Arts in

Health Care Mission, the dynamic is reversed. Students still spend the majority of their learning time online, but instead of us going to them, they come to us. Intensive learning weekends in St. Louis draw them from across the country three or four times a year.

Finally, all of the off-site programs are developed in close collaboration with the local Church in which they are offered. This makes the program more complex, but it also helps assure that students receive maximum support from the bishop and pastors and that their training responds to the actual ecclesial circumstances found in these dioceses.³

Resources and outcomes

Evaluation of distance learning is similar to evaluation of traditional programs in at least two ways: In both cases, it focuses on *resources* (do we have what it takes?) and *outcomes* (did we deliver on our promise?) Let me treat each of these in turn.⁴

Resources

Finance and Technology. When we were contemplating our entry into the world of distance learning ministry education, I had one major question: “How much will it cost?” We assumed that distance learning meant interactive video and that this required a huge investment in hardware. At the time, so-called “smart classrooms” were *de rigueur*. The cost (even a stripped-down model could cost up to \$100,000) made that economically impossible for us, but we were emboldened by the fact that the university on whose campus we reside had plans to create several of these electronically enhanced classrooms. We would not build our own, but surely we could rent one from the university or from Kinko’s, which was just getting into the video conference business.

One of our first lessons was that video was not only too expensive, but also too limited. We used the university’s smart classroom several times, mostly for a faculty lecture during a pre-study or post-study session. We used a national copying center exactly once (our single venture with them was a comedy of errors that involved a missing technician, a wandering camera, and the academic dean trying to find a cable under the table while the professor, who happened to be me, tried to maintain serenity through an introductory lecture. The only consolation was that even the copy center realized they had messed up so we were not charged for connection time).

Although we didn’t know it at the time, we were entering distance learning at the edge of a revolution. From the moment we witnessed a rather crude Internet-based class at a school of nursing, we knew that was the future for us. Even though the equipment and software were relatively primitive and unwieldy, increasing accessibility, higher speed, greater memory, and steadily falling prices would soon make Internet-based education as routine as chalkboards and erasers. We saw that we could use the Internet to sponsor asynchro-

*Serendipity or Grace? What Evaluation Has Taught Us
about Education and Ecclesiology in Distance Learning*

nous “threaded discussions,” to post electronic syllabi with links and class resources like student papers for discussion, and library reserve materials. We also discovered another benefit: students who would rarely speak up in a traditional classroom setting were willing to risk thoughtful and well articulated opinions on-line.

Faculty, staff and technology. The “cost” of distance learning is not only in dollars. Evaluation taught us that there are significant costs in the area of human resources. Some of those costs are directly related to the stress of learning to teach in a technologically-enhanced way, others are related to changes in schedule and format.

Our faculty embraced the concept of distance learning willingly because it expressed our mission and values so clearly, but there were some painful trade-offs. The first was the traditional academic year. When the first annual schedule was presented, it was apparent to all that an uninterrupted summer would soon be a thing of the past. This realization, combined with the minor but evident annoyances associated with Internet teaching (everything from “Where can I get a longer cable?” to “I still can’t download my old class materials onto the website...”) made for a very difficult year. The technological “snafus” were temporary, but the change in time allocation was not. From now on, faculty would at least occasionally have to teach during the summer, over spring break, or on a Monday morning following an intensive weekend at a distant site. One suggestion was that we create a separate “distance learning” faculty. The dean wisely and firmly rejected that idea as inimical both to our collaborative ethos and to quality control.

In the end, we were able to negotiate a slightly increased, but differently calculated, faculty teaching load: no faculty would be required to teach more than fourteen credits in a twelve-month year running from July 1 to June 30. These fourteen credits could include regular semester-long three credit courses, summer session classes, or cohort teaching. If a faculty member agreed to teach more than fourteen credits, he or she would be eligible for additional compensation.

Because we wanted to monitor the program closely and maintain firm control, our own full-time faculty initially taught almost all of the cohort classes. After a year or two, however, we began to develop a corps of adjuncts (our “extended faculty”) for whom we would provide regular in-service training. Once they knew our method, they could teach in any of our cohort programs. This has proved to be effective and we still make it a point to invite them to St. Louis regularly so they can absorb the spirit of the school, develop skills and exchange best practices, and contribute more fully to an integrated program.

The first few classes on-line were a challenge. Technology was unreliable and we were building each course from scratch using an (expensive) consultant and an HTML editing program. Within a year, however, we had moved from

building our own courses to “Blackboard,” a popular instructional software program. Because we were too small to have our own instructional technology department, we secured the services of Fisher’s Net, an intermediate educational support firm that both supported us and helped us develop standardized procedures.⁵

The early period of “technological panic” among faculty soon gave way to more serious questions and exploration about creative ways in which technology could be used to enhance learning. Early on, we talked about “translating” on-campus courses into an Internet-based format; eventually, we realized that classes and material had to be totally *reconceived* for a different medium. Some faculty discovered innovative methods that were impossible in a regular classroom, such as inviting a textbook author to take part in an on-line discussion of class reading, either synchronously or in a threaded discussion. Today almost every faculty member has taught on-line, and when we make new hires, we stipulate that they must be willing and able to do so.

After faculty, the biggest resource challenge is administration. Part of our solution to this problem is an on-site director who is actually hired by the cooperating diocese with approval of our dean. The on-site director makes local arrangements, oversees spiritual formation and field education, and acts as the liaison between Aquinas and the diocese. The director’s position is crucial because he or she is familiar with the local ecclesial scene and with student progress and needs in a way we could not be. Over and over the director stresses how important “relationship” is. In a recent memo, the current on-site director of one of our programs noted the “mutuality of the *relationship* between the sponsoring institution,” the *relationship* to the institution and the Archdiocese, and the *connection* between the students and the sponsoring institution.” These relationships cannot be taken for granted and must be carefully nurtured. It is especially important to enable local personnel to convey the charism or character of the sponsoring institution so that students have a distinctive educational experience analogous to what on-campus students receive.

Evaluation of the impact on mission

Because we entered distance learning through the back door and only gradually added a second and third site, and then a cohort D.Min. and a cohort M.A. in Health Care Mission, we were able to defer serious questions about mission impact. Despite the fact that we were meeting a real ecclesial need and had found a perfect fit with our “itinerant” charism, we were eventually forced to ask strategic questions about the impact of distance learning on our mission, viz., “who is our primary target audience?” and “what percentage of our overall student body will be ‘at a distance?’”

On the one hand it would be possible for us to marginalize distance learning and keep it as a sidecar to our regular on campus programs; on the the

*Serendipity or Grace? What Evaluation Has Taught Us
about Education and Ecclesiology in Distance Learning*

other, we could decide to embrace distance learning wholeheartedly and begin to phase out regular on-campus class schedules. We have still not made a clear decision about that. While we know that cohort learning is likely to be a permanent part of our future, we are only now beginning a year-long research project geared to helping us make informed choices about program mix that will lead to a strategic marketing and enrollment management plan.

Evaluation of outcomes

As in any outcomes assessment plan, there are several crucial areas of evaluation: academics, ministry skills (field education), ministerial identity, ecclesial integration, and spiritual formation. I will address each of these in turn.

Academics

Most evaluation of academic outcomes took place in course papers, exams, presentations, and in faculty evaluations of student work. Most faculty found student work comparable to that produced by on-campus students, but there were some concerns that were especially helpful in shaping curriculum for future cohorts. Faculty submitted lengthy evaluative comments that were as critical of their own teaching methods as of student shortcomings and limitations in the schedule that made weakened continuity. A few representative examples follow:

- ◆ “I found the level of self-confidence regarding counseling low among students who had courses in pastoral theology. In the future, you might consider pastoral counseling as one of the introductory courses.”
- ◆ “Students took on assignments with surprising confidence, due, no doubt, to the fact that they had recently done undergraduate work in theology. “
- ◆ “I was disappointed with writing skills of the students...I’m encouraged to learn that greater emphasis will be placed on evaluating writing skills of prospective students.”
- ◆ “I struggle with concision and tend to place too much on the table for a given sitting. I continue to work on my own teaching approach. I did not find students making connections to the “Introduction to Theology Course, to the Scripture Courses, or to Christology.”
- ◆ “I would completely redesign [my] course for on-line use. There was insufficient communication and too much was packed into the intensive [weekend].”
- ◆ “I found [video conferencing] difficult because of the time lag and also because I had not originally planned to use it.”

Students were generally happy with their learning, but consistently expressed the desire to have more input into the courses that were taught; after

the first cohort, many felt there were too many “psychological” and counseling courses. Nearly all expressed the desire for more scripture.

Field education

This posed a particular challenge, especially the first time around because we had not identified enough good supervisory sites and supervisors did not always have good skills. While this can be a problem in any program, it was especially difficult because we were not familiar with ministry settings and individual supervisors. Some students found field education burdensome because they were already working full or part-time in a ministry setting, and the field education experience seemed redundant or inconsequential. That led us to consider ways in which we could integrate supervised field education experiences into students’ actual ministry work.

Ecclesial integration

From the beginning, our goal was not merely to “airlift” an educational program into a distant city, but to collaborate with a local church in assessing its own ministerial needs and helping them develop an effective strategy to meet them. Because of the dramatic changes in the shape of Catholic ministry resulting from declining numbers of priests, rapid growth of the Church in priest poor areas, and the sudden emergence of “lay ecclesial ministry,” this was difficult to achieve.

In our first cohort, we learned that failure to involve and gain the support of local clergy seriously weakened the program. Before we began our second program, we worked intentionally with the clergy to help them identify their own needs and the role that newly-minted graduates of our program might fill. We learned that however well we might prepare students for ministry, many pastors and parishes did not know how to use them or were unwilling to commit funding to new positions. This was not usually the result of hostility or skepticism, but of inertia and lack of adequate models that could show parishes how to lessen the ministerial burden on their priests and revitalize parish life all at once. There was also a recurring concern that given other diocesan needs, a Master’s degree program was too specialized and expensive and that limited resources could be more profitably directed toward preparing catechists or parish volunteers on an undergraduate certificate level. We have found it consistently difficult to convince parishes and bishops that a basic graduate theological degree is the minimum requirement for most ecclesial lay ministry.⁶ This is a particularly troubling concern given the fact that only a generation ago we required four years of full-time residential education for every ordination candidate. In just a few years we have reduced this standard to as little as an undergraduate certificate for lay persons.⁷

*Serendipity or Grace? What Evaluation Has Taught Us
about Education and Ecclesiology in Distance Learning*

Ministerial identity

This is closely related to the question of ecclesial integration. Lay ministers are often not fully integrated into the *ministerium* of the local church because they do not have a clear status; unfortunately, it is almost impossible for them to achieve this status or develop an appropriate ministerial identity unless they are active participants in clergy formation and deliberation.

Two stories illustrate this problem. Near the end of our first cohort in Oklahoma City, the academic dean and I were present for a theological reflection session among the students. As they talked, it was apparent to both of us that even though these students were just a few months short of graduation, they had no sense of themselves as ministers of the Church; they knew they had learned a lot of theology and gained certain skills, but they clearly did not know what came next: A job? An appointment? Volunteer work? We were both struck by the fact that after more than three years of study, they had not acquired a ministerial identity. As a result of hearing this discussion, we tried to make nurturance of a ministerial identity a much more explicit part of spiritual formation and field education.

The second story is more hopeful. It took place in Colorado Springs at the installation of a new bishop. As we assembled for the procession into the Installation Mass, I was part of a long line of priests. Local clergy were first, followed by visiting clergy, and then bishops. All of us were vested in white. Right in the middle, behind the local clergy and before we visitors, were two women (who stood out even more because they both happened to be wearing black). They were both lay parish directors for congregations that had no resident pastor. As I saw these two women process in between two long lines of clergy, I thought, "This is truly a watershed moment in the history of Catholic ministry." There they were, exactly where they should have been, part of the local church's ministry. Unfortunately, their integration into the local clergy has not been replicated frequently in other churches.

Spiritual formation

On an ecclesial level, the most exciting part of our distance learning programs has been the opportunity to help a local church shape its own future. On a personal level, the most gratifying outcome of our cohort programs is spiritual formation. Faculty, students, and formators all report that the spiritual formation process is what "brings it all together" and makes the program truly valuable. Again and again, student evaluative comments cite spiritual formation as one of the most important experiences. A few examples demonstrate this clearly:

- ♦ "The formation program is one of the most valuable components of this course of study. Not to have it would be like psychologists not undergoing therapy before they set out to practice."
- ♦ "Formation was excellent and vital. I have learned who I want to become and how I need to get there. What a gift!"

- ♦ “Absolutely key to the program! Formative spirituality is what brought this all together for me.”
- ♦ “Spiritual formation was the ‘drawing card’ for me. It brought together, in a very personal way, academia and spirituality.”
- ♦ “Without [formative spirituality], I may have left the program mentally aware but not integrated in mind, heart, and soul.”

Although these comments came from students in one of our off-site programs, students in the M.A. in Health Care Mission are equally enthusiastic. We began one MAHCM cohort with Parker Palmer’s book, *Let Your Life Speak*, which is a brief and simple meditation on how we discover our true calling. This short book was life changing for some of the students, nearly all of whom had been in senior executive positions in health care for many years. The importance of the book was that it showed students that the study of theology was not only academic, but spiritual; it helped them see a larger purpose and goal not only of their study, but to what they had been doing most of their lives. By linking together theology, spirituality, and their work in health care, it provided the “something more” that so many second career students seek in their return to seminary.

Conclusion

In many ways, our elaborate evaluation plans were defensive; distance learning was a new venture for us and we did not want to make a mistake. Our detailed evaluations did help us avoid mistakes; they helped us improve the program each time we started a new cohort, and they made us more aware of the need to examine our on-campus programs and develop clearer recruitment and marketing practices. Most importantly, these evaluative exercises gave us a privileged glimpse into a process of rapid and unprecedented development of ministry in the Roman Catholic Church. We saw this process from our own perspective as faculty and administrators of a Catholic school of theology; from the perspective of bishops and pastors, and from the perspective of our students who are eagerly preparing for a future role in the Church that has not yet fully materialized.

Fr. Charles Bouchard, O.P., is associate professor of moral theology and has served as president of Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri, since 1989. Aquinas is sponsored by the Dominicans (the Order of Preachers) and is located on the campus of Saint Louis University. Aquinas provides theological education for seminarians, lay women and men, and clergy and members of religious orders.

*Serendipity or Grace? What Evaluation Has Taught Us
about Education and Ecclesiology in Distance Learning*

ENDNOTES

1. Today there are forty-nine Catholic seminaries and schools of theology accredited by ATS in the United States and Canada. Of these, thirty are located in states that border on the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans, or the Gulf of Mexico. Only a handful are in the South.
2. In 1994, not one other Catholic seminary or school of theology had a distance learning degree program. Today, nearly ten years later, the picture hasn't changed much; a few schools offer some courses on-line, but Aquinas is still the only one to offer multiple degree programs on-line.
3. This can be an important issue. Compared to St. Louis, for example, the Catholic population of Oklahoma City is very small and prevailing spirituality is far more evangelical than Catholic. This occasioned the introduction of a class on fundamentalism. In Colorado Springs, by contrast, the large Spanish-speaking population suggested addition of a course in Hispanic evangelization.
4. For a seminal discussion of assessment issues in distance theological education, see Elizabeth Patterson, "The Questions of Distance Education" (*Theological Education* 33, (1996) 59-74).
5. Fisher's Net was developed by a consortium of ELCA Lutheran entities, including Luther Seminary, to facilitate continuing education. Their services, including course design consultation, web page licensing and hosting, and student and faculty support, were essential to our initial efforts.
6. This problem is not limited to our experience. It has been noted as a national problem by a number of writers. For discussions of issues around formation, authorization and professional status of lay ecclesial ministers, Zeni Fox's work, especially her most recent book *New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church* (revised edition, Sheed and Ward, 2002); Jeffrey Kaster, "Called, Gifted and Now Certified" (*America* (July 21-28, 2003) 17-19; and Richard Gaillardetz, "Shifting Meanings in Lay-Clergy Distinction" (*Irish Theological Quarterly* 64[1999] 117-139).
7. Garret Kiezer discusses the importance of providing adequate education for part-time ministers in smaller parishes: "Telling a poor church that it has been fortunate to outgrow its reliance on professional ministry is a bit like telling someone who can't afford a car that he'll be much healthier riding to work on a bike." ("Career Ministry: Two Cheers for a Professional Clergy" *Christian Century* [April 24-May 1, 2002] 30-32.

Assessment of Student Learning: Some Perspectives

John H. Erickson

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

*ABSTRACT: Revisions in accreditation standards by both regional and national agencies within the past five years evidence the increased attention that institutions and peer evaluators are expected to give to student learning assessment. The author explores representative elements of this enhanced emphasis on learning outcomes within the context of the 2002 revised standards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. An overview and highlighting of key strategies addressed within a companion handbook, *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources*, demonstrates this handbook's wide applicability and usefulness to all institutional types, including schools of theology. The article concludes with lessons learned from Middle States's experiences that will be useful to other institutions engaged in the development, review, and enhancement of their own assessment plans and activities.*

Contrary to what some campus constituents might claim, outcomes assessment is not a new player on the stage of higher education. In fact, outcomes assessment has been a significant part of accreditation processes for regional and national accrediting agencies for more than a decade. Recently, however, the focus on the assessment of student learning, as opposed to overall institutional effectiveness, has intensified.

Revisions in accreditation standards undertaken by both regional and national agencies within the past five years evidence the increased attention that institutions and peer evaluators are expected to give to student learning assessment.

Within the broader national context, public interest in having useful and reliable information available to assist in making appropriate choices among increasingly diverse higher education providers has further intensified the assessment and accreditation environments. Similarly, public policy makers at both state and national levels have looked to accreditors to demonstrate how they know that accredited institutions are successfully delivering educational programs. Current negotiations relative to the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and amendments have fostered further public inquiry and discussion.

Common to all arenas are these key questions: What are students learning? How do we know?

In early 2002, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education completed an extensive revision of its accreditation standards. Consistent with an early commitment to provide resource materials for institutions to use in

reviewing, planning, and strengthening their existing outcomes assessment activities, the Commission in mid-2003 also published *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources*.

Much that is applicable and useful to schools of theology can be derived from Middle States experience, as evidenced in both the standards (*Characteristics of Excellence 2002*) and the handbook on student learning assessment.

Following a brief overview of the process utilized to revise Middle States accreditation standards, the remainder of this article will focus on three related questions:

1. What are the expectations or requirements relative to the assessment of both student learning and institutional effectiveness in the revised Middle States accreditation standards?
2. What are the organizing principles, key concepts, and applicable strategies detailed within *Student Learning Assessment*? (This is intended to introduce the handbook and demonstrate its multiple uses.)¹
3. What lessons have we learned from the early application of the new assessment standards that could benefit all institutions, including schools of theology?

Middle States 2002 accreditation standards

The wide-ranging and participatory process that culminated in the revised accreditation standards extended over a period of more than three years. The constituent-driven process, led by a steering committee and four task forces, was preceded by extensive information gathering. Surveys, telephone interviews, and focus groups were carried out by an external firm in order to gather information on Middle States's existing accreditation standards and processes from team chairs, evaluators, institutional presidents, students, alumni, and policy makers. Throughout the review process, there were multiple opportunities for discussion and feedback from member institutions and other constituencies: state education departments, public policy makers, and national higher education groups, among others.

Using the survey results, the steering committee drafted a statement of guiding principles for the revision of the standards. The guiding principles, which were endorsed by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, highlighted such items as the following:

- ♦ the need for greater flexibility within the standards to reflect changes in higher education
- ♦ more attention to important *functions* and less to specific *structures* (e.g., information literacy)
- ♦ broadened definitions (e.g., governing board, faculty)
- ♦ more focus on student learning as the primary higher education outcome
- ♦ emphasis on assessment and results rather than inputs or processes
- ♦ improved format that would clarify the standards and related expectations

Working from these principles, the revision process led to the development of accreditation standards that give greater emphasis to institutional assessment and the assessment of student learning, with an increased attention to institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Broadly speaking, these emphases are consistent with changes in standards drafted and adopted by other regional, national, and specialized accreditors during the concurrent timeframe.

Assessment and the 2002 standards: what's expected?

The fourteen standards in the 2002 *Characteristics of Excellence* are organized into two main sections: Institutional Context (Standards 1-7) and Educational Effectiveness (Standards 8-14). Each of the sections concludes with an assessment standard that is a culmination of the preceding standards. Standard 7 addresses Institutional Assessment, and Standard 14 focuses on Assessment of Student Learning.

Standard 7, Institutional Assessment, is the broader assessment standard and includes assessment of student learning conceptually. However, the separate and distinct Standard 14 was developed in order to give greater clarity and emphasis to the assessment of student learning within the standards.

The intended inclusiveness of Standard 7 is apparent, as is the emphasis on individual institutional mission and goals:

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment plan and process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in: achieving its mission and goals; implementing planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes; using institutional resources efficiently; providing leadership and governance; providing administrative structures and services; demonstrating institutional integrity; and assuring that institutional processes and resources support appropriate learning and other outcomes for its students and graduates.²

Standard 14, on the other hand, has by intention a more specific focus:

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.³

In response to the strong request for a clearer format in the 2002 standards, each of the accreditation standards is now accompanied by a statement of related "fundamental elements" that "specify the particular characteristics or qualities that together constitute, comprise, and encompass the standard."⁴ Institutions and evaluators are expected to use these fundamental elements, within the context of institutional mission, to demonstrate or determine the extent to which an institution meets a particular standard.

As seen in the four fundamental elements for the standard on student learning, these elements have an inherent relationship to one another; collectively, they constitute compliance with the standard.

Fundamental elements of assessment of student learning

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ♦ *articulated expectations* of student learning at various levels (institution, degree/program, course) that are consonant with the institution's mission and with the standards of higher education and of the relevant disciplines;
- ♦ a *plan* that describes student learning assessment activities being undertaken by the institution, including the specific methods to be used to validate articulated student learning goals/objectives;
- ♦ evidence that student learning assessment information is *used to improve teaching and learning*; and
- ♦ documented use of student learning assessment information as *part of institutional assessment*.⁵

Articulated expectations include coherent learning goals that stem from institutional mission. Goals at subordinate levels (course, program) should contribute to the attainment of goals at higher levels (institutional).

A student learning assessment *plan* is a coherent, organized presentation of the assessment activities and methods currently in place at the institution. The term "plan" here does *not* mean a statement of what an institution intends to do in the future. The plan acknowledges that assessment is not an event but rather an ongoing process. Each institution determines its own learning goals, the assessment measures that should be used, the sequence or timeframe for assessment activities, and the changes to be made as a result of assessment information. (The possible components of a good assessment plan are discussed later in this article.)

For student learning assessment information to be *used to improve teaching and learning*, the institution must thoughtfully determine who receives or has access to assessment information and in what forms or formats it is provided. There must be demonstrable institutional commitment to and support for the use of assessment results, as well as specific examples of how assessment results have been used at the course, program, and/or institutional level.

To make the necessary *connections between the assessment of student learning* (Standard 14) and *institutional assessment* (Standard 7), an institution will use the results as part of its assessment of overall institutional effectiveness; the institution's institutional assessment plan should cover all aspects and elements of the institution, including student learning. If assessment is to be taken seriously, it must be linked to strategic planning, with the strategic plan taking into account assessment results from both institutional assessment and student learning assessment.

Handbook on student learning assessment

Why did the Commission determine that this handbook was necessary and what were the intended purposes? First and foremost, it was agreed that any handbook was not to be an expansion of the accreditation standards

themselves. Rather, this handbook was intended as a resource to support institutions seeking to fulfill their own mission, to improve, and to strive for excellence. As a resource, it is designed to be consulted often, by various stakeholders, and certainly not only in preparation for accreditation review.

At their core, the underlying principles for *Student Learning Assessment* mirror the historical, overarching purposes of accreditation, which in theological terminology might be expressed as: “To save souls rather than to punish sinners!” While one purpose of accreditation is, of course, to assure quality and institutional compliance with accreditation standards, equally important is the focus on institutional improvement and development.

The contents of *Student Learning Assessment* are intended to allow users to find information that will be most relevant to their particular assessment questions or challenges. The range of topics is clear in the five chapters that follow the introductory section:

- Chapter 1: Motivating and Involving Campus Communities
- Chapter 2: Learning Goals
- Chapter 3: Evaluating Student Learning
- Chapter 4: The Student Learning Assessment Plan
- Chapter 5: Using Results to Improve Teaching and Learning

The intended flexibility of use and guide to users is demonstrated in this list:

ASSESSMENT PHASE	WHERE TO BEGIN
Beginning planning for assessment	Introduction Chapter 1 Chapter 4
Implementing assessment plans	Chapter 2 Chapter 3
Revising or assessing plans	Chapter 4 Chapter 2
Inspiring or engaging faculty	Chapter 5 Chapter 2 Chapter 3

As a supplement to the handbook (which is designed as a broadly usable, timeless resource), Middle States has gathered extensive related resource materials, including time-sensitive and institution-specific examples available through the Middle States website. To access these materials, go to the main website <www.msache.org>, click on the “Publications” link, then click on the “Guidelines for Improvement” link, and finally, select the “Assessment Website” link. The short “Handbook at a Glance” is also available in PDF format on the website.

As institutions look to review their own assessment practices and identify steps for enhancing, broadening, and improving those practices, the individual chapters will provide clear and helpful guidance as well as related strategies for moving forward. Some key highlights for each chapter are noted below.

Motivating and involving campus communities (Chapter 1)

The importance of acknowledging the existing institutional culture as a context for assessment efforts cannot be overemphasized; this includes a clear acknowledgment of assessment activities already in place at the institution. Faculty, students, professional library staff, student affairs professionals, and other administrators are partners in supporting student learning and therefore should participate in the planning and implementation of processes for student learning assessment. Any assessment committee or steering group should have a clear charge and mandate from the institution's leadership.

Learning goals (Chapter 2)

Articulated goals benefit the institution and its stakeholders in a variety of ways, even extending to the areas of marketing, recruitment, and fundraising. In their assessment efforts, institutions are better served by focusing on key learning outcomes and widely agreed upon goals. Learning goals at the various levels (institutional, program, course) need to be defined in ways that show their congruence or consistency. Among the several strategies detailed in this chapter, the following excerpt from "Leading Questions for Developing Learning Goals" highlights questions for faculty:

- ♦ In general, what are the most important things a student gains from your field of study?
- ♦ What qualities and capabilities do you strive to foster in your students?
- ♦ What is the most important knowledge that your students acquire from your field of study or from working with you?
- ♦ How does your field of study or your work change the way students view themselves?
- ♦ In what ways does your field of study or what you do contribute to a student's well-being?
- ♦ How does your field or what you do change the way a student looks at the world?
- ♦ What does your field of study or what you do contribute to the well-being of society at large?
- ♦ How do people in this area of study differ from those in other areas (knowledge, skills, and/or values)?
- ♦ How do we know the extent to which students are learning what we hope from our field of study?
- ♦ How do we use information about student learning and development to enhance student learning?⁶

This is just one example of the many reproducible exercises and handouts in the handbook that may be used for the development of learning goals, workshops, and campus discussions of assessment.

Evaluating student learning (Chapter 3)

Among the important topics addressed in this chapter are the differences between direct and indirect measures and between quantitative and

qualitative evidence. The intent is to further the understanding of the array of assessment instruments available and how to select among them appropriately.

Having a shared vocabulary is an essential building block for campus dialogue on assessment. The most commonly used (and confused) distinctions involve direct vs. indirect measures and quantitative vs. qualitative evidence.

Direct measures of student learning provide evidence in the form of student products or performances or demonstrate that learning has occurred relative to a specific skill or knowledge content. Examples of direct measures include examinations, term papers, capstone courses, and performance on licensure examinations.

Indirect measures of student learning reveal characteristics associated with learning, but these measures only imply that learning has occurred. Examples of indirect measures include course evaluations by students, focus group interviews, employer surveys, and graduation rates.

Quantitative evidence includes data that are represented numerically. *Qualitative evidence* includes both the simple categorization of individuals into groups (employees/not employees) and data expressed in prose narrative (free form response to questions).

To guide institutions in choosing assessment instruments appropriate to the institution, program, or course, several key questions, including the following, are suggested:

- ◆ Is a standardized instrument appropriate for the learning goals (of the institution/program)?
- ◆ Is the assessment method appropriately comprehensive?
- ◆ Are instrument questions clear and interpreted consistently?
- ◆ Are important learning outcomes assessed by multiple means?
- ◆ Do questions elicit information that will be useful for making improvements?
- ◆ Do the results make sense (and therefore promise to be useful)?

The student learning assessment plan (Chapter 4)

This chapter focuses importantly on possible components of a good plan for the assessment of student learning. These components include:

- ◆ institutional mission
- ◆ relationship among the strategic plan, institutional assessment plan, and student learning assessment plan
- ◆ description of the plan and guiding principles for assessment on campus
- ◆ goals for student learning
- ◆ assessment methods
- ◆ process for using assessment results
- ◆ process for reviewing the plan
- ◆ timeline or cycle
- ◆ delineation of responsibilities
- ◆ provision for funding/supporting the plan

Using results to improve teaching and learning (Chapter 5)

Along with institutional strategies for encouraging the use of assessment results, Chapter 5 includes many examples of using assessment results at the institutional, program, and course level.

For example, an institution might have the following *learning goal*:

- ◆ Students will value civic responsibility and engagement.

The institution might use these *indirect assessment measures*:

- ◆ First year experience student satisfaction survey focus group data

If the *outcomes* are that students express strong dissatisfaction with a community service requirement, *likely reasons for the outcome* could include:

- ◆ Students do not see the relevance of the requirement to their chosen major.
- ◆ There are time or transportation constraints.

Actions taken by the institution might include:

- ◆ Student-alumni run seminars about personal relevance of community service
- ◆ References and examples about community service in general education courses
- ◆ Provide transportation, offer credit, or make work-study funds available

Most importantly, this chapter also includes a message explicitly intended for faculty on the interconnectedness of teaching, learning, and assessment.

Lessons learned?

Finally, what have we learned from our experiences with institutions, particularly since the adoption of revised accreditation standards, that may prove helpful to other institutions engaged in the development, review, and enhancement of their assessment plans?

- ◆ Institutions are at different “places” in the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan for the assessment of student learning.

Even though outcomes assessment has been explicitly included in accreditation standards for more than a decade, some institutions are quite far along, while others are in early stages of integrating assessment into the life and culture of the institution.

- ◆ Discussion of assessment issues will create anxiety and resistance within some or several parts of the institution.

This is true no matter how advanced the assessment efforts appear to be.

- ◆ Even the most advanced institutions have some unevenness across the institution or within programs.

Such unevenness also provides an opportunity for institutions to identify best practices and models that can advance assessment within other programs or functional areas.

- ♦ Faculty and institutional ownership are critical elements to success. Without this ownership, assessment will be viewed as an imported activity or one that is totally driven by external forces. Without ownership, efforts to sustain assessment activities will be hampered.
- ♦ There is great value in beginning with what is already in place. Anxiety and resistance will be diminished if there is clear acknowledgment of various ways in which institutions already assess student learning at the institutional, program, and/or course level.
- ♦ Discussions about assessment provide an excellent opportunity for consideration and affirmation of the institution's core values. Assessment, well planned and implemented, will reflect what the institution considers its particular reasons for being: what it values most.
- ♦ Learning goals should not be selected because they are "easy" or easily measured. While it is tempting to focus on such goals, the results will not be sufficiently rich and deep to warrant continuing institutional investment in assessment activities.
- ♦ Assessment is not primarily about "failure." Assessment provides documentation relative to institutional successes as well. Good assessment will aim for a balance within its analysis and conclusions.
- ♦ A modest assessment plan may be better than a more ambitious one. A more modest assessment plan that is institutionally owned and where results are used in a meaningful way is preferable to a more ambitious and comprehensive plan that is owned by only a few individuals and where results are not viewed as institutionally relevant.
- ♦ Assumptions and expectations regarding incoming students may need to be examined in light of learning goals and varied learning styles. Assessment can be of great assistance here, particularly in determining why students may not be meeting stated learning goals in the ways we might expect.
- ♦ Assessment of student learning will be increasingly essential as higher education delivery systems continue to diversify. The expansion of distance and distributed learning, accelerated programs, and degree completion programs will necessitate a continuing reliance on the assessment of student learning outcomes.

In short, there is much that we have learned from the extensive collaborative efforts to develop revised assessment standards and to utilize them both within institutional self-studies and evaluation team visits. These lessons hold promise, over time, for building a more broadly shared culture of assessment within the higher education community.

Assessment of Student Learning: Some Perspectives

In the final analysis, assessment is about doing our best to make sure students are learning. To do so, we must apply the same level of critical thought to determining whether they are learning as we would to evaluating any other valued aspect of our personal and professional lives.

John H. Erickson is deputy executive director of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the regional accrediting organization for colleges and universities in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. He provided primary staff support for the revision of the Middle States standards for accreditation.

ENDNOTES

1. I acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of my colleague, Mary Ann Baenninger, executive associate director, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, who graciously shared with me her presentations on outcomes assessment.
2. Middle States Commission on Higher Education, *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation* (Philadelphia: Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2002), 21.
3. *Ibid.*, 50.
4. *Ibid.*, vii.
5. *Ibid.*, 52.
6. Middle States Commission on Higher Education, *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources* (Philadelphia: Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2003), 22.
7. *Ibid.*, 39-42.

Assessment of Ministry Preparation to Increase Understanding

John Harris
Samford University

ABSTRACT: Focusing on assessment of ministry preparation, as distinct from research-oriented, scholarly graduate theological education, this paper proposes assessment at three points in a seminarian's experience: upon admission, during the program of study, and following graduation. The author suggests strategies for admission assessment, including methods that may be used to select applicants most likely to persevere in their studies and succeed in both seminary and ministry. Proposals for assessment strategies during the M.Div. program focus on the stated goals of the M.Div. degree and how each might be addressed through a variety of assessment activities. Feedback from graduates and those with whom they work provide additional mechanisms for evaluating the ministerial preparation of theological students.

Last summer I was invited to meet with the ATS senior staff to discuss assessment strategies and techniques for seminary education. As the day was ending, Daniel Aleshire asked me to outline actual assessments for a seminary. His question forced me to cut through abstractions and theory to put something specific and operational on the table.

Aleshire's penetrating question stayed with me and I decided to put something on paper. In October Aleshire came to Samford to discuss a preliminary draft of this paper with Brad Creed, currently provost at Samford and formerly the founding dean of Baylor's Truett Theological Seminary; Linda Cannell, professor of educational ministries at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and member of the ATS Executive Committee; and myself. While these meetings added to my understanding of the challenges of assessment for theological education, Aleshire, Creed, and Cannell are not responsible for the thoughts that follow.

One may well ask, "What does John Harris bring to a discussion of assessment of theological education?" The first clear answer is, "Not enough." I have spent most of my thirty-plus years in higher education working on assessment and accreditation issues along with efforts to improve teaching and learning. My acquaintance with theological education includes an undergraduate major in Bible and two years of seminary before deciding to go into education, teaching M.Div. and D.Min. leadership courses, and serving on seminary accreditation teams. Having no substantive understanding of Roman Catholic seminary formation of priests, I recently spent five days living among the seminarians and faculty of Mundelein Seminary. This brief experience certainly makes me no expert on priestly formation, but it did open my

eyes to how formation is done in community as compared to the prevailing pattern of course and classroom emphasis of Mainline Protestant and Evangelical Protestant seminaries. Nevertheless, my thoughts about assessment of theological education inevitably reflect my greater knowledge and experience with Mainline Protestant and Evangelical Protestant theological education.

Purpose-driven assessment

This paper focuses on assessment of ministry preparation as distinct from graduate theological education. For some, these concepts may be the same. From my perspective, that would be like saying that a Ph.D. in biochemistry or in other medical sciences is the same as an M.D. in education *and* training.

I am reminded of T. Hale Ham's description of grand rounds of medical education's history. Ham, a hematologist on the faculty of Case Western Reserve Medical School, pioneered medical students' learning the science and practice of medicine concurrently rather than two years of pure science followed by clinical training. According to Ham, the first round of medical education was apprenticeship to a doctor, which left much to be desired in knowledge of the medical sciences. The second round emphasized medical science, with less emphasis on learning to become a physician. The third round integrated medical science and practice.

In the 1970s, Ham led Case Western Reserve Medical School to put first-year medical students in groups that learned about the cell and participated in prenatal care and delivery. In the fourth year, students studied geriatrics and cared for elderly patients. Medical education has led higher education in active learning strategies such as problem-based learning and the use of trained actors as "mystery patients." The ultimate question is not whether physicians can answer examination questions about disease characteristics, but whether they can use their medical knowledge for accurate diagnoses.

The grand rounds of seminary education seem to have followed a somewhat similar path in its first two rounds but has yet to embrace the third fully. In the first round, seminary faculties were predominantly composed of former ministers. In the second round, Ph.D. scholars with limited experience in full-time ministry became the mainstay of seminary faculties. A third round to integrate scholarship and practice has not occurred generally. Mainline Protestant and Evangelical Protestant seminary education continues to be a classroom-based academic experience led by biblical and theological scholars. The disconnect between fresh Ph.D.s in their first year of theological teaching is such that ATS provides a workshop to orient them to seminary education.

Appearance or value

The apparent disconnect between the training and interests of seminary faculty and ministerial preparation is important for any discussion of assess-

ment of ministry preparation programs. If assessment is to be worth its cost, it must be derived from and congruent with the actual and not just rhetorical purposes of an educational program. The assessment strategies proposed in this paper are for ministerial preparation, not for graduate, research-oriented, scholarly theological education. Assessments for the latter might include externally reviewed theses, comprehensive examinations by multiple readers, and success of graduates in relevant Ph.D. programs. However, I believe assessments for ministry preparation can and should include such assessments, but as suggested below, other types of assessment are also needed.

Given the pressure for assessment of effectiveness from the public in general and accrediting agencies in particular, administrators and faculty often assume that they can satisfy those demands by tacking assessment onto traditionally formatted curricula, conventional instructional practices, and discipline-based organization of the school. That is, surveys of students and alumni and, on rare occasions, comprehensive assessments of learning beyond tests within courses are added to existing programs, often just a couple of years before a reaccreditation review is due. As a member of a number of accreditation visiting teams, I usually am assigned to review assessment programs. More frequently than not, I have observed hastily constructed, Potemkin-village assessment programs. I often sensed that these programs would quickly collapse after the visit. To the typical professor and many administrators, it all seems like busywork and much ado about nothing; sadly enough, that is exactly what it is in too many cases.

Assessment for optimization

There is really no substantive, lasting value in assessment unless faculty and administrators are clear about their actual educational purpose and are determined to deploy themselves and their resources to fulfill that purpose. If a seminary determines to optimize its effectiveness in preparing ministers, it will need the following assessments:

- ♦ Screening and selecting applicants for abilities, habits, experiences, values, and attitudes that predispose them to benefit from what the seminary offers, and that bode well for perseverance and fulfillment in ministry in the principal employing churches or other ministries.
- ♦ Determining characteristics of faculty that make them most effective in preparing ministers and using those characteristics as criteria in selecting, developing, and retaining faculty.
- ♦ Determining and evaluating curricular content, learning strategies, and communal life that most effectively shape individuals for a lifetime of ministry.
- ♦ Tracking the academic, spiritual, and personal development of each seminarian from admission to graduation.
- ♦ Studying what happens intellectually, spiritually, and personally to students as they move through a program.

- ♦ Tracking the careers of graduates to identify the characteristics that distinguish those who persist and find fulfillment in ministry, and those who do not.

The key to optimizing any organization is to increase corporate understanding of how it works. Peter Senge's well-known *The Learning Organization* provides ways of corporate learning that, with some translation, can help a seminary faculty increase its understanding of its work. As a former executive of a major city's electrical utility told me however, "I go to management training sessions and come home to find that the best concepts are in the New Testament." Assessment of minister preparation programs can and should make use of psychometric theory and instruments, but it must also be theologically informed and shaped. It seems that theological educators have sometimes adopted social science strategies and ways of knowing without weighing the theological ramifications. The commonly employed educational assessment strategies rest on positivist assumptions. Numbers are useful, but the more one knows about how they are collected and analyzed, the more one realizes that they serve best as indicators of matters that should be probed more deeply through tacit knowing. Dennis Sansom and I, in *Discerning Is More Than Counting*, attempted to describe the assumptions on which purely quantitative assessment strategies rest and their consequent limitations.¹

Assessment to increase understanding

When one moves from generalities and theory to proposing specific assessment, disagreements intensify. In all the years that I wrestled with assessment, I do not recall a single strategy or technique about which honest and valid concerns could not be raised. Those most familiar with the phenomenon of being assessed sense that the measure does not fully reflect its reality, which raises the epistemological question of how completely anything can be known or comprehended, much less fully measured. I do not propose these strategies and techniques as complete measures of the human qualities in question. Objective and quantitative assessments, particularly of human behavior, serve only as "leaves in the wind." They are only indicators useful for prompting further reflection by multiple interpreters.

Therefore, I propose assessments at three points—admission, during the program, and after graduation—to stimulate and focus ongoing, *community* reflection on ministry preparation. The purpose of this ongoing, communal reflection is to increase understanding of the interrelationships among (1) the types of students admitted; (2) the mix of curricula, instructional methods, and faculty characteristics that comprise the seminary program; and (3) the perseverance and performance of graduates in ministry.

Admission assessment

Assessment of applicants and newly matriculated students can serve three important purposes. First, assessment may be used to identify individuals with undesirable backgrounds, behavior/personality disorders, or obvious lack of preparation for study and formation. Second, assessment may be used to select applicants most likely to succeed and persevere in seminary and ministry. Third, once an entering class is established, assessment may be used to take stock of the students admitted.

Assessment for screening

Seminaries may use some combination of criminal background checks, credit reports, health reports, documentation of vaccinations, personality tests, and psychiatric interviews to identify individuals who would not function well within the seminary community. A seminary also might decide to screen applicants for theological compatibility and denominational identity. That is, a seminary might decide there is a range of beliefs and behaviors within which it can work with students; consequently, it might use questionnaires or interviews to identify individuals most likely to profit from its instruction and community.

Timothy George, dean at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University, suggests that churches could contribute to effective screening of applicants.² An applicant's home church will usually know the applicant's typical behavior patterns. I am impressed with how thoroughly Roman Catholic diocesan vocational directors review candidates for admission to seminary. There are major differences between Roman Catholic and Mainline Protestant and Evangelical Protestant polities that produce the differences in the church endorsement approaches. Nevertheless, George suggests that Evangelical churches could and should do more than they often do when reviewing individuals asking the church to endorse their applications for admission to seminary. A brief chat after a Wednesday evening prayer service is not enough.

Given the absence of uniform policies and processes in the "free church" tradition, seminaries will likely have to take the lead in developing and promoting more systematic review processes leading to church endorsement. Such a review process should include relevant discussions about beliefs and commitments, but add maximum value by also including a kind of observed life history of the applicant. Obviously, the applicant's participation in the life of the church could be documented, but the applicant's school and work history should also be included. Perhaps no component of one's life history is more important than the individual's family narrative. While we know that patterns of past behavior are the best predictors of future behavior, all such predictions are based on low empirical correlations. Religious history is full of individuals who, by their efforts or divine intervention, rose above their pasts.

Assessment of Ministry Preparation to Increase Understanding

So the review should not only include a report of influential circumstances and prevailing behavior patterns, but also life-changing religious experiences. In the end, an admissions committee will remember that prophets are seldom welcomed in their home towns.

Assessment for selection

As most educators know, educational outcomes are greatly determined by the quality and nature of admitted students. In fact, there are empirical studies that demonstrate that the effects of educational treatments or curricula on intellectual and knowledge achievements of graduating students are minimal when incoming intellectual differences are statistically controlled. In other words, incoming abilities explain more of the variation in graduates' academic achievement than is explained by the educational program.

Ability tests and grades only moderately predict future grades; for example, tests such as the GRE and undergraduate grades at best will account only for about one-third of the variance in seminary grades. Because of their lower reliability, psychological assessments and interest inventories are generally even poorer predictors of future behavior. We should also be aware that judgments based on interviews correlate poorly with later performance. This is true even when the interviewers are well trained, such as clinical psychologists. If human behavior is completely determined by genes and environment, as some believe, experts have yet to identify the variables and means of measuring that predict individual human behavior at the accuracy level of physical sciences.

While precise prediction of individual behavior is not available, there are techniques and instruments that predict certain performances significantly better than chance. For example, the modest correlation of previous grades and test scores with future grades allows one to predict rather accurately the extremes of a distribution. That is, the farther an applicant's previous grades and test scores are below the average of all the applicants' grades and test scores, the greater the chance the applicant's future grades will be at the lower end of the class's grade distribution. The opposite is equally true. Thus, an admission committee is on fairly safe ground in admitting the applicants at the top of the distribution of applicants' grades and test scores as far as their seminary academic performance is concerned. The chances of the academic success of applicants who are far down in the distribution of entering grades and test scores are small, but modest correlations do not help much in judgments about applicants' grades and test scores in the middle range of the distribution.

Whatever emphasis a seminary may place on academic achievement, one assumes it also will be interested in the student's personal and spiritual development. Personal and spiritual development may have more to do with perseverance and fulfillment in ministry than academic performance. Yet, as

messy as assessment and prediction of academic performance are, assessment and prediction of attitudes and behaviors are even messier. Measures of cognitive abilities and academic achievement require the test taker to demonstrate knowledge, skill, or understanding. In contrast, when one responds to an inventory or questionnaire about interests, values, or emotional states, one struggles with several problems, such as what should I report versus what is expected or socially acceptable. That is, questionnaires and inventories about attitudes, interests, and behaviors ask one to report typical or usual feelings and behaviors as distinct from what they might perceive to be expected or desired. While tests of cognitive abilities can be affected by circumstances in which the test is administered, and the person's physical and emotional condition, personality inventories may be more affected by them.

Cronbach³ made a useful distinction between tests of ability or maximum performance and tests of typical performance. Ability tests for admission, such as the GRE or Miller Analogies Test, assess maximum performance. One is expected to do one's best. Questionnaires, such as the popular Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the heavily researched Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, ask the respondent to report typical or usual behaviors. As a genre, such inventories or questionnaires are less reliable or consistent than maximum performance tests of abilities or skills. Consequently, their correlation with academic or work performance is lower.

Bio-data prediction

Given that so much is at stake in assessment for screening and selection, seminary educators might find value in supplementing ability tests and typical performance questionnaires with bio-data prediction. In brief, bio-data prediction involves in-depth analysis of individuals' biographies to identify factors that predict future performances or behaviors. That is, the researcher is working with what the individual or others report about what they have actually done, i.e., service activities, church work, extracurricular school activities, hobbies, etc. The following description of bio-data prediction may be helpful in understanding what is involved:

Biographical inventory is a selection device used as an alternative or supplement to cognitive testing because this measurement method predicts aspects of job performance that are not predicted by cognitive measures. Examples of these aspects of performance are interpersonal relationships (e.g., with co-workers or clients) and motivation.

Biographical inventories have been empirically developed against such varied criteria as amount of insurance sold by life insurance agents, turnover of bank clerks, productivity of

Assessment of Ministry Preparation to Increase Understanding

research scientists, and performance of naval personnel in diver training. Such inventories have proved valid as predictors of job performance in groups ranging from unskilled workers, office clerks, and service station dealers to chemists, engineers, and high-level executives. Personal history types of items that discriminate can provide a great deal of information about what kinds of employees remain on a job and what kinds do not, and what kinds are promotable and what kinds are not.

RATIONALE

The assumption that underlies the use of bio-data is that past behavior is a valid predictor of future behavior. More specifically, it is assumed that information obtained from job applicants about previous work experiences, education, etc. can be used to predict job performance. Items included in these inventories are selected on the basis of previous research which demonstrates significant relationships between item responses and job performance. Personal history items commonly used fall into the following areas:

- ♦ personal
- ♦ background, general
- ♦ education
- ♦ employment experience
- ♦ skills
- ♦ socioeconomic level—financial status
- ♦ social
- ♦ interests
- ♦ personal characteristics, attitudes expressed⁴

In addition to providing an admissions committee information on variables related to success in seminary, individuals could use their bio-data reports to reflect on their call to ministry. That is, after completing a structured bio-report, one considering ministry might reflect on the bio-data to discern paths and patterns that confirm or question one's call to ministry. One might review the biography for transition points that seem to have moved one toward ministry. Obviously, we are prone to report and see in what we reported what we want to see. So sharing one's review with a mentor or counselor would be desirable in most cases. An admissions committee, in addition to reviewing bio-data reports for factors that are empirically related to success in seminary and ministry, could ask candidates to assess their call to ministry by the paths and patterns they observe in their bio-reports.

Assessment for optimal learning

More is at stake than deciding whom to admit. Those preparing others for ministry need to understand their students. Ideally, they should have some shared understandings or intersubjective agreements of the desired personal

traits, ministry skills, and theological abilities that beginning ministers should possess. Given these understandings and agreements, they may determine a pattern of the differences between the entering students' traits, skills, and abilities, and those they hope to nurture in students by the completion of the seminary experience. Once a beginning class is admitted, the faculty should develop some empirical and tacit understanding of the material with which it has to work. That is, how do the entering, first-year students look in comparison to what it is hoped they will look like three or four years later? The gaps between what they enter with and what they should leave with define the seminary's education or formation task. Only when education or formation is seen as closing the gaps does assessment add value equal to its costs.

During-program assessment

ATS expects member institutions to assure four outcomes in M.Div. programs:

- a. Knowledge of religious heritage
- b. Understanding of cultural context
- c. Growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity
- d. Capacity for ministerial and public leadership

In light of these expected outcomes, a comprehensive, systematic assessment program should be developed to provide feedback on the program's effectiveness in facilitating student achievement of each of these four goals or desired results. Ideally, such assessments should be embedded in the total curricular experience, classroom, and community life. When a goal involves cognitive learning, the assessment should test for understanding and the ability to act on the learning, such as applying the learning to an issue or problem different from the context of the original learning. These four goals clearly require integrative understandings and behaviors that cross theological disciplines and the confines of modular courses; therefore, the assessments should be interdisciplinary and require integrative responses. The four goals also contain mixtures of cognitive and affective-behavioral learning. For example, "knowledge of religious heritage" appears to call for a straightforward test of knowledge, whether at the recall level or at higher cognitive levels, such as application, synthesis, or evaluation. "Growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity" obviously calls for a very different type of assessment. In this case, one is interested in typical attitudes and behaviors that are more amenable to assessment through surveys, self-reports, and unobtrusive observations.

Examples of assessment strategies and techniques for three of the ATS M.Div. goals are offered below.

Knowledge of religious heritage

Annual theological problem. Present each year's cohort (first-year, second-year, and third-year cohorts) with a challenging theological problem. The aim is not to determine if students reach certain predetermined theological conclusions, but to assess their abilities to think theologically. There are many techniques of juried assessments, e.g., creating divider essays between three categories—outstanding, acceptable, and unacceptable. Each paper could be read by two readers independently; if both rate it the same, that is the rating it would receive. If the two disagree, a third reader would rate the paper. Once the papers are sorted into the three categories, the same or other readers could compare and contrast the outstanding and unacceptable papers to identify patterns of differences among them. Another strategy would be to compare the students' papers with three or more papers on the same issue by professors. Yet another strategy to determine improvements in a given year is to have the students write on the same issue twice in one year—one paper at the beginning of the fall and the second at the end of spring. Consistent improvements would suggest what the curriculum actually yielded in terms of student learning that year.

Charlemagne-Alcuin encounter. Perhaps the best test of a pastor's ability to think theologically is the ability to respond to the person in the next seat on an airplane who asks a question about common but complex issues, such as the Trinity, predestination-free will, or the resurrection. Though illiterate, Charlemagne asked Alcuin, the theological scholar, questions that rattled his brain. Similarly, M.Div. students could be tested by the questions that theologically unschooled but bright laypeople, adults, and children ask. Such questions would challenge the student's integrated understanding of theology and the student's ability to explain complicated theological issues in everyday language. Ideally, students would be quizzed by trained actors.

Theology and classical issues. M.Div. students could be presented with recurring dilemmas in human existence through the classics of great cultures, such as Confucius, Homer, Plato, etc. The test would be twofold: (1) demonstration that they understand the perennial human problem as presented by the classical figure and the proposed resolution of it; and (2) their ability to deal with the problem from a Christian perspective.

Understanding cultural context

Reading a different socioeconomic setting. Have M.Div. students spend several days in a community very different economically and socially from their own. Ask students to identify the primary recurring values, power structures, and economic patterns of the new culture. Against the backdrop of their analysis, ask them to formulate the most effective expression of Christianity and ministry for that culture.

Reading one's own setting. Ask students to describe their own culture using basic anthropological, sociological, and economic tools. Also ask them to

describe how that culture has shaped its current expression of Christianity and to describe how the church could be a more faithful witness to that culture.

Reading the effect of a historical moment. Choose a particular time and place in Christian history and ask students to identify and describe how that time and place shaped Christianity and the church as an institution. Then ask them how well or poorly that particular culture shaped Christianity and how the church witnessed to its culture.

Connecting multiculturally. Arrange for every student to work in a mission setting in a culture distinctively different from the student's own culture. Ask the resident missionary to observe and report how well the student comes to understand and develops rapport with the people.

Growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity

As I approached suggesting assessments for moral and spiritual growth, I was reminded of an oxymoronic session at an annual assessment conference of the American Association of Higher Education. Austin Doherty, then dean at Alverno College, and I led a session, "Assessing the Ineffables." In my judgment, moral and spiritual growth is not ineffable or "incapable of being expressed in words,"⁵ but it is an area in which assessments must especially be understood as "leaves in the wind," not as direct measures.

An Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) search for research on "seminary students" and "values" brought up only the two following articles:

- ♦ "Human Nature and Authoritarianism in Seminary Students and Counselor Trainees." Mason, Robert; and others; *Personnel Guidance J*, 47, 7, 689-92, 69 Mar (EJ002625)
- ♦ "American Theological Students: A Survey of Their Value Commitments." Roscoe, John T.; Girling, Paul A., 1969 (ED027835)

A similar search for "medical students" and "values" brought up seventy-nine articles. A review of them indicated that not all appeared to deal directly with values and values change, but the following titles taken from the list suggest that several do deal directly with values and values change:

- ♦ "Vanquishing Virtue: The Impact of Medical Education." (EJ631188)
- ♦ "Navigating the Wards: Teaching Medical Students to Use Their Moral Compasses." (EJ527868)
- ♦ "Toward a Person-Centered Medicine: Religious Studies in the Medical Curriculum." (EJ514952)
- ♦ "The Effect of a Required Third-Year Family Medicine Clerkship on Medical Students' Attitudes: Value Indoctrination and Value Clarification." (EJ499647)
- ♦ "Sensitizing Residents to Moral Issues by Case Discussions." (EJ434655)
- ♦ "The Effect of Teaching Medical Ethics on Medical Students' Moral Reasoning." (EJ400941)
- ♦ "Value Orientations and the Effects of Professional Schools on Students." (ED214470)

Assessment of Ministry Preparation to Increase Understanding

- ♦ "Development and Validation of a Test Instrument for Assessing Value Preferences in Medical Ethics." (EJ259984)
- ♦ "Moral Reasoning as a Criterion for Admission to Medical School." (ED217817)
- ♦ "Interns' Attitudes and Values as Antecedents of Clinical Performance." (EJ198222)

It is interesting that these two ERIC searches found so many more research articles on medical students' values than on those of seminary students. (I ask any reader to let me know of a database that can give a fuller list of research articles on values change during seminary than I found in ERIC.)

Observation

Cultural anthropologists, by living among and observing a people group, can report the group's dominant values with considerable agreement among independent observers. I have wondered why we have not asked them to describe the pervasive values, attitudes, and work habits of student groups. In quality improvement efforts, organizations have identified "listening posts" or "observation posts" to listen or watch for repeated patterns of problems in processes. At Samford, the director of institutional research and I have begun an experiment with listening posts for student values, worries, and problems in living. We have identified certain individuals at strategic places to observe and reflect on student behaviors, such as the director of the health center, the university counselor, the associate athletic director, director of student ministries, etc. They will not report on any individual's behavior or identify anyone. Instead, they and we will work together to develop common definitions or categories of what they observe and report, and we will concentrate on recurring behaviors or patterns, not isolated, unusual behaviors.

To estimate beliefs, values, and attitudes from observed patterns of behaviors, observers must have opportunities to observe groups and individuals beyond formal events such as classes, chapel services, and called meetings. They must be able to observe in the candy store. That is, what do individuals do when they are free to choose? For example, if they could observe the materials students or former students select in airport bookstores and newsstands, English literature teachers could get some idea whether they had affected students' literary tastes.

Obviously, one does not want to and will not spy on students in their private moments, but as Yogi Berra said, "You can observe a lot just by watching." This adage is particularly true if faculty and students live in close community.

The power of community became very clear to me in my five days at the Mundelein Seminary. Because Mundelein is a Roman Catholic seminary, the students all live in community with one another and their faculty, spiritual leaders, and many of the staff. Every student is a member of a sixteen-man

camerata (known on campus as “cams”) that lives in the same area of a residence hall with the cam leader, a priest with a suite in the same area. Students in each cam worship together, do sports and recreation together, and meet frequently with their cam leader as a group and individually. Every seminarian has a contact separate from his cam leader and spiritual director. While the spiritual directors function entirely within the “internal forum”—that is, the student’s private, spiritual life is kept in absolute confidence—the contact functions in the “external forum.” In the external forum, the contact observes the assigned seminarians, meets with each seminarian at least twice each semester, and collects information on the seminarian’s progress from his faculty, his cam leader, and his parish-field work supervisor, but *not* his spiritual director. Every seminarian has a contact, and each contact is expected to report seminarians’ progress every semester to the rector.

Living in community 24-7 allows a contact to observe patterns of behavior far beyond academic engagement in the classroom. Obviously, Mainline Protestant and Evangelical Protestant faculties have similar opportunities to observe patterns of typical behavior on which they might base estimates of beliefs, values, and attitudes. At the same time, such faculties can learn a great deal by observing what they talk about over coffee or at lunch, and particularly when they are with them in off-campus retreats. If a faculty decided to learn what they could about students by unobtrusive observation and listening, they could become more accurate reporters and analysts by the following activities:

- ♦ Have someone skilled in ethnography train them in observation techniques.
- ♦ Work together as they observe and report to develop operational definitions and categories of behaviors to increase the chances they are observing and reporting the same things.
- ♦ At the end of each semester, faculty who often counsel students could report on recurring themes that they have heard that semester.
- ♦ A seminary faculty or administrator might identify individuals on and off campus who interact with students outside class. Whether the British college or the American campus, if one wanted to know what is going on, one asked the janitors or custodians. Secretaries and other staff often hear and see what is all but invisible to faculty and administrators.

The greatest barrier to a faculty learning about students’ values and how they may change during their seminary careers is not lack of knowledge or skill about systematic observation and unobtrusive indicators. It is deciding to observe and report, taking the time it requires, and learning from experience.

Student reports

It often has been said, “If you want to know what people think, just ask them.” If a faculty really wants to learn about students’ spiritual development, why not ask them at a certain point each year to describe their spiritual

struggles and practices? The faculty could craft the rubrics for the reports consistent with its shared theology and approaches to spirituality. In general, students will be more candid if they are not asked to identify themselves.

A strategy used at Samford might clarify what I am suggesting. All Samford freshmen take two semesters of Cultural Perspectives, an interdisciplinary course that integrates western and world civilization, history, and literature. To evaluate the effects of this two-semester course, on their first day of Cultural Perspectives in the fall, all freshmen were asked to write a brief essay on Plato's "Allegory of the Cave." At the end of the following spring semester, they were given a similar assignment. A Samford English professor, a Samford history professor, and a philosopher from another university read and compared the fall and spring essays of eighty randomly selected students. One consistent difference emerged: On the first essay in the fall, students tended to bring in their own beliefs and perspectives without entering into Plato's thought. In their spring essay, they wrote taking Plato's thoughts into consideration.

If seminarians wrote reports on their spiritual development each year using common rubrics, their papers could be compared from one year to the next. With a little help for individuals skilled in content-qualitative analysis, a faculty using at least two readers could identify patterns of change.

Values inventories

Opinion and values inventories are used throughout higher education to evaluate programs and to identify prevailing student attitudes, to assess engagement in learning, to evaluate instruction and degree programs, to gauge satisfaction with administrative services and processes, etc. I was struck by the number of religious and values inventories (124) identified by Hill and Hood in *Measures of Religiosity*.⁶ Ralph Hood describes Gordon W. Allport's seminal work on intrinsic-extrinsic religiosity as the "dominating conceptual paradigm in the empirical psychology of religion during the last three decades."⁷ Therefore, seminaries using inventories to assess students' change in spirituality and values are in good company with their academic colleagues. Given the instruments described in *Measures of Religiosity*, seminaries appear to have a rich array of instruments available to assess religious values and spirituality.

Despite their convenience and frequent use, surveys by paper-and-pencil questionnaires present several problems:

- ♦ **Low response rates.** As most know, mailed questionnaires almost always have low rates of return, which raises certain questions. For example, did those who took the time to respond do so because they were unhappy and wanted to send a message? Or were they particularly pleased? Many techniques have been employed to boost response rates, such as keeping the questionnaire brief and simple, providing stamped/addressed envelopes, printing the questionnaire on brightly colored and odd-sized paper so that it is hard to hide on the

desk, including token appreciations, and follow-up postcards and phone calls to nonrespondents. These efforts help somewhat, but response rates remain low. If a questionnaire is for students on campus, have students complete and return it during a required class or some other event where most, if not all, students attend. Return rates are about the same for web-based surveys. Consider telephone surveys if the survey results are really important, but still only expect to get complete responses from one-half of the sample.

- ♦ **Positive bias.** Whether one is dealing with evaluations of individual performance, program effectiveness, or product satisfaction, people tend toward positive ratings. Scales, such as the Likert 1-to-5 scale, are especially vulnerable to positive bias. The 5 rating usually means “completely satisfied” or “outstanding” or “excellent,” while the 4 rating usually suggests “some but not complete satisfaction” or “good but not outstanding.” The 3 rating often represents “average” or just “OK.” Given the pervasive presence of positive bias, some suggest discounting the 4 rating by 20%. A 3 rating on performance can often be interpreted as “unsatisfactory.” When possible, it is generally better to use forced-choice or budgeted scales. A forced-choice scale might ask the respondent to rank eight to ten characteristics of a program. For example, seminary graduates might be asked to rate their seminary experience by ranking the following outcomes from 1 (the most realized outcome) to 4 (the least realized):

- ___ Knowledge of religious heritage
- ___ Understanding of cultural context
- ___ Growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity
- ___ Capacity for ministerial and public leadership

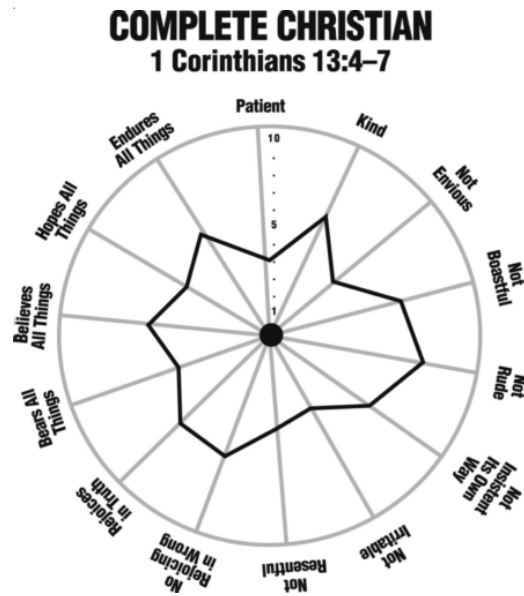
Or they might be asked to distribute 100 points to the four, giving the greatest number of points to the most realized or valued outcomes.

As suggested earlier, survey results should be used to stimulate reflection and focus tacit knowledge. They should not be taken as absolute or dismissed as ephemeral.

Quality check

One of the quality improvement tools is the Spider Diagram. Its purpose is to compare graphically ideal or perfect quality of a product or process to its current, actual quality. The graphic is composed of a circle with the center representing zero and the outer edge or perimeter representing 10. Each characteristic of the process or product is a spoke going from the center to the perimeter of the circle. Each characteristic of the process or product is rated one spoke from 0 (No quality) to 10 (Ideal or Perfect).

It occurred to me that one could rate one’s Christ likeness. For example, the characteristics of Christ-like love described in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 might be used as rating spokes. The following diagram is my effort to use the qualities of love described in this passage to represent the Complete Christian.



The inner “spider web” indicates estimates of how loving one is as compared to Paul’s ideals. Seminarians might rate themselves on each. If they wished, they could ask a mentor, spiritual director, or others who know them well to rate them. They could then compare how they rate themselves to how others rate them. If done each year, they could track their growth or decline.

Capacity for ministerial and public leadership

I teach leadership courses in Beeson Divinity School’s M.Div. and D.Min. programs, so I am tempted to wander into philosophies or theologies of leadership, but I will spare the reader. Suffice it to say, if leadership is to be assessed, it must be defined in operational, observable terms. From my experience in and outside of seminaries, becoming specific about the kind of leader an institution hopes to produce will test most faculties’ collective patience.

There are two obvious issues in assessing leadership. First, do students possess a working knowledge of a reasonable range of leadership styles and are they able to compare and contrast them in terms of their effectiveness and congruence with Christian principles? Developing valid and accurate assessments of such understanding in and of itself would be a significant accomplishment. One possibility: Give students summaries of several well-known leadership styles, e.g., Homeric heroes such as Agamemnon and Achilles, Machiavelli, Jack Welch, and Lee Iacocca, and ask them to compare and contrast these leadership styles with that of Jesus.

To assess leadership behavior of any style requires something beyond academic tests. If one wants some idea of how a person is likely to respond in leadership, one place to begin is to examine past leadership behaviors. In

general, past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. The bio data prediction strategy described earlier would be one way to get this information.

Another widely practiced approach is to put individuals in situations they are likely to face and observe whether they take a leadership role; if they do, observe how they attempt to lead. Situational testing has a long history, even into classical and biblical times. Its more recent impetus came from spy-master Wild Bill Donovan when he led the cloak-and-dagger spy organization, Office of Strategic Services (OSS), in World War II, which later became the Central Intelligence Agency. Spy candidates were put in situations similar to those they would face in the field so that their master could observe how they would respond. AT&T adopted and adapted situational testing to corporate leadership using clinical assessment. Today, trained actors test medical students' diagnostic skills. The point is that assessments of probable behaviors must approximate as closely as possible actual situations the individual may encounter.

While situational tests seem to be the best way to assess likely leadership, they are expensive to develop and administer. Here are some possible simulations for testing ministerial leadership that would have some of the value of situational testing but would be less expensive:

- ♦ **Cases.** Have trained case-study writers develop leadership cases with working ministers based on actual experiences. Then have the students respond to the cases.
- ♦ **Video vignettes.** Show students a video of a leadership dilemma often encountered by pastors and ask them to describe how they would deal with the situation.
- ♦ **Public arena.** Assign students to attend a local government meeting in which some policy is being discussed that affects the poor or otherwise disenfranchised. Ask them to describe the dynamics, underlying values, and agendas at work in the meeting, and how they might have contributed to discussion if their ministry was in that area.

Assessment feedback from graduates and others

Graduate Survey. Survey each year's M.Div. graduates about the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy, and total experience in preparing them for ministry. A key question is, "What did you not get or not get enough of in seminary that you need in ministry?" Keep in mind the problems of survey return and positive bias that were discussed earlier.

Employer Survey. Survey employers of each year's M.Div. graduates about their ministry effectiveness.

Focus Groups. Focus groups comprised of graduates or employers can be useful, but it is important to use trained facilitators who are not connected with the seminary to get the most objective information.

Advisory Board. Appoint a Ministry Advisory Board of informed laypeople and pastors to review a summary of the results of the graduate and employer surveys to recommend curricular, pedagogical, and total experience changes.

The categories and items in ATS's *Profiles of Ministry* program could be used to identify or develop the graduate and employer surveys. The 360° assessment as employed in *Skillscope* and other managerial assessment instruments published by the Center for Creative Leadership might be used in the development of the employer survey.

Concluding reflections

Assessment is of little value unless it is part of a larger commitment to improve continuously. Within the context of continuous assessment, the first task is to identify deficiencies; in academic assessment, its primary focus is on student learning. Are students learning what the educational program is designed to accomplish? Assessment's second task is to assist an inquiring faculty to find root causes of deficiencies. One of the most common mistakes is to attempt to improve on hunches without deep probing for root causes of learning deficiencies. Senge and associates advocate asking "Why?" five times before assuming a root cause has been identified.⁸

Ted Ward observed that seminary faculties find it difficult to check empirically on praxis because they are so full of beliefs.⁹ He was not referring to their theological beliefs but to their educational beliefs. His observation resonated with my experience with faculty and academic administrators in general. It is interesting that those engaged in the most rational work find it particularly difficult to take a detached, objective view of their work. Admittedly, it is always difficult to reflect on the water in which one swims. That is why those interested in continuous improvement value the naïve observer's perspectives. A visitor is more likely to see the dust on the baseboards than the resident.

Assessment's only lasting value is to increase understanding of an organization or process for its improvement.

Russell Ackoff's following three sentences cut to the chase of this paper:

An ounce of information is worth a pound of knowledge.

An ounce of knowledge is worth a pound of information.

An ounce of understanding is worth a pound of knowledge.¹⁰

A recognized authority on educational assessment, John Harris is the Orlean Bullard Beeson Professor of Education and associate provost for Quality Assessment at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. He has taught leadership courses in Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry programs and has been an accreditation visitor to theological schools.

ENDNOTES

1. John Harris and Dennis Sansom, *Discerning Is More Than Counting* (Washington: American Academy for Liberal Education). <<http://www.aale.org/harris-sansom.pdf>> (18 December 2003).
2. Timothy George, dean, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, December 19, 2003, personal communication.
3. Lee J. Cronbach, *Essentials of Psychological Testing* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 2nd Ed., 1960), 29-34.
4. Jennifer Crafts, "Using Biodata as a Selection Instrument," ERIC Database # ED338702.
5. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1984, 617.
6. P.C. Hill and R.W. Hood, *Measures of Religiosity* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1999).
7. Ralph W. Hood, Jr., "Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religiosity," William H. Swatos, Jr., Ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*, Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT. <<http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/allport.htm>> (18 December 2003).
8. Peter M. Senge, et al., *The Fifth Discipline Field Book* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 108-112.
9. Personal communication with Ted Ward, October 31, 2003.
10. Russell L. Ackoff, *Ackoff's Fables: Irreverent Reflections on Business and Bureaucracy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1991), 75.

The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Education in 2002: What Program Directors Think

Timothy D. Lincoln

Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT: More than 100 North American theological schools operate Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degree programs. Little published research exists about the quality of these programs. This report interprets survey responses from program directors who attended the 2002 annual conference of the Association of Doctor of Ministry Educators within the context of educational assessment as a theoretical framework. Respondents were generally pleased with the competency of their faculties to teach theological reflection, but less pleased with competencies in teaching field research methods, despite the ATS expectation that final projects evince a research design. Directions for further research include discovering faculty perceptions of what constitutes adequate research design for final D.Min. projects and uncovering the methodological skill set from which faculty members teach. The gap between standards for D.Min. education and the perceived practice is also discussed.

Introduction

Since 1998, more than 8,100 ministers have been enrolled annually in Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) programs approved by The Association of Theological Schools (ATS).¹ Seminaries large and small and of every theological stripe offer D.Min. degrees.

In the small published literature about D.Min. education,² the only large-scale study of the programs (seventy-seven in all) approved by ATS was conducted in the 1980s and published in 1987 by Jackson Carroll and Barbara Wheeler.³ Carroll and Wheeler's analysis called into question several aspects of D.Min. education. Noting that most observers believe that the quality of programs varied dramatically, Carroll and Wheeler concluded that "the degree is not taken as seriously as the other activities of the theological school."⁴ Nevertheless, in the ensuing years, D.Min. programs have continued to proliferate in response to the professional education needs of pastors and the ministry needs of churches. In academic year 2000-2001, there were more than 100 D.Min. programs approved by ATS. Approximately half of the schools that offer the basic ministerial degree (M.Div.) also offer a D.Min.⁵

Problem statement

Seminaries invest resources in D.Min. programs because they perceive the enterprise to be consistent with their missions of teaching, research, and service. Ministers invest time and money in D.Min. education because they perceive that it will enhance their ministries. What level of quality do D.Min. programs exhibit? Quality is more than the exclusive concern of pastors who make decisions about the best D.Min. programs to meet their needs. Because D.Min. education is a form of professional education, D.Min. programs intend to impact the life of congregations by increasing the ministerial skills of pastors. Seminaries have a stake in the assessment of the quality of D.Min. programs as well as they seek to provide programs that are as effective as possible in meeting the needs of pastors and congregations. As a community of those concerned for accountability in theological education, all ATS schools participate in the creation and review of appropriate standards for D.Min. programs. They, too, have a direct stake in knowing more about the actual performance of D.Min. programs. Since the study of Carroll and Wheeler more than fifteen years ago, no published research has examined the quality of D.Min. programs.⁶ Sukhwant Bhatia's interesting research (2001) examined the program of Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) from the point of view of graduates of the program.⁷

This report sketches what directors of thirty-three D.Min. programs think about some dimensions of their programs. While not a comprehensive look at the landscape of D.Min. education—surely such an overall assessment is long overdue—the data presented here offer at least a glimpse of the current state of this distinctive form of professional education.

This report has four parts. First, it briefly discusses the value of assessment in theological education as a theoretical basis for pursuing research about program quality. Second, the report outlines the research design that produced the data discussed here. Third, the report analyzes the data in conversation with S.S. Bhatia's recent research and generally recognized expectations for D.Min. programs. Finally, the report suggests fruitful areas for further research.

Assessment in theological education

This section discusses assessment in theological education in order to provide a conceptual framework for what follows. Formal program assessment is commonplace in American education, having emerged in the 1960s as a requirement for schools receiving federal funding. As a form of accountability, assessment in education has been driven by two forces. First, government bodies have mandated program review in order to convince legislators and the general public that tax dollars are being used in accordance with legislative intent and that the tax paying public is getting "bang for its buck." Second,

regional accrediting bodies have embraced assessment as the methodology by which schools can document compliance with standards and, just as importantly, promote excellence in teaching and learning. To cite one example, “The Commission on Colleges expects institutions to dedicate themselves to enhancing the qualities of their programs and services within the context of their missions, resources and capacities, and creating an environment in which teaching, research, and learning occurs.”⁸ Robert K. Greenleaf called on leaders in organizations to strive for excellence because “with the present level of education and the extent of information sources, too many people judge our institutions as not meeting the standard of what is responsible and possible in their service ” even in good institutions.⁹

In the context of theological education, moreover, assessment should also be driven by the desire of theological schools to be responsible managers of the resources with which seminaries have been entrusted. Seminaries routinely employ auditors to review their business records. Program assessment, just as importantly, seeks to monitor how effective seminary programs are. In short, assessment is a form of stewardship, that “philosophy of life,” as T.A. Kantonen wrote in his classic study, “which determines not only religious activity in the narrow sense but also all of life’s orders: home, citizenship, business and industry, science, art, and education.” He continued: “Everything God has created has a meaning and a purpose based on His will. Physical health, mental capacities, time, opportunity, daily occupation, material possessions—all these must be viewed as talents which God has entrusted us to use according to His purpose.”¹⁰ Seminaries are accountable to accrediting bodies, boards of trustees, donors, and ultimately to God to be good stewards. Despite the need for accountability, S.S. Bhatia concludes that the evidence suggests that “[t]he only form of program evaluation employed by most theological institutions has been externally imposed evaluations for accreditation reviews.” He further suggests that seminaries shy away from formal assessment because of concerns about commonly used assessment methods, lack of trained personnel to conduct assessment, and a sort of intellectual agnosticism about the value of learning about the functioning of educational programs.¹¹

Formal assessment, however, aids several significant constituencies within a seminary. First, administrators gain a better understanding of the actual functioning of the program reviewed rather than relying on memory or anecdote. Second, faculty members may gain insight into ways that teaching, in all its forms, might be changed in the program reviewed in order to enhance learning. Third, assessment should contribute materially to student learning—the explicit *raison d’être* for educational programs. Far from being a purely mechanical counting activity, assessment seeks to address issues of *quality* in the context of a school’s self-chosen mission.¹² Finally, formal assessment provides seminary deans and presidents with accurate news (whether good or bad) needed for faithful communication with boards of trustees and other constituents. Without formal assessment it is extremely difficult to imagine

*The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Education in 2002:
What Program Directors Think*

how leaders of theological schools might know if their schools are fulfilling their missions of teaching, learning, research, and service.

Assessment in higher education has progressed from an emphasis on resources (providing minimums for staff credentials, buildings, libraries, and the like) through a focus on processes (documenting, for instance, that schools have policies and procedures in place for all aspects of the educational enterprise), to the current emphasis on outcomes (how resources and processes ultimately impact learners).¹³ Accrediting bodies, at least, want schools to demonstrate that resources and processes contribute to student learning. The form of assessment employed in this research centers on the process of teaching itself, specifically, the formal classroom activities undertaken by instructors in D.Min. education.¹⁴

Research design

This section describes the research design of this project. The research reported on here began with an invitation to the author from Christine Eaton Blair, then president of the Association of Doctor of Ministry Educators (ADME), to lead a workshop on doctoral projects at the April 2002 annual meeting of ADME in Fort Worth, Texas. The doctoral project is the last requirement for completion of the D.Min. degree. In conversation with Ms. Blair about the scope of the workshop, it became clear that collection of some data about D.Min. programs—via anonymous survey—would be a helpful way to begin conversations among D.Min. directors about common difficulties encountered in the management of doctoral projects. Because the doctoral project is a capstone to a student's entire course of learning, the author decided to include in the survey instrument some questions that addressed programs generally.¹⁵ The general questions asked directors to describe the sorts of methodological courses required of students before beginning their doctoral projects. Specifically, directors were asked to indicate if their programs offered mandatory courses in field research methods and theological reflection. Directors were also asked to assess the competence of their respective faculties in teaching field research methods and theological reflection courses in the D.Min. program. The precise wording of questions is reported in the tables in section three.

These questions were asked because of the distinctive shape of D.Min. education. As a second professional degree in ministry, the degree is not a research doctorate.¹⁶ At the same time, as a degree designed to enlarge the knowledge base of ministers and enhance skills for ministry, the ATS standards for the degree expect that social science methods be appropriately employed in the final project. The standards state:

The ministry project should demonstrate the candidate's ability to identify a specific theological topic in ministry, organize an effective research model, use appropriate resources, and evaluate the results,

and should reflect the candidate's depth of theological insight in relation to ministry.¹⁷

Drafts of the questionnaire were reviewed extensively by Ms. Blair and the author.¹⁸ The final questionnaire was mailed to all registrants for the 2002 ADME meeting, forty-eight in all, with instructions to return the completed questionnaires before the conference. Each director was instructed to respond anonymously. A total of thirty-three questionnaires were returned (69%). Given the total number of ATS approved D.Min. programs, the data reflect the views of approximately 30% of those responsible for the administration of current D.Min. programs in Canada and the United States. Data were stored and sorted in a *Microsoft Access* database. Explanatory comments and other free-text responses were transcribed. Preliminary data were shared in two sessions with directors at the ADME meeting.

Respondents directed programs located in Alabama, California, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Oklahoma, Ontario, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Australia. Respondents directed programs with enrollments ranging from twenty to 800.¹⁹ The median for student enrollment was seventy-five. Fifty percent of respondents directed programs with enrollments of between fifty and 170.

All research is subject to limitations. This research had an extremely limited scope. It asked a modest set of questions of directors of D.Min. programs only, not students or professors. Respondents are not a random sample, nor necessarily a representative sample of D.Min. directors. The data-gathering instrument was a printed questionnaire capable of assessing attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and demographics.²⁰ Thus, the data documents the perceptions of program directors. Nevertheless, the resulting data set provides an opportunity to view D.Min. education through the eyes of program directors—persons with clear investments in improving the quality of this form of education.

Results and analysis

This section reports and analyzes the data obtained from questionnaires. The first part of this section details and explores the data. The second part discusses the data in conversation with S.S. Bhatia's research on the D.Min. program at Dallas Theological Seminary. The third part places the data in the broader context of ATS expectations for D.Min. education.

Part 1

A set of questions in the questionnaire asked about courses on field research methods and theological reflection. Questions about "field research methods" were intended to get at the social science dimensions of D.Min.

*The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Education in 2002:
What Program Directors Think*

education. (Attention to such methodologies, by the way, is a growing concern of a number of practical theologians.)²¹ Table 1 summarizes responses.

Table 1: Courses on Research and Theological Reflection

Currently my program...	Yes	No
has a required course focusing primarily on field research methods.	24	9
actively teaches field research methods in several courses.	12	21
has at least one required course focusing on theological reflection.	26	7
actively teaches theological reflection in several courses.	25	8

Respondents indicated a clear preference for requiring courses dealing with the theological aspects of D.Min. education. 79% of respondents reported that their program has at least one required course dealing with theological reflection. Almost the same percentage (76%) reported that theological reflection was taught actively in several courses. By contrast, field research methods, respondents stated, are actively taught in several courses in 36% of the programs, though 73% have a required course focusing primarily on field research methods.

Another question asked respondents to rank the importance that they attached to various dimensions of doctoral projects for grading purposes: "When assessing (grading) projects in my program the top two dimensions are (select only two)..." Table 2 summarizes the responses.

Table 2: Top Two Dimensions When Assessing Projects

Research Design	22
Theological Reflection	19
Clarity of Writing	10
Other	5
Reporting on Data Collection	4
Data Analysis	3
Literature Review	2

Responses sorted by frequency

In the view of respondents, students should have both skill in theological reflection and the ability to construct an adequate research design for the final doctoral project. The most frequent response was research design (22 respon-

dents; 67%) and the second most frequent response was theological reflection (19 respondents; 58%). Clarity of writing was chosen by 30%.

Another question asked D.Min. directors to assess the competency of the faculty members with whom they work. Commenting about the abilities of one’s peers may be awkward; in this research all respondents offered their opinions to the question “Please rate your faculty’s competency” when teaching research methods, theological reflection, supervising students on final projects, and assessing the quality of doctoral projects. Table 3 summarizes responses.

Table 3: Perceptions of Faculty Competency

Please rate your faculty’s competency...	Outstanding	Adequate	Inadequate	Poor
Teaching field methods	8	18	7	0
Teaching theological reflection	21	11	1	0
Supervising students on final projects	7	22	3	0
Assessing final projects	10	20	2	0

In the opinion of respondents, faculty members do the best at teaching theological reflection (64% find their faculty outstanding at it; 33% find them adequate). D.Min. directors, when presented with this finding during workshops, found this result to be the most obvious of the entire questionnaire: they expected seminary professors to be adept at theological reflection. Respondents graded faculty members lower regarding their expertise at supervising students on final projects and assessing the final product. By far, the most common response in both cases was “adequate” (67% in the case of supervision, and 63% in the case of assessment).

As indicated in Table 3, respondents graded faculty members lowest in teaching research methods. Only 24% indicated that their faculty were outstanding, 33% thought them adequate, and 21% believed them to be inadequate in this area. In conversation with D.Min. directors, it was noted that many teaching D.Min. courses have formal background in various theological specialties, but no social science training at all.²² Swimming against the stream, one solitary director wrote the following comment: “We have an excellent instructor for qualitative research methods + design.”

The perception that faculty are not especially skilled in teaching research methods becomes even more troubling when linked to another question about the quality of doctoral projects. Respondents replied to the question, “In my view, the quality of projects would be most improved if students had better skills in. . . .” Respondents were asked to select only one area. Table 4 summarizes responses.

*The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Education in 2002:
What Program Directors Think*

Table 4: Projects Would Be Improved Most by Better Skills in

Research Design	11
Theological Reflection	5
Clarity of Writing	5
Reporting on Data Collection	1
Data Analysis	3
Literature Review	0

Responses sorted by frequency

The most common answer was research design, with one-third of respondents choosing this response.²³ Thus, directors indicated that the largest improvement in the quality of final projects would be obtained by upgrading the area of the program in which they adjudged professors to have the weakest skills.

Part 2

The only recent in-depth examination of a D.Min. program was conducted by Sukhwant Bhatia, who explored alumni perceptions of the program of DTS. While the research reported here explores the perceptions of D.Min. directors, Bhatia's work looks through the eyes of former students. Bhatia asked respondents several questions bearing on research methods and theological reflection. Bhatia's question about "sociological theory" is the closest parallel to the questions this author asked about research methods. Among Bhatia's respondents, 13% stated that the Dallas program gave "much emphasis" to sociological theory; 36% said the program gave "some emphasis" to sociological theory. Regarding pastoral or practical theology, in contrast, 68% said the program gave "much emphasis."²⁴ Only 8% of his respondents reported that they placed "great value" on the sociological aspect of their D.Min. program, while 75% accorded "great value" to pastoral or practical theological aspect of their program.²⁵ Seen from the perspective of DTS alumni, the DTS program emphasized pastoral theology and alumni valued this aspect of the program.

Part 3

This section concludes with a discussion of how the data relate to the ATS standards for D.Min. education. Clearly, the standards posit that D.Min. education promotes ministerial excellence from an explicitly theological viewpoint. The standards also value theory-rich practice. One of the purposes of the degree is: "The formulation of a comprehensive and critical understanding of ministry in which theory and practice interactively inform and enhance each other..."²⁶ The data presented here suggest that D.Min. directors are generally pleased with the ability of their programs to deliver courses that enhance critical theological thinking.

At the same time, the data point to the problematic nature of social science methodologies as they inform ministerial analysis and practice. The standard requires that final projects have an appropriate research design, address a ministry problem, and rise above purely local concerns. Thus, projects need to have elements of transferability for other ministry settings. The standard states that a project: “should be of sufficient quality that it contributes to the practice of ministry as judged by professional standards and has the potential for application in other contexts of ministry.”²⁷ The requirement for a research design in D.Min. projects echoes fundamental concerns of the social sciences that research about human beings be conducted with rigor and a fair dose of disinterest. Rigor is demonstrated in a variety of ways, including an appeal to a coherent conceptual framework and the use of various control measures for the gathering and analysis of data.²⁸ D.Min. research about preaching, for instance, may appeal to a theory of oral communication and exercise caution in creating and administering feedback instruments so as not to lead respondents to respond in ways pleasing to the researcher. While some balk at embracing social science techniques in the context of D.Min. education,²⁹ the ATS standard presupposes the value of a coherent research design that assists in discovering ministerial practices that may have merit in other ministerial settings. This is action-research methodology flying under another flag. Recent writing on social science distances itself from older positivist views and embraces both quantitative measures and qualitative ones undergirded by a humanistic tradition. One social scientist recently wrote, “Ethics is part of method in science, just as it is in medicine or business, or any other part of life.”³⁰

To the extent that D.Min. programs value social science rigor, the data reported on here suggest that many programs have vast room for improvement. The apparent gap between the ATS expectation for rigor in research design for final projects and the perceived quality of social-science dimensions in D.Min. programs is large. Because of this fact, one may wonder about the utility of a standard that is either ignored or whose achievement is unlikely.

Further research on the quality of D.Min. programs

The approach used in this research yielded a glimpse at the quality of D.Min. programs through the eyes of thirty-three D.Min. directors. The respondents were a non-random sample; their views should not necessarily be considered representative. A comprehensive assessment of D.Min. education on the scale of Carroll and Wheeler’s research in the 1980s would serve all stakeholders in D.Min. education. The steering committee of ADME is aware of this need and has some funds available to underwrite research. Given the growth in D.Min. education since the 1980s, a truly comprehensive assessment will require considerable money, time, and expertise. In the author’s view, such an assessment would be beneficial to all involved in theological education in North America.

*The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Education in 2002:
What Program Directors Think*

The data presented here suggest that D.Min. faculties are not expert at teaching appropriate research methods. A number of fruitful lines for further research present themselves based on this finding. Regarding faculty perceptions of methodology and research design, one wonders: what sort(s) of research methods do faculty members consider appropriate to D.Min. research? How do faculty members think that research methods and a theological viewpoint come together in a research design? One candidate for such a suitable methodology, applicable for projects that make interventions in the life of a congregation, is the new specialty of congregational studies.³¹

At an even more basic level, one also wonders about the ability of seminary faculty members to teach social science research methods at an appropriately advanced level.³² Those concerned for the quality of D.Min. programs would benefit from knowing the answers to questions such as: what formal credentials do those teaching in D.Min. programs have in research methods? What steps do schools with D.Min. programs take to upgrade the skills of professors in this area, should requisite skills be lacking? More intriguingly, is there a perceptible difference in quality between programs whose faculty have social science competencies and those that do not?

Summary

Assessment in theological education is a form of Christian stewardship. The research reported here indicates that directors of D.Min. programs perceive theological reflection to be a strength of their teaching faculties, while ability to teach suitable research methods is a weakness. Of all choices available to improve doctoral projects, respondents most frequently selected research design as the focus for improvement. Further research about faculty skills in social science methodology and their opinions of its benefits for D.Min. research would assist stake holders in improving the quality of D.Min. education.

Timothy D. Lincoln is director of the David L. and Jane Stitt Library and director of institutional effectiveness at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas. He has been involved in Doctor of Ministry education since 1994 as a librarian, instructor, researcher, and consultant.

ENDNOTES

1. ATS Annual Data Table 2.10 for the academic year 2002-2003 (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada) at <www.ats.edu>. In 1998, 8,191 were enrolled; by 2002, enrollment had grown to 8,584.
2. The paucity of published literature addressing D.Min. education was noted most recently by Sukhwant Singh Bhatia in his dissertation *Christian Higher Education at Dallas Theological Seminary: An Assessment of Doctor of Ministry Programs* (2001, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Texas), p. 48. For his review of the literature, see *Christian Higher Education*, pp. 33-51.

3. Jackson W. Carroll and Barbara G. Wheeler. *A Study of Doctor of Ministry Programs*. Hartford CT: Auburn Theological Seminary and Hartford Seminary's Center for Social and Religious Research, 1987. For a distillation of the research, see Jackson W. Carroll and Barbara G. Wheeler, "Doctor of Ministry Program: History, Summary of Findings and Recommendations," *Theological Education* vol. 23 no. 2 (Spring 1987).
4. Carroll and Wheeler, 282.
5. *ATS Fact Book*, 22.
6. Indeed, Bhatia's review of literature assessing D.Min. programs (p. 48) found only two other unpublished dissertations addressing D.Min. programs, William Hugh Tucker, *Doctor of Ministry: Non-Traditional Models of Advanced In-Service Professional Education*, (1977, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan) and Robert George Duffett, *The History and Development of the Doctor of Ministry Degree at the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools 1957-1985* (1986, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin).
7. A total of 130 responded to Bhatia's questionnaire, which generated a wealth of data about alumni perceptions of the value of various components of Dallas' program.
8. *Principles of Accreditation* approved in 1999 by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, p. 2 as downloaded on May 14, 2003 from: <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/Proposed%20Principles%20of%20Accreditation.pdf>.
9. Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 55.
10. T.A. Kantonen, *A Theology for Christian Stewardship* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 36. Early Christians applied existing words associated with managing estates to the responsibility of Christians to use possessions in ways that show commitment to Jesus Christ.
11. Bhatia, p. 30.
12. In the author's experience, two of the chief misconceptions about assessment in seminary contexts are the notions that (1) assessment is merely a tedious inventory exercise (bean counting) and (2) assessment, therefore, has nothing to do with the actual mission and values of any given school.
13. John Folger and J. Harris, *Assessment in Accreditation* (Atlanta: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1989) and Trudy Banta and Associates, *Making a Difference: Outcomes of a Decade of Assessment in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).
14. The classroom was one of the three "locations" of the life of a theological teacher used as an organizing principle in the recent collection of essays, L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, eds. *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).
15. The author will report on other aspects of the data elsewhere. See his "Reviewing Faculty Competency and Educational Outcomes: The Case of Doctor of Ministry Education," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7, No. 1 (2004): 13-19.
17. D.Min. Degree Standard F.3.1.3.1. Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, "Standards of Accreditation" (adopted at the 1996 ATS Biennial Meeting), *Bulletin* 45 part 1 (2002). For examples of social science methodologies for D.Min. project design, see William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (3rd ed., Chicago: Exploration Press, 2000).
18. The author wishes to thank Kristine Toma, Archivist and Records Manager, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, for her assistance in designing the survey form.
19. One respondent indicated that he or she was leading a brand new program, which had not yet begun to enroll students.

*The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Education in 2002:
What Program Directors Think*

20. According to Trevor M. Spunt, questionnaires contain no more than these four types of questions. See *Guide to Customer Surveys* (New York: The Customer Service Group, 1999), pp. 15-20.
21. This attention is evident in such Dutch practical theologians as Gerben Heitink (see his *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains Manual for Practical Theology*, English trans. Reinder Bruinsma, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) and Americans such as James W. Fowler (see his "Practical Theology and the Social Sciences" in *Practical Theology—International Perspectives*, eds. Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes A. Van der Ven, New York: Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 291-305). For a recent example of the fruitfulness of approaches that value close observation in conjunction with theological reflection, see *Transforming The City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry*, eds. Eldwin Villafaña, Bruce W. Jackson, Robert A. Evans, and Alice Framer Evans (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).
22. The comments of program directors echo the observation that "few professors involved in D.Min. programs have experienced a qualitative form of research." William R. Myers and Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Can One Be Faithful While Teaching Research Methods to D.Min. Students?," *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry* 12 (1990): 25.
23. Several respondents did not answer this question, perhaps because it was printed directly beneath another question and was posed succinctly as a fill-in-the-blank question.
24. Bhatia, table 18, Extent of Emphasis on Various Aspects of the D.Min. Program at DTS, p. 91.
25. Bhatia, table 19, Value to DTS D.Min. Alumni of the Extent of Emphasis on Various Aspects of the D.Min. Program at DTS, p. 93
26. "Standards of Accreditation," D.Min. Degree Standard F.3.1.1.2.
27. "Standards of Accreditation", D.Min. Degree Standard F.3.1.3.
28. Discussions of validity and reliability are part of all social science texts. See, for instance, H. Russell Bernard, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), pp. 46-52.
29. See William R. Myers and Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Can One Be Faithful While Teaching Research Methods to D.Min. Students?," *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry* 12 (1990): 15-29.
30. H. Russell Bernard, p. 21.
31. See, for instance, Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).
32. This concern, of course, is part of the neuralgic over-arching question about what qualifies as "doctoral level" work in a second professional degree.

Weaving Garments of Grace: En-gendering a Theology of the Call to Ordained Ministry for Women Today

Joy Ann McDougall
Candler School of Theology

ABSTRACT: This essay argues that Protestant denominations that currently ordain women need to reform their “culture of the call” in order to affirm women’s distinctive vocations and gifts for ordained ministry. First, I explore the institutional barriers and interior predicaments that many women experience in authoring and being authorized in their calls. Second, I appeal to a Reformed feminist doctrine of sin in order to interpret these struggles as a “gendered bondage of sin,” in which women fall prey to gender roles and perceptions of their self-identity that distort their true graced identities. I invoke the language of sin in order to encourage women to re-envision their struggles as a process of new creation—a breaking free from sin and a claiming of God’s gifts of grace. At the same time, I call upon the language of sin as prophetic discourse in order to urge church leaders and theological schools to redress their gendered assumptions and practices that impede women’s passage into ordained ministry. The essay concludes with three practical theological strategies for educators, denominational officials, and congregations to undertake so as to weave the “garments of grace” that will foster women’s callings to ministry.

Listening to women’s voices¹

On a May evening over a year ago, I gathered eight Master of Divinity students together with a few faculty colleagues in order to give the students an opportunity to discuss their experiences in the ordination process. Admittedly, this was not your average group of seminarians. They came mostly from mainline Protestant denominations, United Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian churches, as well as a couple from the Roman Catholic tradition, but they were younger than many seminarians are today—ranging in age from twenty-three to twenty-eight. What set this group even further apart was that they were all high academic achievers. As undergraduates each had excelled at highly competitive liberal arts colleges and universities—Duke, Emory, the Universities of Virginia and Villanova, the College of Wooster, Wellesley and Calvin Colleges. They were at the top of their class at the Candler School of Theology as well, each earning a G.P.A. of 3.7 or better. Beyond their academic achievements, these students were passionately engaged in parish ministry. They ran youth groups and a singles ministry, taught adult formation and religious education classes, and worked with the disabled and the homeless.

Weaving Garments of Grace: En-gendering a Theology of the Call to Ordained Ministry for Women Today

All was not well, however. All eight had experienced profound disappointments and crises of confidence in the ordination process. Some of the students were stranded at the early stages, halted by a lack of support either from their local congregations or from denominational boards who had deferred them in the process and told them to wait another year. Others in the group had put themselves on hold, hesitating to approach denominational officials until receiving the inner assurance and some external confirmation about their calls to ministry. As you may have guessed by now, all eight were women.

I had gathered this group together hardly by accident. During my first three years of teaching systematic theology at Candler School of Theology, I had become privy to these young women's inner struggles and professional rebuffs in authoring and being authorized in their calls to ministry, and I was troubled, deeply troubled, by why they were being deterred from seeking ordination by denominational officials, parents, and local pastors, and indeed by their own personal ambivalence about ordination. Each had excelled in my theology classes. Each had impressed me with her theological imagination, her passion for social justice, and her deep commitment to the church. Most of all, I spied in each of these women what they were struggling to recognize in themselves—a clear vocation for ordained ministry.

As our group gathered that night, we listened first to these young women's voices: "It took my district superintendent two years to find me a mentor in the process. He kept saying 'we just don't know where to fit you in.'" "Neither my family nor my church questioned me any further about deciding to go to seminary because I was planning on getting a Ph.D. to teach and not becoming a pastor." "I was pretty nervous when I went before the board for my orals. They told me afterwards that I wasn't ready and would have to wait a year before I could go up again for probationary membership. I couldn't believe it; I have been serving in leadership positions in my church since I was fifteen."²

Much of what I heard that night frustrated me, but I was not all that surprised that ordination was not proving to be the sure rite of passage for these talented young women that I had seen some less-qualified men enjoy. It did stun me, however, when each, in turn, began to voice her self-doubts, ambivalence, and even guilt about her call to ordained ministry: "Did I really want to set myself apart within my church community?" "I was petrified about standing in the pulpit for the first time to preach. I didn't think I could do it." "I think I felt guilty about wanting to be a priest, as if I thought that I was somehow better than others or spiritually elite."

My mind flashed back to these women's voices a few months later when I read an article on the current crisis of pastoral leadership by Gregory and Susan Pendleton Jones in *The Christian Century*.³ The article diagnosed, in no uncertain terms, the "downward spiral" in pastoral leadership: the decline in the academic quality of students entering seminary, the weak catechesis of candidates for ministry, and the lack of "pastoral imagination" among church leaders in addressing the pressing challenges of our day.⁴ The Jones's analysis was

multifaceted and yet wide-sweeping. The authors attributed the crisis to failures on both the churches' and theological schools' parts—failures, for example, in maintaining high professional standards for the ministry and in providing adequate formation and nurture of Christian living among candidates for the ministry. To address the crisis, the authors urged congregations, church leaders, and theological educators alike “to re-claim ‘the culture of the call.’” They charged all involved “to lift up a compelling vision of ministry as vocation” and to nurture ministry candidates in the faithful practices that are needed for such “a demanding vocation that is centered on the call to costly discipleship.”⁵

Although I found myself agreeing with many aspects of the Jones's diagnosis, *none* of it fit these women. These were some of the most gifted candidates for the ministry that one could hope for. All eight had been raised in the church and were shaped in profound ways by their respective faith traditions. Each had been deeply engaged in parish ministry and social outreach programs since adolescence. In short, these *were* the passionate and learned clergy the authors were calling for. I was puzzled and, I have to admit, incensed. Did we really need to raise the academic or the spiritual bar higher for these women? Did they truly lack faithful practices or, for that matter, the pastoral imagination to provide strong church leadership? What had gone wrong? Why were these young women's gifts for ministry being neither recognized nor readily fostered by our denominations and seminaries? Moreover, why did the Jones's analysis miss the mark in identifying the roots of these women's vocational struggles?

Obviously there are many obstacles, institutional and individual, sociological as well as theological, all of which can stand in the way of women authoring and being authorized in their calls to ordained ministry. Nonetheless, reading the Jones's analysis in light of the anecdotal evidence of my young women students provoked some disquieting questions. Here are just a few: Why is the issue of gender largely absent from contemporary discussions about the crisis of pastoral leadership? This seems especially surprising, since most sociologists and theological educators agree that women's entry into the ordained ministry represents the most significant transformation in pastoral leadership in the twentieth century, if not since the Reformation. Surely discussion about how gender intersects with genuine concerns over the crisis in pastoral leadership merits deeper theological as well as sociological consideration.

Further, what theologies of ministry are operative in such efforts to reclaim a culture of the call? Are specific models of ministry and pastoral authority, and certain practices of spiritual formation and vocational discernment, being advanced and others turned aside? Might certain aspects of our contemporary culture of the call contribute to women's ambivalence or, even worse, silence their calls to ministry? If so, how might the church and theological schools learn to recognize and redress these gender troubles as to assure women's safe passage into ordained ministry?

This essay addresses one of these unexplored theological challenges concerning gender and the vocation to ordained ministry confronting us today: how

Weaving Garments of Grace: En-gendering a Theology of the Call to Ordained Ministry for Women Today

might church institutions and theological schools need to *re-form* our culture of call so as to better nurture women's theological voices and pastoral gifts for the vocation of for ordained ministry? In raising this question, a couple of caveats about the scope of my proposals and my vantage point as a white Protestant theologian are due at the outset. First, although I utilize research on women in ministry that represents a cross-section of diverse ethnic, racial, and denominational backgrounds, I do not directly address the distinctive challenges that African-American, Hispanic, and other ethnic minority women experience in their calls to ordained ministry. Because both race and class intersect with gender dynamics in any cultural context, my proposals to en-gender the culture of the call need to be brought into critical conversation with efforts by womanist, *mujerista*, and Asian-American theologians to inculturate theologies of the call for women in their faith communities.

Second, this essay does not engage the theological debate about women's ordination, nor do I address the different ecclesial realities of those faith traditions that do not currently ordain women.⁶ Rather, my proposals to reform the culture of the call are directed at those Protestant denominations which presently affirm women's ordination, and how they may more fully live out their vision of women's pastoral leadership they embraced more than a generation ago. Having listened carefully to my women students' private and public struggles with authoring and being authorized in their calls to ministry, I am convinced that Protestant churches need to develop theologies of the vocation to ministry that are better suited to women's lives. On the one hand, we need to better understand the systemic issues that underlie women's ambivalence about their calls to ordained ministry. On the other, we need to offer women robust visions of pastoral authority and of ministry that will actively affirm and nurture their distinctive calls. In short, we need to en-gender our theologies of call—what I describe in poetic terms as weaving “garments of grace”—if we are to meet the challenge of lifting up a compelling vision of ministry for women seeking ordination today.⁷

In this essay, I begin this task of en-gendering a theology of the call for women to ordained ministry by framing some of the interlocking sociological and psychological dimensions of women's ambivalence and self-doubts about ordained ministry. I do not offer a comprehensive genealogical account of the challenges that face women contemplating their calls to ordained ministry. The aims of my analysis are more limited: first, to expose the prevailing institutional gender barriers that can delay or dissuade many women from pursuing their calls; and second, to illuminate the interior predicaments that many women experience due to conflicts between their gender-role socialization and their stereotypical images of the pastorate and priesthood. To trade on the metaphors I invoked earlier, I seek to investigate what hinders women from “authoring” their calls and from being “authorized” by denominational officials, other clergy, and their own congregations in their calls.

I turn, next, to offer a distinctly *theological* perspective on women's self-doubts, ambivalence, and false guilt about authoring their calls to ordained

ministry. Here, I appeal to a Reformed feminist doctrine of sin in order to interpret these interior predicaments as a gendered bondage of sin, in which women fall prey to false “performative scripts” (their own and those of others) of their vocational identity. Building on the work of feminist theologian Serene Jones, I use the term “performative script” to describe those gender roles and I invoked earlier, understandings of their self-identity prescribed to women by their given culture.⁸ Such performative scripts become a gendered bondage of sin when they confine women to gender roles not of their own choosing—roles that ultimately distort their true graced identity.

Invoking the doctrine of sin might seem odd, if not altogether out of place, in the context of a theology of vocation to ordained ministry. One expects words about grace, and perhaps wishes to hear a few more in the context of affirming women’s calls to ministry. Indeed, I raise the specter of sin certainly not to further burden women struggling with their calls to ordained ministry, but just the opposite: I risk invoking the language of sin in order to encourage women to re-envision their struggles as a process of new creation—a breaking free from sin and a claiming of God’s gifts of grace. Put differently, I seek to inspire and empower women to break free from these false scripts of their vocational identity in order to author their distinctive calls to ordained ministry. At the same time, I invoke the language of sin as a prophetic discourse in order to urge church leaders and theological educators alike to redress their gendered assumptions and practices that impede women’s smooth passage into ministry.

In the final part of this essay, I propose three steps toward *en-gendering* a theology of the call to ordained ministry for women today. These are practical theological strategies for theological educators, denominational leaders, and congregations to undertake together in order to better support women in the vocation of ministry. With each of these proposals, I seek to weave the garments of grace that will authorize women’s callings to ordained ministry and nurture their gifts for pastoral leadership in the church.

A house divided against itself: women’s multivalent struggles with the call to ordained ministry

As I pored over the recent literature on women in the ministry, I quickly discovered that my young women students’ struggles with their calls were hardly anomalous. In fact, my anecdotal evidence closely matched the findings of statistics and interviews that had been gathered from women clergy since the mid-1970s, when the number of women entering seminary began to rise dramatically. For example, the 1982 programmatic study *Women of the Cloth* reports that women often seek ordination later in life, and that their decisions usually take longer than those of men.⁹ Not only do many women decide to go to seminary later than their male counterparts, but also a smaller percentage of them are actively engaged in the ordination process when they enter seminary. The research reveals that women often delay their decisions to seek ordination because of their

Weaving Garments of Grace: En-gendering a Theology of the Call to Ordained Ministry for Women Today

multiple commitments to family, child rearing, and work, and also because they receive less encouragement early on from parents and pastors to pursue their callings. When women finally do seek ordination, they often encounter, once again, the reluctance or not-so-subtle resistance of their families, pastors, and local church boards.

The 1998 study *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*, as well as the most recent 2002 Pulpit & Pew Research Report, "Women's Path into Ministry: Six Major Studies," also have mixed news to report.¹⁰ The good news is that by the mid-1980s, many seminaries had reached an equal ratio of women and men in their student bodies, and the percentage of women entering seminary who were seeking ordination had also increased significantly. On the other hand, the sharp rise in the number of women actually entering ordained ministry had significantly slowed down in the 1990s, and the overall proportion of women in ministry still lagged far behind that of men at approximately fifteen percent in mainline Protestant denominations.¹¹ Even more troubling was the news that gender inequities and gender-segregation practices prevailed throughout the clergy placement process.¹² Not only are there clear salary differentials between men and women clergy in comparable positions, but most denominations cluster women clergy even in their second and subsequent placements at lower level clergy positions—either as assistant pastors or as solo pastors in isolated or declining parishes; only a token few are admitted into the senior ranks of pastoral leadership. As women regularly hit this stained glass ceiling, they are cycling out of parish ministry into alternative careers faster and at a significantly higher rate than their male colleagues.

These studies also alert us to the fact that recent women candidates for ministry are often caught off-guard by such perduring gender inequities in the church. Unlike their predecessors, these women entered seminary not as pioneers focused on changing a sexist church, but as equal partners in ministry expecting that such gender grievances had long since been redressed. When they encounter various forms of gender discrimination in their churches, many women find themselves blind-sided and ill-prepared. They tend to interpret their difficulties as personal failures rather than recognizing them as part of systemic problems, and therefore, they often try to handle the situations alone rather than seeking either institutional remedies or the support of others.¹³

Let us shift our gaze for a moment from these systemic issues that can hamper women's smooth passage into ministry, and direct our attention to the interior predicaments that many women experience in authoring their calls. Here, recent pastoral care literature on women's gender-role socialization and identity-formation comes to our aid.¹⁴ Since the mid-1970s, both developmental psychologists and pastoral theologians have alerted us to the way in which women are gender-socialized from infancy into adulthood into assuming the roles of primary caregiver and nurturer of relationships in their families and in their larger communities. Women's self-identity is often defined in terms of nurturing their economy of relationships with others and by a culture that raises women "to

consider the needs of others, to take care of men, and to care for children.”¹⁵ In other words, women inherit certain normative scripts about their gender identity, for example, performative scripts that valorize women’s capacities for empathy with others or for peacemaking and deter them from self-assertion and from assuming public roles of authority.¹⁶

Although such gender-role socialization to relationality brings both personal satisfaction and communal benefits, it also bequeaths to women an acute dilemma: in order to maintain and nurture their economy of relationships, women must often compromise or even sacrifice their own identity-formation by silencing their needs, desires, and dreams in favor of others. This interior dilemma is further intensified by what pastoral theologian Brita Gill-Austern describes as women’s “unholy trinity of self-abnegation, self-doubt, and false guilt.”¹⁷ Women often suffer from low self-esteem and harbor the nagging feeling of not doing enough in caring for others. These ill feelings eat away at the personal agency women need for self-care and self-determination, and feed, instead, into unhealthy patterns of self-sacrifice and self-denial.

If we link women’s socialized scripts toward empathy and relationality with their stereotypical images of pastoral authority, it becomes more apparent why many women struggle in authoring and being authorized in their calls. Recall that women (as do men) often associate the office of ordained ministry with being called out and set apart from their communities of faith in order to assume a position of spiritual or moral authority. Given their gender socialization as the primary caretaker and nurturer of relationships, women considering ordained ministry do not always easily identify with, or claim, such roles of authority within their communities of faith.¹⁸ They often experience, instead, a conflict between either their own or others’ gender and professional expectations, a role conflict these women must resolve in order to claim their calls to ministry. The authors of *Women of the Cloth* alerted churches early on to these extra hurdles in women’s socialization to pastoral ministry: “. . . a part of socialization into the status of ordained ministry involves having to come to terms with their own ambivalence about occupying two statuses that have traditionally been kept separate. How is she to relate to others in this or that situation? Primarily as a woman? Or primarily as a minister? Or if she has no ambivalence herself, she will have to learn how to deal with the ambivalence of others toward her.”¹⁹

Negotiating these socialized images of herself as a woman (perhaps also as a wife and mother) with those of pastor or priest can dissuade or significantly delay women from saying yes to their calls to ordained ministry. To trade on a domestic metaphor, women discerning their calls to ordination become like a house divided against itself. Women often must tear down their internalized images of womanhood and of the pastorate and priesthood, and then build new images in order to license themselves to seek ordination. Only when they succeed at putting this interior household back in order do women consider approaching denominational officials and licensing boards with their intentions. Those who do so know they may well pay a high price for disrupting others’ gender

expectations and their stereotypical images of the pastor or priest. On this, the recent studies of women in ministry speak with one sobering voice: clergywomen not only suffer inequities in their salaries and opportunities for professional advancement, but they report greater pressures and added stress on their personal lives than their male counterparts in the ministry. Many clergywomen experience acute “role strain” or “role overload” in trying to function and conform to the conflicting expectations of their supervisors and colleagues, the laity in their congregations, and their families.²⁰

Falling into the gendered bondage of sin

Even as we expose these cultural and psychological gender dynamics involved in women’s struggles with their calls to ordained ministry, we can use a distinctively theological lens to re-frame this situation. To that end, I propose that a Reformed feminist analysis of sin can be put to surprising service. Ever since the pioneering study of Valerie Saiving in 1960, Protestant feminist theologians have argued that the classical notion of sin as pride—in Paul’s terms, being boastful or puffed up in one’s faith—is ill-suited to women’s experienced realities.²¹ Sin defined as the rebellious will (or in modern terms as the self-inflated ego) assumes and universalizes a kind of self-possession and agency that many women do not enjoy. To understand women’s sin, one should better turn to pride’s mirror-image or, more precisely, to pride’s underside: those unhealthy forms of self-denial and passivity that have been alternatively described as “triviality,” “hiding,” “self-loss,” or sloth.²² In the terms I introduced earlier, women’s sin often manifests itself not as narcissism or domination over others, but as a silencing of the self and subjugation to the desires, dreams, and will of others.

In her recent work, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, Serene Jones deepens this classic feminist analysis of sin by refracting it through her Reformed tradition’s dialectic of sin and grace. She appeals, in particular, to Calvin’s root definition of sin as unfaithfulness in order to interpret women’s dilemma of self-dissolution and self-denial, their loss of identity and agency. Women fall into a gendered bondage of sin, a state of profound unfreedom, whenever they perform or fall prey to “fragmented” or “false” scripts of their identity. Jones explains: “To be a fragmented self is, [one] who knows neither the promise of agency nor the hope of just relation; . . . this state is one of false identity, in which the unbounded self is exhausted by relations of oppression.”²³ Such scripts, she cautions us, are not simply of women’s making; they are inherited, that is, encouraged or imputed to them, by others.²⁴

Jones analyzes these fragmented or false self-identities in the classical theological terms of sin—as “grace denied.”²⁵ Taking on these false scripts signifies at once a lack of trust in God’s promises and a lack of faith in oneself. Jones blunts neither the gravity of women’s fall into sin nor its fruits. Trading on Calvin’s metaphors of despoilment, she describes sin’s effects in devastating

terms as a plundering of the self's integrity. Sin unravels women's true identity as women are stripped of the "envelope of God's grace," the "skin" that holds them together.²⁶ Here, sin's plundering of the self signifies women's dissolution in their economy of relationships to others and by various structures of oppression, as well as women's abdication of personal agency, public roles, and responsibilities.

Jones's interpretation of sin as "grace denied" contributes two potent Reformed theological insights to a contemporary feminist doctrine of sin. First, she reminds us that a woman can only grasp the true nature of sin from the vantage point of received grace and through the eyes of faith. "As an utterly grace-dependent concept," Jones explains, "sin can never be understood apart from a simultaneous affirmation of the promised grace that contradicts it."²⁷ Jones reminds us here of a liberating insight: a woman can only recognize sin when she sees through it, and declares the false script that imprisons her to be a distortion—even more, a lie—about her true graced identity. At that point, she gains not only a vision of her true identity, but also the hope and the passion to realize it.

This conclusion points directly to a second Reformed insight for a feminist doctrine of sin. The practical aim of the doctrine is not to tear the believer down, but rather to build up and nurture her faith. Following Calvin, Jones reminds us here that "sin-talk" has a "*rhetorical function*" as "a tool of faith's pedagogy"; "Knowledge of sin should teach us how to strengthen our faith; it should instruct us in love of God, prompting us to strengthen our faith."²⁸ If we apply this insight to our feminist analysis of sin, it suggests that the language of sin should actually nurture a woman's awareness of her true graced identity. A feminist doctrine of sin should help every woman discover that her gendered bondage of sin is not irredeemable and should call her forth from its imprisonment into faith's freedom.

Although Jones does not herself apply this Reformed feminist doctrine of sin to the dilemmas of women authoring and being authorized in their calls to ordained ministry, I propose that we can do so powerfully here. How might we link the two? If we consider the notion of vocation or one's calling in theological terms, we might define it quite simply as a call to oneself—as a claiming of one's true graced identity. Rowan Williams formulates this basic theological truth well when he states that "discovering one's vocation has to do with discovering the person one was created to be—the freedom of that unique identity, that utterly distinct name which God has been calling out to an individual from the moment of his or her creation."²⁹ This is not to suggest that one's vocation is a fixed reality set in stone, but rather to insist that finding one's vocation means discovering that distinctive path of flourishing in life for the fullness of one's gifts of grace.

If we draw this notion of vocation together with our feminist analysis of sin, women's struggles to author and to be authorized in their calls to ordained ministry are cast in a different light; these struggles appear as a kind of falling into sin. Women's self-doubts, trivialization, and hiding of their distinctive gifts for ministry appear at once as a denial of grace and a denial of true identity. Recalling Jones's metaphors, falling into sin in this particular situation means either falling

Weaving Garments of Grace: En-gendering a Theology of the Call to Ordained Ministry for Women Today

prey to or else being bound by others' false scripts of one's gender roles and vocational identity. By imputing to women self-doubt and false guilt, such false scripts sap women's agency and blind them to the possibility of assuming leadership positions in the church. Falling into this gendered bondage of sin strips a woman of her distinctive gifts for ministry and threatens to unravel her true vocational identity. Indeed, this gendered bondage of sin may exercise such a stranglehold on woman's spiritual imagination that it utterly extinguishes her calling to ordained ministry.

Now I have to admit that linking sin to women's struggles with their calls to ministry could easily become a dangerous liaison. Why associate women's personal ambivalence, self-doubts, and false guilt about seeking ordination with a denial of God's bountiful grace? Would not the mention of sin in this context threaten to weigh women down even further and perpetuate a cycle of self-blame? Moreover, might such an appeal to the doctrine of sin personalize women's struggles with their calls to ministry in such a way that we avert our gaze from the structural inequities that trouble our denominations, our local churches, and theological schools? In short, would this theological move relieve ecclesial and educational institutions of their responsibility to redress these systemic gender troubles? Indeed, these are powerful objections and they must be of vital concern, especially because sin-talk has too often functioned destructively in women's lives, dashed their most cherished hopes, and plunged them into passivity. The language of sin always bears this moral ambiguity for women, for it so easily becomes a rhetoric that alienates rather than inspires women to new life.³⁰

Although sin-talk can serve women poorly, I nonetheless risk invoking the language of sin in order to persuade women to engage their institutional and internalized struggles with their calls to ministry as a process of new creation—a breaking free from sin and a claiming of God's gifts of grace. Recalling the Reformed dialectic of sin and grace, I invoke the doctrine of sin within the midst of an even more robust theology of grace, one that affirms wholeheartedly women's vocations to ordained ministry and seeks to nurture women's faith in their graced identities. From within this framework, I risk the language of sin in order to expose women's false vocational and gender scripts as forms of unfaithfulness or grace denied. I do so neither to fault women nor to cement them further into passivity and self-doubts. I seek the very opposite: to inspire women to *contest* their and others' false scripts about their graced identity, and to break free of them so as to claim their vocation to ordained ministry.

At the same time that I invoke the doctrine of sin as a word of inspiration for women discerning their calls, I also see this move as only half of the pressing theological task today. We need the doctrine of sin just as much to serve as a prophetic word that will persuade church leaders and theological schools to remedy both their gendered assumptions and institutional structures that impede women's safe path into ministry. The doctrine of sin pronounces a clear word of judgment on those hidden gender segregation practices and gender inequities in our institutions as themselves unfaithful to God's wide and gracious

purposes. They too are grace denied. Here again such a denunciation of sinful structures should not drive us into despair, but rather inspire churches to take up the urgent task ahead of en-gendering a culture of the call that fosters women in the ministry today.

Weaving new garments of grace: en-gendering a theology of the call for women today

How might theological educators and church leaders, clergy and laity alike, offer a robust theology of grace for women seeking ordination today? Can we redress the systemic gender troubles that women candidates for ministry confront today and simultaneously attend to the internalized vocational dilemmas that can hold women back in the ordination process? In closing, let me suggest three steps that will take us on the way toward en-gendering a theology of the call for women today.

The first significant step is to *re-dress* some of the images and dominant narratives that we use to describe God's call to ordained ministry. As Rebecca Chopp has pointed out in her study of women in theological education, women are already composing new narratives of personal and social flourishing for themselves at seminary because they realize that women's narratives in ministry have long been missing (or worse, falsified) within the church's larger stories.³¹ Through these narratives, women seek to inscribe themselves imaginatively into the vocation of ordained ministry and into new roles of church leadership. Here, theological educators, pastors, and church leaders can actively support women in this endeavor by offering them more affirming images and narratives about their callings. With this same gesture, the church can empower women to contest and to eventually overturn any false scripts of their self-identity that they have inherited, scripts that might diminish or else deny women their spiritual gifts for ministry.

What might such narratives look like? How might we need to transform our images of ministry to better suit women's lived realities, and even more, to nurture their spiritual formation and socialization for ordained ministry? In my view, women candidates are not served well by narratives of God's call to ministry that rely on the highly individualized and heroic rhetoric of self-denial and self-sacrifice, for example, Bonhoeffer's weighty image of "costly discipleship," or his even more dramatic script that "when Christ calls [someone], He bids him come to die."³² Once we recognize women's interior struggles with self-denial, false guilt, and fragmented identities, we can comprehend how such rhetoric can be debilitating to women's calls. Narratives of spiritual formation that idealize costly self-sacrifice and the rugged individualism of setting oneself apart from one's relationships and community can easily amplify women's gender-scripted ambivalence about ordained ministry.³³ Such appeals, however well-intentioned, can undermine the very agency and self-determination that women require if they are to claim their calls to ordained ministry.

Weaving Garments of Grace: En-gendering a Theology of the Call to Ordained Ministry for Women Today

Given women's potential role conflicts about their socially prescribed gender and vocational identities, women need a more edifying discourse about God's call to ministry. They require words that will confirm and even more, build up their self-identity and distinctive gifts for ministry. To this end, women might better envision their calls to ministry as a process of new creation and a call to abundant life—of becoming more fully and wholly who they are created to be. To return to the theological terms I suggested earlier, we can encourage women to envision their callings as a turning to claim God's grace and a turning to claim themselves. Such narratives prove life-giving because they return to women agency and inspire them with a vision of their graced possibilities. Once clothed in such "garments of grace," women can then be called upon to share their graced identity freely and abundantly in service to their communities of faith. Women can then readily assume the pastoral and priestly vocation of sharing the gifts of God for the whole people of God.

Along with affirming images and inspiring discourse about women's vocation to ministry, a second significant step is to provide structures of institutional support that will help women contest their and others' false gender scripts about their vocational identity. For example, women need more opportunities to try on and try out the roles of pastor and priest, especially as an integral part of their discernment process for ministry. Studies of women in ministry reveal that many women first feel authorized for ministry when they receive external confirmation of themselves in the role of pastor or priest from their communities of faith, for example, when they preach or preside at the liturgy for the first time. For this reason, seminary internships and first church placements are the crucible in which many women claim their ministerial identity and develop their professional confidence.³⁴ This is hardly surprising, once one recalls that many women (unlike men) lack the encouragement early on about pursuing their vocations to ministry. It often takes the actual experience of assuming pastoral leadership roles in order to confirm women's calls to such positions.

Women need not only more opportunities to try out the different roles and responsibilities of ordained ministry, but also female mentors that will accompany them through the discernment, formation, and ordination processes. Here, women are no different than men; both need persons with whom they can identify and in which they can mirror themselves in the role of pastors and priests. I do not wish to be gender exclusivist in my analysis and prescribe that women must have only female role models in order to flourish in ministry. This seems to me both empirically naive and theologically shortsighted. Nonetheless, at the critical early stage of forming new gender and professional roles, women need more female mentors and role models to counter the gender imbalance they regularly experience when they go before ordination boards or accept their first calls to churches. Studies of women clergy show that such positive experiences of female pastors and priests as role models and mentors, especially early on in the discernment process, encourage women to seek ordination and affirm them in their diverse calls to become pastors, teachers, and leaders in the church.

Women mentors have much wisdom to pass on these days to the new generation of women contemplating ministry. My women theology students regularly express profound anxieties about balancing work and family obligations, being a good pastor, and possibly also a wife and mother. They need to see how other women have successfully juggled these multiple commitments and adjudicated their own “role strain” with creativity and grace. They can also learn from the spiritual autobiographies of women who have trodden along similar paths to ministry. For example, it is helpful to know that it took an extraordinary preacher, such as Barbara Brown Taylor, many years to discern and to fully claim her call to the priesthood. They can also benefit from the prophetic witness of earlier educated women in ministry—Anna Julia Cooper decrying the lack of support among black clergy for the theological training of women, and Hildegard of Bingen castigating the ecclesial authorities of her day. Such past and present women’s traditions can inspire women today to persevere in the midst of their struggles to claim their calls to ordained ministry.

This leads to a third and final suggestion, perhaps the most challenging one because it involves all of us in theological education and in church leadership positions, the clergy, and the laity alike. All of us need to unmask and to transform our own gendered dimensions of the culture of the call, that is, our own gendered attitudes and expectations that we harbor about ordained ministry, as well as our discriminatory practices that can hinder women’s safe passage into ministry. Here, our tasks are clearly multiple and diverse. For example, well-intentioned congregations and denominational officers might learn to recognize how women’s discernment narratives for the ministry differ, and perhaps seem ambiguous if they are measured against men’s articulations of God’s calls. As a response, both congregations and church leaders might consider what specific programs and institutional support could be put into place to foster women’s callings in their distinctive manifestations and at different juncture-points in the formation process.³⁵

Further down the road, churches and denominational officials might need to recognize that women’s professional timelines often look different and not penalize them for these differences, as women confront the “role strain” that often accompanies the multiple demands of family and ministry. Moreover, women need to know that once they are called into parish ministry, judicatory officials will be hard at work to lift the stained glass ceiling that often halts women’s professional advancement in the ministry. As the most recent studies on women in the ministry explain, it is not enough for denominational officers to adopt a neutral stance toward appointing women to church placements if congregations are to overcome their gender biases; church leaders “need to be active advocates if women are to find jobs.”³⁶ If we wish to offer a compelling vision of the vocation of ministry for today’s gifted women candidates, these women need to know that the leadership positions of rector or senior minister will be open for them to serve in, rather than finding themselves tracked into lower level positions.

Weaving Garments of Grace: En-gendering a Theology of the Call to Ordained Ministry for Women Today

I realize that these different proposals for en-gendering a theology of call—transforming our narratives of the vocation of ministry, creating more opportunities and better institutional support for women clergy, and finally reforming our deeply ingrained and gendered culture of the call—represent an ambitious agenda. Yet this should hardly take us by surprise, once we recognize that women’s entrance into ordained ministry represents the single most significant transformation of the clergy profession since the Reformation. Although churches have been transforming their vision of pastoral leadership in light of women clergy’s increasing presence since the mid-1970s, we still need to undertake more targeted efforts if we are going to right the gender troubles that still prevail in our congregations, denominational structures, and seminaries. Re-scripting our gender roles in the church and society requires much courage, dedication, and common work.

Although engendering our culture of the call is hard work, I urge all of us in theological education and in the church to see this as our shared theological task today. Fostering women’s calls to ordained ministry should not be just women’s work. It is, in Rebecca Chopp’s prophetic formulation, “saving work,” and as such, it must be the church’s work.³⁷

Joy Ann McDougall is assistant professor of systematic theology at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. She is the author of several essays on contemporary Trinitarian theology and is currently working on a book on a feminist re-visioning of the doctrine of sin.

ENDNOTES

1. I am grateful to my women students as well as the women faculty gathered at the FTE 2003 Annual Forum, the 2003 Wabash Center Workshop on Teaching and Learning for Theological School Faculty, and at the Candler School of Theology for their lively theological discussion of earlier versions of this essay. My thanks go as well to my colleagues James Fowler, Charles Foster, Arnfridur Gudmundsdottir, Tom Long, Jonathon Strom, Helen Pearson, and Kathryn Tanner for their helpful suggestions and to Regina Weiser for her able editorial assistance.
2. These are quotations from the women students that were recorded in the minutes of the meeting on June 4, 2001.
3. Gregory Jones and Susan Pendleton Jones, “Pivotal Leadership,” *The Christian Century*, Sept. 12-19, 2001: 24-28.
4. *Ibid.*, 24-25.
5. *Ibid.*

6. On the contemporary discussion over women's ordination in the Roman Catholic tradition, see Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). For two excellent discussions of Roman Catholic women's moral and theological ambiguities about pastoral roles and authority, see Susan Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998), and Ruth A. Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002). Although my essay focuses on Protestant denominations that presently ordain women, there may be some important implications for women who serve the church in lay ministries as well.
7. For the term "garments of grace," I am indebted to Serene Jones's recent work, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). Jones adapts the term from Luce Irigaray's notion of women adorning themselves in garments of their own desires. For Jones's reading of Irigaray and her theological re-mapping of this metaphor, see esp., 42-43, 64-68.
8. For this Reformed (Calvinist) feminist doctrine of sin and the notion of identity as a "performative script," see S. Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, esp. 49-68, 94-125.
9. Jackson Carroll et al., *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 64-68.
10. Barbara Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville: Westminster, 1998), esp. Chapter 1: A New Situation, 4-7; Edward Lehmann, "Women's Path into Ministry: Six Major Studies," *Pulpit & Pew Research Report*, No. 1, (Fall 2002), 7. Available at www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu.
11. Lehmann, "Women's Path," 4. For detailed statistics on the proportions of women clergy in different mainline Protestant denominations, see Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, Appendixes 1.2-1.4, 138-140.
12. For a survey of these gender problems in the placement process, see Lehmann, "Women's Path," 14-21. For more detailed data on salary differentials, gender-segregation practices, and clergy career paths, see Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, 70-91 and Paula Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 107-134.
13. Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, 112-113. For an excellent analysis of how women attribute such gender difficulties in the placement process or with supervisors as personal failures, see Miriam Anne Glover-Washington, "Pastoral Care and Counseling with Women Entering Ministry" in Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, ed., *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 66-93.
14. For an excellent overview of the feminist discussion about women's socialization to relationality, and its implications for pastoral care practice, see Christie Cozad Neuger, "Women and Relationality," in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, eds. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 113-132; see also Brita L. Gill-Austern, "Love Understood as Self-Sacrifice and Self-Denial: What Does It Do to Women," in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 304-321.
15. Gill Austern, "Love Understood as Self-Sacrifice," 305.

Weaving Garments of Grace: En-gendering a Theology of the Call to Ordained Ministry for Women Today

16. For a critical discussion of how models of public authority assume a view of self-identity built on separation and which excludes empathy for others, see Kathleen B. Jones, "On Authority: Or, Why Women Are Not Entitled to Speak?," in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, eds. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988). On the issue of authority in ministry, see Jackson W. Carroll, *As One with Authority: Reflective Leadership in Ministry*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991).
17. Gill Austern, "Love Understood as Self-Sacrifice," 307.
18. For example, Lynn Rhodes notes that in her interviews with Protestant women clergy they were less likely to claim such a special calling or a sense of being called out of their communities than their male counterparts. See Lynn N. Rhodes, *Co-Creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 106-107. For the differences between men's and women's characterization of their calls, see also Zikmund et al., *Uphill Calling*, 106-111. For two excellent discussions of Roman Catholic women's moral and theological ambiguities about pastoral roles and authority, see Susan Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998), and Ruth A. Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).
19. Carroll et al., *Women of the Cloth*, 11.
20. For this issue of "role strain" or "role overload" and its particular expressions in the personal lives of women clergy, see Lehmann, "Women's Path," 22-24, Zikmund et al., *ClergyWomen*, 83-91, and Glover-Washington, "Pastoral Care and Counseling," 85-87.
21. Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion* 40 (April 1960): 100-112.
22. Serene Jones, *Cartographies of Grace*, 111. For an in-depth discussion of women's socialized tendency toward "giving themselves away," see Carol Lakey Hess, *Caretakers of Our Common House* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 31-54. For an excellent feminist interpretation of women's sin of self-loss as sloth, see Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 139-166.
23. Jones, *Cartographies of Grace*, 113.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 94.
26. Ibid., 112.
27. Ibid., 98-99.
28. Ibid., 99.
29. Rowan Williams, "Vocation," in *A Ray of Darkness: Sermons and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1995), 149.
30. See Serene Jones's similar concerns about sin-talk, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 96-97.
31. Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster, 1995), 19-44, 99-100.

32. For example, Gregory Jones frequently appeals to Bonhoeffer's image of "costly discipleship" in order to highlight the serious moral, theological, and personal claims that are involved in God's call to ministry. In addition to *The Christian Century* article cited above, see his discussion of the vocation of the theological teacher in G. Jones, "Negotiating the Tensions of Vocation," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, eds., L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 209-224. To his credit Jones draws attention in this latter essay to the dangers of such rhetoric for women who can be "co-opted by a destructive culture of self-sacrifice" (ibid., 215).

33. In her essay "Reading from the Underside of Selfhood: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Spiritual Formation," *Spiritus* 1 (2001): 186-203, Lisa Dahill offers a sympathetic but also gender-critical analysis of Bonhoeffer's model of spiritual formation. She rightly cautions Bonhoeffer interpreters against an uncritical use of his rhetoric, since it may reinforce patterns of abuse and submission of women that are deeply entrenched in our culture.

34. Glover-Washington, "Pastoral Care and Counseling," 76-82.

35. One such pilot program, Covenant Colleagues, was recently launched as a continuing education program for United Methodist clergywomen at Candler School of Theology. The program addresses the special concerns women face in their first four to ten years of ministry as they transition from seminary and probation into parish ministry. The program provides various opportunities for spiritual formation, continuing education, and for developing women's networks in order to offer ongoing resources and support for clergywomen. For more information on the program, see www.emory.edu/candler/ocme.

36. Jackson Carroll et al, *Women of the Cloth*, 122.

37. For Chopp's use of this metaphor to describe various feminist practices of theological education, see her *Saving Work*, esp. 75-96. Throughout this essay, I have drawn on certain of these practices, for example, Chopp's narrative and rhetorical (contextual) strategies as inspiration for my own proposals to en-gender a theology of the call for women today.

Theological Education Submission Guidelines

The Association of Theological Schools is a membership organization of schools in the United States and Canada that conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and advanced study of the theological disciplines. The Association's mission is to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.

Theological Education, the journal of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, is devoted to the distinctive concerns of graduate theological education in North America. The journal supports the mission of the Association by providing those concerned with theological education—including administrators, faculty, and independent researchers—with scholarly discourse and reports on issues and trends, research findings and resources, and models of critical analysis and effective practices in graduate theological education.

Unsolicited submissions are reviewed by members of the journal's Editorial Board, who then make recommendations regarding their publication. The Editorial Board will not consider articles that are being submitted simultaneously to other publications.

Article Formatting Requirements

1. Recommended length of articles is 5,000 words (approximately 18 double-spaced pages).
2. Follow *Chicago Manual of Style*, using endnotes.
3. Convert footnotes to endnotes, if necessary, using author's given name and then the surname with no intervening comma.
4. The *American Heritage Dictionary* and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* are the references for preferred spellings.
5. Provide a paragraph abstract at the beginning of the article in approximately 80 words.
6. Add a short (2-3 sentence) paragraph at the end of the article identifying the author(s), institution or relationship to the project/topic, position held, and/or other information relevant to the experience of the writer(s).
7. Articles should be e-mailed to the managing editor <merrill@ats.edu> in Rich Text Format (RTF) followed by a hard copy sent by conventional mail to: Nancy Merrill, Managing Editor, *Theological Education*, The Association of Theological Schools, 10 Summit Park Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1103.

