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additional copies or selected back issues,
please contact the Association.
Email: giehll@ats.edu
Web site: www.ats.edu
Phone: 412-788-6505
Fax: 412-788-6510

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Continuing the Conversation

Theological Education invites responses, of up to 1,500 words, to articles published in the journal in order to foster conversation among its readers. Reader responses may be emailed to the managing editor at merrill@ats.edu. Responses are published at the discretion of the editors and may be edited for length.

Editor's Introduction

Jeremiah J. McCarthy

As this volume of the journal went to press, the Easter season was in full bloom, a time of renewal and refreshment for the communities of faith served by the member schools of ATS. The words of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins come to mind, "Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us" ("The Wreck of the Deutschland"). Hopkins's arresting image is an apt play on the metaphor of mariners tacking their vessels toward the "east" and the enduring gift of the Spirit guiding the Christian community by the "light" of Christ's resurrection. Hopkins's understanding of "easter" as an enduring action, a verb, accentuates the dynamic process of faith formation and development. The member schools of ATS face distinctive challenges as they endeavor to identify evidence that they are effectively equipping their graduates for the task of "eastering" the faith community.

This spring volume celebrates the work of the thirty-nine schools that participated in the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project by highlighting the specialized case studies undertaken by a group of ten of the schools that agreed to develop particular, contextual assessment strategies and to contribute essays on these experiences that would form this issue of *Theological Education*. This volume captures these distinctive efforts and brings to a culmination the extremely fruitful and productive Learning for Religious Vocation project funded by Lilly Endowment.

The Learning for Religious Vocation project was designed to enable the member schools to develop skill and capacity in the activities required to assess or evaluate the effectiveness of student learning and the achievement of the goals of the Master of Divinity degree program. Through a series of conferences, workshops, and five research studies published in the journal over the last five years, a body of knowledge and expertise has emerged that the task force overseeing the project believes will enable faculties to implement effective assessment strategies and to demonstrate the effectiveness of these practices in self-studies that enhance the quality of ATS accrediting efforts. Each of the case studies provides insight and helpful advice regarding the assessment of student learning and institutional resources necessary to sustain effective assessment initiatives.

Jo-Ann Badley in "Moving the Mission Statement into the Classroom" reports on the challenges of assessment in a small, Roman Catholic school, Newman Theological College, that serves a diverse constituency of candidates for ordination and lay ministry in western Canada. Rather than creating new structures, the college focused on its mission statement and creative adaptations of curricular strategies to highlight formation goals within the framework of classroom pedagogical efforts.

In "Preparing Leaders for Mission," James L. Boyce and Richard W. Nysse and their colleagues at Luther Seminary devised an approach to coordinate and systematize already well-established assessment activities. The seminary realized that many of the assessment efforts were episodic and results emerging from rather sophisticated instruments were underused and minimized ongoing, comprehensive assessment. The school built its efforts on a foundation of careful conversations with its constituencies about the goals of theological education and the capacities and skills essential for leadership in faith communities. The school benefited from thoughtful faculty engagement in a number of homegrown research efforts including the highly effective Kolden Study of its graduates.

Robert Cathey's essay, "Practicing Assessment/Resisting Assessment" identifies insights that were helpful in building a positive culture of assessment among the faculty at McCormick Theological Seminary. The McCormick essay captures the need for ongoing conversation and attentive listening to ensure not only faculty ownership or "buy in" to assessment efforts but also to ensure shared ownership of the goals of the curriculum as a cohesive intellectual structure that incorporates learning outcomes in individual course offerings.

The Church Divinity School of the Pacific targeted the distinctive liturgical pedagogy of its Episcopal tradition as a vehicle for effective assessment efforts. Linda Clader reports that the intentional focus on the school's ethos provided opportunities to secure comprehensive integration of classroom learning with well-established annual evaluations of students and preparation for the general ordination examinations required by the church. Establishing baselines for assessment, making use of sermons delivered by students, and creatively using capstone and other integrative activities, are among the constructive insights developed in this essay, "Speaking Assessment in the Local Vernacular."

Talbot School of Theology emphasized the strengths of its curricular ethos geared toward holistic formation of its students. Dennis Dirks reports in "Toward an Integrated Model of Assessment" that a significant learning was the need to "connect student learning outcomes with assessment measures." The essay provides helpful guidance in crafting an effective and cohesive assessment plan emphasizing the value of assessment to Talbot's identity as a "learning community."

Readers looking for insight into the development of criteria or rubrics for assessing student learning will benefit from the careful work of Stephen Graham, Kimberly Sangster, and Yasuyuki Kamata at North Park Theological Seminary. "Evaluation Rubrics: Weaving a Coherent Fabric of Assessment" attends to the singular focus on student achievement of excellence in the integration of scriptural studies. The faculty project enabled them to identify specific biblical learning outcomes and to align these outcomes with effective measures to demonstrate achievement of these outcomes. Principles and a set of best practices are featured in the essay.

Jack Holland's essay, "Progressing Toward Ministry: Student Perceptions of the Dispositional Evaluation Process at Emmanuel School of Religion," describes the progressive evaluation process for each student and articulates how Emmanuel School of Religion has devised instruments to demonstrate student achievement of formational outcomes.

The essay by Willie James Jennings, "Leclercq Among the Blue Devils: Assessing Theological Learning in the Modern University," takes note of the distinctive location of a divinity school within a modern research university. Reflection on this unique ethos has enabled the Duke Divinity School Faculty to find important ways to help students integrate "a love of learning and a desire for God," a theme derived from the work of distinguished theologian, Jean Leclercq.

Mary Kay Oosdyke's essay, "Vocation in a New Key: Spiritual Formation and the Assessment of Learning," succinctly captures a key assessment emphasis at Aquinas Institute of Theology, namely the effort to establish discernible benchmarks for assessing student learning and its integration with spiritual formation efforts.

Mount Angel Seminary's essay, written by Elaine Park, "Preaching, Proclamation, and Pedagogy: An Experiment in Integrated Assessment," describes a careful process to leverage a key curricular outcome, skill in preaching, as a central focus for program assessment. The Preaching Portfolio is a creative tool that has implications for evaluating other dimensions of the Master of Divinity degree program.

This issue contains two contributions in the Open Forum section. Sr. Mary Karita Ivancic's essay, "Imaging Faith: The Biblical Imagination in Theory and Practice," is rooted in the Catholic theological tradition and develops implications for the use of the arts to enhance the teaching of Scripture and biblical theology. Readers from across the theological spectrum in ATS may find some of the pedagogical strategies adaptable to their distinctive contexts as well. Francis Lonsway, former director of student information resources at ATS, provides an insightful overview of the history and development of the Profiles of Ministry instrument that is widely used by member schools. He reports highlights and selected findings of the recent survey to determine the expectations and values clergy and laity hold for beginning ministers and the similarities and differences among clergy and lay respondents.

I trust that our readers will find in these pages of the journal stimulating reflections and useful insights to help with the challenge of effective assessment. The goal of the Learning for Religious Vocation project has been to provide resources, knowledge, and increased clarity to facilitate the evaluation of theological learning among ATS member schools. To paraphrase Hopkins, may the efforts of the ten schools reflected in the essays shed light on the task of assessment and, in so doing, contribute to a greater awareness of the One who "easters" in us.

Vocation in a New Key: Spiritual Formation and the Assessment of Learning

Mary Kay Oosdyke
Aquinas Institute of Theology

ABSTRACT: Assessment at Aquinas Institute of Theology has been a strong internal value and focus for us over the past ten years. When exploring educational assessment as a faculty, we found that faculty members were assessing performance on several levels and using various means of assessment; however, few of these means were data informed or data driven. Thus, we identified four assessment issues we wanted to address in the course of our various planning projects:

1. *Learning how to assess mature, healthy, spiritual development for church ministry in our Lay Spiritual Formation program; this is, as we will point out, an enormous and rapidly evolving challenge that involves acquisition of new skills observation and reporting*
2. *Making our institutional, programmatic, and course goals more coherent and the objectives more measurable*
3. *Creating efficient and accurate means of measurement*
4. *Becoming more intentional about the amending procedures or "closing the assessment loop"*

A number of factors contributed to our faculty's readiness to work on reasonable and helpful assessment practices. Among these were

- *the 1990s move into high quality distributed learning degree programs (Master of Arts in Health Care Mission, Master of Arts in Ministry, and the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching) that called for an in-depth exploration of new pedagogical initiatives;*
- *the revision of our Master of Divinity degree;*
- *a previous assessment plan that is yet to be fully implemented;*
- *the preparation of a self-study for the 2006 reaccreditation visits;*
- *the creation of a new mission statement and strategic plan, the year-long development of a business plan, and computerized financial modeling software that will feature "dashboard indicators" to enable rapid assessment of performance by the board and administration;*
- *the coming evaluation for our ten-year-old Lay Spiritual Formation program; and*
- *the Apostolic Visitation of American Seminaries by the United States Bishops in 2005.*

Background

As a seminary and graduate school of theology in the Roman Catholic tradition, Aquinas Institute of Theology has specific educational and formational responsibilities for each ministerial program as well as for two types of students: those called to ordained ministry and those called to lay ministry. The lay and ordained dimensions of graduate theological education for ministry in the Catholic tradition each have some distinctive educational needs and expectations that accompany a common curriculum. In addition, some programs, such as the Master of Arts in Health Care Mission, were designed to meet new and different ministerial needs such as an informed sponsorship of an institution's Gospel-based mission. In these programs, there was little precedent for assessment of a distinctive call. Academic assessment skills were developing rapidly but new categories were needed. As a faculty already committed to mature collaboration in ministry, we knew that we needed to address the needs of ministries that were at once distinctive and common and their important interrelationship within an overall church vision of mission and ministry.

This need was emphasized by the influx of young lay men and women for the Master of Divinity degree from 1999 to 2003. In 1999, a grant from Lilly Endowment enabled Aquinas Institute to mount a multifaceted strategy to attract students under the age of thirty. In the five-year project, Generation X: Good Ground for Ministry, "Millennium Scholarships" provided the financial base for recent college graduates to consider ministry as a professional life-work choice. These young people brought their own developmental needs along with their many gifts for ministry.

The Roman Catholic Church has a long tradition of spiritual formation for priesthood candidates. The faculty was aware that the Dominican seminarians experienced an intentional spiritual formation program complementing their theological and ministerial academic programs. They knew that lay women and men in the various programs, of whatever age, needed to be similarly prepared for future ministry but with a focus on their particular vocation within the ministerial context. Thus in 1996, co-directors of lay formation were hired and charged with developing a lay formation program to address this goal. As this seminal program developed, informal assessment occurred regularly along with some formal assessment, but there was a growing desire for more measurable outcomes indicating a holistic readiness for ministry.

Simultaneously, it became clear that the Master of Divinity degree was in need of revision for two reasons: to meet the revised *Program for Priestly Formation* from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and to address the specific curricular needs of the lay MDiv students. Because the MDiv degree provides the underlying supportive structure for all degree programs in the school, this was a major curricular undertaking that was completed and implemented in the fall of 2004.

The work on these two projects, along with a major business plan initiative, provided the impetus for an effort to express our mission and vision statements anew. This effort was integrated into the larger overall process of strategic planning. The members of the Institute expressed the common vision we hold in the following vision statement:

> Aquinas Institute, a graduate school of theology and ministry, envisions a hopeful, vital and participative church. Animated by an eight-hundred year Dominican tradition of study in pursuit of truth, we are a community of scholars and ministers offering our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
>
> We commit our gifts in service to the Church and world as:
>
> - a school for collaborative lay and ordained ministry;
> - a center for preaching education;
> - a community for scholarship and theological reflection;
> - a resource for adult faith formation.
>
> We engage this work as a community transformed by our commitment to communion, to a spirit of holiness and respect, and to innovation grounded in the Catholic tradition. We welcome others to share our vision and mission. In a suffering world, we believe, nevertheless, that God's Word is alive and active. In response we say, "Here we are, God, send us."

In the mission statement, the members of the Institute wanted to express the dynamic purpose that flows from our identity and vision in a concise but clear manner.

> Impelled by the Catholic faith and in the Dominican spirit,
> Aquinas Institute educates men and women to preach,
> to teach, to minister, and to lead.

From these statements we derived the core values that guide our institutional behavior and our program development and outcomes. For example, we say that as a theological community we value:

1. full, active, and collaborative participation in the mission of the Church;
2. excellence in teaching, learning, preaching, and public scholarship;
3. dialogue and public discourse in the search for truth;
4. academic and faith-filled engagement with the Dominican and Roman Catholic tradition;
5. ongoing formation for Christian life, leadership, and ministry;
6. justice as constitutive of preaching the Gospel.

These values are integrated in our academic programs and community life and enable us to make a statement of what a graduate of Aquinas Institute of Theology will look like.

In May of 2004, after two years of study and conversation centered on curricular goals and outcomes, the faculty of Aquinas Institute of Theology arrived at the following statement:

> Graduates of Aquinas Institute of Theology are effective pastoral leaders who place special value on the ministry of the Word. They are distinguished by their integration of theological knowledge, cultural awareness, pastoral skill, and spiritual discipline, offered in the service of the Church and the world. As a body, our graduates participate in the larger mission of the Dominican Order: to become—through word, deed, and presence—a "sacred preaching" (*sacra praedicatio*) in the midst of contemporary society.

Planning for effective assessment

In 1994 the academic dean engaged the administration and faculty in a process of developing a Student Outcomes Assessment Plan. They examined each of the degree programs in light of the Aquinas Institute Mission Statement. Following those discussions, a faculty committee formulated goals and objectives for each of the degree programs. The study and discussion of these goals and objectives resulted in a careful formulation of desired outcomes for each degree program. The North Central Association of the Higher Learning Commission commended the Student Outcomes Assessment Plan as an excellent model.

This plan had incorporated some current practices and called for several new initiatives. It clearly addressed the present reality of the school that had some careful assessment practices in place, and it provided for a yearly review by the faculty of the results of assessment strategies. The work that remained was to establish a practice of using student portfolios for admission to candidacy and to design thoroughly integrated implementation of the plan. This would call for a complete revision of the admission to candidacy procedure and further work on assessment strategies. Before this occurred, the faculty needed to complete the curricular revision it had planned. Other institution-wide projects occurring simultaneously resulted in the new articulation of the mission statement. While many structural elements of the plan remain, the curricular revision and the integration of a new mission statement have made significant changes that are being incorporated into the Aquinas assessment plan.

The Master of Divinity revision and the *habitus*

In the course of the extensive revision of the Master of Divinity degree, the faculty determined that by graduation the student will have acquired the *habitus*, or abiding practices, in each of the following areas:

1. Clear and effective oral and written communication
2. Close reading of texts
3. Social analysis
4. Theological reflection
5. Collaboration

For this to happen, these practices must permeate the curriculum with accountability. To ensure a solid beginning, a new Proseminar was designed for all incoming students to initiate them in these practices, provide foundational content for graduate theological study, and establish a baseline evaluation to be included in their portfolio for admission to candidacy.

The two faculty members who designed this course to address these practices received an award from Yale University Divinity School's Center for Faith and Culture for their careful development of the practices and the strategies for assessment of these practices.

The entire faculty saw the import of these practices as cross-disciplinary practices. Social analysis skills, knowledge of the Catholic tradition, a holistic yet focused spiritual formation that integrated personal and ministerial identities, and the skills for ministerial leadership became essential pieces of the consistent theological reflection required of all students in various forums. The faculty committed itself to fostering these practices because they believed that they resulted, with God's grace, in faithful, effective, vital ministry over the long haul.

Thus, along with the Proseminar, each course in a student's program will focus on at least two of the practices and provide assessment of these as well as of the course content. Faculty will look at the content of their courses and determine which of these practices are integral to course content and methodology and design an assessment strategy for the practices that will supply student and faculty with information. The faculty will then look at all the courses within a particular degree program to see that all the practices are addressed effectively and with some consistency.

In this plan, admission to candidacy in a degree program takes on much greater importance. In the past, "admission to program" was often granted after a perfunctory discussion of grade point average and vague goals. In the new model, the candidacy committee reviews data in the portfolio on the various practices integrated with course content, notes the evaluation of faculty, has a conversation with the student about his or her progress, and decides to recommend or not recommend the student for candidacy in the specific degree program at this time.

This procedure is a vast improvement over anecdotal information and course grading by professors and a general statement of future goals by the student. Prior to graduation, another form of assessment will occur focusing on the student's portfolio. At this point, the orientation of the portfolio shifts to providing evidence of substantial integration of theological study, ministerial practice and vocational formation for a ministerial discernment of pending employment, and the accompanying transition process. This is accomplished through a carefully constructed Integrative Seminar that includes the goals of leaving students with a truthful perception of the level of their knowledge and skills, confidence in the abilities they have, and a clear sense of direction set by their careful attendance to their call.

The next step is to design a way to evaluate the achievement of graduates in relation to the integration of these habits/practices in their ministries. This is part of the larger plan of assessment that addresses department outcomes in relationship to program and institutional outcomes.

Lay formation

While other aspects of assessment involved refinement and revision of traditional academic assessment practices, assessment of spiritual formation for lay students presented an entirely new challenge. Although the Catholic Church has had a highly developed spiritual formation program for priesthood candidates for centuries,[1] formation for lay ministry candidates—and the phenomenon of lay ministry itself—are new and rapidly evolving realities. While candidates for lay ecclesial ministry outnumber seminarians ten to one, structures and standards for recruitment, selection, formation, and authorization of lay ministers are varied and disorganized.[2]

The selection and formation of priesthood candidates have traditionally been the responsibilities of local bishops. Many bishops, however, are ambivalent or fearful about the development of lay ministry and have not embraced the process of selection or formation. Schools have therefore assumed this responsibility by default, often without the active participation of local church leadership.

Lay Spiritual Formation is a required component of all ministry degree programs at Aquinas Institute of Theology. Students take Lay Spiritual Formation for four to six consecutive semesters depending on their degree program. The program seeks to form the whole person as he or she discerns his or her vocation for ministry. We believe that spirituality is a holistic endeavor involving spiritual, physical, sexual, and psycho-social elements. It is vital to the personal and professional transformation of lay ministers and to their future work in church and society.

One of the guiding principles for the Aquinas Institute's Lay Spiritual Formation is that we partner with the students in this process, engaging them in purposeful attention to their spiritual growth, to intentional planning for their well-being, and to discernment of their vocation to public, professional ministry in the church.

Over the past ten years we have developed our program by trial and error, based on our knowledge of priesthood and religious formation but seeking an authentic lay spiritual and ministerial formation. As Elizabeth Patterson noted in a 2001 letter inaugurating this project, "we are all finding our way together into territory that is relatively new."

In partnership with the students, we are continuing to develop and assess the following model. Lay Spiritual Formation is designed as a developmental sequence.

- The focus in the first year is to identify, develop, and explore a stable, interior prayer life. Students are introduced to forms of spiritual life. Emphasis is placed upon developing a habit of prayer and forming a spiritual life in a community context. Of substantial significance in the first year is the lengthy process of spiritual, psychological, and behavioral assessment. From this process, the student, in conjunction with the director of lay spiritual formation, develops formation goals and some strategies for achieving those formation goals. This assessment process reflects Aquinas's ongoing commitment to formation of the whole person and to discernment of suitability for ministry.
- The second year of Lay Spiritual Formation builds upon the experience of the first year, thus reinforcing and capitalizing upon the increased self-knowledge and developmental processes. The second year has two primary foci. The focus of the first semester is to develop strategies to enact the formation goals of the first year. The focus of the second semester is to integrate spiritual and psycho-sexual formation with one's self-identity as a minister.
- The third year builds upon the developmental capacities of years one and two. The emphasis in the third year is the spiritual pastoral praxis of ministry. Whereas the second year explores the personal identity of the minister, the third year explores the corporate or communal identity of the minister. Attention is given to the correlation of personal spirituality and the spirituality of the larger Christian community in the praxis of ministry. Issues such as collaboration, gender, power, communication, and conflict are explored within the context of spiritual development.

As Ken Homan, former director of the lay formation program, noted in a recent summary:

> The emphasis in Lay Spiritual Formation is to lay the foundation and to develop the habit of intentional ongoing faith formation accompanied by human growth and development. Attendant to this dynamic of formation is the need to develop increasingly sophisticated capacities for critical self-awareness and enhanced recognition of the need for holistic evaluation of one's faith journey in life. The challenge in such a process is that persons are at unique places on their spiritual journey, and they are at varying stages of their spiritual, psycho-social, sexual development. As such, care must be directed to meet the unique needs and growth patterns of individual persons while addressing communities of formation.[3]

Even prior to actual assessment, our faculty has to develop new habits of observation. John Harris notes the importance of skilled observation: "The greatest value 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 the experience."[4]

Priesthood formation takes place in a residential setting and allows 24/7 observation. All our lay students, however, are nonresidential and many are part time. This requires a different kind of observation and reporting. Indeed, we only explicitly included "spiritual and psychological maturity appropriate to ministry" to our criteria for admission to the program within the last eighteen months. Development of effective assessment programs are also complicated by the tension between transparency and the need for confidentiality and respect of matters that in priesthood formation were considered to be "internal forum," that is, information unavailable for external evaluation.

Similarly for the lay person, using a "spiritual/psychological assessment" conducted by outside professionals in the process of admission to candidacy raises issues of confidentiality mandated by HIPAA legislation, and it also carries with it the risk of an excessively medical paradigm for formation.

This entailed a year-long discussion of the appropriate assessment of the formation experience and how that might support a fuller ministerial readiness assessment. One result was the Authorization for Release of Information form that allows the director of spiritual formation, after discussion with the student, to discuss the information with the academic dean and the director of field placement (not test results or responses to questionnaires) that would cause concern about readiness for ministerial placement. This represents an ongoing effort to integrate lay spiritual formation into the overall experience of education for ministry.

Coherent assessment systems

During the past five years, the work of implementing the Aquinas Institute Assessment Plan has included developing curricular, spiritual formation for ministerial vocation, business and institutional goals and objectives, accompanied by an assessment plan for each. Although these projects were often separate but sequential endeavors by necessity—because of their magnitude—the entire faculty and staff were involved in some capacity and, thus, the results contain many common elements that are being developed into a cohesive, well-integrated whole. We have had a number of workshops in which experts in assessment recommended by The Association of Theological Schools, the Higher Learning Commission, and the Center of Teaching Excellence of St. Louis University have worked with us as we focused on a comprehensive, integrated, and measurable outcomes plan.

Currently we are working on incorporating highly developed business plan software into the strategic plan in a way that will move the plan forward. In addition, we are still determining sequential strategies for academic goals and objectives. The goal is to have all of the components in place by December 2006.

Conclusion

During the last ten years, Aquinas Institute of Theology has worked at developing a healthy and effective model for lay spiritual formation with an emphasis on ministerial identity and readiness. It has been a challenging endeavor and the school has learned a great deal in the process. The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project provided numerous keys as we grappled with the many new issues it raised. Early on we established a Lay Formation Advisory Committee to assist the director of lay spiritual formation in determining process, content, means of assessment, and student evaluation of the effort. They wrestled with how assessment would fit in this process and in the overall educational assessment of the student. Experimentation, consultation, a series of directors (each with their own strengths), a draft of a manual on lay formation for faculty consideration, and endless discussion have been part of the process.

The Character and Assessment of Learning project was helpful in focusing the need for attention to religious vocation and its assessment. The ATS conferences gave us valuable input that we could use with the Lay Formation Advisory Committee and the director of lay formation. It provided questions, tools, and guidance as we struggled to create a meaningful and accountable experience in lay formation for students that would lead to more spiritually mature, faith-filled, and holistically healthy ministers. Our students tell us we have made progress. The faculty and administration think we have made progress. Further assessment will tell the tale.

Mary Kay Oosdyke is academic dean of Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri.

ENDNOTES

1. Priesthood formation and assessment programs are so extensive that there are several distinct traditions—each the result of hundreds of years of development. For instance, the "French," or "Sulpician" model was developed in France in the eighteenth century; Jesuit spiritual formation dates to the sixteenth century, mendicant models to the thirteenth century, and monastic forms, rooted in the rule of St. Benedict, date to at least the fourth century.

2. Zeni Fox noted that professional organizations of ministers and organizations of church personnel administrators have developed competency standards and principles, and she observed, "Perhaps the weakness in the endeavor is that too often the larger Church is not sufficiently aware of what these groups are addressing, and at times the groups are insufficiently aware of work being done by other groups . . ." *New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 2002), 105.

3. Kenneth Homan, "Lay Spiritual Formation Program," internal document, Aquinas Institute of Theology, (2004).

4. John Harris, "Assessment of Ministry Preparation to Increase Understanding," *Theological Education* 39, no. 2 (Pittsburgh, PA: The Association of Theological Schools, 2003), 117–136, especially 129.

Speaking Assessment in the Local Vernacular

Linda Lee Clader
Church Divinity School of the Pacific

ABSTRACT: The faculty members at Church Divinity School of the Pacific have felt confident about the thoroughness and appropriateness of our processes for assessing students preparing for ministry in the Episcopal Church. Our experience with the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project has challenged us to find congruent ways to assess our overall program. In addition, we recognize that a major part of that program is grounded in the Episcopal Church's peculiar way of communicating our tradition through worship, and we are beginning to undertake an intentional program to claim that culture, to conduct assessment on our own terms, and to discover the language to communicate what we do to people unfamiliar with our tradition and ethos.

Introduction

Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP) is one of the eleven seminaries of the Episcopal Church USA, the only one in the western third of the United States, and a founding member of the ecumenical and interfaith Graduate Theological Union (GTU). CDSP has 120 students (ninety-eight FTE) enrolled in MDiv, MTS, and DMin degree programs, an MA program shared with the GTU, and several certificate programs. Within the ten full-time, two regular half-time, and two or three adjunct faculty members are six who carry some administrative responsibility. Half of the faculty are also involved in the GTU doctoral program, which by common agreement constitutes 25 percent of those faculty members' teaching, advising, and committee loads. CDSP does not directly carry responsibility for oversight or assessment of the doctoral program, but, of course, individual faculty members may be deeply involved. Nearly all CDSP students and staff, and all the faculty are Episcopalians. The MDiv program accounts for approximately two-thirds of all students.

Context for assessment

When CDSP agreed to participate in the Ten Schools component of the ATS Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project, the faculty had already begun reviewing some components in our process of educational assessment, specifically in the area of designing syllabi and course evaluations, to reflect attention to an outcomes-based approach to assessment.

These minor changes related to a much more ambitious project of assessing and revising the curriculum for the Master of Divinity degree. During academic year 1997–98, after widespread discussion by many groups around the seminary, the CDSP board of trustees had adopted a new mission statement, and the arrival of new personnel on the faculty had made some rethinking of the curriculum desirable. So, beginning in 2000, the faculty had been holding workshops, retreats, and regular discussions about the MDiv degree program, grounding our review in the language of the new mission statement, and emphasizing desired MDiv outcomes. We concluded this process right at the time of our first team visit from ATS and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), in spring of 2003.

Concurrent with many of these discussions, the CDSP faculty was also involved in a project connected with the Lexington Seminar, funded by Lilly Endowment, and organized by Lexington Theological Seminary. Our team had brought a case to the Seminar that we believed illustrated the challenges of being an Episcopal seminary in the ecumenical and multicultural milieu of the GTU. To our surprise, on the basis of our case study, the other participants foregrounded slightly different considerations. Our discussions at the Seminar produced for us three important understandings:

1. Aspects of the Episcopal culture and ethos that we take for granted were extremely difficult to explain to outsiders;
2. Our involvement in the GTU was virtually unintelligible to anyone not involved in a theological consortium; and
3. The CDSP faculty at the time felt overwhelmed by unclear and often contradictory expectations, on top of a teaching environment already complicated by our participation in the GTU.

As a result of our participation in the Lexington Seminar and our increased awareness of our own institutional culture, the CDSP faculty had been engaging in a process of focused self-assessment beginning in the fall of 2001.

CDSP had also been identified as one of the schools under WASC's jurisdiction to experiment with a new, two-phase process of review for reaccreditation. The timeline for this review began with the preparation and initial submission of our institutional proposal in fall of 2000, continued with the preparation and submission of a Preparatory Review Report in fall of 2002, a team visit in spring of 2003, preparation and submission of an Educational Effectiveness Report in fall of 2003, and a second team visit in spring of 2004. Because ATS had agreed to follow WASC's review process for our accreditation review, CDSP did not do a standard ATS self-study.

The most direct consequence of our participation in the ATS project was visits by two ATS consultants. As we were beginning to compose our Educational Effectiveness Report (the second review document), Carolyn M. Jurkowitz met with us and struggled with us to clarify what WASC was expecting in this second round of review, taught us some of the language and constructs that would allow us to communicate with our visiting team, and, possibly most helpfully, agreed with us that the WASC handbook lacked clarity and direction. In addition, after our accreditation review had concluded and we were continuing on our process of internal assessment with some renewed clarity, Vic Klimoski met with our board of trustees on retreat to assist them in their self-evaluation, making use of the In Trust board assessment tool. Again, Klimoski offered language and structures and guided the trustees through a very useful and energizing process of affirming their identity and reviewing their mission.

Because we were so far along in our accreditation review when the ATS project began, our participation in the project did not have significant influence on more than half of our formal ATS/WASC review. We have changed a few procedures as a result of our enhanced understanding of educational assessment, and we have embarked on several evaluative processes since accreditation, as we had pledged to do in our review. Most significantly, however, we are engaging in all these activities with a deeper understanding of their import, of how they fit into a larger "culture of assessment," and of how difficult it is to explain who we are and what we do to people who come from outside our educational environment.

Assessing the learning of individual students

Formal evaluations by faculty

The CDSP faculty members take seriously their individual and corporate responsibility for the preparation of students for ministry, and they focus a significant amount of that responsibility on the quality of learning in classes. In addition to grades and comments on exams and papers, faculty also produce a narrative evaluation of every MDiv student in a given class. These evaluations are crafted along the lines of the expected outcomes for the course, which are, in turn, based on the desired outcomes for the MDiv program.

By canon law, the Episcopal Church requires that every MDiv student preparing for ordination be evaluated annually by the seminary faculty. The CDSP faculty has expanded this requirement for our school to evaluation of *all* MDiv students. In the first and third years, faculty members review each student during a regular faculty meeting devoted to that process, and at every monthly faculty meeting there is opportunity to discuss students who appear to be having difficulties. Follow-up is normally handled by the student's adviser. At the end of the MDiv program, faculty members are charged with deciding whether to recommend individual students for ordination to the diaconate in the Episcopal Church.

In the second year, this process of evaluation follows a canonically required form for review of the student's progress in the areas of knowledge and understanding of the Christian tradition; personal faith, spiritual discipline, and commitment to justice; preparation in the skills of ministry (liturgical and organizational leadership, communication, teaching); and personal readiness for ministry (emotional stability, maturity, authority). After discussion with the student, the student's advisor writes the first draft of the evaluation, which is then reviewed by the entire faculty, who produce the final version. These evaluations depend heavily on information from the student's supervisor at a field education placement site, and on faculty members' observations of the student's competence in liturgical leadership, as well as on grades from faculty outside CDSP and the narrative evaluations produced by course instructors for each MDiv student.

As a result of our increased attention to assessment of student learning, the faculty has been trying to align the format of these narrative evaluations directly with the stated outcomes of the individual course and the MDiv program.

In general, CDSP faculty members believe they do a serious and thorough job of evaluating individual students, particularly in academic areas. Our ATS/WASC reviewers agreed. We still struggle to find more effective ways to evaluate less public or measurable formational aspects, such as faith development. So far, participation in the ATS project has not offered us new tools for that task.

***General Ordination Exams*[1]**

Every year, graduating MDiv students who are candidates for ordination in the Episcopal Church take required, standardized General Ordination Exams (GOEs). A student receives grades in seven canonical areas related to ministry in the church, from Church History to Pastoral Care. The grades of individual students are revealed only to the student, to the student's bishop, and to the seminary president. If a particular student has scored poorly, the president will make that information known to the student's advisor, for the purposes of pastoral support. Otherwise, faculty members do not officially receive feedback on performance of individual students.

The GOEs thus serve as an assessment tool for the individual student and for the student's church supervisors but cannot be used by faculty for the purposes of judging the progress of a particular student. The data from the GOEs in aggregate, however, serve as an assessment tool for the effectiveness of the overall curriculum.

Senior sermons as an assessment tool

Third-year MDiv students are required to preach once in the context of a daily service of Holy Eucharist at the seminary. Most faculty members as well as a sizable percentage of the student body attend services where students preach.

Some members of our visiting team from WASC identified this as a missed opportunity for assessing student learning, both at individual and program levels. In response to this suggestion, faculty members now respond to each senior sermon by an email questionnaire, compiled by the professor of homiletics, with individual faculty members explicitly assessing the student's preaching in terms of each member's field of expertise. The set of responses for each student is shared with that student's adviser, and at the end of the school year, the responses are reviewed in aggregate to serve as an assessment tool for the MDiv program.

Assessing from a baseline

Advising. As part of the admissions process, students write essays that include descriptions of faith development and reflections on vocation. Faculty advisors have access to these essays, which are part of a student's permanent record. In the past, the degree to which this material has been used to track a student's development has been entirely up to the individual advisor. As a result of our increased attention to assessment, the faculty has begun considering these admissions essays as part of the agenda for an initial meeting between new student and advisor and to be revisited at the time of the second-year review. To date, we have not developed a real "culture" of responsibility among faculty regarding this activity.

Coursework. The new curriculum for the CDSP MDiv requires all students to take six core courses, one per semester. The faculty has begun to see the fall course for the first year, Anglican Tradition and Life, as having the potential to provide more formal baseline information on individual students. The fall history course, which most MDiv students take, also provides important information about a student's comfort with academic writing. The narrative evaluation required for each MDiv student at the close of courses should become the locus for a more intentional baseline assessment of individual students.

Capstone or exit information

Advising. Many students graduate from our MDiv program without having a serious exit interview with their advisors—an interview that might, for example, look back at those initial essays and try to assess how far a student has come. It is easy to see why this part of the process slips through the cracks—the end of the academic year is hectic. Because the faculty has not yet agreed on a regular procedure for this sort of discussion, success is haphazard.

Coursework. The new MDiv curriculum requires students to take a course in their final semester called Issues in Ministry. Because the course has not yet been taught, its content is still in the planning stages. Our work on assessment would indicate that the course should in some way serve as a capstone and should provide information to assess both individual student learning and program effectiveness. The faculty has not been enthusiastic about devising a student portfolio or some such capstone product, having experimented with similar ideas in the (dim) past.

Assessing the effectiveness of our MDiv program

Much of the CDSP faculty's focus on assessment of learning has taken place in a review of the MDiv academic curriculum that began in 1999. We gathered evidence both external and internal, eventually put a new curriculum in place, and are now living into it. At this writing, our students have still not completed one full three-year cycle. We have been observing how the new curriculum functions, and we plan for a full assessment once the cycle has been completed, during academic year 2006–07.

External evidence for program assessment

Sources. Some provide us routinely with data, and some have had to be approached especially for the purpose of our curricular review. These have included

- responses from the annual ATS *Graduating Student Questionnaire;*
- responses from surveys of alumni/ae gathered as part of curriculum reviews in 1992, 2000, and 2001;
- responses from a survey of the bishops of Province VIII in October 2001, asking them to assess the strengths and weaknesses of CDSP graduates they have known;
- structured discussions with alumni/ae who come back to campus for Five Year Reflection Conferences, held for classes five years after their graduation;
- informal but regular and focused discussions with the Academic Committee of the seminary's board of trustees, the bishops of Province VIII, and the seminary's Advisory Council;
- informal and incomplete information regarding the placement of graduates;
- composite results of our students' performance on the General Ordination Examination each year, which indicate how our students compared to students at other Episcopal seminaries taking the same exam in each of the seven required areas of study.

Findings. Reviewing the evidence from these sources, the faculty concluded that CDSP students were doing as well as other Episcopal students, and that the data did not indicate the need for an emergency-level rethinking of our curriculum. The most pressing needs the data suggested were

- a higher emphasis on the more practical dimensions of parish leadership and administration;
- a more explicit connection between the "academic" material we taught and its practical application to congregational life.

Internal evidence and discussion of desired outcomes

Identification of themes and criteria for assessment. The majority of the faculty discussion for the three years of our review concerned the academic content of our MDiv curriculum.

- Faculty identified seven core themes that shaped the way we thought about the MDiv: contextualization, integration, partnership with the church, multiculturalism/diversity, the Anglican tradition, our membership in the Graduate Theological Union, and formation.
- We then used CDSP's new mission statement along with the Degree Program Standard for the MDiv as foundations for devising a set of desired outcomes for this degree program.
- Recognizing that a significant amount of the formation for theological vocation happened in areas outside the classroom, the faculty concentrated first on the things for which we felt we had some direct responsibility, such as course content and alignment of courses with an overall curricular shape and attention to the seminary mission.

Alignment of course planning with desired outcomes. As a result of increased attention to assessment of learning, CDSP faculty now identify intended learning outcomes at the start of each course syllabus and devise course evaluation forms that explicitly connect matters to be evaluated with the stated outcomes. Faculty members have also undertaken to use the language of their stated outcomes for their narrative evaluations of individual students at the close of courses. These small steps have begun influencing the way we think about exactly what we expect individual courses to achieve and how those courses contribute to the overall curriculum and seminary mission. Perhaps most significantly, in hindsight, the faculty has begun to think in terms of alignment—that stated outcomes, goals, teaching methods, and evaluations should "match up."

Departmental and curriculum-wide alignment. As we continued the curricular review, we began applying outcomes-based reflection to "department" curricula, producing white papers on what was currently offered in the various areas of our teaching, and later dreaming about what a "blue-sky" curriculum might look like. At every stage in these deliberations, we returned to the desired outcomes we had identified for the MDiv as well as the mission statement of the seminary.

New curricular emphases. Our deliberations yielded a sense that we wanted to aim at a more integrated curriculum, a series of courses that would not simply be a "collection" but, in themselves, would suggest ways the various pieces of a seminary education worked together in preparing a student for professional ministry. In addition, we recognized the need to emphasize areas of pastoral leadership more than we had. And we also identified a need to teach our Anglican tradition more explicitly. The resulting curriculum, while consisting mostly of the same "packages" we had worked with before, now organized some of those packages into a required sequence of six core courses, four of which dealt directly with practical aspects of ministry.

- The first course in the new sequence, Anglican Tradition and Life, intends to present students with a broad view of the background to the Episcopal Church.
- The final course, Issues in Ministry, intends to be not just a capstone but a window looking toward the future. It is hoped that this course will offer us a way to assess the strength of our program, both for individual students and for students as a group.
- The field education faculty do some longitudinal assessment of their own program based on aspects of these evaluations, but those data have not been integrated well into evaluation of the whole MDiv curriculum. The information gleaned from reports by field education supervisors are already key to our evaluation of students' progress in the exercise of ministry and should also be central to our ongoing evaluation of the overall MDiv program.
- It is time to gather some of the external evidence again—notably, the bishops' input and the alumni/ae surveys.
- At the time of this writing, CDSP has also been given a long-awaited endowment for a full-time musician. We are now reviewing the MDiv curriculum again, deliberating how to address our tradition's emphasis on music in our curriculum.

Assessing the strength of the faculty

Individual faculty members. Every year, each faculty member produces a self-evaluation of teaching, research, and service to the church and seminary. These evaluations are discussed by the faculty member with the president and academic dean, who then write a record of the conversation, including recommendations for future focus. Special reviews for reappointment and tenure include similar self-evaluations, as well as letters from external reviewers of the faculty member's scholarly work, and from colleagues in the same field at other schools of the GTU. Reviews for reappointment and tenure are conducted by the president and academic dean with the tenured faculty. Reviews of full professors are conducted at five-year intervals by the president, academic dean and the other full professors.

We are confident that our review of the CDSP faculty is generally fair and professional. Although reviews implicitly follow the CDSP mission statement in emphases noted, we have not, thus far, tried to align them clearly with our agreed-upon outcomes for the MDiv degree program.

In the past, a gap in our approach to reviewing faculty for promotion has been direct knowledge of classroom performance; we have depended on course evaluations by students for information on teaching. Some steps have been taken toward instituting a regular process for class visitation by tenured faculty members, but a systematic program is not yet in place.

Faculty as a group. Our participation in the Lexington Seminar helped us to identify weaknesses in our faculty culture and to begin to streamline how we handle some of the routine tasks that threaten to overwhelm us. We have a subcommittee whose task is to find ways to make implicit expectations explicit and to watch over the tendency toward creeping responsibility. The president and academic dean oversee progress on this activity.

Because advising is a key means of assessing the formation of our students, we need to be attending directly to the training and assessment of faculty as advisors. We have identified this area as one that needs further attention as we try to align various aspects of our program.

Assessing how nonacademic contexts contribute to formation

In assessing MDiv preparation, it has been especially difficult to evaluate how the nonacademic program of the seminary functions in the formation of our students. Having considered the question of how many of these activities we had responsibility for, faculty members decided that, besides our work as advisors, we could justifiably take responsibility for the worship life of the community. Trying to assess how the worship program functions in the overall program has been an enormous challenge, and the faculty has just begun trying to find a way to grab hold of it.

This area also includes the aspects of formation that are peculiar to the Episcopal Church and are, therefore, most difficult to explain to outsiders. Our ATS and WASC teams were astonished by the fact that CDSP holds fifteen services of worship every week and had a difficult time understanding the way the Episcopal Church has traditionally claimed to "teach" its doctrines and culture through worship. For our part, we had great difficulty putting into words exactly how we think this formation takes place and had to acknowledge that we were quite unclear about how one can assess it. Our faculty has embarked on a more thorough evaluation of our worship program and still needs help finding structures, models, and language both to be able to assess it for ourselves and to communicate our findings to non-Anglicans.

In 2001–02, while we were involved in many of the deliberations cited above, the faculty realized that the current division of responsibility left no one but the faculty to oversee many noncurricular aspects of formation—and assessment thereof—of our MDiv students. A decision was made, initiated by the faculty and supported by the board of trustees, to upgrade what had been the office of director of student affairs to a true dean of students position and to identify that office as the locus for attention to vocational formation. This change required a rethinking of the relationship between the general area of student affairs and the faculty, a change that is still evolving. The dean of students has been participating in discussion about and evaluation of our formational program, and has observed the canonically required evaluations of MDiv students.

Looking ahead

Following our three-year process of accreditation review, CDSP was notified that we were being reaccredited for the full ten years. We must make plans, however, for a focused visit in spring 2008, aimed directly at our progress on assessment. We have made some progress in the direction of organizing these processes: besides some steps identified in the descriptions above, we have formed a three-person standing faculty committee to oversee assessment. The need for a "champion" in the area of assessment was an explicit recommendation to us from our ATS and WASC visiting teams, and we are hopeful that this committee—made up of the dean of academic affairs, the registrar, and the professor of pastoral theology, who has gifts in this area—can serve as that champion. Given our size and resources, it would be difficult to conceive of another way of handling this.

We hope that our participation in the ATS project will ultimately result in our learning how to "tune" the systems we are already using—to align processes institution-wide, to improve our consciousness about assessment, and to find the language to communicate what we are doing to people outside our small community. We also hope that this report of our experiences will help other schools navigate the confusing territory more effectively than we have done.

Linda Lee Clader is dean of academic affairs and professor of homiletics at Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California.

ENDNOTE

1. These exams are under the control of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church and can be seen, therefore, as an indication of how well our students are being prepared in terms prescribed by our faith tradition. Their weaknesses, which our faculty deem to be numerous, include a lack of a benchmark of any sort, either provided by the church or identified by us for individual students or for our program; inconsistency from year to year in the quality of the readers; and inattention to issues of context, both at the seminary and in the church milieu where a student is being trained and of which he or she is a part.

Leclercq among the Blue Devils: Assessing Theological Learning in the Modern University

Willie James Jennings
Duke University Divinity School

ABSTRACT: Assessing theological learning in the modern university is a complicated endeavor. The fundamental challenge we face at Duke University Divinity School is to bring together two different ecologies of assessment, those of the research university and those of the church. Through our curriculum review, self-study, ATS consultants' visit, and ATS comprehensive visit, we were able to clarify the two central sites where we need to connect the ecologies of assessment: (1) the divinity school's multiple forms of student assessment and the research practices of the faculty and (2) the relation between doctoral student formation and master student formation.

Searching for a moment of clarity

On December 7, 2004, the divinity school hosted an ATS assessment consultation team. Jeremiah McCarthy and Charles Willard from ATS and John Harris of Samford University gathered with the entire divinity school faculty for a day of conversation regarding our assessment practices. John Harris was the central facilitator of the gathering. The goal of the conversation was to engage the faculty in substantial reflection regarding our practices of student assessment. After helpful opening statements by McCarthy and Willard, the conversation began with Harris asking probing questions. From the first set of answers to the final comments of the day, our visitors and the faculty had not arrived at the central issues. This was no fault of Harris, ATS colleagues, or the faculty. After the meeting, I debriefed with our ATS visitors regarding the meeting. Harris sensed that it could have been a more productive conversation. What hampered it?

It took several months after this meeting to actually figure out where we missed it. At the time of the consultation visit, we were in the middle of our self-study, having just completed our curriculum review, and looking toward our ATS comprehensive visit. As a school, we were trying to articulate to ourselves the complexity of our formation processes for our students. The conversation with our ATS colleagues came at a moment when we were wrestling with a different set of questions than the ones they were asking us. Yet we were not at the point in our process to be able to articulate to them the questions unique to a university setting for theological formation.

Leclercq among the Blue Devils

When Jean Leclercq wrote his famous book, *Amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu* (*A Love of Learning and a Desire for God*), he surely could not have anticipated the complexities of ministerial formation and assessment in the modern research university.[1] Regardless of authorial intent, we at Duke University Divinity School have taken this theme—love of learning and desire for God—to capture the kind of cultivation we are aiming at in our curriculum and in all our programs. The challenge facing us is trying to figure out what ministerial cultivation and assessment look like in the university. The task before us was one of clarification and augmentation of our assessment processes, clarifying to ourselves what we do well and determining the places that need work. We determined that there were two sites where the different ecologies of university and church converge quite powerfully: (1) the divinity school's multiple forms of student assessment and the research practices of the faculty and (2) the relation between doctoral student formation and master student formation.

Assessment and research

Who is qualified to assess the growth or progress of a student toward our formation goals? The faculty offers the best candidates for the job. Cultivation and assessment are bound together. Yet it is often difficult for faculty members to imagine their task reaching deeply into assessment. Our faculty members do student assessment well, yet they are apprehensive about their appropriateness for the task. They often feel they are being asked to evaluate students in ways beyond their expertise or wisdom. They are also concerned about the sheer amount of time demanded of them to perform our multiple forms of student evaluation, which, together, constitute the way we assess the progress of our students. The evaluative process culminates in the faculty vote on candidates for degrees.

Admissions process

Evaluation begins with the admissions process. The faculty has determined that the successful candidate for admission to Duke University Divinity School will be intellectually strong, academically prepared, and church-related in some meaningful way. The campus visits of prospective students, along with all other forms of recruitment contact, allow students to examine our school. But these contacts allow us to examine the students as well.

Advising process

From the beginning of their studies, students are assigned an academic advisor or a director to help them move through their programs. Each semester, they meet with that advisor and examine their completed course work and projected courses for the next semester. When it works well (which is often), our advising process provides important aid in evaluating the students' progress.

Writing assessment

The mandatory writing assessment, administered through the Center for Theological Writing, is designed not only to evaluate the writing abilities of our entering students but also to introduce them to theological writing as a constituent practice of Christian ministry. Our goal is to open the students to the critical self-reflection essential to faithful theological interpretation and witness. By this process, we hope to move their conception of writing away from that of an intellectual exercise or test and toward that of a vital practice of spiritual growth and service.

Spiritual formation group evaluation

Each entering student is assigned to a spiritual formation group. The purpose of these small groups is to cultivate the spiritual disciplines in the context of theological reflection and community formation. Of additional benefit is that the groups allow us to monitor the students' own sense of their spiritual growth and development. This is done first by the group leaders, who report the general condition of their groups and share the sense of growth registered by the students in monthly meetings with other group leaders and the chaplain. This monitoring is also done by evaluations that the students complete at the end of each semester.

Field education evaluations

Students who do field education are required to be interviewed by the directors of field education before each placement and to submit an evaluation from their field supervisors at each placement's conclusion. The initial interview not only serves a crucial role in establishing where students might best be placed but also gives us an early opportunity to diagnose potential challenges students may face in the supervisory evaluative context. The written evaluation culminates a process of ongoing assessment throughout the time of pastoral and church-committee supervision. This evaluation form is coupled with other evaluative materials submitted to the students' faculty advisors (or others assigned by the academic dean), who then meet with the students in individual conferences to review the field education experiences. The advisors render grades of pass or fail for the field-work placements. Grades are submitted to the registry and relayed to the office of field education. During summer placements, students also meet in area reflection groups led by faculty and/or divinity school staff to discuss their field work in the context of theological reflection.

Middler evaluation

In the fall semester of the middler year, halfway into the MDiv program, Master of Divinity students undergo a comprehensive evaluation based on all classroom and field education work up to that point. This evaluation allows faculty members to assess the students' readiness to complete the program, examining in particular their sense of self and vocation, command of skills of ministry, and ability to integrate the practice and theology of ministry. Each student submits for review the following materials:

- a seven- to ten-page typewritten self-evaluation document (in which the student describes the ways he or she has grown in relation to God, self, and others);
- field education reports and related data;
- a self-evaluation of academic performance with a transcript; and
- an episode of ministry such as a verbatim, a sermon, a case study, or a church program that indicates some aspect of a theology of ministry.

These instruments are discussed in an evaluation conference of at least forty-five minutes with a faculty member of the student's choice. After the conference, the faculty member prepares a written evaluation, which is submitted to the student and the academic dean and placed in the student's file. Any remediation or special course work prescribed by the evaluator (with the concurrence of the academic dean) must be completed prior to the student's graduation.

Denominational and academic references

During their middler and senior years, many of our students engage in the evaluative processes of their denominations. Our faculty and staff are often asked to participate in those processes by completing evaluation forms, sitting on denominational boards of ordination, writing letters outlining the qualities of particular students, or commenting formally or informally about the strengths, weaknesses, and general preparedness of students being considered as candidates for ordination. Faculty members are also regularly asked to provide academic references for students seeking admission to doctoral programs.

Faculty evaluation and vote

The faculty is the central factor in student evaluation, both establishing the formal procedures and enacting a very important informal process of assessment. Through interaction inside and outside the classroom, faculty members gain a fairly strong sense of the students. This sense is vital for their evaluation of student preparedness for moving to the next steps of credentialing beyond divinity school. Not every faculty member knows every student, but the collective sense of the faculty on any given student (especially when coupled with the assessments of key administrative staff who have extensive student contact) is quite remarkable in its accuracy. The culmination of the complex process of student evaluation is the faculty vote and recommendation to the university board of trustees for the conferral of degrees.

Faculty members are deeply involved in our assessment process, carrying the greater share of work at every point of evaluation. Faculty members are also deeply involved in research and teaching that grows out of that research. These are parallel and not intersecting practices. In fact, as some faculty members have observed, research practices, either because of the habits of mind they cultivate or the effort it takes to shift from reductive to holistic thinking in order to do student evaluation, make the work of assessment more complicated rather than easier. It is one thing to evaluate students' course work and quite another to make more comprehensive judgments about their character or readiness to carry out synthetic tasks like preaching, counseling, or church management. Faculty also struggle with how much time to give each student at each point of evaluation. How deeply does one probe an issue or event, past or present relationships, theologies, or personal identities? We have a very young student body and each faculty member averages at least thirty to forty advisees. Every student potentially represents hours of advising. Faculty members are willing to give students the time they need, but in a research university that time is extremely costly. In addition, faculty members recognize they are engaged in evaluative practices not mirrored in university departments or most professional schools of the university.

An ecology of theological and spiritual assessment does not fit easily into the ecology of the modern university. The theme of learning and its assessment clearly fits our context, especially learning vivified by disciplined and robust research. The academic imagination as we experience it at Duke can easily grasp the idea of cultivating a love of learning. More difficult to grasp is the idea of cultivating a desire for God. Far more difficult to accept is the idea that this is an inseparable twofold cultivation that has been torn asunder in our time. The Duke University motto, *Eruditio et Religio*, reflects not only its Methodist heritage but also harkens back to this ancient sensibility of learning bound to vital piety especially embodied for us in the life and thought of the Wesleys. Yet we live with a very difficult question: How can we bring together the practices of research and assessment?

Doctoral and Master's degree students

The divinity school does not have separate faculties for the doctoral and master's degree students, nor do we have courses exclusive to these students. One shared learning ecology forms both groups of students as well as those students who wish to transition from the one (master's) to the other (doctoral). Herein lies a point of important complication: faculty members must continually facilitate a learning environment helpful to both student populations. Creating a learning environment suitable for both master's and doctoral students is a difficult task made even more difficult by the role doctoral students play in the formation of master's students.

Our faculty members are very careful to consider the educational needs of both student populations, especially the doctoral students. This is done in three ways:

1. Faculty members specify the primary and secondary audiences and thus the instructional focus for each of their courses. If the focus for a course is primarily doctoral formation, intentional allowances are made for appropriate work and assignments for master's-level students.
2. Faculty members offer independent (directed) studies for doctoral students that build upon the subject matter of master's-level courses or examine specialized subject matter necessary for doctoral student development.
3. Each doctoral student is assigned an advisory committee, through the Graduate Program in Religion, to ensure proper guidance in course work and scholarly formation.

The execution of the master's-level curriculum is profoundly affected by that of the doctoral program. Divinity school faculty must calculate their course offerings in conversation with colleagues from the Department of Religion. There is an ongoing struggle to coordinate the teaching needs of the divinity school with those of the graduate program in religion. There are times, in fact, when our normally smooth working relations are disrupted by miscommunication and misunderstanding in this important area.

The number of doctoral students admitted each year who are able, prepared, and willing to step into the role of preceptor for our master's-level divinity courses is very small. This means that we are forced to rely on some students who are lacking in at least one of the key determinants of excellence in the divinity school classroom. Equally significant, our doctoral students are stretched fairly thin. While they need the financial support afforded by precepts, they can take on only so many without the quality of all their work suffering. In addition, many tire of precepting the same courses year after year. Understandably, they want to expand their range of teaching skills and disciplinary expertise.

Doctoral students have an ambiguous relationship with the divinity school, even as they play a pivotal role in our educational work. That ambiguity arises from their in-between status. They are not master's-level students (many of them already have master's degrees), although they are in community with master's-level students. They are not professors, although they function as professors-in-training in many classroom settings. This in-between faculty and master's-student status makes them both powerful and powerless at the same time. They are powerful because they profoundly affect the outcome of the learning experience of the master's students. Indeed, for most master's-level students, doctoral students are ubiquitous: they are instructors in the foundational courses, and they are participants—often dominant participants—in most of the advanced courses. Yet they are powerless in the sense that they are in the classroom simply to carry out the pedagogical goals of the professors. Doctoral students also must share their own course-work time and their professors and mentors with master's-level students.

In their role as leaders of the small-group preceptorials and graders of the course assignments, doctoral students are the single most important factor in facilitating the work of the faculty with the students. Therefore, teaching graduate students how to teach is a critical task for the faculty and the senior administrative staff of the divinity school. There is also interest from the university's vice provost for graduate education in equipping doctoral students to be excellent teachers. However, the unique situation of divinity school teaching requires that we attend to the formation of doctoral students in ways that will prepare them specifically for the divinity school classroom or other seminary contexts.

Doctoral students are fundamentally teachers-in-training, and because they are new at this craft, they tend to bring three challenges to the teaching environment:

1. **Learning how to follow the leadership of the professor while running their own small groups**. These are two difficult tasks, and we have preceptors who struggle with organization and with compliance.
2. **Learning how to evaluate student work**. Preceptors need significant guidance in learning how to grade and how to communicate that evaluation to students. Often, some of our brightest doctoral students are some of our weakest communicators of evaluation.
3. **Learning how to respect difference while facilitating learning**. Preceptors (like faculty members) must learn how to function well in a diverse classroom environment.

Many of our preceptors have very little exposure to diverse groups of people, and learning how to teach in such an environment is a significant challenge for them.

In response to these challenges, we have developed a requisite full-day teaching orientation for divinity school preceptors. The orientation consists of panel discussions with experienced preceptors, faculty members, and students. We also offer instruction on running precept sessions, grading, and classroom dynamics. In recent years, we have added instruction in Web technology and our grading rubric and template. Later in the semester, we hold a lunch meeting with the preceptors to discuss how their teaching is going. In addition, there is a section on the course evaluation that allows students to give direct feedback to the preceptors on their performance. Even with these forms of ongoing orientation and training, we must constantly work at supporting the doctoral students in their dual role. We must maintain a delicate balance between allowing them the freedom to be students while holding them to the responsibilities of being leaders in our educational work both inside and outside the classroom.

The presence of doctoral students profoundly enriches but complicates our academic ecology and creates important questions for assessment. How does one carry out the intellectual formation of future academic scholars while fostering ministerial formation? How do the formal and informal evaluation processes of doctoral students intercept and relate to the evaluation processes of Master of Divinity (and other master's degree seeking) students? These questions point to more than logistical matters. They approach the heart of the complexity of our situation. Doctoral students require a mentor-mentee relationship that demands more time and focus than the faculty members' relationship to a Master of Divinity student. Or should it? In addition, the professor-doctoral student (becoming professor) relationship is closer to the heart of the formation process imagined by the modern research university. Clearly, we must engage in two different but, we hope, complimentary strategies of assessment. However, trying to determine how they relate and what constitutes a healthy balance between them or even appropriate influence of each on the other remains elusive.

There is also the question of the cumulative effect of engaging in the practices associated with both doctoral and ministerial formation. As with assessment and research practices, the practices of teaching and mentoring these different populations of students move on parallel tracks, even if these tracks are situated closely together. Yet we know that faculty must handle the forms of evaluation inherent to the cultivation of each population with great skill and clarity. They must keep clear that they are not evaluating ministerial students in the light of doctoral students, creating a hierarchy of importance based on their scholarly interests or aspirations. Nor can they separate the two populations as though they are engaging in the care of two different species of students with unrelated intellectual endeavors. The crucial question here is whether the cumulative effect of engaging in this dual work renders suspect healthy assessment of each population?

Conclusion

Anyone who arrives at the doors of Duke University, newly appointed as a faculty person, brings a similar story. By skill, temperament, and promise they are persons of outstanding intellectual ability who are deeply committed to the scholarly life. The covenant they make with the university from the moment of their appointment is to engage in research that will make a difference in the world. Faculty members of the divinity school make the same covenant. Covenant bonds mark an additional set of commitments for divinity faculty. We are committed to the spiritual and ministerial formation of our students for the manifold ministries of the church and the betterment of society. Faculty members perform these commitments primarily through their research and their teaching. Yet they do far more than research and teach. They assess students' readiness for admission, their performance in the classroom, their readiness to take advanced courses, their adequacy in performing disparate tasks and exhibiting various skills, and even their interpersonal and relational skills. In all these matters and many more, they often are quite astute and helpful to students in their assessments.

The weakness in our process of student assessment is that it remains fragmented. But this fragmentation we have discovered is due in large measure to our setting. As a former dean of the school was fond of saying, "We are a school of the church and of the university." Our existence in two communities of concern and accountability places on us multiple obligations and the need to think through the connections of our complex forms of assessment. The advantage we have at Duke University Divinity School is that the university senior administrators, colleagues all over the university, not to mention students, appreciate our difficult tasks and are not opposed to our endeavor being in formation. This broad-based support and a divinity faculty deeply committed to turning their scholarly work toward serving the church and the wider society give us hope that we will be able to clarify the connections between our two ecologies of assessment.

Willie James Jennings is academic dean of Duke University Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina.

ENDNOTE

1. Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961).

Progressing Toward Ministry: Student Perceptions of the Dispositional Evaluation Process at Emmanuel School of Religion

Jack Holland
Emmanuel School of Religion

ABSTRACT: In the 1996 response to Emmanuel School of Religion's self study, the ATS Commission on Accrediting imposed Notation N7.1, "The evaluation procedures are insufficiently developed or implemented in this institution." Evaluative procedures were implemented according to the required schedule, and in June of 1998 the notation was removed. This article summarizes the assessment strategies that were initiated by the institution to bring the school into compliance with these expectations and follows the continued development of the school's efforts to effectively use the tools of assessment to better prepare students for ministry. Particular focus is given to the practice of an annual progressive evaluation by the faculty of each student's overall progress toward ministry. Qualitative interviews of a sample of students and faculty were conducted to learn their perceptions of the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of this practice. Dominant themes that emerged from a content analysis of these interviews are summarized.

Introduction

As a member of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project, Emmanuel School of Religion is in the midst of preparing for a comprehensive evaluation visit this spring. Concerted effort has been given in this process toward implementing a battery of assessment instruments that are designed to provide valid and reliable feedback regarding the attainment of institutional goals. In the last self-study conducted in 1996, the ATS Commission on Accrediting imposed Notation N7.1 which states, "The evaluation procedures are insufficiently developed or implemented in this institution." Under the qualified leadership of Eleanor Daniel, a number of assessment tools were initiated that resulted in the removal of the notation in 1998. The first section of this article summarizes the Learning Outcomes Assessment strategies that have been implemented to assess the academic functioning of the school. These tools provide important quantitative feedback regarding the school's academic preparation of students. Through the influence of Emmanuel's participation in the ATS Character and Assessment project, the faculty continues to add and adjust instruments, striving to improve our assessment practices.

Although the Learning Outcomes Assessment template serves the institution well in assessing the academic preparation of students, there was a growing awareness within the faculty of a need to assess more than just academic performance. Charles M. Wood refers to a distinction between what he identifies as "ability-language" and "disposition-language,"[1] noting that certain ministerial abilities such as memorization, biblical exegesis, preparing and preaching a sermon, etc., are amenable to specific teaching approaches and to quantifiable measurement. He adds, however, that ". . . learning an ability, even a reasonably complex ability is one thing. Being disposed to exercise it is another."[2] Emmanuel recognizes that the quantitative assessments in place do not necessarily adequately measure the fitness or "disposition" for ministry that we desire our graduates to possess. The second portion of this article reports on a practice called *progressive evaluation* that was established as a means to assess annually the overall development and potential for ministry of each student. In an effort to evaluate the impact of the progressive evaluation process at Emmanuel, a qualitative investigation was conducted in which a small sample of students and faculty was interviewed to learn its perceptions of the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of this practice. The dominant themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data are reported with the hope that what we are learning may benefit other schools that are also struggling to find ways to assess the dispositional elements of theological education.

Learning Outcomes Assessment

Responding to the challenge from the ATS Commission on Accrediting to "more sufficiently develop and implement evaluation procedures," Emmanuel School of Religion has established a number of instruments for the assessment of its academic practices. This Learning Outcomes Assessment process is designed in accord with the General Model of Evaluation as described by Daniel O. Aleshire in which four tasks are delineated: (1) a focus on the goals of the theological school, (2) identification of the kind of qualitative or quantitative information needed to assess those goals, (3) analysis and interpretation of the information that has been collected, and (4) translation of the results of the assessment phase into appropriate plans of institutional action.[3] The Learning Outcomes Assessment practices of Emmanuel are formatted within a template that attends to each of these tasks. Each spring Eleanor Daniel, Emmanuel's director of institutional research generates and distributes a composite report to faculty and administrators detailing: (1) the institutional goal, (2) the assessment tool used to measure that goal, (3) the results of the assessment, and (4) how report results have been used or suggestions for their application.

The Learning Outcomes Assessment instruments currently in use at Emmanuel represent a variety of strategies including the ATS *Graduating*

Student Questionnaire (GSQ), surveys of alumni/ae who have completed five years of post-graduate ministry, occasional alumni/ae focus group reviews of degree programs, and the assessment measures of specific curriculum areas. The table on page 34 provides a succinct illustration of this template focusing, for illustrative purposes, on selected instances in which the four tasks of the General Education Model have been applied.

This table presents the clearest examples of instances in which all four tasks of the General Education Model have been accomplished. It may be observed that these assessment strategies have probably had their most significant impact in the Christian Ministries area. The Introduction to Ministry class required of first-year students has been significantly altered to teach toward the applicable institutional goals. The addition of mentoring and peer groups, a required preaching and Christian education course, the design of a required Clinical Pastoral Education experience, and modifications to the Theological Integration class at the close of the MDiv degree are all changes that have been made based on the school's interpretation of assessment feedback. This feedback has been used in conversation with the institutional goals establishing a cycle through the four tasks of the general education model.

Progressive evaluation

As the instruments of academic assessment gradually fell into place, there was a growing awareness in the institution of the need to attend to the dispositional readiness of Emmanuel's graduates for ministry. Emmanuel School of Religion has its roots in the nineteenth century church reformation known today as the Stone-Campbell Movement. In many of the churches associated with this movement, ordination is a congregational decision as there is no central decision-making body beyond the local eldership of a particular congregation. Many of the churches for which Emmanuel prepares ministers take for granted that an Emmanuel graduate will be capable ethically, academically, experientially, and spiritually to minister. With an awareness of this style of governance among our constituent churches, Emmanuel feels the weight of responsibility to counsel students on their potential to minister in all areas.

Within this context the process known as progressive evaluation was implemented in the spring term of the year 2000. The rationale for this practice is explained in the current Emmanuel School of Religion academic catalog:

> The School has a sense of responsibility to students to assist them to develop personally and spiritually so they can minister to others but also to the churches and other organizations for which students may minister or work following graduation. This requires substantial evaluation of the progress of students in as many facets of their preparation as possible. To assist students in their academic, personal, and spiritual formation, the faculty will each spring assess each student's readiness to

Four Tasks of the General Education Model			
Institutional Goal	**Measured By**	**2004 Results**	**Use of Results**
Develop a mature love of God, commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and awareness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.	GSQ-items dealing with (a) trust in God, (b) ability to pray, (c) ability to live faith in daily life, (d) strengthening of spiritual life	3.8, 3.2, 3.7, and 3.6 (5 being best and compared to 4.1, 3.7, 3.9 and 4.0 for all ATS graduates)	Introduction of peer groups for first-year students to mentor them in spiritual formation.
Contextualize the Christian faith in relation to contemporary culture.	GSQ-items dealing with ability to relate issues to faithAlumni Questionnaire-Item 19	4.4 (5 being best, compared to 4.0 for all ATS graduates) 2.13 (1 being best)	Redesign of Introduction to Ministry class to Nature of Ministry, a class for first-year students in MAR and MDiv programs focusing on the intersection of the church, culture, and ministry.
Test and refine one's theology of ministry.	Alumni Questionnaire-Item 20	2.07 (1 being best)	Redesign of Theological Integration class for MDiv students to complete the process of refining a theology of ministry that was begun in Nature of Ministry in the first year of study.
Communicate clearly and accurately through preaching, teaching, writing, and/or other forms applicable to his or her specific vocation.	GSQ-items dealing with (a) preaching and (b) teaching	4.2 and 4.1 (5 being best, compared to 4.1 and 4.1 for all ATS MDiv graduates)	Redesign of the curriculum to require a preaching course as well as a course in Christian education.
Assess people and situations accurately and sympathetically to provide ministerial leadership in such activities as counseling, worship, preaching, teaching, program planning, and administration.	GSQ-items on (a) preaching, (b) teaching, (c) leading, (d) counseling, (e) administration, (f) conduct of worship Alumni Questionnaire-Item IV B-preparation for primary responsibilities Chapel Leadership Evaluation by Participant-Observers-(a) competency for ministry, (b) communication of ideas and message, (c) design and leadership of worship, (d) articulation of convictions, (e) understood audience, (f) sound interpretation of Scripture	4.1, 4.1, 4.0, 3.7, 3.7, and 3.5 (5 being best, compared to 4.2, 4.1, 4.1, 3.8, and 4.1 for all ATS MDiv graduates) 2.55 (with 3 being best) 9.0, 9.0, 8.6, 8.91, 9.09, 8.9 (10 being best)	Inclusion of Clinical Supervised Ministry or Clinical Pastoral Education as a requirement in the MDiv program.
Function as a change agent-to use and mediate the range of social process (including conflict) in a way that reflects the mission and spirit of Christ.	Field Supervisor Evaluations-(a) relationships, (b) self-starter, (c) overall progress	6.1, 6.14, 5.81 (7 being best)	Peer groups meeting weekly during the field work year have been introduced.
Demonstrates competency in the function of ministry by integrating personal faith, emotional maturity, and moral integrity.	Field Supervisor Evaluations-overall progress CPE Supervisor reports-ability to be professional	5.81 (7 being best) 9.5 (10 being best)	Introduction of mentoring groups for first-year students.Introduction of peer groups for second-year students. Inclusion of Clinical Supervised Ministry or Clinical Pastoral Education as a requirement. Redesign of Theological Integration.

> continue in pursuit of the stated degree goal. Factors to be considered include grade point average, reports from supervised ministry experiences, attitudes and behaviors demonstrated in the classroom and community, and other data that may be deemed essential by the faculty.

The progressive evaluation process begins with a day-long faculty retreat each spring semester. Rosters of the entire student body are provided, and the faculty works through the list of names throughout the day considering each student's grade point average, field work reports, and anecdotal data. Students are then asked to schedule a meeting with their advisor in which they are presented with a letter from the dean's office summarizing the key observations that were made by the faculty regarding the student's development and potential for ministry. The advisor has the responsibility of discussing the observations made by the faculty with the student, and in the cases where some form of change is called for, the advisor should seek to counsel the student on those issues.

In the five years that progressive evaluations have been conducted, there have been a few instances in which the faculty expressed major concerns about a student's progress toward the completion of the Master of Divinity and his or her potential to be effective in ministry. In these instances, the Dean, and, when appropriate, other faculty have met with the student to discuss these issues. The nature of these concerns has typically been about issues such as very poor class attendance, improper classroom behavior, and the like. In one instance, it was recommended, after painstaking dialogue, that a student whom the faculty unanimously agreed was probably not called to ministry be advised to discontinue the pursuit of a seminary education.

Qualitative review

Although this evaluation process has been used since the spring semester of 2000, the process itself has not been evaluated. In an effort to gauge the impact of this exercise on the ministerial preparation of Emmanuel's students, a qualitative research project was conducted during the summer of 2005. This investigation focused on learning the perceptions of both students and faculty regarding the effectiveness of the progressive evaluation.

Methodology

Data were gathered from a ninety-minute focus group interview of a sample of seven students. The interview followed the *long interview* method developed by McCracken "to give the investigator a highly efficient, productive, 'streamlined' instrument of inquiry."[4] In the long interview, the principle of maximizing the quality of the interview is applied to respondent selection. McCracken believes "it is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many."[5] This emphasis guided this study as an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of the students was sought. To protect the anonymity of students, the focus group interview was conducted by a matriculated student trained in this model of research. This interview was audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. Student interview questions consisted of intentionally open-ended "grand tour questions"[6] designed to elicit discussion regarding any positive or negative perceptions they had about the helpfulness of the progressive evaluation process and sought student input regarding how the practice can be improved.

Data were gathered from the faculty using a modified version of the long interview method in which they were asked for written responses to a number of open-ended questions. Questions of the faculty sought to learn their perceptions of how they think the progressive evaluation has functioned as a means to evaluate the dispositional character of students.

Treatment of data

A content analysis of both sets of data was performed to "determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the respondents' views of the topic in particular."[7] The content analysis involved coding frequently repeated words and phrases as well as recurring ideas or comments and then calculating the occurrences of those elements in comparison to the rest of the data. This analysis served to transform individual perceptions into general properties or themes for "academic presentation."[8]

A process known as "peer debriefing," as proposed by Guba and Lincoln[9] was included in this analysis. In this process, an additional individual, acquainted with the method of research of this study, assumed the role of devil's advocate in reviewing the transcribed data, the analysis, and the interpretations and conclusions of the researcher. Guba and Lincoln suggest that this process of debriefing makes "it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced."[10]

Findings

The following discussion provides an overview of three dominant themes that arose from these analyses of the interview data. These themes were (1) a sense of confusion and lack of information among students about the process (2) a desire among both students and faculty for the practice to occur at a more personal/relational level, and (3) an appreciation and valuing of the process by both students and faculty as it is ideally conceived along with a critique of how it has actually been performed.

The first interview question asked about the student's awareness and feelings regarding the practice of receiving an annual progressive evaluation from the faculty. Of the seven students in the focus group, five reported not knowing anything about the evaluation prior to notification from their advisor that they needed to make an appointment to review their evaluation. Two stated that they had heard of the process (one made reference to the academic catalog description) but noted that "a better job could be done of informing the students." It should be noted that as this first interview question was asked, the entire group of students reported that they thought they were coming to be interviewed about their perceptions of the annual practice of faculty course evaluations, an entirely different evaluation practice than the progressive evaluation. While it may be possible that communications regarding the purpose of the focus group interview could have been more explicit, the student group's confusion about the progressive evaluation process seemed palpable at the beginning of the conversation.

The facilitator redirected the focus group to its actual purpose by reading the catalog description of the progressive evaluation. With this clarification, student comments suggested that even when they experienced the evaluation, they were confused about its intended purposes. As one student summarized, "I didn't know until tonight that the evaluation was to look at the ministerial skills . . . I thought it was a formality to let you know that they (faculty) know you exist."

A second theme that arose from the analysis of data can be summarized as a desire for the progressive evaluation process to occur at a more personal/ relational level. Student requests for this personal dynamic were expressed in statements such as asking for face-to-face dialogue about the evaluation: "we need faculty to take a more hands-on approach to addressing student's strengths and weaknesses," and "we don't feel like someone should be evaluating us who does not have a relationship with us." Others noted that the evaluation letter is too "generic," and that "it seemed like a form letter." One student reported that "my advisor handed me the letter and said if I had questions I should come back and talk." Another reported that the "advisor just read the letter to me. I could have done that myself." One student did report that a more in-depth discussion with the advisor had occurred. In describing this instance the student explained that he/she felt the evaluation contained an erroneous perspective and stated that "if I didn't have a close relationship with my advisor this would have been really hard."

An underlying theme that arose from the data suggesting that the process needs to be more personal is that in making it personal the evaluation needs to focus specifically on the student's preparation for ministry. For example, statements from various students noted that "The purpose should be to monitor our progress toward ministry," "I would like more emphasis on vocational things," and "My biggest concern is that it needs to be focused more on ministry potential."

It is important to note that the desire for a more personalized process was expressed by the faculty as well. As one colleague stated, "The process is helpful when delivered in the context of the advising relationship. It is not helpful if received without the relationship and conversation." Another stressed the need for faculty advisors to be sure that a "real" conversation takes place with the student regarding the evaluation.

It is within this appraisal that "the process needs to occur in a more personal face-to-face dialogue" that a third theme emerged from the transcribed data. Faculty and students expressed a concern that the process is not always occurring in the manner that is prescribed by the description in the academic catalog. In response to a question asking the students to describe the process as they "had experienced it," six commented in some way or another that the process was "too general," that the meeting with their advisor was "too short and impersonal," and that "the meeting had not been helpful." A seventh perspective softened the critique a bit with the statement that the process was "helpful with one or two reservations. The generalness, I kind of took it as there were so many students that [faculty] couldn't spend a lot of time with each student. I will say that I felt honored that they would spend time talking about me. I remember one or two comments were helpful." One student added that while it was "generic, it came at a time when I was wondering if I should be in school or not, and it helped me to decide that maybe I should be here."

While the criticism from the student group of the process is more severe than the faculty critique, it is heartening that many of the negative comments are followed by the proviso that the progressive evaluation concept is valuable, and desired. In fact, the content analysis revealed that the more severe critical statements were often paired with the more enthusiastic statements of support for the value of the evaluation. The following statement by a student exhibits this dual perspective, "The purpose should be to monitor our progress toward ministry. I am just not seeing that in the current process, in what these other students are saying, or in my own letter. I really like the idea though. I like the thought of the faculty sitting down and talking about me, caring enough to talk about me." Another, after criticizing the lack of face-to-face dialogue stated, "I want guidance about my preparation for ministry."

Conclusions

Analysis of the transcribed focus-group interview of seven students and written responses of faculty members revealed three central perspectives regarding Emmanuel School of Religion's practice of the progressive evaluation. These three themes are lack of awareness and confusion about the process and its intended purpose, a desire for personal face-to-face dialogue about the student's progress toward vocational ministry, and a critique of the process as experienced along with a genuine desire for the evaluation. Appropriate responses to these perspectives may include a more concerted effort by the institution to call attention to the original design of the progressive evaluation process. Intentional communication about the process beyond the brief description in the academic catalog may be helpful as well.

A major concern that seems to be a thread through all three themes is the desire for more personal interaction between faculty and students. Both groups seem to agree that the process can do more harm than good when it occurs without a relational investment. The critique of these students and the faculty awareness of a need for more personal relationships may call for more intentional training to improve faculty advising practices and skills. Additionally, the faculty may wish to consider remodeling how the process itself occurs, seeking to find ways to make the process of delivering the report more personal, in-depth, and interactive. Students and faculty alike are aware of the time constraints posed by a student-to-faculty ratio that makes one-to-one relationships difficult.

In conclusion, it seems important to the future of the progressive evaluation to emphasize that genuine improvement of the process will not occur at a bureaucratic level. Preparing students in the dispositional nature of ministry calls for dispositional relationships that are oriented toward guiding students in a model of relating that portrays the ministry that we entrust to students when they leave this seminary.

Jack Holland is associate professor of pastoral care and counseling at Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tennessee. He joined the faculty in 2000 and is a member of Emmanuel's Continuing Accreditation Steering Committee.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles M. Wood, "Knowing and Caring," *Theological Education* 39, no. 1 (Pittsburgh, PA: The Association of Theological Schools, 2003), 32.
2. Ibid., 33.
3. Daniel O. Aleshire, "Introduction," *Theological Education* 35, no. 1 (Pittsburgh, PA: The Association of Theological Schools, Autumn 1998), v-xii.
4. Grant D. McCracken, *The Long Interview* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988).
5. Ibid., 17.
6. James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1980).
7. McCracken, *The Long Interview,* 42.
8. Ibid., 46.
9. Egon G. Guba, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Effective Evaluation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1981), 301.
10. Ibid.

Preparing Leaders for Mission: The Experience of Assessment at Luther Seminary

James L. Boyce and Richard W. Nysse
Luther Seminary

ABSTRACT: Luther Seminary has worked at designing a curriculum faithful to its mission statement and strategic plan to "educate leaders for Christian communities." Though we have engaged in many diverse assessment activities, for the most part, these have been episodic and the results underutilized. There is need to continue to work for an assessment climate and system that is ongoing and sustainable, in which the interconnectedness of individual courses with the outcomes of the curriculum as a whole can be clearly demonstrated.

Introduction: Luther Seminary's mission and curricular program

Luther Seminary's long tradition of commitment to the church and its mission is reflected in its mission statement adopted in 1995 at the conclusion of a comprehensive process in the design of a new curriculum.

Luther Seminary educates leaders for Christian communities

- called and sent by the Holy Spirit,
- to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ, and
- to serve in God's world.

This mission statement has been repeatedly reaffirmed by all areas of the seminary community and has served as a primary point of reference for continuing evaluation and revision of the curricular program, in efforts to be attentive to the missional needs of our congregational constituency, and in strategic planning for the future.

"Serving the Promise of Our Mission": The strategic plan as a framework for planning and assessment

In January 1997, Luther Seminary initiated a process toward a renewed statement of a shared vision that would guide this institution—board members, faculty, staff, students, and constituents—into the future. Over the next two years, hundreds of people from the seminary community and from the wider constituency collaborated in a discernment process eventuating in a strategic plan titled "Serving the Promise of Our Mission,"[1] Beginning with the statement, "We believe God is calling and sending the church of Jesus Christ into apostolic mission in the twenty-first-century world of many cultures and religions," this document set the continuing agenda for curricular strategy and evaluation in its reaffirmation of mission, its statement of vision, its expression of the theological values and commitments of Luther Seminary, and especially in its creative restructuring of the educational program. The program identifies four educational processes focused around those leadership capacities necessary to carry out our mission of educating leaders for Christian communities:

1. Lifelong Learning,
2. Specialized Ministry,
3. Missional Pastoral Leadership, and
4. Graduate Theological Leadership.

The strategic plan established specific goals and strategies for each of these four educational processes, while reaffirming the overall curricular strategy adopted in 1993. This curricular design with its three interrelated movements—Learning the Christian Story, Interpreting and Confessing, and Leading in Mission—encompassed within the overall theme of Discipleship identified objectives for each of the courses of the curriculum focused by four components of evaluation: Attitudes and Beliefs, Skills, Knowledge Base, and Habits and Character.

Assessment of curriculum: Congregational and missional engagement

Much of the impetus for this new curriculum design had emerged out of focus group conversations with our constituency in the early 1990s. Serving those congregations has continued to be an important focus for the initiation and evaluation of the effectiveness of curricular projects in relation to our mission.

The Lilly Institutional Assessment Project, 1996–1999

Supported by a grant from Lilly Endowment, the Lilly Institutional Assessment project was designed to evaluate the curriculum through evaluation of student work, through longitudinal evaluation of graduates, and through focused interviews in congregations. Over the three years of the study, significant data were collected from surveys of graduating seniors; analysis of a sampling of student course papers; focused interviews with eighteen graduates in their first-call sites; focused interviews with thirty congregations in a variety of rural, regional, and metropolitan areas; and nineteen faculty papers written in response to the findings of the project.

With regard to the curriculum, the summary report of this longitudinal study noted the following nine points:

1. Students' perception of their Luther Seminary experience was overwhelmingly positive.
2. Surveys consistently ranked historical, biblical, and theological aspects as highly effective; congregational leadership skills in the middle range; and other areas such as stewardship, evangelism, justice, cultural diversity, and youth ministry in the lowest range.
3. The curricular movement—from "learning the story" to "interpreting/confessing" to "leadership for mission"—was appreciated as sound but need was expressed for development of the leadership for mission area.
4. The diversity of the seminary community brought challenges for teaching and learning.
5. The seminary curriculum was seen as preparing graduates to carry out central aspects of the call to ministry—preaching and equipping/nurturing the laity with the story of God's faithfulness.
6. Contextual learning, especially internship, ranked high but was not sufficiently tapped for its learning potential.
7. Concerns were raised that some aspects of the curriculum that especially brought together theory and practice and the focus on leadership for mission seemed to have been abandoned in the course of revisions.
8. Students collectively did not sense that their education prepared them for a particular setting of ministry.
9. Four areas of the teaching/learning climate were lifted up as needing to be heard:
    a. The place of the growing number of MA students among the predominantly MDiv community as well as the small number of persons of color among the student body.
    b. Students looked for more modeling of different learning styles and more open ways of dealing with opposing viewpoints in their classes.
    c. Some students looked for modeling of more alternative worship forms that might be used in congregations.
    d. A number of students and faculty perceived that the academic climate was less demanding than it might be, with the suggestion that the pass/fail grading system might need reexamination.

In the focus visits with congregations, though responses were complex, seven categories emerged as to what members looked for in their leaders. These expectations included:

1. Persons of good character who recognize their leadership abilities, enabling them to function well with a wide range of people.
2. Persons who know or will learn and value the context in which they are called to serve.
3. Persons who are good communicators.
4. Persons who have strong convictions and are dedicated to their calling.

5. Persons who are good administrators in a broad range of congregational activities both spiritual and institutional.
6. Persons who have solid pastoral skills and a heart for ministry with people.
7. Persons who have a solid knowledge of the Scriptures and the faith tradition of the church.

Though a final report of these longitudinal studies and visits and the written faculty responses were discussed at the annual faculty retreat in the fall of 1997 and though many of the insights were incorporated into curricular revisions and particularly in the strategic planning process for Serving the Promise of Our Mission, there is still much information here that could be tapped in the continuing process of evaluation of our curricular effectiveness.

Focus on leadership visits (2002–2004)

Consistent with our mission of preparing leaders for Christian communities in mission, a second major congregational assessment project, titled "Focus on Leadership," sought to hear and learn from congregations about the kind of graduates and leaders they need and seek. In a series of focus visits to twenty-three congregations from 2002 through 2004, three to four visitors from Luther Seminary, including faculty, staff, and students, asked a series of ten questions[2] eliciting responses from the congregations about their sense of mission and their partnership with Luther Seminary.

Nearly all of the congregations reported significant changes in their communities that called for corresponding changes in leadership and programming in order to fulfill missional goals that varied with differing contexts of ministry. They expressed continuing support of seminary education but also awareness of the need both for greater diversity in leadership in the future and for resources for training given the increasing costs of seminary education and reduced denominational support. Iin-depth analysis of the collected data from these visits and incorporation of its results into curricular assessment and planning has yet to be done.

The contextual leadership initiative

The Lilly Institutional Assessment project had highlighted the need for continued enhancement of contextual learning experiences in Luther's curriculum. A Lilly grant, "Learning Congregational Leadership in Context," received in 1999, allowed us to explore ways of making congregations more essential partners with the seminary in the work of preparing leaders. As the proposal put it:

> [We seek] to place congregations at the center of the theological education process in order to develop leaders who can provide missional and evangelical leadership in helping congregations carry out their apostolic calling within the context of the communities they serve.

Drawing upon the insights of faculty and supervising pastors along with important input from students and a consultant, a two-year preinternship curriculum has been developed for students and pastors in participating cluster congregations.[3]

Curricular assessment: The self-study process

The strategic plan, Serving the Promise of Our Mission, provided the key direction and framework for the curricular assessment involved in Luther Seminary's self-study completed in September 2004 as part of the reaccreditation process.[4] It was during this period that Luther Seminary participated in the ATS project on the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation.

Building upon the prior decade's evaluative work, we sought to regularize the evaluation and assessment of our curricular work. We stated the goal as follows: "When the ATS self-study is completed, Luther Seminary will have in place an assessment system that (1) is sustainable and ongoing and (2) improves the work of students and teachers in the education of leaders for Christian communities called and sent by the Holy Spirit to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve in God's world."[5] In order to accomplish this, we envisioned a continuous feedback loop that would involve planning, implementation, analysis of results, and action/response. To avoid atomized efforts that develop little institutional or transferable learning, we developed a conceptual map to visualize the interconnections between individual courses, the programs and curriculum as a whole, and the overall mission of Luther Seminary. (See chart on page 46.)

Within a coherent curriculum, each course would have its own particular focus but with points of interconnection and accountability to programs and, ultimately, to the educational mission of the institution. For example, the goals of the Pentateuch course should resonate with Luther's missional aim of educating leaders for Christian communities. Between the specific goals of a course and the broad goal of the mission statement, there would be intermediary goals specific to each program but not as specific as those of a single course. No one course does everything, but each course should know its contributions to the overall learning of students as they engage in a program of study. Ideally, one should be able to trace the interconnection in either direction—from courses through programs to mission statement, or the reverse.

Assessment with such interconnection, we imagined, would be a means of mutual, continued learning rather than something done to each other. Such was our conceptual map as we anticipated our self-study and reaccredidation process leading to an ongoing and sustainable assessment system that would improve our work. In the following section we describe, in case study fashion, four assessment efforts at addressing the interconnections between the three interrelated areas of our conceptual map.[6]

Interconnected Areas of Assessment

DISCIPLESHIP

DISCIPLESHIP | **DISCIPLESHIP**

Assessment Areas		
Courses Divisions (Subjects)	Programs Curriculum as a Whole	Institution as a Whole
Criteria Knowledge base Attitudes and beliefs Skills Habits and character **Course Objectives** 1. 2. 3. 4. Etc. **Course Activities** 1. 2. 3. 4. Etc.	**Curricular Movements** **Learning/Knowing the Story** **Interpreting and Confessing** **Leading in Mission**	**Mission Statement** **Luther Seminary educates leaders for Christian communities called and sent by the Holy Spirit to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve in God's world.**
Primary Participants		
Individual teachers Divisions Students	Programs Faculty as a whole Students	Educational Leadership Committee Entire Institution

DISCIPLESHIP

1. *The "Kolden Report"*

By the time of the self-study, we were already in the third iteration of a homegrown survey of incoming and graduating students. The survey, devised by Marc Kolden, a former academic dean, and administered electronically, centered on students' perceptions of their learning in terms of the movements of the curriculum: Learning the Christian Story, Interpreting and Confessing, Leading in Mission, and Discipleship. Each survey question requested a response on a scale of 1 to 9. Three descriptive statements were provided, one for a 1–3 rating, another for 4–6 and another for 7–9. For example, the first question asks: "In terms of 'knowing the Christian story,' how much do you know about the Old Testament?" The guide to the ratings states "a basic grasp of the OT's content" for the 1–3 range, "good exegetical insights into the history and meaning of OT texts" for the 4–6 range, and "excellent exegetical and hermeneutical awareness in interpreting OT texts" for the 7–9 range. Incoming students were asked to rank themselves; graduating students were asked to rank themselves both as they looked back to the beginning of their seminary education and as they viewed themselves at the end.[7]

The most striking feature of the results is the consistent perception of movement among graduating students. Whether a high 7 or 6, the spread from beginning to end was around 3. For example, to use the Old Testament question above, graduating students retrospectively saw their beginning as 2.99 and their end-point as 6.23, thus a self-perceived change of 3.24. Overall, across eleven different categories, the average self-reported change was 3.29 with an average ranking of 7.00 on the 1–9 scale. The lowest change was 2.80 and the highest 3.98. Confidence in the integrity of the results is supported by the distinctions students made between questions.[8]

The Kolden Report is an indication of successful collective work by the faculty. In the President's Report to the board in October 2004, it was noted as a success and received as such by the board. Within the faculty, however, there has been little or mixed interest in the results. To date, the survey results have not been used by the Educational Leadership Team (ELC) to shape decisions or to foster deeper probes for understanding or assessing the curriculum. Discussions that have occurred have often raised questions about our level of agreement on the curricular movements in relationship to specific courses; about the descriptors used for the 1–3, 4–6, and 7–9 ranges; about the validity of students' self-perceptions; or about the need for anything beyond course-by-course evaluations.

Criticism of the aggregate character of the results has been particularly sharp and there have been calls to wait until we accumulate sufficient years of data to warrant longitudinal judgments. (The current instrument does not enable longitudinal tracking of specific individuals from entrance to graduation and into their initial years of service.) One observes here a preference for individual evaluation over curricular-wide review and the desire for summative evaluations versus ongoing assessment as a basis for action. Additionally, there has been little interest in seeking ways to move the concluding numbers higher. For example, what would it take on the part of Old Testament teachers to move the average graduate perception of 6.23 up to a 7.00 average for the question that asks: "In terms of knowing the Christian story, how much do you know about the Old Testament?" We have not yet, *as a faculty*, developed the ability to address curricular improvements that are measured aggregately.[9]

2. *Faculty interviews on assessment*

A major initiative toward establishing a climate of assessment was lodged in a process of individual interviews with the entire faculty exploring their attitudes and practices of assessment. Pat Taylor Ellison, a trained interviewer and interpreter of qualitative data and an affiliated faculty member who was familiar with our curriculum and had developed strong trust among the faculty, was retained to conduct these interviews and assist in their analysis.

During the summer and fall months of 2003 she interviewed a total of fifty-two persons, primarily faculty but also a few administrators. The interviews, consisting of eight questions,[10] gathered reflections on teaching and learning at Luther Seminary in relation to our mission. Responses from the interviews were gathered, categorized, summarized, and shared with both inside and outside readers. A summary report offered a series of findings or conclusions in relation to each of the eight questions as well as some summary remarks about the findings.

The findings clearly documented individual faculty members who care deeply about theology, are committed to the vocation of educating leaders for Christian communities, and passionately desire the success of our students. The term *mission* had become embedded in the consciousness and imagination of most of the faculty. Energy had developed around the word as individuals had explored its implications for their individual classes, puzzled over its varied definitions voiced in past faculty discussions, and recognized the need of this—or an analogous—concept given the changes in the church within the United States and global culture. The focus, however, was decidedly on *individual* consideration. A significant number were leery of what shape this might take *corporately* in view of goals stated in the strategic plan, Serving the Promise of Our Mission. We recognized in principle the need for assessment but were unclear about which accountabilities should have priority or who should oversee that accountability. Fundamental change had occurred at an implicit, thematic level, but the interviews revealed significant reticence regarding explicit planning, implementation, and accountability at a facultywide level. Strategic planning was not yet considered a normal, trusted way to operate within the faculty.

The summary report offered a list of polarities that seemed to the readers to describe the climate of teaching, learning, and assessment at Luther Seminary emerging from the interviews: six polarities regarding assessment itself; five regarding the teaching/learning enterprise; and four regarding Luther's culture, climate, and purpose. Use of the term *polarities* was intended to mark the malleability of the lines of tension, and the reticence toward the unfamiliar and unresolved issues rather than any entrenched factions.

Six Polarities Regarding Assessment	
assessment design from outside	assessment design from inside
assessment that opens options	assessment that adheres to particulars
focus on the work of learning	focus on the work of teaching
formal methods of assessment	informal/intuitive methods of assessment
standardized instrument every course	various methods used randomly
professor sets all criteria and evaluates	community sets all criteria and evaluates

The report was distributed to the entire faculty in the spring of 2004 and placed on the agenda of the May 2004 faculty retreat. Discussion focused on one particular faculty member's compelling response, which both reflected on past practice and offered suggestions for future steps in developing a productive and trusted climate of assessment. The following fall, this faculty member's contribution was often mentioned in informal faculty discussions, but neither the report nor the compelling response has ever been taken up formally by the educational leadership for further processing. Retrospectively, the impact remains informal—an anecdotal marker that is recalled by the participants and will seep into institutional lore. It has not led to planning and formal action.

3. *Faculty assessment designs*

Intra-faculty attempts at assessment have also been undertaken, but none took hold in a manner that could be termed programmatic. Recognizing the need presented by the institutional self-study and reaccreditation process and the perception by a significant number of faculty that evaluation was an imposition, we attempted to shift the focus to faculty answering their own evaluative questions. Faculty members were asked to answer what they were seeking to do in their courses and how they knew they were accomplishing those ends. In the fall semester of 2003, faculty members were invited to participate in the process of assessment in their individual courses by (quoted from the invitation):

1. Checking current syllabi to make certain learning objectives are clear: what should students be able to claim to have learned by the end of the course?
2. Making some remarks at the beginning of the course , to draw attention to what the course is trying to do and what learning students can expect.
3. Organizing and discussing these anticipated learnings in terms of the following:

   The Four Components of Capacity grid developed by faculty members for each core and core elective course (1992–93):

   a) knowledge base
   b) attitudes and beliefs
   c) skills
   d) habits and character
4. Doing an exercise internal to each course at natural junctures in the course (e.g., writing projects or tests) in which *both the faculty and the students* identify learning in terms of these Four Components

   a) Near the beginning of the course
   b) Around the middle of the course
   c) Near the end of the course

5. Thinking ahead to preparation of spring semester syllabi and further integrating the above course assessment approaches with the three curricular movements/foci of the seminary's curriculum and programs
    a) Learning/knowing the Story
    b) Interpreting and Confessing
    c) Leading in Mission

There was no threat for nonparticipation. A brief one-page summary report of this activity was requested for each core course with the announcement that good practices would be shared throughout the faculty and with assurance that none of this activity was to be used in any way for tenure and promotion decisions. The primary pitch was that, because assessment was not going to go away and because we were being given the responsibilities to raise and answer our own assessment questions, we should and could exercise the freedom to ask what we each considered to be germane questions. Assessment instruments would not be standardized or imposed from the outside. There was no request to abandon or change already established methods of evaluation. Stated another way, while nonparticipation was not to be an option, the character of participation was to be wide open. The long-term goal was to take a first step toward a "climate of assessment" rather than to conduct one more exercise in un-invested "compliance."

The result was, simply put, disappointing. In fall 2003, participation in steps one through four was less than 50 percent. It is, therefore, not surprising that the effort collapsed in spring 2004, when we sought to implement step five (connecting courses to the curricular movements). We did not even gain the full participation of the faculty members of the Educational Leadership Committee (ELC) and, accordingly, we derived little community wisdom from the effort. In response to this failure, the academic dean pressed the ELC to commence a two-year use of a standardized evaluation form developed by the IDEA Center. This instrument had been used at Luther Seminary for more than twenty-five years for promotion and tenure reviews. In May 2004, the faculty complied, voting to employ the IDEA form in all classes for two years with the commitment and hope that during that time we would develop an alternative instrument that garnered more enthusiasm and was more suitable to our curriculum and context.

4. *Student government survey work*

One final activity during the 2003–04 academic year consisted of growing student initiative and involvement in learning and assessment issues, notably in the design and implementation of a student survey of learning. A first student-designed instrument was administered at the end of the fall semester 2003 to assess student perceptions of their progress in overall curricular program objectives. In light of the experience with the first instrument, a second redesigned survey instrument was administered again at the end of the spring semester 2004. These two studies may well become chief markers of an emerging "climate of assessment." Significantly, they were student-driven and they reflect a distinct difference in perception between evaluation and assessment issues. In the way that the surveys pivoted around learning/knowing the story, interpreting and confessing, leading in mission, and discipleship, the surveys also marked the depth to which the curricular movements have taken hold in student perception. The surveys also addressed method in teaching and learning. The results strikingly underscored the positive impact of plenary class discussion on learning. The impact of assigned readings equaled that of lectures, while small group activities increased in their importance for learning when it came to the area of leading in mission.

The student subcommittee met with the ELC in May 2004 to report on its experience. The students stressed the importance of feedback from faculty—an area in which they saw need for considerable improvement. Most importantly, they indicated their intention to continue their interest and work on assessment issues in the future.

The preceding descriptions of four efforts at building a climate of assessment illustrate the difficulty we have had in fostering a climate in which the necessary and productive connections between individual faculty practices in courses and institution-wide curricular commitments take root. Although Luther Seminary's mission statement and strategic plan have embedded terms like *mission* in our working vocabulary, faculty reflection has for many remained an individual enterprise in which institutional mission and individual practice are not linked through programmatic goals that shape accountabilities on a facultywide basis. Admittedly, for most faculty this is a matter of unfamiliar work rather than outright resistance—more a matter of inexperience and deeply ingrained habits that direct faculty to focus on courses rather than programs. Yet for a few to press for such accountability seems to be a threat to academic freedom or a veiled sign of administrative distrust of individual faculty work. It is easy to assume that good courses will add up to a good program; actual student performance from one course or term to another is therefore not assessed in an ongoing, developmental manner. Past experience has focused on individual teaching adequacy and evaluative judgments for tenure and promotion. Shifting to an emphasis on learning and a scholarship of teaching develops significant counter currents to the ways we have historically inhabited educational institutions. Our history of assessing corporate educational work was not deep, extending back a decade at most and then only episodically. We have even less experience in connecting subject-based goals in individual classes to corporately determined programmatic goals. We were and remain in new territory.

From the self-study into the future

As we began the 2005–06 academic year, it is fair to say that many of the goals adopted in our five-year strategic plan, Serving the Promise of Our Mission, had been achieved. Our recent self-study report concluded:

> If the strategic plan has effectively set the focus and framework for our current work, then the self-study process has been important in giving us the confidence that in many ways we are doing the things that we need to do to accomplish our educational mission. We have a high level of confidence that we are committed to the right goals and we can be encouraged by the continued progress that has been made over the past decade. Luther Seminary remains a healthy institution with a strong and supportive constituency and with the program, material, and human resources needed to fulfill its mission.

While there is cause for celebration in our overall institutional health and systems for assessment, and while there are signs of progress,[11] the self-study report and the preceding descriptions reinforce the importance of giving more sustained attention to the important area of curricular assessment and evaluation. It would be difficult to argue that we have achieved the goal stated at the beginning of our self-study process to "have in place an assessment system that (1) is sustainable and ongoing and (2) improves the work of students and teachers in the education of leaders for Christian communities."

During the past academic year, a work team (READs 2) convened to lead us in the next phase of addressing these issues. After reviewing our efforts over the past ten years, the work team noted especially the following: (1) that our evaluation and assessment efforts in the past have been episodic, driven primarily by particular needs or interests and appearing for the most part to not be related to any larger strategy or purpose and (2) that most of our previous studies appear to have had a relatively short shelf-life and have led to only isolated decisions and actions. Their sometimes interesting and valuable insights still lie buried in volumes of detail unsynthesized and underdeveloped. There is work to be done in bringing this assessment activity into some kind of systematic whole to enable us to build more effectively on the strengths that are already evident in our programs. At the time of this writing, the READs work team has made two concrete proposals to the educational administration and faculty about how to proceed in this work: (1) the creation of a Work Group on Assessment and Learning to lead us in the development of an integrated conceptual framework for assessment as learning and learning-centered approaches to theological education and (2) the creation of an Office/Structure for Research and Evaluation that would support further development of Luther Seminary's mission, vision, and core educational processes through the development of instruments and processes for assessing our progress in relation to our mission.

It is with such work before us and the determination to continue to work toward greater effectiveness in "serving the promise of our mission" that we look with confidence to our work for the future.

James L. Boyce is professor of New Testament and Greek at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He also served as the coordinator of the seminary's reaccreditation self-study and author of the self-study report in 2004. Richard W. Nysse is professor of Old Testament and associate dean for learning systems and technology.

ENDNOTES

1. "Serving the Promise of our Mission," Luther Seminary Strategic Plan 2000–2005. The full text is available on Luther Seminary's Web site at http://www.luthersem.edu/strategic_plan.

2. The following questions were asked: 1. How is the community in which your congregation is located changing? 2. What are you doing or planning to do differently to respond to changes in your community? 3. How do you equip your members for their callings in the world, in their families, and in the congregation? 4. What is the primary mission of your congregation, now and in the future? 5. What specific skills and/or qualities do your leaders need to accomplish your mission? 6. Would you encourage a gifted young person to become a pastor? Why or why not? 7. What place do you see for the growing number of nonordained leadership roles in the ministries of the church? What could the seminary do to help assure this future? 8. What does your congregation, the national church, and the seminary need to do to identify and encourage our talented youth or adults to consider seminary? 9. What can the seminary, congregations, synods, national church, and individuals do to provide the resources necessary to prepare our future leaders? 10. If you could make one statement to the president or faculty of Luther Seminary, what would you say?

3. For further information about Luther Seminary's Contextual Leadership Initiative see our Web site: http://plts.luthersem.edu/cli. Several other initiatives of contextual learning are worthy of note. Luther Seminary's curriculum adopted in 1994 includes a required *cross-cultural experience* of two to four weeks in a culture different from each student's formative culture. While it was assumed that students would learn basic cross-cultural skills by simply observing and reflecting with engaged practitioners, we are still working on tools to evaluate learning that are designed with theologically focused content and categories. In the required core course Reading the Audience, students prepare sociological and systems analyses of local congregations that are in turn shared with the congregational leaders and become the occasion for learning and dialog about the tasks of ministry and leadership needs in real-life congregational contexts. Finally, in keeping with our missional strategy, a *congregational research project* has been designed and authorized to explore this mutually critical partnership by an appreciative inquiry into the existing use of the data gathered by Luther Seminary and the expansion of that use on the basis of what is learned in this inquiry to form a measurement of learning for the curriculum.

4. *Self-study Report 2004* (St. Paul, MN: Luther Seminary, September 2004). For the full text of the report see the Luther Seminary Web site: http://www.luthersem.edu/selfstudy2004.

5. The mission statement was deliberately and repeatedly referred to in this statement of goals and in the following strategies for implementation: a shared institutional mission, cohesive goals and processes to which we hold ourselves accountable, reassessment of the goals and processes to which we hold ourselves accountable, and adaptation to changes in our teaching and learning environment.

6. The faculty of Luther Seminary experienced great difficulty in reaching consensus on which assessment efforts to undertake during the course of the self-study. Many faculty members had experience through course-level reviews for promotion and tenure or through their own practice (both in most cases). We also had experience at the institutional level through the assessment activities of the last decade. What we lacked was significant experience at working the middle, namely, the programmatic and curricular level. The fact that our past experience was dominantly summative evaluation compounded this deficiency. We never fully succeeded in overcoming the perception that the process was one of compliance. Questions like "What do they want?" or "What do I need to do?" marked the difficulty in focusing on assessment as learning rather than evaluative, summary moments of judgment.

7. That incoming students regularly rated themselves higher than graduating students did retrospectively would seem to indicate that students discovered there was more to learn than they initially realized.

8. For the complete chart of responses see the *Self-study Report 2004* (St. Paul, MN: Luther Seminary, September 2004), 138. It is also available online at http://www.luthersem.edu/selfstudy2004.

9. The difficulty of the interconnections between corporate assessment and individual evaluation is apparent in the comparative lack of operative programmatic and departmental goals. The Leadership Division has struggled to articulate and implement a set of core competencies to shape individual courses and move toward student portfolios. That work is still in process. The Bible Division did not have a publicly articulated set of goals until May 2004, toward the end of the year of self-study. No formal assessment was conducted on the basis of those goals during the 2004–05 school-year. The third division, History and Theology, has not developed common goals for its work. The degree programs have only fragmentary statements of goals and no ongoing assessment practices. In short, the institution's commitments and broad curricular themes are undertaken in an atomized fashion; they have not become a basis for assessing the contributions of individual courses—surely not in a way that systematically and recurrently informs institutional decision making.

10. The eight questions were: 1. When you hear the word *assessment* at Luther Seminary, what do you think of? What would you like to call the process? 2. What have we been paying attention to the past ten years? How has that developed in your classes? 3. What are you curious about? What would you like to understand, take stock of, this year? 4. How do you presently learn what students are learning in your classes? 5. What, above everything else, must your assessment team keep in mind? 6. How might the assessment benefit Luther? The church? 7. How might assessment benefit you? Your students? 8. Pick your favorite course to teach. Years later, running into a student, what would you like him or her to remember learning?

11. A group of younger faculty, for example, have modeled a focus on learning and assessment by sharing their successes and failures through regularly opening their classrooms and their teaching and learning practices to mutual reflection and critique. They have recently invited the remainder of the faculty into structures that will broaden this conversation.

Practicing Assessment/ Resisting Assessment

Robert A. Cathey
McCormick Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT: Some institutions evolve in ways that practice and *resist assessment. McCormick Theological Seminary is a middle-sized, urban, multicultural, ecumenical institution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We already practice assessment out of our sense of accountability to standards of excellence. But assessment diverts us from our first love, teaching, and urgent issues facing our times. For theological educators, assessment needs new rationales and revised practices. We put our McCormick "spin" on assessment due to the differences we bring to theological education.*

McCormick: A unique institution and community of theological partnership

In distinctive ways, McCormick Theological Seminary (MTS) is melding new assessment practices into ones already in place in our advisory system since the 1980s. As a seminary with a Reformed, ecumenical, and cross-cultural ethos, sometimes we embrace while at other times resist assessment. Our resistance is due to conflicting, creative values and diverse assumptions among us about why we assess, what needs to be assessed, and how to interpret the data in useful ways to achieve our mission. Our ongoing practices are justified by our promises *to* and partnership *with* our students and the communities they serve. Further, as we live in covenant-community with them and our faculty, staff, trustees, ecumenical and interfaith partners, the Holy Spirit acts through human lips and lives to remind us:

> We are called to nurture the gifts of women and men for faithful Christian ministry and leadership through rigorous academic study, practical experience and spiritual formation (McCormick's Mission Statement).

In 1975, McCormick made a historic move from a self-contained campus near DePaul University on the North Side of Chicago to a scattered urban campus near the University of Chicago on the South Side of the Windy City. Some have speculated since last year's White Sox championship that this move was motivated by our long search for a professional baseball team from Chicago that would actually win the World Series. A more reliable tradition records that this move signified our renewed commitment to urban ministry that included dynamic African-American congregations on the South Side, Chicago's growing Hispanic communities, first generation Korean Americans, and the service of ministers-in-the-field through our change-oriented Doctor of Ministry program. It also engaged us with the intellectual resources of the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Hyde Park cluster of seminaries.[1] Classroom space, library resources, and information technology became shared resources with the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC).

By 1998, we had outgrown our scattered urban campus. A bold new partnership with LSTC to build a three-story office building on the north side of its campus above 200 new underground parking spaces was engaged by our President Cynthia Campbell, LSTC President James Echols, and the respective boards of trustees of our two institutions. By March 2003, an award-winning new building was completed to house all faculty and administrative offices with meeting space for conferences, committees, and intensive class sessions. The move from 56th and Woodlawn to South University Avenue heralded a new chapter in McCormick's pioneering heritage. While construction workers had excavated the underground parking lot and built above it floors of offices, the faculty had designed a new curriculum on a 4-1-4-1 semester calendar with a January term for experimental courses and a May–summer term for intensives.

As an urban seminary in a global city, MTS tries to combine the wisdom of two traditions in a context of respect for the possibilities and perils of globalization. The Reformed theological tradition in its Presbyterian forms of worship, governance, and mission provides the fundamental values and practices that shape our corporate life. Inquiry and teaching about that tradition is open-ended, historically disciplined, and attuned to the pluralism of the Reformed family of churches, confessions, and cultural settings. The heritage of the ecumenical movement with its double focus on discovering the convictions all Christians share in common and progressive partnerships for social change populates our faculty and student body with Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Church of God in Christ members, Methodists, Episcopalians, African Methodist Episcopalians, Mennonites, Baptists of several varieties, Roman Catholics, and candidates from emerging new networks and denominations.

While most seminaries diversified their denominational portfolio in past decades, McCormick is a pioneer among Protestant seminaries in seeking to build a diverse learning community along the axes of race, gender, culture, language, and sexual-orientation. Forty years ago at its North Side campus a focused program in Hispanic ministry was launched that has evolved into the Center for the Study of Latino/a Theology and Ministry. On the South Side, two new focused-ministry programs emerged in African-American and Korean ministries. These offices have also evolved into the Center for African American Ministries and Black Church Studies, the Center for Asian-American Ministries, and AADVENT (Asian American Discipleship for Vocational Empowerment, Nurture and Transformation). As a result of these efforts spanning decades by many dedicated faculty, administrators, ecumenical partners, and alumni/ae, no one racial or ethnic group constitutes a majority of the student body. Searches for new faculty and staff seek to diversify leadership. Fluency in English as measured by standardized, written tests is not a requirement for admission. Persons whose open and affirming practice of their sexual orientation bars them from ordination and recognition of their domestic partnerships in most churches are welcome as full partners in theological education at McCormick.

Our faces of diversity are further enriched by a spectrum of theological positions and callings into forms of ministry. Although MTS is generally classified among neo-liberal theological institutions, the presence of students, faculty, and staff from evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic communions adds a rich complexity to every conversation, class discussion, and faculty decision. Ecumenical diversity is complemented by openness to interfaith dialogue through the Chicago Parliament of the World's Religions. One tenured professor of New Testament is Jewish. Muslim students from Turkey at LSTC take our Introduction to Christian Theology course. Unitarian Universalist students take History of Christianity. An upper-level comparative course on Luther and Calvin is offered with LSTC. Faculty from the eleven other ACTS schools (Association of Chicago Theological Schools) partner with us to offer comparative and interdisciplinary courses.[2] Out of this matrix of theological and cultural complexity, students find themselves called to a diverse set of vocations in congregational settings, executive leadership, and specialized ministries in institutions, agencies, and community organizations.

Within the urban, global diversity of our seminary there is also a pragmatic, progressive ethos focused on change in church and society. This is due in part to our Reformed heritage, the pragmatism of our cultural context in the United States, and the progressive heritage of the University of Chicago and local "Chicago School" theology. Such a context can be *both* receptive to assessment procedures as ways of measuring and explaining human behavior and development in the context of teaching and learning, *and* resistant to assessment. For some colleagues, when the tail of quality control for external assessment wags the dog of theological, moral, and spiritual formation with our students, then we have failed in our mission. In seeking to perfect our accountability to partners in accreditation, we may lose sight of the student-as-person sent to us by the Word and Spirit working through the body of Christ. Or, in theological terms, is the spirit of assessment derived from Hegel's pan-rationalism or Kierkegaard's love for the individual seeker and disciple?

Assessment through McCormick's current practices

The work of our Assessment Task Force began in fall 2003 and over two years developed a distinctive, ambitious assessment program for our master's level programs (MDiv, MATS, and dual-competency programs in social work administration).[3] Our work began with an audit of ways we were already engaged in doing assessment.[4] What we uncovered was that McCormick has instituted and refined over the years an extensive program for assessing individual student formation at the master's-degree level. This approach assumes an individual student working with his or her faculty advisor and a circle of assessment that is broadened over time to include others in a position to evaluate the student's preparation for ministry. The method of this approach to assessment is three annual reviews (for MDiv candidates) and two annual reviews (for MATS candidates). In the *Advisory System Handbook* every student receives during orientation and through presentations by our deans and conversation with advisors and their peers, students repeatedly hear that they are responsible for initiating an extensive annual review that requires gathering of materials for assessment, self-reflection in writing, and oral reflection with their advisor (and experiential studies supervisor in the middler or senior year) on their progress in formation for ministry. In their senior year, this review includes both their advisor, another faculty member designated by the dean of master's-level programs, and peers and/or mentors they may invite to the review. Each of these reviews produces a written document that is shared with the candidate and put on file in the office of the master's-level dean. Students cannot receive the MDiv or MATS degree without successfully completing their senior review.

In reviewing this system, our concerns were based on what we learned from reports by the master's-level dean: some MDiv candidates and advisors treated the junior and middler reviews as optional or peripheral to formation for ministry. In our new semester system, the senior review occurs in the fall semester of the third or final year in the program, too late for significant mid-course corrections. We were also concerned that this system of two to three annual reviews fails to look at students on the collective level of a class or cohort of juniors, middlers, and seniors. Cohort analysis in our metro-regional context appears practically impossible to many of our colleagues. Some MDiv candidates proceed through the program in the required, traditional three years while others take four to six years or more to complete the degree while they commute, work to support their families, raise children, fill part-time positions in churches, serve in their local communities, etc. The fact that at least half of our students at any given time are commuters creates a spectrum within the student body. At one end of this spectrum, we have the residential students in Hyde Park, some of whom are twenty-something or thirty-something Presbyterians who receive generous financial aid. The other end of this spectrum is made up of commuter students living in the Chicago metro-region or across the Midwest who commute to campus by car, train, and plane. Their distance from residential campus life, commitments to families, jobs, congregations, and communities, and need for courses taught in evenings, on weekends, and in summer session provides them with a different yet overlapping set of experiences compared to our residential students. Will one assessment model fit students across the spectrum?[5] Further, isn't cohort analysis impossible in our context unless we construct cohorts for our students in new and different ways?

What McCormick's first assessment task force proposed: Key examples

Lib Caldwell, chair of our task force, kept us focused on three questions put to us by the ATS standards:

- How do we assess growth and maturity in human formation?
- How we do we assess spiritual and moral maturity?
- How do we assess the progress of integration of these areas in the MDiv student?

In particular we found that our advisory system lacked ways to help students discern better their spiritual and moral maturity as they progressed through our curriculum. Further we found that although we had in place integrative required courses in the junior year (Pilgrimage in Faithfulness, a course required of all entering master's-level students each fall) and middler year (Reflection on Ministry, a course taken in conjunction with supervised ministry in a congregation or agency), the senior year lacked an integrative capstone course required of all students.

The need for ways to model spiritual and moral self-assessment in our advisory system was due in part to the variety of definitions of spirituality that flourish at McCormick. The spectrum runs from some Presbyterian faculty who define spirituality in terms of corporate worship and a worldly asceticism of social action to some students deeply engaged in interfaith meditation or small-group devotional practices. To redress this gap, our task force instituted a new spirituality self-assessment that students complete as part of a skills inventory discussed early in the junior year with their advisors. Remembering our Reformed tradition, we seek to integrate issues of spiritual growth with vocational discernment. Thus we have proposed that we augment the one-on-one relationship between student and advisor that spans a student's years in seminary with a small group of five to ten students who work with a faculty advisor over time on discerning vocational directions: congregational ministry, institutional chaplaincy, campus ministry, social work and community organizing, further studies and higher education, and those still seeking God's will.

Achieving integration in the senior year of master's-level studies is a new priority we have put before the faculty. Without designing a one-size-fits-all integrative course, we have challenged each of our four fields (biblical studies, ministry, history, and theology-ethics) to review their course offerings for seniors and team-taught courses that are interdisciplinary by nature in order to identify three to four courses each year that can be offered as senior capstone experiences. For example, several years ago Robert Brawley (New Testament) and I developed a cross-listed course in Bible and theology that we call Thinking Biblically. The course explores five major paradigms of biblical and theological hermeneutics in the late modern era and engages students in exegesis, preparing sermons, teaching the Bible, and using the Bible in ethical discernment. Students have consistently evaluated the course as both overwhelming in its theoretical complexity and integrative in its use of skills and concepts from their previous course work in Bible, preaching, religious education, theology, and ethics. By offering this course as a senior capstone experience on Saturdays in the next academic year (making it more accessible to our commuters), our two fields will be able to evaluate a cross-section of our graduating seniors as a cohort group with regard to their skills in exegesis, hermeneutics, and ability to integrate those skills and paradigms of understanding to the practical tasks of ministry.

Reception and resistance to assessment: Challenges concerning justification, time, energy, and creative labor

Lowell Barrington of Marquette University has given voice to concerns we found shared among some colleagues who are stretched thin among the demands of competing voices of accountability: denominations, professional societies, accrediting agencies, congregations, and clergy:

> Increasingly, popular "learning assessment" efforts in higher education distract professors from their essential work. It's time to rethink the assumptions behind these measures . . . Those who care about liberal arts education should be frightened that supporters of assessment either do not realize or do not care how Orwellian their reasoning sounds.[6]

One issue that Barrington's critique provoked for me is our lack of an intrinsically theological rationale for practicing assessment. At times intuition tells me that a methodology for measuring learning outcomes and achievement of public mission in higher education (one of the great bastions of secularity in our age) has been projected into our seminaries without due recognition of the things that make theological education *theological* rather than merely preprofessional. If my colleagues and I were social scientists or educational psychologists, assessment might be more interesting and worth the time, energy, and creative labor. In fact, one of my daydreams is that someday an archivist will discover that assessment was the brain child of B. F. Skinner and his movement of radical behaviorology. As theological educators, many of us are much more at home in the humanities and value the intrinsic dimensions of learning that are much harder to objectify and measure for external observers.

Have we bought into (or become softly coerced into) models of assessment that presuppose all learning is expressed in public behaviors that we can track and objectify? Whatever happened to the soul or spirit of our learners and teachers in preparation for and engaging in ministry with and for other persons and communities? And what of the Spirit of God who is provocative and transformative in all we aim to do in an education that is truly theological? Do not many higher education assessment models downplay if not utterly ignore the intersubjective realm named by the language of soul and spirit?

Finally, we work on an institutional scale much smaller than that of most universities and research colleges that dedicate entire offices to institutional research and assessment. Can we afford to emulate the assessment practices of much larger, more highly developed institutions? (As one of my administrative colleagues once pointed out, the faculty of our entire seminary would constitute only a small- or middle-size department in many state universities).

Challenges of communication, transparency, and trust: The crucial role of our students

During the first two years of work by our Assessment Task Force, a series of events occurred in the life of McCormick that taught us new things about how we should be better partners with our students in assessment. One of our faculty colleagues failed to pass a review for continuation shortly before spring commencement. One student member of the Assessment Task Force expressed concern about this situation because a number of thoughtful students perceived this professor to be particularly dedicated to excellence in teaching and advising. If assessment of teaching and learning was a renewed priority for McCormick, we were asked why continuation was not granted in this case. Why should students partner with faculty in processes of assessment if we failed to take seriously their positive evaluations of one of our colleagues?

Students expressed concern about the outcome of this faculty review directly to our acting dean of the faculty and president. Rather than ignore our students' concerns, our president, deans, and faculty dedicated significant time in one faculty meeting and many hours on a Saturday to talking with concerned students about issues like transparency in communication between all persons and offices within the seminary, students' roles in evaluating courses, serving on faculty search committees, and having input into faculty reviews for continuation and promotion. The constructive criticism of how we give and receive criticism that emerged from these dialogues was valued, in part, due to our greater awareness of the place of assessment in the life of McCormick, and our need to be more faithful partners with our students in evaluating teaching and learning. A situation that could have turned into the occasion of bitter resentment became a critical moment for us as a covenant-community to take stock of how we listen to one another in evaluating teaching and learning and how we care for one another's teaching and research as faculty and student colleagues.

De-centering and re-framing assessment in our urban-global context

McCormick Theological Seminary is a late modern, culturally de-centered institution of teaching and learning by design. To the degree that models of assessment presuppose institutions where one culture and language predominates, ours requires new models for servants of a church engaging globalization in its promise and perils. Based on the first two years of creative labor by our Assessment Task Force, we are moving away from radically behaviorist models of assessment and moving toward a renewed sense of partnership with our students and denominational colleagues in assessing teaching and learning. We are re-framing assessment as an intersubjective process of critical and complex judgments that we make across fields, disciplines, and the conventional divisions between students, faculty, staff, trustees, and partners in congregations and agencies. If we take seriously the reality of the body of Christ that both incorporates and transforms the linguistic, cultural, engendered, and theological diversities of our age, then the practices of assessment must come to reflect the beautiful, rich mosaic of faces and bodies that gathers each time our community celebrates the Eucharist, remembers our baptism, and looks with expectation for more light to break forth from God's living Word in Jesus Christ.

Robert A. Cathey is associate professor of theology at McCormick Theological Seminary and a clergy member of the Presbytery of Chicago. He was a member of the Assessment Task Force of McCormick chaired by Lib Caldwell, Harold Blake Walker Professor of Pastoral Theology. Task Force members included four faculty (Homer Ashby, Caldwell, Cathey, and Jae Won Lee); three students (Mamie Broadhurst, Tahir Golden, and José Morales); Deborah Mullen (dean of masters level programs); David Esterline (vice president for academic affairs); and Deborah Kapp (acting vice president for academic affairs, 2004–05).

ENDNOTES

1. The Hyde Park cluster includes Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Catholic Theological Union, Meadville Lombard Theological School, Disciples Divinity House, Chicago Theological Seminary, and the University of Chicago Divinity School.

2. The Association of Chicago Theological Schools includes Catholic Theological Union, Chicago Theological Seminary, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Loyola University Chicago Institute of Pastoral Studies, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, McCormick Theological Seminary, Meadville Lombard Theological School, Mundelein Seminary, North Park Theological Seminary, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School of Trinity International University.

3. Lib Caldwell, "Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation—Report of the Task Force" (September 2005). This internal McCormick document is the

most complete summary of our understanding of assessment, what we are already doing, and how we are working to close the loop on many of our systems of evaluation.

4. Our working definition of assessment is borrowed from an interview ("Assessment Measures Learning: Monitoring to Improve Learning Outcomes") with Maria Harper-Marinick (director of learning, instruction, and assessment for the Maricopa Community Colleges) that appeared in *Higher Education Digest* 8 (April 2004): "Assessment is the systematic, continuous process of monitoring learning over time to determine if the institution's learning goals are met and to identify areas that need improvement. This process involves the use of a variety of measurement tools, which are selected by institutions based on their mission and specified learning outcomes."

A very helpful definition is offered by Barbara E. Walvoord (University of Notre Dame): "Assessment of student learning can be defined as the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning." *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*, The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004), 2.

5. In the work of our Masters Level Program Committee, we had already discerned that this model was an oversimplification of the complexity of our student body and how it moves through our curriculum. However, as an intentional fiction for the purposes of analysis, it was a useful model for framing a lot of data we had from annual reviews, course evaluations, and student focus groups on the quality of education, advising, and student life in our institution. For example, the author of this article is still working with one advisee who began his/her McCormick education at the same time I joined the faculty in fall 1998. That student's experience of McCormick as a learner is quite different from the residential students who are "up and out" in three years.

6. Lowell W. Barrington, "Less Assessment, More Learning," *Academe: Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 89, no. 6 (November–December 2003): 29, 30.

Preaching, Proclamation, and Pedagogy: An Experiment in Integrated Assessment

Elaine Park
Mount Angel Seminary

ABSTRACT: Preaching, particularly preaching in a liturgical context, provides a window into how well students are achieving the key educational goals of the MDiv degree at Mount Angel Seminary as well as how well they are integrating the various components of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. Using liturgical preaching as the focus, Mount Angel's project has two interlocking goals: (1) developing and refining on an ongoing basis teaching and learning strategies for effective preaching and (2) assessing student attainment of MDiv outcomes and integration of all areas of formation. Thus, our aim is not only to provide the seminary with information on how well individual students are attaining our goals and how effective our program is but also to assist our students in deepening their biblical and theological understanding, in developing an aptitude for theological reflection, and in exercising ministerial skills—all manifest through liturgical preaching.

Introduction

Mount Angel Seminary Graduate School of Theology offers the Master of Divinity degree to seminarians studying for the Roman Catholic priesthood. The seminarians in the MDiv program, approximately eighty-five in total, come from more than thirty dioceses and eight religious houses. The program is designed as a four-year curriculum at the seminary, with most students also completing an internship year in a parish setting.

When Mount Angel faculty members began looking at the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project, we wanted to focus on aspects of learning that are central to our own curriculum and at the heart of the ministry for which our students are being prepared. In addition, we wanted an assessment that we could track throughout our students' education, making it a means of assessing their progress as well as our own institutional efficacy and, at the same time, be a catalyst for developing students' skills and learning for ministry. The assessment we envisioned would be integrated, so that we could determine how well students manifested intellectual understandings, engaged in theological reflection, exhibited pastoral skills, and showed personal and spiritual commitment. Although, like most schools, we already had some assessment tools in place, we wanted to design a more global instrument that would involve students, faculty, and parish congregations in the project. With all of these reasons in mind, we chose preaching as the window through which we could view how well our students are achieving the key educational goals at Mount Angel as well as how well they are integrating the various components of priestly formation.

Mount Angel's Master of Divinity curriculum is organized around a unifying theme, "communion ecclesiology," and grounded in the understanding that the Eucharistic celebration makes the Church. The curriculum, as inaugurated in 1993 and revised in the years since then, is designed to lead students ever more deeply into both the understanding and the experience of communion, nourished at the twin tables of the Eucharist and of the Word. Within the context of communion ecclesiology, preaching is seen as the occasion in which classroom learning and pastoral experiences attain an essential purpose: nurturing of the community gathered in faith at the Eucharist. Developing the understandings, skills, and attitudes needed for effective preaching thus extends beyond homiletics courses and is integrated throughout the curriculum in areas such as sacramental theology, ecclesiology, biblical interpretation, catechesis, and pastoral practica.

Our understanding of the centrality of preaching in priestly formation and ministry is confirmed and enhanced by Church writings. A variety of documents have provided guidance for curriculum development as well as alerting us to important aspects of assessment. *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum*, of Vatican II provides foundational guidance in formation for preaching within our curricular emphasis: "The Church has always venerated the Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's Word and of Christ's Body" (*DV* 21). Therefore, according to *Dei Verbum*, knowledge of the Scriptures is essential for all the faithful, especially those who preach, enhanced by "diligent sacred reading and careful study . . . so that none of them will become an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly" (*DV* 25).

Throughout Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* preaching is central to evangelization. He writes that preaching in the Eucharistic celebration will most benefit the faithful when it manifests specific characteristics: it should be "simple, clear, direct, well-adapted, profoundly dependent on Gospel teaching and faithful to the magisterium, animated by a balanced apostolic ardor coming from its own characteristic nature, full of hope, fostering belief, and productive of peace and unity" (*EN* 43). More recently, *The Program of Priestly Formation* promulgated in 1993 by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops states: "Proclaiming and teaching the Word of God are fundamentally priestly activities required for the life of the Church" (*PPF* 333). Effective preaching requires not only skills in communication but also "a sound and thoughtful theological foundation" (*PPF* 338), and an understanding of "the world in which the message of Christ is preached" (*PPF* 344); it should be "authentic and convincing" as well as blending "imagination and creativity" (*PPF* 348).

If our course of studies in fact provides students with the means to become effective preachers as envisioned above, we wanted to be able to track how they were progressing. The courses in homiletics, which begin in the second year of the MDiv curriculum and extend through the fourth, provide a beginning place to examine student attainment of goals. However, just as preaching classes are not the only place in which students acquire knowledge and skills for preaching, neither can homiletics classes be the only means of assessment. We began to think of how to track student progress beyond homiletics and beyond the classroom.

With our vision of integration, all areas of formation could and should be used both in the development of effective preachers and in assessment of our overall program. Human, spiritual, and pastoral formation, along with intellectual formation, each contribute to dimensions necessary for effective preaching, as stated in the institutional goals for each of these departments. Among other things, human formation aims for students "to reflect the Gospel and the person of Christ and to enhance ministerial strengths." Spiritual formation assists seminarians in developing "continuously and progressively in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ." Pastoral formation and the curriculum of pastoral theology "center on service to the community of faith brought together in the celebration of the Eucharist." Intellectual formation intends to provide education so that students are "theologically informed and solidly grounded in the Catholic tradition, so that they can teach, preach, and celebrate with knowledge and skill." While preaching is not the only place in which these outcomes ought to be manifest, it is clearly a moment in which they should be evident and integrated.

Goals and strategies

Having chosen preaching as the focus of our project, we decided upon two interlocking goals: (1) developing and refining teaching and learning strategies for effective preaching and (2) assessing student attainment of Master of Divinity outcomes, integrated with all areas of formation. A steering committee, dubbed "The Preaching Team," was given the responsibility of overseeing the project, from suggesting strategies, to gathering of data, and working with the faculty in ongoing development and refinement. In addressing the first goal, the Preaching Team led an examination of our MDiv curriculum to determine how it could clearly and realistically incorporate aspects of preaching throughout the curriculum. We invited teachers of Sacred Scripture, Systematic Theology, and Pastoral Theology to reflect in their course descriptions and assessment procedures the importance of preaching as it relates to their discipline. Specific suggestions, such as using certain readings from the lectionary or developing preaching related to areas of theological study, served as a catalyst for looking at natural ways of incorporating preaching, without overemphasizing it.

We also provided education and in-service for both faculty and students to deepen their understanding of the ministry of preaching. The address for the inauguration of the 2003–04 academic year, titled "Master-Ministers of the Word: John Henry Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins," presented the crafting of language, whether prose or poetry, as fundamental to effective preaching. That same year, our annual Theological Symposium investigated "Effective Proclamation of the Word." Topics included preaching in a parochial setting, the pragmatics of homily development, the importance of theology in homily development, and preaching and storytelling. These occasions brought students and faculty together as a community of learners, together growing in their understanding of the ministry of the Word.

The most beneficial assessment is also an occasion of learning. Thus, our second goal—assessment—aims not only to provide the seminary with information on how well individual students are attaining our goals and how effective our program is but also to assist our students in deepening their biblical and theological understanding, in developing an aptitude for theological reflection, and in exercising ministerial skills—all manifest through liturgical preaching. The key assessment-and-learning tool we have developed is a preaching portfolio, used in conjunction with courses throughout the curriculum, and integrated with human, spiritual, and pastoral formation.

Each seminarian's preaching portfolio reflects his own preaching style, methods, and interests and is organized in a way that is most useful for his own ministry of the Word. It is expected that each portfolio will manifest:

1. development in understanding of the theology and ministry of preaching,
2. awareness of skills needed for effective preaching,
3. evidence that the seminarian is working on developing these skills,
4. use of appropriate materials in homily preparation, and
5. openness to honest critique.

Because the portfolios reflect each person's unique style, a variety of materials can be included in the portfolio, items such as model homilies, articles and other resources on preaching, and ideas to use as "seeds" for future homilies. In addition to such optional materials, every portfolio is expected to include specific materials:

1. Homilies that the student has given, at least two for Theology II and III, and three for Theology IV
2. Critiques of these homilies from professors, peers, and members of congregations
3. Student self-assessment
4. Peer review of portfolio
5. Faculty review of portfolio

The review of student portfolios takes place at an annual formation seminar for each level of theology. The formation seminars, which are an ongoing component of the human formation program, provide an opportunity for students to integrate their development as preachers with their human, spiritual, and pastoral formation. At the seminar, each seminarian briefly reflects on aspects of his own preaching, as evident in his portfolio, particularly his annual self-assessment. The group discusses the strengths and weaknesses of their own preaching and of the seminary preaching program and makes suggestions for developing or improving it. One or more members of the Preaching Team attend the session, followed by individual assessment of the student portfolios. The chair of the Preaching Team, or other person delegated, analyzes how well the students as a group are attaining the expected outcomes of the MDiv degree as manifest through preaching; a summary of these findings is given to the Preaching Team, who makes recommendations to the entire faculty. Any decisions made by the faculty are implemented by the administration. The system of assessment follows this process, repeated each year:

Individual assessment of portfolios by faculty
↓
Summary assessment of the group by chair of the Preaching Team
↓
Recommendations by Preaching Team (based on findings of group assessment)
↓
Deliberation/decision by faculty
↓
Implementation by administration

Status of the project

In the spring of 2005, students in second, third, and fourth year theology presented their portfolios in the annual formation seminars. Because the students in Theology IV have been participating in the preaching project for the longest time, their comments and assessment of their portfolios were particularly helpful. While their portfolios generally exhibited significant strengths and satisfactory attainment of the expected outcomes for preaching, we learned that the assessment tools and process need streamlining and a clearer statement of outcomes as they relate to the goals of the MDiv degree and the four dimensions of formation.

Therefore, the specific goals being assessed for each year of theology as well as the means of assessment of the preaching portfolio have been redesigned for the spring of 2006. The revisions give specific attention to how well seminarians are attaining the goals of the Mount Angel MDiv degree and how they show commitment to human and spiritual formation as manifest through preparation, preaching, and critique. Another change is that fourth-year theology students are now expected to reflect not only on preaching itself (liturgical homilies) but also on their entire liturgical ministry. A sampling of the revised goals and assessment tools are included at the end of this article.

Student recommendations from spring 2005, closely aligned with those arising from a whole-faculty curriculum review, led to some changes in the preaching curriculum itself, inaugurated in the 2005–06 academic year. The following developments bring together some of the comments and recommendations of both students and faculty:

- Have seminarians go to parishes on weekends to hear and evaluate homilies. They should take evaluation forms with them, particularly looking for "the pearl," (i.e., the main idea or message). Theology IV students (deacons) are already in parishes on weekends. Possibly seminarians in Theology III could go every (or most) weekends.
- Students recommended that the seminary offer classes in public speaking. A new course titled Proclamation will be required for students in first-year theology. The class will examine what words are in themselves; how the spoken word and other sounds communicate beauty, emotion, and meaning; what "Word of God" signifies; what the Bible says about words, the voice of God, and listening; the meaning of "the Word made flesh"; and how the Word is communicated in the ongoing life of the Church. With this foundation, students will use prose and poetry from sacred and secular sources for developing skills in listening and proclaiming the Word in an effective and appropriate manner. In addition, students will develop a collection of written resources on a variety of topics that they can use in preaching and teaching.
- Students commented that in the preaching classes, as well as other classes in which homilies are assigned, different expectations of faculty are evident. What is expected in one class is not acceptable in another. Although different styles of preaching should be respected, sometimes the various expectations can be confusing or even contradictory. They recommended that faculty discuss different approaches and have some common expectations of students, even with the variety of perspectives. In response to this recommendation, the faculty has developed principles for preaching a homily and brought together common understandings, even with a variety of preaching styles.
- When students evaluate one another, they are often not honest and simply affirm the homilies. The same thing often happens in parishes. The Theology IV class has learned that student evaluators aren't helping the homilist if their critiques aren't honest, and the homilist himself must be open to criticism. Students recommend that evaluations done in chapel should be done by students who have some background in homiletics and understand the importance of offering honest critique. Deacons should also be

evaluated in the seminary chapel. People in the parish who are evaluating should be given more guidance and be told to be critical and honest. Along with the written feedback form, some personal conversation would provide a more specific critique.

- Preaching in Spanish is a particular challenge not only because of the language but also because of cultural aspects. Homilists need to have cultural sensibility and sensitivity. Students recommend that the seminary bring in priests with experience of preaching in Spanish to give several talks to students who will be preaching in Spanish. They can give insight in how to relate to congregations from a variety of Hispanic backgrounds.

Analysis and continuing challenges

Our project has been addressing two goals: (1) developing and refining teaching and learning strategies for effective preaching and (2) assessing student attainment of Master of Divinity outcomes, integrated with all areas of formation. We consider both of these goals as ongoing projects, continually evaluated and adapted according to changing faculty, student body, and circumstances. We have made progress in both areas, have gained insight for faculty and students alike, and have plans for immediate and long-range development. We have learned that developing and refining teaching and learning strategies for effective preaching requires careful and constant coordination among all departments of the seminary. The in-services and all-school events have assisted faculty in understanding how preaching can be incorporated across the curriculum; however, most courses do not yet include specific preaching goals.

Not only must the faculty remain engaged in conversation and be open to developing individual courses and curriculum but the academic department must also keep in close contact with the human, spiritual, and pastoral departments. Through the preaching project, the four formation departments have at least begun to work together in assessment and program development. However, it is only a beginning. The Preaching Team is being reconstructed with members from each department who have the responsibility of keeping their particular departments informed and involved. In the academic department, the preaching faculty will meet regularly to coordinate what students are learning and how they are being assessed; the team also has the task of working with other faculty in setting up appropriate preaching strategies in individual courses.

Assessment of student attainment of Master of Divinity outcomes, integrated with all areas of formation, is the second goal of our project. As students in Theology IV noted in their review, the differing expectations of teachers and the variety of means of assessment has led to some confusion. Coordination of assessment tools, whether used in individual classrooms or with people in the parishes, need to be looked at as a whole and revised so that they are in fact clearly assessing the specific goals of the program. Another area of assessment still to be developed is the preaching at daily seminary liturgies, providing models of good preaching. In this way, all faculty, both in academics and formation, are also exposed to critique so that the entire seminary community becomes a learning community, a community in formation.

One of the most effective assessment components has been the individual student's self-assessment. Such personal evaluation has motivated students to look at the assessments made by teachers, peers, and congregations, to become aware of both strengths and limitations, and to set realistic goals. One theology student summarized this aspect well:

> According to the written evaluations and verbal feedback I have received, areas of strength of my preaching include: good, clear message; easy to follow; profound insights; and great liturgical presence. Likewise, according to the evaluations, the areas in which I need improvement have to do with my (too slow) pacing, very little voice inflection, and showing little emotion.

Involvement in evaluating and improving preaching skills during their seminary years gives students tools and encouragement for continuing to improve their skills after graduation. In addition, their honest assessment has given the seminary helpful suggestions not only for improving preaching but also in developing a more cohesive formation program.

Just as preaching itself can become stale or rely on recycled verbiage, our preaching project may become stale and lose creativity. The Preaching Team, likely to be reconstructed over and over in the coming years, hopes to keep preaching and assessment fresh, integrated, and responsive to the changing needs of the Church.

Elaine Park is academic dean and professor of biblical studies at Mount Angel Seminary. She is a member of the seminary Preaching Team and teaches the Proclamation course.

Appendix A

Assessment of Goals through the Preaching Portfolio

Each year, the preaching portfolio is expected to show that seminarians are attaining specific goals of the MDiv degree. As seminarians progress through the program, they add additional goals to those of the previous year. Objectives for the goals are listed in the graduate catalog and provide specific bases for peer evaluations, seminarian self-evaluation, and faculty portfolio reviews. In addition to assisting each seminarian in attaining the goals of the program, manifest through effective preaching, the assessments also provide the seminary faculty and administration with assessment of the effectiveness of our curriculum and are a catalyst for making improvements.

Level	Goal	Relevant Items in the Preaching Portfolio
Theology I	The student holds himself accountable to exhibit skills in written and oral communication for academic and pastoral effectiveness.	Tape of Scripture reading at beginning and end of semester Written introductions to Scripture passages Peer evaluation Seminarian self-evaluation
Theology II	The student can articulate the Catholic faith in a clear and appropriate manner. The student engages in theological reflection as a means of integrating intellectual formation with spiritual, pastoral, and human formation.	Two homilies given by seminarian Assessment of homilies by faculty member(s) Peer evaluation Seminarian self-evaluation
Theology III	The student manifests skills necessary for effective pastoral ministry.	Two (or more) homilies given by seminarian Assessments of homily by faculty member(s) and peers Video of preaching Peer evaluation Seminarian self-evaluation
Theology IV	The deacon, both through preaching of the homily and his entire liturgical ministry, manifests appropriate leadership skills.The deacon will set realistic goals for improvement of preaching and liturgical ministry.	Two (or more) homilies given by seminarian Assessments of homily by faculty member(s), peers, and members of congregations Assessment of liturgical presence by director of pastoral formation and parish supervisor Peer evaluation Seminarian self-evaluation

Appendix B

Annual Seminarian Self-Evaluation and Formation Session on Preaching

Each year during the second semester, one group formation session for seminarians in Theology I through IV will focus on preaching, with each seminarian briefly reflecting on aspects of his own preaching. A written summary of the self-assessment is kept in each student's preaching portfolio. The following questions are used in each seminarian's self-evaluation and may be used as a springboard for group reflection at the formation seminar. The questions, flowing from the goals of each year of theology, are added to those of the previous year.

Theology I

1. What evidence is there that you hold yourself accountable to exhibit skills in written and oral communication for academic and pastoral effectiveness? Use the tape of your own reading as well as your written introductions to biblical passages to give evidence of your self-assessment.

Theology II

2. What evidence is there from your two homilies that you can articulate the Catholic faith in a clear and appropriate manner? Use the specific objectives for this goal as listed in the academic catalog, indicating how **any** of them are evident in the homily.
3. How does the way in which you prepare your homilies show that you engage in theological reflection as a means of integrating intellectual formation with spiritual, pastoral, and human formation?

Theology III

4. How do your homilies and the manner in which you prepare them manifest skills necessary for effective pastoral ministry? What evidence is there in your preparation and the homilies themselves of **any** of the specific objectives for this goal as listed in the academic catalog?

Theology IV

5. In what specific ways, through preaching of the homily as well as your entire liturgical ministry, do you manifest appropriate leadership?
6. What goals for improvement of preaching and liturgical ministry do you have? How do you plan to attain them? How have you improved since last year?

In order to assist the seminary in improving both the preaching program and the entire MDiv curriculum, please comment on the following or other areas that may assist us.

- What are some things (people, classes, books, experiences, etc.) that have been helpful to you in developing as a preacher and attaining the goals of the program?
- Do you have any suggestions on ways the seminary could be of additional assistance?

One or two people from the preaching committee will be present at the formation session, taking notes on the discussion. Individual portfolios will be also be reviewed by members of the preaching team or their delegates. These notes from the seminar and the portfolio review will provide a means of assessing the group for understandings, skills and attitudes, and as part of the planning for the next year.

Appendix C

Peer Review of Preaching Portfolio

In reviewing another student's portfolio, please comment on the following, developing your responses on a separate page:

Theology I

1. What evidence is there that the student holds himself accountable to exhibit skills in written and oral communication for academic and pastoral effectiveness? Use the tape of the student reading as well as his written introductions to biblical passages to give evidence of your assessment.

    A. Using your comments as a basis, please mark on the line below to indicate how well you think this student is exhibiting skills in **oral** communication:

    Poor ____Excellent

    B. Using your comments as a basis, please mark on the line below to indicate how well you think this student is exhibiting skills in **written** communication:

    Poor ____Excellent

What have you learned about preaching from reviewing this portfolio?

What specific commendations and recommendations do you have for this seminarian?

A copy of this peer review is to be kept both in the portfolio of the one being reviewed and the one doing the review.

Appendix D

Faculty Review of Preaching Portfolio

In reviewing a student's portfolio, please comment on the following, developing your responses on a separate page:

Theology IV

1. From viewing the video of this seminarian preaching or from observing him in person, please mark on the line below to indicate how well you think this student is exhibiting skills in **oral** communication:

   Poor ____ Excellent

2. What evidence is there from this student's homilies that he can articulate the Catholic faith in a clear and appropriate manner? Use the specific objectives as listed in the goals of the MDiv in the catalog, indicating how **any** of them are evident in the homily.

   Using your comments as a basis, please mark on the line below to indicate how well you think this student is articulating the Catholic faith in a clear and appropriate manner:

   Poor ____ Excellent

3. How does the way in which this student prepares his homilies show that he engages in theological reflection as a means of integrating intellectual formation with spiritual, pastoral, and human formation?

   Using your comments as a basis, please mark on the line below to indicate how well you think this student is engaging in theological reflection.

   Poor ____ Excellent

4. In what specific ways does this seminarian manifest skills necessary for effective pastoral ministry? Use the specific objectives as listed in the goals of the MDiv in the catalog, indicating how **any** of them are evident in the homily.

   Using your comments as a basis, please mark on the line below to indicate how well you think this student is manifesting skills necessary for effective pastoral ministry.

   Poor ____ Excellent

5. In what ways does this seminarian (deacon), both through preaching of the homily and his entire liturgical ministry, manifest appropriate leadership? What are areas to be improved?

   Using your comments as a basis, please mark on the line below to indicate how well you think this student is manifesting appropriate leadership.

   Poor ____Excellent

Has this deacon set realistic goals for improvement of preaching and liturgical ministry? Please comment.

What specific commendations and recommendations do you have for this deacon?

A copy of this review is to be given to the student and to the chair of the Preaching Team.

Moving the Mission Statement into the Classroom

Jo-Ann Badley
Newman Theological College

ABSTRACT: The faculty of Newman Theological College used the opportunity of participating in the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project to rearticulate its vision of ministry preparation and to develop its skills to better implement that vision in classroom teaching. The project's focus was an intentional response to the particular situation of the college and the size of its faculty. We built on existing strengths in the ethos of the college and used existing structures to accomplish our goals. The success of the project is demonstrated by the increased coherence of mission statement, educational objectives, and course objectives.

Welcome to Newman Theological College

Newman Theological College (NTC) is a privately funded Roman Catholic college in western Canada. Each of the college's characteristics influenced our involvement in the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project. First, because we are Canadian, ATS is the only accrediting agency to which we are accountable. Second, historical Canadian settlement patterns have created regional distinctions with the result that the church in western Canada has a different culture from the church elsewhere in our country. In particular, a strong commitment to ecumenism and to training ordained, religious, and lay workers together is a part of the ethos of our school. These characteristics are enshrined in the founding legal documents and reaffirmed in our current mission statement. Third, we are the only Roman Catholic college in western Canada to offer an MDiv degree. Finally, we work in cooperation with St. Joseph Seminary. That institution provides human, spiritual, and pastoral formation for those students who are preparing for diocesan priesthood. Some of our other students are also in formation programs directed by their religious communities.

NTC is also a small college. There are eight full-time teaching faculty, six part-time teaching faculty (including the dean and vice dean) and several adjuncts. The college offers a variety of programs from lay certificates to the MTh program. Thus, despite our size, we have a broad mandate. In the fall of 2004, we had 370 students enrolled in our programs (FTE 160). Of those 370, 140 are in ATS approved programs (FTE 60). In practical terms, the combination of a wide mandate with a small number of faculty means faculty are stretched. We all carry administrative responsibilities of various kinds in addition to our teaching responsibilities. Most perform other duties outside the college as well—in religious orders and parishes or in diocesan educational programs. We all teach broadly in our disciplines in order to facilitate the entire curriculum.

When we began the Learning for Religious Vocation project in 2002, we were at a point of transition in our history; in retrospect, the project came at a fortuitous time. We began our work just after a long-serving president retired; the new presidency was short-lived and the project was completed under the direction of an interim president. During the project, we also changed deans. The college faculty was also in transition. Long-time faculty, mostly ordained and religious, were retiring or moving into other ministries after decades at the school. New faculty tended to be lay people, some with degrees from Newman who have gone on for further training, and some with no previous history at the college.

Opportunity knocked: The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project at NTC

When the initial questionnaire came from ATS, the dean at the time oversaw our contribution to the Learning for Religious Vocation project. When we were selected to continue participating in the project, the leadership passed from the dean to the faculty, and a committee of the faculty selected a faculty chairperson. This demonstrates the level of commitment to the project from both the dean's office and the faculty more generally.[1] This level of commitment was maintained throughout the project.

As chair of the new committee, I started my work by reading through the Reaccreditation Self-Study Report prepared for ATS in 1996, our College *Catalogue*, ATS Standards (*Bulletin, Part 1*), and articles in *Theological Education* 35 (1998). Our dean had also recently published an article on the theological formation of seminarians that clearly articulated his perspective on theological education.[2] These documents produced a vision of Catholic ministry education that both matched the ATS concern for whole-person formation (as articulated in Standard 4) and appeared to be the historical vision of NTC. However, this vision was not articulated clearly or intentionally integrated into classroom activities, as demonstrated by the fact that I, a relatively new faculty member without a history at the college, had not been made aware of it before. It was a vision that was caught, not taught. It was immediately clear that this was the direction the Learning for Religious Vocation project should take in our institution. We needed a clearer articulation of the vision of the college and an intentional implementation of that vision into MDiv curriculum and teaching practices; in this way, we could demonstrate that students moved toward the educational goals we held as they progressed through the program.[3] This choice of direction respected the practical realities we faced and the particular situation of our institution at the time the project began.

What we did: Learning for Religious Vocation project at NTC

Revisiting our mission statement: Articulating a common vision

Our first collective action was a faculty seminar in February 2003 dedicated to the question of whether we all agreed that we had good goals for our school, given our context, and whether we agreed that these goals addressed the ATS Standard 4.[4] We assessed this question by reviewing the changes made to the section of our *Catalogue* that has described Newman's vision of education for Christian ministry since 1996 (our last ATS self-study). As chair, I prepared a handout that identified the additions and deletions to these vital fifteen paragraphs since 1995. As we reviewed the changes to this section of the *Catalogue*, we had several laughs. In 1995 Newman was committed to "reflective discipleship of the crucified Lord Jesus," and, in 1996, to "reflective discipleship of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus." Obviously something had changed! We realized that we no longer knew the meaning of pet phrases written into the document by faculty who had since retired. We also saw how we had become more intentional about our concerns for spiritual formation; over the years, the faculty had added sentences and sections about this aspect of our program. We were reminded of some core values the institution held: ecumenism and the diversity of the Catholic tradition. Finally, we saw that we could organize these paragraphs to demonstrate a clear link between our mission statement and this vision of education. Most of all, the seminar process demonstrated that we continued to share "a coherent, explicit set of norms and expectations about what a good school looks like."[5]

A vision becomes an educational objective

Turning this statement of norms and expectations into clear objectives for curriculum or course planning and evaluation proved more difficult. It was one thing to say what we thought was important *in general* in theological education; it was another to think about how we made this vision happen *in particular* in our MDiv program; and it was yet another to think about how we might measure the degree to which we were being successful with students. At a faculty seminar in September 2003, we worked in small groups to associate the many activities in the MDiv program with various clauses of the description of our goals from our *Catalogue*. We made two discoveries: first, the *Catalogue* description was too discursive for effective use in program discussions; and second, the classroom was a primary location for meeting the goals we had for ministry education. As a result of this faculty discussion, our Learning for Religious Vocation committee condensed the fifteen paragraphs from our *Catalogue* into five objectives that each faculty member could use more easily in his or her course planning and evaluation. And the committee narrowed the scope of the project to focus on classroom teaching. Our primary focus became the coursework of the MDiv: how should we *teach* to implement educational goals for formation? This narrowing of focus should not be understood to suggest that the faculty in any way minimized the role of field education or other program components; indeed the faculty relies on these other components to facilitate important ministry formation in students. Rather, the classroom focus of the Learning for Religious Vocation project was intended to reduce the dissociation between field education or other activities of the program and classroom learning.

Program objectives become course objectives and learning outcomes

In light of the direction this project had taken in our college, we determined that it would be helpful to get professional assistance to improve our ability to articulate course objectives in a way consistent with our program objectives and the college mission statement. In April 2004, Victor Klimoski, the ATS consultant assigned to help us, spent three days with us working both with the faculty as a whole, and, probably more importantly, with small cohorts of faculty grouped by teaching discipline. He guided us in our articulation of educational outcomes for our particular course outlines. We began to see how we could shape courses so that we intentionally focused them on the program objectives that, in turn, reflected the vision and mission statement of the school.

In October 2004, our faculty seminar again addressed the MDiv program more broadly. The committee provided a grid for discussion that listed the components of the MDiv program and the MDiv program objectives (see appendix). Each of five small groups of faculty identified student characteristics or attributes that demonstrated maturity in meeting one educational objective and the places where that characteristic could be observed in MDiv program activities. This was a modification of a working tool Klimoski had provided. The groups then shared their results. By this point in the project, most faculty were able to see where particular objectives should become the particular focus of particular classes or other activities in the program. This seminar reinforced the learning of the previous spring. I prepared a handout summarizing our discussion so that faculty could use our common wisdom in their course design and other college activities. The discussion also demonstrated where we lacked common vision or had not articulated our vision adequately. For example, we realized that there was a distinction between demonstrating maturity and demonstrating ability to lead others to maturity.

In addition to our common work as a faculty, other activities of the Learning for Religious Vocation project enriched our endeavours. The committee work behind the scenes to organize faculty seminars and to follow through on the suggestions of faculty at those seminars cannot be underestimated. As well, we compiled a bibliography, and the librarian established a special section on reserve for our growing collection of books on curriculum and course planning and evaluation. Faculty circulated brief articles they found instructive for their own thinking on theological education. Some formal policy initiatives were required to amend faculty policies on course outlines and peer review of course outlines so that there was a formal structure to reinforce and maintain the initiatives of the Learning for Religious Vocation project.

A trail of evidence

The process of intentionally moving the college mission statement into the classroom is a slow one. However, we have objective evidence that we are accomplishing that goal. The clearest pieces of evidence are the course outlines that faculty members prepare that identify our intentions as theological "formators." These course outlines are reviewed in department meetings to ensure that we are individually maintaining the educational goals we have set collectively. The discussions of theological pedagogy that have taken place in department meetings (and in the hallways) are also informal markers of the success of our work. The changes in course goals, in student evaluation processes, and in pedagogy all speak to our progress toward implementing our vision of theological education.

The assignment structures and the success of students in meeting the course objectives also formally indicate the degree to which students have moved toward meeting the goals of the MDiv curriculum. Because we chose to integrate the process of theological formation into classroom activities, our classroom evaluation measures are preliminary measures of student success.

Parallel institutional developments

The direction the Learning for Religious Vocation project took at NTC was very much a function of the history and situation of the college at the time the work began. Our MDiv program already had components that addressed aspects of Standard 4 when we began the work. In particular, we assess all incoming MDiv students in their first semester for suitability for pastoral training; either the student's local bishop or a faculty board approves each person entering the MDiv program. Second, we had already begun to provide spiritual formation activities for all students; while some students were engaged in programs directed by the seminary or their community, the college had earlier recognized its responsibility to provide formation options for lay students who initiate their own program of study. Third, field education is an important component of our MDiv program and there is variety in the type of ministries in which students are involved. Fourth, the MDiv degree at NTC is completed when students write a theological synthesis and pass a comprehensive oral examination. This process is specifically structured so that students will articulate their integration of the various components of the program. For each of these components, we could see how the new discussions and initiatives of the Learning for Religious Vocation project enriched these other program components and called for clearer procedures so that we could demonstrate compliance with Standard 4. The people we met at Learning for Religious Vocation workshops proved to be very good resources for further developing these other aspects of college life.

The Learning for Religious Vocation activities at NTC were not isolated initiatives but rather complementary to other institutional commitments. Initially, the Learning for Religious Vocation project limitations were distinguished from a long-range strategic planning initiative that had an institution-wide focus. In contrast, the Learning for Religious Vocation project was specifically limited to the MDiv program. The project was also kept distinct from an MDiv curriculum review initiated by the dean in May 2003. The curriculum review was born, among other considerations, out of recognition that the first courses of the MDiv program were a critical integrating moment for students and that our current program structure did not adequately address that moment. Maintaining the classroom focus for the Learning for Religious Vocation project in contrast to this program-wide focus was also an important limitation.

Results of the Learning for Religious Vocation opportunity

The primary result of this initiative for NTC is that faculty are more cohesive and intentional about implementing the NTC educational vision. The project helped us to name the importance of teaching for formation and to begin discussions of how this can happen. This development is apparent in formal discussions about what works in classrooms throughout the institution: with students, in department meetings, in faculty seminars, and at faculty council. Probably more important, it is apparent in informal conversations among faculty. The Learning for Religious Vocation project has prompted questions from new faculty as they participate in these conversations, questions that press longer-term faculty to articulate NTC procedures (sometimes resulting in their revision). In the end, we all understand better what we are trying to do and we have more ideas how it can be done.

If there has been a negative repercussion of the project for the institution, it is that the MDiv and pedagogy for ministry training has dominated our attention at the expense of time and energy toward other concerns, such as attention to research for publication, continued assessment of our MRE, MTS and MTh programs, not to mention the lay certificate and undergraduate programs. Clearly there are spin-off benefits from the project for these other program areas; however, attending to these other programs may reestablish scholarship for publication (rather than for competent classroom teaching) as an important task. The implications of an institutional focus on formation are beginning to be implemented in faculty tenure and ranking policies.

Future directions

Now that we are at the end of this intentional initiative, the faculty needs to decide how to regularize the pedagogical focus within our usual faculty processes. This obviously has several components. First and foremost, the process by which students evaluate courses needs to be revised so that it is more attuned to the mission statement. At present, we practice regular course evaluation, but the instrument needs to be revised so that it reflects the particular educational goals of each program and class.

Second, a faculty discussion of our processes of student evaluation would be fruitful. This would again call us to focus on the particular skills, attributes, and knowledge that we desire to see in our graduates to ensure that our learning activities are guiding student learning in the right direction and that our learning evaluation criteria are consistent with those goals.

Third, the adjunct faculty members need to be brought into the process. At a minimum, this will mean revising the documentation provided for adjunct faculty and devising a way by which their course outlines are evaluated within our department structure.

Fourth, a larger focus on all the activities of the MDiv program needs to be maintained. Classroom pedagogy is important, but it is only one component of the whole. Continued assessment of the whole MDiv program will remind faculty that we are coordinating many activities to meet our formation goals; screening, field education, academic and pastoral counseling, spiritual formation, and a final synthesis as well as the many noncurricular activities of the college contribute to the overall picture.

Finally, we need to think about how to assess potential new faculty so that anyone hired is amenable to these teaching goals and emphases. Clearly not all potential instructors are committed to teaching for formation and such persons would not be a good fit for our institution.

Reflections on our experience

As I reflect on our experience, I have no question that the most valuable aspect of our work together was revisiting our mission statement with its fuller description in the *Catalogue*. The rearticulation of the vision of education that has undergirded Newman's life and programs throughout its history and the reaffirmation of the importance of the mission statement for *all* our academic activities developed cohesion among the faculty as colleagues and in our pedagogical efforts. The project prompted us to speak about what had been previously assumed and to give more concrete form to activities that embodied this educational vision. I do not think it is possible to overestimate the importance of keeping the mission statement in constant view. Clearly, the process is also most vulnerable at this point. If the mission statement changes explicitly because the institution's leadership takes the school in new directions, or, more likely, implicitly, because new participants bring new experiences and expectations into the educational mix, the attained cohesion is jeopardized and the process needs to start again.

Second, our experience would suggest that it is important to respect one's history and present situation. Potentially, the task of educational reform could be overwhelming, and it is easy to think that new program components need to be designed. In some instances this may be true, but we found it to be more effective to begin where present practices could be enhanced. In a practical sense, this means using the institutional structures that exist. In our situation, we did not add faculty development sessions but used some of the regularly planned faculty seminars for this new task. We did not implement new departmental tasks but changed the criteria of ongoing departmental reviews of course outlines. We changed the expectation of what is included in course outlines rather than add additional requirements to faculty course planning. This was especially important because we are a small faculty with limited energies; evaluation needs to enhance rather than replace the thing we are really doing—forming people for ministry. Inevitably, using the existing structures will mean the process of implementing educational evaluation processes will be slow because we cannot attend only to this task. And inevitably, the task of leading the process will require consistent effort and new implementation strategies, but perhaps the reform of theological educational practice is more possible because those activities have become part of regular academic processes.

Third, we enunciated clear limits and expectations for the project. It was important to keep in mind the other initiatives of the institution in order not to duplicate efforts. The Learning for Religious Vocation project was complementary to, not competitive with, other institutional activities. This also involved recognizing the limits of our own expertise and finding help outside the college. In our case, we had faculty with educational backgrounds who were able to assist those of us without such backgrounds. The funding from the Learning for Religious Vocation project also provided for intensive assistance for enhancing course outlines. The downside of limiting the project to classrooms as we did is that the classroom component of the MDiv educational experience is easily overrated, especially by the teaching faculty.

Finally, it is our experience that this kind of work is only possible with the explicit support of the institution's leadership and personnel. Our president and dean participated actively in faculty seminars as faculty members (they both carry teaching responsibilities). The dean regularly reiterated that this was necessary work for the faculty to do. As well, the good spirits and collegiality of participating faculty were crucial; we enjoy working together and this was a way to learn to work together more effectively.

We are glad we did this. Newman Theological College is stronger and we are better teachers. We'll see if our graduates are better priests and parish workers.

Jo-Ann Badley is associate professor of New Testament at Newman Theological College in Edmonton, Alberta, where she chaired the school's participation in the ATS Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project.

ENDNOTES

1. The president was also supportive, but the scope of the project required particular support from the academic dean.

2. Don H. MacDonald, "The Theological Formation of Seminarians According to Recent Roman Documents" *Communio* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 424–37.

3. We took to heart the warning offered by Daniel Aleshire to remember that "The primary task of a theological school is theological scholarship . . . and the school cannot spend more energy on evaluation than on its primary task." Daniel O. Aleshire, "Introduction," *Theological Education* 35, no. 1 (Pittsburgh, PA: The Association of Theological Schools, Autumn 1998), ix.

4. Daniel Aleshire's Introduction to the 1998 *Theological Education* journal was helpful in outlining the approach we should take to this process. He directed us to ask the normative question, "Are these the goals an accredited school should have for its various areas of work . . . ?" and the contextual question, "Are these goals the right ones for this institution, at a particular point in its history . . . ?" Aleshire, "Introduction," vii.

5. Daniel O. Aleshire, "MDiv Education and Numbering the Levites" (address at the conference on the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation, Pittsburgh, PA, Nov. 1, 2002) citing Richard F. Elmore, "Testing Trap," *Harvard Magazine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Sept.–Oct. 2002): 7.

Appendix

MDIV PROGRAM COMPONENTS	NTC EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES				
	Teaching-educating mission ministry of theology God's truth and love in Jesus Christ; divine-human drama (Israel, Christ, Church); Scripture and Tradition; theological education and reflection	**Contemplative spirituallliturgical formation** universal call to holiness; deeper relationship with the God of Jesus Christ; find the workings of the Holy Spirit in daily life	**Human maturing**	**Pastoral ministry** impact in the Church	**Social ministry** impact in the world
Screening					
Classes • Introductory classes • Core classes • Electives • Reading courses					
Field education					
Lay spiritual formation					
Pastoral counselling					
Academic advising					
Noncurricular activities: • liturgies: planning and attending • student association activities • informal conversations • lectureships (Jordan, Grandin, faculty seminars)					
Integrative seminar					
Synthesis					
Comprehensive examination					

Evaluation Rubrics: Weaving a Coherent Fabric of Assessment

Stephen Graham, Kimberly Sangster, and Yasuyuki Kamata
North Park Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT: One of the learning goals for North Park's Master of Divinity degree is "living and working under Scripture's authority by knowing the Bible in its original languages and engaging responsibly in the interpretation and application of its teaching." The Master of Divinity core requirements include twenty-seven semester hours of biblical courses, including Greek and Hebrew languages. In developing a culture of assessment that will be able to demonstrate whether this learning goal is being met, North Park plans to create evaluation rubrics on the basis of which we will be able to make explicit our expectations of the competencies expected from students upon completion of the various courses in the curriculum and to develop consistent standards of evaluation based on the rubrics. This project involved the development of a rubric that would serve as a tool to help determine to what extent the Introduction to Greek Exegesis course served to meet the learning goal. Our expectation is that growing out of this process, we will develop rubrics for most, if not all, core courses in the curriculum.

Background

As we entered the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project, North Park's first step was to collect data about assessment processes already present. We were both surprised by the amount of assessment already present and somewhat dismayed that the various processes of assessing student learning, while generally effective in themselves, were not woven together seamlessly into a coherent fabric of assessment. We perform assessments through the admission process, at the end of students' first year, associated with field education, and at the end of studies, as well as through coursework. Our survey revealed inconsistencies, however, and, in many cases, a lack of clarity to allow students (and faculty evaluators) to know exactly what was expected and what was to be the basis for assessment.

An important next step in our assessment plan was to clarify learning goals for each of our degree programs. With guidance from our consultant, James A. Meek, and through a process of discussion within the faculty, learning goals were clarified and made explicit in the seminary *Catalog* for each degree program. Earlier *Catalogs* had included degree objectives and goals, but this process led to greater consistency and clarity. Through our ongoing work of assessment, it has become evident that our learning goals will need additional refinement as we implement our full plan of assessment.

We also have developed curriculum maps to help ascertain faculty perceptions of how specific courses contribute to the overall learning goals for each degree program. Through this process, among other insights, we discovered that different faculty members believe that particular courses contribute differently to the learning goals. This finding points to the need to develop evaluation rubrics to help achieve more consistency in both expectations for student learning and evaluation of that learning.

Over the next few years, we plan to examine all the elements of our assessment of student learning in order to seek more consistency and clarity. For this project, we selected our Introduction to Greek Exegesis course as the focus of a pilot project in the development of an evaluative rubric. We assumed that achievement of the learning goal would be significantly influenced by the completion of this course, which marks the completion of the Greek language sequence of nine semester hours.

Development of the rubric

Step one

The first step was to create a significant level of consensus among the faculty, particularly the members of the biblical field, about what would indicate fulfillment of this learning goal. How would we know that this learning goal has been met? What are the critical indicators we can glean from the Introduction to Greek Exegesis class? To develop the rubric for Introduction to Greek Exegesis, the seminary's biblical field faculty met a number of times to plan the process for development. All members agreed that they used their own "internal" rubrics in grading, but none of the faculty members had made those rubrics fully explicit, either for themselves or for their students. Because of the amount of work that would be involved in this process, in the midst of already busy lives, there was some resistance to taking on the task. Some also assumed that the rubric could be developed through brief conversation within the field. Instead, the dean and the director of assessment urged adoption of a process that would enable more thorough examination of assumptions and allow the rubric to emerge through the actual process of grading.

Five members of the biblical field faculty, working independently, graded from three to five papers from a set of seven papers gathered more or less randomly from previous Introduction to Greek Exegesis classes and assigned three-digit identification numbers. The Introduction to Greek Exegesis class routinely requires a final exegetical paper, and the specific requirements for the final paper varied somewhat from course to course. Because the focus of this process was less on the papers themselves than on the faculty members grading them and their expectations of what constituted adequate achievement of the learning goal, that was not a problem. Authors of the papers were kept anonymous, and no criteria for grading were named except for the faculty members' own expectations for papers of this kind and whether they achieved the learning goal. Faculty were instructed to mark the papers with a 5 or 6 for "exceptional," a 3 or 4 for "satisfactory," or a 1 or 2 for "unsatisfactory." Faculty members were also asked to give their *reasons* for marking the papers as they had. This step revealed considerable difference of opinion within the field about what constituted achievement of the particular levels of accomplishment. For example, on paper number 100, ratings ranged from 5 (exceptional) to 2 (unsatisfactory) with the other rating being 4 (satisfactory). The following chart shows the range of ratings for the seven papers.

Paper #	Rater #1	Rater #2	Rater #3	Rater #4	Rater #5
100	2		4	5	
101	5	4		3	
102	5	4		6	
103		2	4		2
104	3		4		4
105		2		2	
106	4		5		4

Step two

Faculty evaluators then returned the papers and evaluation sheets to the Academic Services office where staff compiled the scores and collected the comments. These data were distributed to members of the biblical field for review. A meeting followed during which the field members worked to craft a rubric that emerged out of the actual practice of evaluation, based on the comments and ratings. It became clear that the *process* had been crucial, because the field faculty members agreed that criteria that had surfaced during the process of grading could now be made explicit and applied to grading other papers. It also became clear that standardization of expectations and standards for evaluation would be an important development, both for faculty evaluators, and for helping students to understand and achieve uniform standards, particularly directed toward the learning goal. It also became clear that in a general sense, the field needed to pay closer attention to assignments, in this course and perhaps in other core courses, to ensure that all aspects of the learning goals were addressed adequately.

The rubric that emerged from this process included columns for the categories required for the paper, including:

- Clear argument/thesis
- Use of Original Languages
- Concern for Historical Context
- Concern for Cultural Context
- Assessment of Literary Issues
- Application or "So What" Factor
- Bibliography
- English Grammar
- Writing Style

Within each category, the rubric named subcategories. For example, within "Use of Original Languages," were subcategories of "stays with the text," "shows ability to identify forms and translate," "translation choices clear; appropriate use of grammar and syntax," and "textual variants appropriately addressed." Each category was weighted with a percentage of the total, and additional columns included criteria for each of the three general evaluations: satisfactory, exceptional, and unsatisfactory. (SeeAppendix.)

Initial use of the rubric

Step three

Once the rubric was developed, additional readers evaluated the papers on the basis of the rubric. For this exercise, authors were anonymous and readers were asked to rate fulfillment of each category of the rubric using the ratings of "exceptional" (5 or 6), "satisfactory" (3 or 4), or "unsatisfactory" (1 or 2), using the criteria from the rubric. Readers also made narrative comments on how well or poorly the papers addressed the categories.

The Office of Academic Services gathered copies of the final exegesis papers from the classes completed during the fall terms of 2003, 2004, and 2005. Three different faculty members taught the courses during those years, and we believed this variety of instruction and three years of aggregated student data would be very rich and allow for meaningful analysis and conversation. A total of forty-four papers were collected (approximately 50 percent of the total number of papers submitted for those classes). For purposes of data collection and evaluation, students were identified by the term in which the course was taken, gender, ethnicity, and a record was made of what other biblical field courses the students had taken by the time they took Introduction to Greek Exegesis. Additional data were collected concerning whether the student had taken Introduction to Greek Language courses through a summer intensive format or during the regular academic year, what their undergraduate major had been, whether they had graduated from North Park University or another undergraduate institution and their major course of study, and whether they had received advanced standing or transfer credits upon entering North Park

Theological Seminary. These various categories will enable us to evaluate the variety of circumstances involved in preparation for the Introduction to Greek Exegesis course and their relative impact on performance in that course. The pool was limited to those students who had taken one of the New Testament survey courses (Interpreting the New Testament I: Gospels or Interpreting the New Testament II: Acts and Epistles) either prior to taking Introduction to Greek Exegesis or concurrent with it. For purposes of evaluation and development of the rubric, however, author identity remained anonymous and papers were numbered before being distributed to faculty for grading.

Reflections on learning

We learned many things through this process and look forward to applying those insights to the process of developing additional rubrics and to the overall shaping of our processes and goals for student learning.

We noted that the demographics of the readers did not adequately reflect either our overall faculty demographic profile or the demographic profile of our student body. Because all of our biblical field members and the outside readers assigned to the project were white males, there is at least the possibility that the diversity of perspectives characteristic of our whole faculty and our student body was not adequately represented.

In addition, the demographics of the authors of the papers do not match the overall demographics of our student body: 82 percent of the authors were white, non-Hispanic, contrasted to 70 percent overall student body being in that category. Also, 73 percent of the authors were male when only 50 percent of all students are male. In the future, we will seek to obtain samples that are more fully representative of our campus community. Although the statistical pool was small, there appears to be a slight variation between the papers submitted by Anglo students and those from underrepresented constituencies. Because of the limited size of the pool, conclusions cannot be drawn, but this will be an item that requires attention as the sample size increases.

It was interesting to note the variety of courses taken prior to or concurrent with Introduction to Greek Exegesis. Like most schools, North Park has a curriculum designed to be taken in sequence, but clearly, for a variety of reasons many students are not following the designed sequence as presented in the *Catalog*. This phenomenon raises questions about curriculum design and sequence, as well as how and when accurate assessment of achievement of learning goals can and should take place. For example, the relatively early placement of the Introduction to Greek Exegesis course in the Master of Divinity curriculum might lead to the assumption that the area of application, the "so what?" factor, might not be well developed in students this early in their programs. As it turns out, though, all of the students in our sample had previously taken Interpreting the New Testament I: Gospels or were taking it concurrently with Introduction to Greek Exegesis. An additional 59 percent had already taken Interpreting the New Testament II: Acts and Epistles, and twenty of the forty-four had previously taken an additional four to twelve semester hours of biblical field courses before they enrolled in Introduction to Greek Exegesis. Given that background in biblical studies courses, we would expect better facility in application than was evident in the sample of papers.

Another example is that 45 percent of the papers gave evidence of "exceptional" use of the Greek language, and an additional 45 percent were rated "satisfactory" in that category. This preliminary indication reveals that we are doing a good job of teaching students in the use of Greek. On the other hand, marks for "clear argument/thesis" and "application or 'so what?' factor" were considerably lower, with a number of papers marked "unsatisfactory." We need to attend to this difference and perhaps make our expectations more clear to students.

A number of values and principles emerged from the conversation that can inform the faculty as a whole.

- It is important to make explicit and consistent the criteria by which we evaluate student work.
- We need to make clearer to students the learning goals of the class and how achievement of those learning goals will be measured.
- We should seek greater clarity about what capacities are measured by which classes and how they are measured. Ultimately, this will give us better knowledge about whether our curriculum as a whole is achieving the learning goals we have articulated.
- There is a need to attend to the cycle of assessment to ensure that data gathered inform the process of revision and bring about modifications as appropriate.
- Data verify our perception that many students do not follow the curriculum design in the *Catalog*. We need to address this phenomenon either by adapting the curriculum to the present reality or by developing structures that keep students more in line with the design.
- It will be interesting to see whether the overall quality of the papers increases next year when the students will be informed of the rubric and will be instructed to attend to all aspects of it as the basis for evaluation of the paper.

Step four

While the specific findings learned from this process are not conclusive for a number of reasons, it is clear that the process was a valuable one and well worth the effort. It is clear that the final paper for the Introduction to Greek Exegesis course can carry the initial responsibility for measuring success in meeting the biblical learning goal. It cannot be expected to carry the whole freight, but it can give an important initial indication of progress.

This project provides us with a starting point. We plan to repeat the process next year using the data gathered from this first experience as a baseline. Our next step will be to process the results of this project within the biblical field and then with the entire faculty as a case study of what we need to do in other fields and core requirements. We have become believers in the value of rubrics—and perhaps even more in the processes that led to their creation as a means toward developing a culture of assessment. There is a lot of work involved, but we believe that the ultimate outcome will be more effective student learning.

Stephen Graham is dean of North Park Theological Seminary. Kimberly Sangster is director of academic services and assessment at NPTS. Yasuyuki Kamata is a graduate assistant at NPTS.

Appendix

Rubric: Greek Exegesis Paper

Category	%	Satisfactory	Exceptional	Unsatisfactory
Clear Argument/Thesis (a) main thesis/makes a case (b) key issues in the text addressed	15	Thesis identifiable. Paper moves from statement of thesis, through argument, to conclusion. Key issues identified and treated.	Thesis is innovative, creative, and insightful. Paper moves from statement of thesis, through argument, to conclusion. Key issues identified and discussed with awareness of the strength of various arguments.	Thesis not clearly stated. Some or all key issues ignored.
Use of Original Languages (a) stays with the text (b) shows ability to identify forms and translate (c) translation choices clear; appropriate use of grammar and syntax (d) textual variants appropriately addressed	30	Basic ability to translate. Makes clear hermeneutical approach. Ability to discern what should be treated. Understands the function of the text. Assessment of uniqueness of text. Textual variants identified and assessed. Keeps focus on the text. Demonstrates awareness of grammatical issues and possibilities.	Translation reveals above average facility with the language. Textual variants assessed, understood and cogently presented. Demonstrates ability to evaluate grammatical possibilities and argue for choices made in context.	Translation inadequate. Does not reveal discernment of what should be treated. Does not understand textual variants or grammatical issues.
Concern for Historical Context	5	Shows basic awareness of the historical situation in which the text is written.	Superior awareness of historical situation and how the text relates to and makes use of that situation.	Inadequate/no awareness of the historical situation.
Concern for Cultural Context	5	Shows basic awareness of the cultural context in which the text is written.	Superior awareness of cultural context and primary sources from the ancient world and how those factors contribute to understanding.	Inadequate/no awareness of the cultural context.
Assessment of Literary Issues (a) literary context (b) text's literary structure (c) assessment of the inner biblical context and place of passage in overarching narrative: immediate, book, canon	5	Aware of related texts. Places text in the overarching narrative of the immediate chapter, book, and related writings with the canon. Some awareness of text's internal structure. Understands the legitimate contribution of other passages to interpretation.	Strong grasp of related texts and ability to evaluate the connections. Places text in the overarching narrative of the canon. Understands and makes us of the stylistic and theological tendencies of the writer. Superior grasp of text's internal structure.	Does not demonstrate awareness of text's internal structure or of related texts.

Category	%	Satisfactory	Exceptional	Unsatisfactory
Application or "So what?" factor (a) identifies implication of the text/theological concepts (b) solid conclusion	15	Clearly identifies theological implication of the text. If appropriate concrete suggestion for adapting the text. Adequate conclusion.	Identifies theological implication of the text with particular insight and persuasiveness. Real insight about the significance of the text for modern church life. Convincing conclusion.	Inadequately identifies theological implications of the text. No application of text.
Bibliography (a) solid academic sources (b) adequate number (c) critique of sources used during discussion	15	70% or greater met. Proper form use.	90% or greater met. Proper form use.	Less than 70% met. Proper form not used.
English Grammar (a) proper grammar (b) punctuation (c) clear style (d) spelling	5	Few grammatical, punctuation and/or spelling errors. Proper use of words.	No/very few grammatical, punctuation and/or spelling errors.	Many grammatical, punctuation and/or spelling mistakes.
Writing Style (a) evidence of thoughtful logic; moves from a good beginning, through a good main discussion, to appropriate conclusion(s) (b) appropriate summaries (c) good flow (d) appropriate length and format (e) appropriate us of footnotes/endnotes	5	70% or greater met. Use of clear language, no "commentaryesque." Clear introduction, progression, and coherence. Style is readable and understandable.	90% or greater met. Lively style, clear flow. Clear introduction, progression, and coherence.	Less than 70% met.

Toward an Integrated Model of Assessment

Dennis H. Dirks
Talbot School of Theology of Biola University

ABSTRACT: Talbot School of Theology has intentionally endeavored through the years to realize its commitment to an educational process that prepares students for integrated, holistic ministry. In the project described below, the school sought to refine further its commitment and to develop a comprehensive plan for assessment of the degree to which this goal is achieved in students. Included are an overview of the plan development process, principles of assessment that guided and shaped the plan, and ways in which the process contributed to institutional learning.

Introduction

The preparation of Master of Divinity (MDiv) students for ministries that are holistic and integrated has long been an objective of Talbot School of Theology. It has been recognized that an integral connection must be made between learning for knowledge and learning for personal formation and the practices of ministry. Courses and other learning experiences have been designed toward an objective of bringing together the elements of knowing, being, and doing in ways that are meaningful in and extend beyond the classroom in sustainable practices of spiritual growth and ministry. This integrative goal has been reflective of the school's efforts to fulfill the breadth and depth of content requirements for the MDiv, as reflected in The Association of Theological Schools' Degree Program Standards: knowledge of religious heritage, understanding of the cultural context, growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity, and capacity for ministerial and public leadership.[1]

The school's strategy in the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project was to develop an assessment plan that would evaluate student learning in ways that would account for our overarching goal of holistic preparation. As our plan of assessment developed, we likewise sought to review and refine our commitment to this goal.

This article will provide a brief description of the context of Talbot's MDiv program and a summary of assessment efforts prior to the current project. An overview of the assessment plan design process will examine the institutional culture with its strengths and weaknesses related to assessment, describe research questions that assured a holistic focus, identify existing MDiv assessment measures, and represent what was learned through successive assessment plan drafts.

Talbot School of Theology is grateful to ATS for the invitation to participate in this Lilly Endowment-funded project and for the opportunity it provided for focused, deliberate attention on the meaning of assessment and on effective means by which it might profitably be engaged. We are likewise appreciative of the occasion it provided to reflect carefully on our MDiv program with greater intentionality. In addition to resources to which we were introduced at ATS-sponsored conferences on assessment, we benefited from contributions of our project consultant, James Meek. Meek's penetrating questions, eminently helpful insights, and exceedingly practical, workable recommendations guided us through revisions needed to arrive at a workable assessment plan.

Context for assessment

Talbot School of Theology is a nondenominational seminary founded in 1952. Throughout its history, the school has served a steadily growing number of evangelical denominations/affiliations of which nearly fifty are presently represented. Such diversity presents its own unique challenges for the assessment task. Student population has grown rather consistently with nearly 1,000 students presently enrolled. Talbot offers ten graduate degree programs, seven of which are foundational theological courses of study that include the MDiv, one advanced theology degree (ThM), and three doctoral degrees (PhD, EdD, and DMin). As a university-related school, Talbot is also responsible for two undergraduate academic majors and for providing thirty units of Bible and theology for 3,600 undergraduate students. Fifty-six full-time faculty engage instructional and other scholarly activities.

Overview of assessment plan design process

Assessment plan design team

A task force representing diverse aspects of the faculty and administrative community was carefully selected to study the school's Master of Divinity program, its mission, goals, and learning outcomes, and to develop a plan for the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project. Members of the team included a systematic theologian (specialist in biblical/theological content of the curriculum), director of field education and Talbot support ministries (ministry supervision/evaluation and alumni ministry specialist), director of intentional character development (authority in character and spiritual formation), director of the PhD in Educational Studies program (education specialist for whom the language and process of assessment is familiar territory), assistant dean, and dean. A biblical studies faculty member was brought in for parts of the process to assure that certain portions of the curriculum were appropriately considered. Students were involved at appropriate points to evaluate components of the plan. Though representing varying interests, the team quickly developed working relationships that facilitated accomplishment of project objectives.

Institutional culture

As the process for creating a comprehensive assessment plan for the MDiv program began, it became apparent that both strengths and hindrances in the institutional culture would influence the endeavor. First, some institutional strengths. Talbot has long benefited from a highly collegial faculty community in which faculty genuinely enjoy working together cross-disciplinarily. While assessment is not customarily associated with joy, the strength of the faculty community coupled with a sincere desire to assure that the MDiv program is accomplishing what it intends encouraged openness to assessment. Faculty had a general familiarity with aspects of assessment as a result of a process that reviews degree programs every five years, exposure to various evaluation-intensive programs such as Field Education and Intentional Character Development, and recent involvement in writing degree program mission statements, goals, and student learning outcomes. Two prominent degree programs, the Doctor of Philosophy and the Doctor of Education, both in Educational Studies, helped generate a climate of awareness of educational concerns through the years. The school had participated in the ATS *Entering Student Questionnaire* and *Graduating Student Questionnaire* process for many years, developing an expectation for gathering data. Talbot is closely related structurally with a university that is committed to assessment of educational effectiveness. Every faculty member was engaged in the ATS and regional accreditation self-study process. This helped make the prospect of site visits a strong stimulus to engage and to develop a plan that had rather immediate consequences as well as long-term sustainability.

We also became aware of hindrances to the process. While faculty had general awareness and understanding of assessment, it was sufficiently deficient that a comprehensive understanding was needed. In typical fashion, faculty did not see assessment as their responsibility; they tended to see it as something for administrators and other educational process experts. Assessment conversations tended to produce faculty shudders and anxiety about implications of assessment for faculty governance as it relates to curriculum. Although this was not a strong concern, it was based on the fundamental misconception that assessment is an administrator's responsibility. Faculty had heard rumors circulating in educational circles for years that the outcomes and assessment movement has sinister hidden agendas. During the years of the Character and Assessment project, much of the school's attention and effort of necessity were focused on coping with rather rapid schoolwide enrollment growth, making assessment appear less urgent. Finally, minimal interaction was occurring between academic departments regarding assessment-related activities. The need for coordinated effort became quickly apparent. The strengths identified above helped prepare for development of a plan while weaknesses suggested elements to be corrected through the plan and its implementation.

Research questions

Early in the project, we identified foundational guiding assumptions about the nature of learning for ministry. These assumptions were those values we believed to be nonnegotiable, or at least exceedingly important, in student learning for ministry. These fixed principles or commitments were synthesized into three "research questions":

1. Do students demonstrate a growing, intimate knowledge of God, themselves, and their ministry calling in learning and practice, developing and sustaining habits of spiritual growth that continue into ministry?
2. Do students and graduates demonstrate they are developing deeper knowledge of God's Word and the doctrines of the Christian faith, understanding of their own cultural and ministry context, and ability to relate these truths to their own and others' lives?
3. Are students and alumni developing and practicing ministry skills that are informed and guided by internalized biblical values as they serve and equip others for effective ministry worldwide?

These questions came to be highly valued by the assessment plan task force because they served as an indispensable guide in the process. They assured that our commitment to holistic preparation for ministry was integral to the plan, and they drove us to focus on our goal of educational effectiveness. The ways in which research questions were framed served as valuable organizing structures for student learning outcomes. Each MDiv student learning outcome was grouped with its related research question.

Identification of existing MDiv assessment measures

Moving from formulating research questions and organizing learning outcomes, we conducted an audit of existing MDiv assessment measures. As the school had endeavored to address evaluative requirements implicit and explicit in the ATS standards, MDiv assessment prior to the current project consisted of dispersed institutional and student learning evaluation measures. Student ministry skills and the application of theological content to ministry situations were routinely and rather thoroughly evaluated in the three-year Field Education sequence. The ATS Profiles of Ministry inventory had been used rather extensively in this succession. Talbot's Intentional Character Development (ICD) program by its nature focuses on assessment of spiritual and character formation through a variety of measures. A mid-degree program, Progress Review, was developed to assess not only ICD-related components but other academic concerns as well. Each faculty member is consulted regarding student progress. The Character and Assessment project provided impetus to refine this process. ATS's *Entering Student* and *Graduating Student Questionnaires* are administered each semester. Every five years, an internally required comprehensive program review is administered. This process consists primarily of evaluating the degree to which student learning and institutional effectiveness have been achieved. Students and alumni are consulted and evaluated by means of surveys and focus groups. Talbot's alumni assistance program, Talbot Support Ministries, maintains contact with graduates during at least the first five to seven years of ministry following graduation. Anecdotal information is solicited from graduates to determine the degree to which educational preparation has been adequate for actual experiences of ministry. Several years prior to the present project, degree program mission statements, program goals, and student learning outcomes were written for each degree program in preparation for developing an institution-wide comprehensive plan of assessment. Although it was recognized that these materials represented drafts requiring revision, a modification process was initially postponed until the self-study and site visits (Western Association of Schools and Colleges schedules two) were completed.

While each of the current forms of assessment mentioned above was helpful in developing a general but diffuse "culture of assessment," the degree to which each was successful in determining educational effectiveness was evaluated. The most notable weakness identified was a failure to explicitly connect student learning outcomes with assessment measures. The result was imprecision and minimally usable data for making changes in response.

Two programs in the MDiv were found to have been particularly effective in nurturing a climate of and expectations for assessment in ways that helped kick-start a broader, more comprehensive MDiv assessment endeavor: Field Education and Intentional Character Development. As is true of most well-designed Field Education curricula, many evaluative components were already in place and required only a modicum of tuning to render them effective for the Character and Assessment project. Similarly, the Intentional Character Development program had conceptualized and to some degree operationalized spiritual and character formation upon which evaluative procedures had been developed. Included were measurement tools such as a battery of inventories, student self-appraisal, faculty appraisal of students, and various external assessment measures including church lay leaders, focus groups, etc. Components of both programs helped create an environment that was conducive to broader assessment efforts and provided measurement tools that served as a backbone for our MDiv assessment plan.

Learning through successive assessment plan drafts

As might be expected, we found that our learning about and understanding of assessment accumulated as each successive draft of an assessment plan developed. Grappling with issues from how to assess intangibles to how to create scoring rubrics that evaluate the intended heart of a learning outcome forced us continually to expand, enhance, and enrich our comprehension of assessment in theological education. Much of what was learned came from the observations, abundant questions, and plentiful resources provided by our ATS consultant for the project.

The first assessment plan draft carefully identified existing sources of evaluative information and new measurement tools to be created to assess students and graduates, and connected each with its related research question mentioned earlier. Although student learning outcomes were implicit in research questions, the first draft's chief weakness was the lack of explicit connection between evaluative measures and learning outcomes.

In the process of developing a second draft in which outcomes and assessment tools were directly associated, analysis reconfirmed what we earlier had concluded: learning outcomes for the MDiv degree required revision toward greater succinctness, pithiness (for ease of remembering), and measurability. Finding that assessment could not adequately be designed with outcomes as presently stated, we engaged in a revision process. We were then able to develop an assessment plan with explicit connections between the program's mission, goals, learning outcomes, and evaluative tools. To our list of existing or embedded means of assessment was added the use of capstone courses in the curriculum that had potential for assessing student skill in holistically integrating MDiv curricular components. Other existing evaluation tools were added including the ATS *Graduating Student Questionnaire*, which we had used for years but somehow failed to include, and reports from lay people in each student's church. Analysis revealed, however, that seven of ten assessment measures in the second draft involved student self-reporting—clearly unsatisfactory. Several were dropped and replaced to achieve greater balance between student self-reporting and external or more impartial appraisal.

A third assessment plan revision revealed that in directing our energies to identify means of assessing some of the more difficult, intangible learning outcomes, we had overlooked evaluating student knowledge. Perhaps unconsciously it had been assumed that knowledge evaluation was an explicit element in the grading process in each course in the curriculum. Adequate evaluation of alumni was likewise a recognized deficiency in the plan. Permission was obtained to draw upon elements of the ATS Profiles of Ministry inventory to assess the effectiveness by which graduates actually do in ministry what the MDiv seeks to prepare them to do. We also noted that too much reliance was placed on assessment at the curriculum's midpoint rather than toward the end. The latter makes good assessment sense and was needed to evaluate our integrative, holistic objectives. Rubrics were created where needed to assure information usable in determining achievement of learning outcomes was obtained.

Guiding premises of assessment

As successive drafts of an assessment plan unfolded; as guidance was provided at project-related, ATS-sponsored conferences; and as evaluative input was received from our ATS consultant; numerous principles of assessment were identified and employed to guide the procedure. A selection of these tenets is described below with means by which they guided the plan and contributed to our integrated focus.

Becoming a learning community

A foundational principle of assessment is that an institution learn from assessment and change in appropriate ways as a result of that learning. We found it helpful to conceptualize this principle as "learning about theological learning." Handled well, assessment presents occasions for development into a learning community. A community that genuinely learns avoids the common practice of relying merely on anecdotal data and educated hunches. In this sense, assessment may be seen as community-wide institutional accountability.

The process of developing into a learning community involves significant changes in institutional culture. A number of activities contributed to changes in Talbot's culture toward a learning orientation. As mentioned above, the entire faculty was involved in writing degree program mission, goals, and learning outcomes. Use of this material to develop a plan of assessment revealed that our institutional mission statement as well as learning outcomes required review and likely revision to reflect all that the community had come to be and value. Issues and progress in development of an assessment plan were frequently kept before faculty by way of brief highlights and discussions. Resource persons with assessment expertise (Louis Charles Willard, ATS director of accreditation and institutional evaluation, and James Meek, ATS consultant) were engaged to assist in guiding faculty toward understanding of and commitment to assessment.

Recently, I initiated periodic "Assessment Aha Moments" in monthly faculty meetings. These are brief reports by faculty members who have achieved some measure of assessment success, indicating what was learned and change(s) that were made to increase learning effectiveness. Their intent is to celebrate successes. One such "Aha" moment was reported by the director of Field Education who had developed rubrics to assess ministry skills. While identifying significant strengths, he also discovered weaknesses in interpersonal skills that until then had escaped notice. In response, extra case studies were added to Field Education seminars, drawing from actual experiences of former students and using them to teach skills and provide opportunities for student practice. In all, these and other activities are helping develop an institution-wide culture of "learning about theological learning."

Creating an assessment plan

While each principle in this section was instrumental as a guide in developing a plan of assessment, it was helpful to recognize explicitly that learning is both objective and tacit. Assessment that is effective will seek to measure both, as difficult as the latter might be. It became our objective that assessment be "more than counting."[2] Examples included reports of Field Education supervisors and lay couples in students' churches that entailed exercises in professional and lay judgment. Still, it was soon recognized that some form of counting, as rudimentary as it might be, facilitated the assessment endeavor. In the case of learning outcomes that tend to be tacit, rubrics were created with Likert scales reflecting a continuum of characteristics of the degree to which an outcome was achieved. Our ATS consultant prompted and assisted us in evaluating this and other aspects of the plan by posing analytical questions throughout, a sample of which follows: Because the research questions came to be highly valued as representing our integrated focus, do learning outcomes need modification to reflect the theological education values represented in the questions? Are learning outcomes adequately measured by the plan? What "hot buttons" do faculty have and want to improve that can serve as assessment momentum builders? Is each assessment measure both appropriate and effective in evaluating the learning outcome that it is intended to assess? What can be done to incorporate important faculty judgment and other measurement of student achievement of learning outcomes toward the end of the program (summative assessment)?

An underlying objective was an assessment plan that would be *sustainable*. We agreed with our ATS consultant that nothing would be accomplished long-term by a plan that would rest quietly on an administrator's shelf.

Utilizing existing assessment

One principle of assessment that helps secure sustainability is the use of existing information and forms of evaluation. We were encouraged by our consultant to seek information we already have that may not have been considered for assessment purposes. For example, for years we had been using the ATS *Graduating Student Questionnaire* (GSQ) to identify areas where adjustments or changes were needed. However, using the principle of existing assessment, we identified elements in the GSQ that were connected with specific learning outcomes in the MDiv, increasing the assessment value of the GSQ for our program. Of a total of fourteen assessment measures in our plan, only three involved new measures. The remainder used data from existing programs, projects, student assignments, etc. that were refined for assessment purposes.

Embedding assessment

Assessment fatigue and frustration readily ensue if it is assumed that assessment must involve creation of an all new set of measurements. Instead, it is desirable to identify assessment that is embedded, or part of existing curriculum, courses, or procedures. When embedded it is more likely to be repeated, assuring greater sustainability. Moreover, accuracy can be expected to increase when assessment is "transparent" to students, when they are not aware they are being assessed.

We found, for example, that a number of courses provided natural contexts for embedded assessment. Measures to evaluate student skills in areas addressed by student learning outcomes were identified in preaching skills, pastoral counseling, and Field Education courses. The Field Ed capstone course had embedded assessment elements that required a bit of reworking to include a scoring rubric for an integrative case study. The purpose of the case study became an evaluation of students' ability to bring all aspects of the MDiv curriculum to bear on a ministry-related problem, obviously helpful in assessing our goal of integrated, holistic ministry preparation.

Assessing each learning outcome with multiple measures or tools

The principle of employing several evaluative tools to assess each learning outcome was learned early in the process. Its significance is clear: multiple measures hold greater promise of accuracy, particularly when it involves not only student self-reporting but other means apart from students. Further, they allow for the possibility of both formative and summative assessment, with priority given to the latter. In our assessment plan, each learning outcome was assessed by two to four measures with at least one or more measure being at or near the end of a student's course of study.

Learning from learning (closing the assessment loop)

Assessment is little more than showcasing unless it leads to appropriate changes, a process described as "closing the assessment loop." It has also been characterized as "assessment-as-learning."[3] We quickly discovered that even the process of analysis and development of a plan of assessment itself can lead to programmatic revisions even before implementing a plan. Mentioned earlier was the revision of learning outcomes that were revealed as inadequate during our preparation of the assessment plan. Changes in requirements in certain courses and modification of or additions to programs such as Intentional Character Development were likewise a result of plan development.

Early trials in implementing the assessment plan led to other changes including, for example, course content, reporting process and forms, and an integrative capstone project in Field Education. The midprogram progress review in the Intentional Character Development program was refined, while requirements in Theology and Bible survey courses were enhanced to accommodate an added knowledge learning outcome.

Alignment of various aspects of the MDiv program more closely with learning outcomes was a related consequence of learning from assessment. Modest but significant changes in course textbooks, requirements, the relative emphasis given to units of study, and even pedagogical practices similarly brought outcomes and program into greater congruence.

Assessing development of the plan of assessment

In light of our focus on integrated learning and experiences in developing a plan of assessment, it may be helpful to summarize what was learned from which others might profit:

- Of significant help were the aforementioned research questions developed at the beginning of the project. These questions helped us step away from the curriculum, from program goals, and learning outcomes for a fresh examination of integrated outcomes to which we are committed. They forced us to ask probing questions regarding what we want students to know, be, and do, and then to shape the assessment plan to determine whether these outcomes indeed were being accomplished.
- It was beneficial to incorporate in development of the assessment plan faculty who are presently involved in various aspects of the MDiv program. We did this because of our commitments to holistic education. Later we found confirmation of this approach in Harris and Sansom's concept of "practitioner reflection,"[5] in our case faculty who because of their experiences teaching in the program were able reflectively to consider the interaction of content, structure, learning, and assessment.
- Time was lost by jumping too quickly to identify means of assessment before making certain learning outcomes for the MDiv were clearly what we desired and were connected directly with specific assessment measures.
- Drawing upon programs in which assessment was already integral, in our case Field Education and Intentional Character Development, helped greatly to establish encouraging early progress. Highlighting existing assessment likewise contributed to acceptance of assessment in the seminary community.
- Despite urgings from our ATS consultant to pare down the plan to something more simple and thus more sustainable, the design team found it difficult not to be comprehensive. Perhaps it is a characteristic of scholarly minds that exhaustive treatment of any subject seems necessary. We found the need to continually view assessment through eyes of sustainability and to remind the team that assessment is *not* the same as doing scholarly research in which no stone is left unturned.

- It became clear that a curriculum map would have been helpful to indicate requirements of each course in the MDiv curriculum. A map was planned prior to engaging the Character and Assessment project but was deferred until work on the project was completed. Overlaps and gaps could have been avoided by identifying which outcomes are addressed in which courses.
- Good assessment is collaborative and some of the most productive assessment collaboration is cross-disciplinary. There is a refining process that takes place when ranges of perspectives are brought to the endeavor. Blind spots are avoided. A sense of collective responsibility for learning outcomes develops; assessment really becomes everybody's business. The institution benefits by transforming its culture into a genuine learning institution.
- The significance of assessment in the minds of faculty crossed an important bridge when it was connected with purposes that have explicit and implicit roots in biblical concepts. The most helpful catalyst in this regard was a paper written by our ATS consultant, "Assessment 101: An Introduction for Theological Educators."[6]
- We were continually reminded that gathering and analyzing data is only the *prelude* in assessment, not the *culmination*. Assessment must lead to course, program, and institutional improvement. The bad news is assessment is never-ending. The good news is that because it is never-ending, it will lead to enhanced quality in educational programs.
- Related to the above, we noted a certain truth-defining nature of assessment, not in the ultimate sense of truth, but in the sense of an accurate portrayal of the current effectiveness of educational programs. Responded to genuinely, the educational community is strengthened.

Conclusion

By carefully defining our overarching desires for the MDiv in the form of research questions; by intentionally connecting program mission, goals, and learning outcomes with these purposes; and through successive iterations; an assessment plan was developed that we are confident measures the holistic, integrated goals of our MDiv program. Fundamental principles of assessment learned along the way were essential for the process. Still, we are aware that the plan requires further refinement and simplification to assure full usability and sustainability, a process to be engaged after our present self-study.

Dennis H. Dirks is dean and professor of Christian education at Talbot School of Theology of Biola University in La Mirada, California.

ENDNOTES

1. The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, *Bulletin 46, Part 1, 2005*, "Standards of Accreditation: Degree Program Standards, A. Master of Divinity (MDiv), A.2 Primary Goals of the Program, 193.

2. John Harris and Dennis Sansom, "Discerning is More Than Counting," *Higher Education and Assessment*, The American Academy for Liberal Education, AALE Occasional Papers on Liberal Education #3.

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Profiles of Ministry: History and Current Research

Francis A. Lonsway
Webster University

ABSTRACT: The thirty-year history of the Association's Profiles of Ministry project began in 1973–74. The methodology of the original research project, Readiness for Ministry, was replicated in 1987–88 and again in 2003–04. This article focuses on the connections among the three projects, highlights selected findings and explores the similarities and differences among clergy and lay respondents to the current survey. Their views provide an interesting study of thirty-eight characteristics, traits, and sensitivities that these individuals judge essential, helpful, or likely to impede a successful ministry in the churches served by the seminaries and theological schools of ATS.

The Profiles of Ministry program (PoM) has its roots in 1973 as the American Association of Theological Schools[1] focused on the value and utility of adding a measure to the standard reporting of grade point average in the overall achievement of its seminaries' MDiv graduates. The goal was to explore whether a supplementary measure might be designed that would help member schools "verify" that graduates of their first professional degree were, indeed, ready for pastoral ministry in the denominations represented in its membership. The original research effort was called the Readiness for Ministry project (RfM); it was changed in the fifteen-year revision of the program in 1987–88 to the Profiles of Ministry program.

The basic research for the thirty-year study of the original questionnaire, which explored the expectations and values clergy and laity held for beginning ministers, was completed in 2005.[2] There are four critical antecedent publications that trace the history of the project through its revision in 1987–88. The first two are publications of the Association itself, the third a major work published by Harper & Row, and the fourth a chapter in a volume on clergy assessment.

The first volume sketched the original research project and the sixty-four "core clusters" that resulted from the responses of clergy and laity to a 440-item questionnaire that had undergone several test administrations and analyses before the final set of items was selected.[3] The second volume explored the issue of evaluation in theological education, the development of the original set of instruments to assess the criteria, the rationale for criterion-referenced instruments, and the common and unique values different denominational families placed on those beginning ordained ministry within their churches.[4] The third work, a *magnum opus*, retraced the rationale and steps in the original research project and added individual chapters by denominational leaders representative of the distinctive profiles found in thirteen religious families of clergy/lay responses.[5] The final piece, included in a volume focused on clergy and career development, recapped essential elements of the 1973–74 research project and provided details of both the research and the findings from the 1987–88 study.[6]

The Profiles of Ministry program from that date through the completion of the thirty-year study in mid-2005 owes its substantial form to that project. It is this work that led to the reshaping of the assessment instruments, the interpretive manuals, and related materials. While there have been textual changes in the instruments, programming changes in the presentation of individual and group profiles, and periodic research checking the reliability of the instruments, the present corpus of the materials was shaped in this fifteen-year study of the original project.

The four reports sketched above are, in effect, critical markers in the history and development of the Profiles of Ministry program and serve as the fundamental sources for learning about, understanding, and evaluating the overall project and its development. The PoM program also maintains a file of commentaries, articles, and doctoral theses that have used elements of the research, the characteristics it measures, and its instruments.

The next two sections, historical in nature, focus on the research methodology and research findings from 1973–74 to the present time. They are designed to capture the essence of the work through the thirty years of research, development, and use. The third section will explore the findings of the current thirty-year project.

History of the research methodology

The initial survey in 1974 represented a distillation of more than 2,000 items that had been gleaned from the literature and an evaluation of critical incidents in the practice of ministry. An initial set of 834 items was tested on a preliminary sample of more than 2,000 clergy and laity. The results were analyzed and items that were redundant, unclear, or failed to contribute to any pattern of statistical meaning were set aside. The remaining 440 items formed the basic questionnaire for the 1973–74 survey. A stratified, random, stage sampling procedure was used. It was designed to provide a representative sample from the various denominations and denominational families represented in the member schools of the Association. This sample included seminary faculty, senior seminarians, and alumni/ae. Denominational leaders were drawn separately but in the same proportion as their traditions were reflected in the membership of the alumni/ae. The total number of responses, 5,169, represented a 45.0 percent return.[7]

A major focus of the 1987–88 survey was to see whether the criteria that were identified in 1973–74 were still valued by clergy and laity, in what ways, and to what extent opinions and views might have changed in the intervening years. The questionnaire was shorter than the original survey. Two key decisions were made before launching this project. First, the revised questionnaire would include only those items that contributed to characteristics assessed in the casebooks, interview, and field observation form that were in use at the time. While there were sixty-four clusters revealed through factor analysis in the original research, the task of developing instruments with adequate strength to be used across North America reduced the total number of characteristics to be measured to a set of thirty-five. Second, a set of items that reflected "Contemporary Issues" was added to the abridged survey in order to take account of the 1987–88 research team's judgment about changes in the "theological landscape" since the beginning of the Readiness for Ministry project. Among these were items to test elements of an individual's personal spirituality, the broader issues of social justice, and the role of women in the church.

The questionnaire consisted of 330 items and was sent, using the same research protocols as the earlier study, to a random sample of clergy and laity that reflected the membership of ATS and the denominational bodies represented in its schools. The sample size was 5,776; the number of respondents 2,607, a percentage (45.1 percent) nearly identical to the response rate of the original survey.[8]

The relative strength of the assessment instruments, the *Casebook* and *Interview for Entering Students* (renamed *Stage I* in 1987–88), the *Casebook, Interview,* and *Field Observation for Graduating Students* (renamed *Stage II*), were also studied at this time. Reliability coefficients were reported for each instrument again in 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005. A thorough study of the instruments, their development, changes over time, and their reliability will be reported in a subsequent article.

Finally, the goals of the thirty-year study in 2003–04 were the same as those of the prior two surveys. The 2003–04 study had increased interpretive potential simply because it allowed ATS to have a unique view over thirty years of the positive values, attitudes, skills, and sensitivities that clergy and laity hold as important to those beginning pastoral ministry. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to see how these may have changed as well as to identify the judgments clergy and laity made about traits that could impede effective ministry.

The survey instrument was the same as that used in the 1987–88 survey and the number of clergy and laity, 5,570, was nearly identical as well. The number of respondents was 2,433 which is 43.7 percent of the total, a percentage nearly equal to each of the two earlier surveys.[9]

Review of the research findings

Factor and cluster analyses run on the responses of clergy and laity in the 1973–74 survey yielded sixty-four "criteria" or "characteristics" drawn from statements in the survey. The research staff met with small groups of individuals across the United States and Canada to examine the characteristics, to summarize the sets of statements, and to name each criterion.[10] Further analysis of the data revealed differences between clergy and lay responses across denominations and similar patterns of responses formed by seventeen denominational families.[11] The responses of clergy and laity were weighted evenly so that the responses from each group received equal treatment in the analysis of the data. The same was done for the denominational families in light of their unequal size. Analyses by geographic region, gender, age, level of education, and other factors yielded no statistically significant differences. Virtually all of the differences were accounted for by whether the respondent was clergy or lay.

The Readiness for Ministry project focused next on the characteristics that could be developed into reliable assessment instruments. The goal was to assess the extent to which those preparing for ordained ministry reflected the positive characteristics highlighted by the responses of clergy and laity as well as those traits that they judged might impede or derail effective ministry. The first set of instruments designed for those in their final year of graduate preparation for ministry included a casebook, a structured interview, and a field observation form. The latter was to be completed by up to five individuals who experienced the ministry of a seminarian in a supervised ministry setting. Items from thirty-six of the original set of criterion characteristics were judged strong enough for reliable feedback and were therefore measured in this initial set of instruments.

The first year's use of the instruments was limited to thirty-five ATS member schools. Within two years it was clear that the power of the instruments was such that some characteristics and patterns that might impede effective ministry were emerging and, with that in mind, the research team moved to develop a parallel set of instruments designed for the first-year MDiv student.

Approximately 90 percent of the cases and the entire structured interview were brought together so that both strengths and weaknesses in a seminarian's profile could be interpreted early in his or her preparation. There were a few minor changes in the tense of several interview questions in order to accurately explore responses from individuals who had no experience of ministry and those in their final year of study who had supervised ministry experiences. The field observation instrument was reserved for the graduating student. Gradually, over time but intentionally in the early 1990s, the focus of the assessment became the entering student and then the pattern of growth and change in a given student over the years of his or her graduate studies. The new set of Readiness for Ministry instruments lay the ground work to capture the emerging importance given to a seminarian's formation by both seminary and denomination.

The primary goal of the fifteenth anniversary study of RfM in 1987–88 was to see how stable the items and characteristics being measured were over time. There were forty items added to this questionnaire to reflect new issues and changes in emphasis that the research team judged had occurred in the intervening years. These included the importance of personal spirituality, the role of women in the church, issues of peace and justice, and moral concerns such as abortion and homosexuality. As in the RfM project, the responses of clergy and laity were weighted in order to make their value equal in the analysis of the data.

The principal researcher reported that, "The most consistent finding about the ratings of importance was that little change was evident between the 1974 and 1987 ratings."[12] The characteristics assessed in the mid-1970s remained important characteristics or traits for those beginning ordained ministry in the late 1980s. Furthermore, the responses of clergy and laity and the denominational families were fairly close to those reported in the earlier research. Daniel Aleshire observed:

> A notable difference in the 1987 data was the greater degree of agreement between clergy and laity and among denominational families. The variance in the 1987 responses suggests that North American denominations have considerable agreement about personal characteristics judged negatively, some agreement about personal characteristics judged important for ministry, and minimal agreement about the importance of different approaches to ministry.[13]

Based on the findings of this research, the assessment instruments (casebooks, interview scripts, and field observations forms) were revised and the overall project renamed. It became Profiles of Ministry with a set of instruments for the beginning seminarian titled, *Stage I*, and a set for the graduating seminarian, *Stage II.*

As the year 2002 approached, the timetable for the thirtieth anniversary study of the original Readiness for Ministry project was set. The overall goal of the 2003–04 *Profiles of Ministry Survey,* the official name of the questionnaire sent to clergy and laity, was to see how the program had fared over the thirty years of its life. Were the personal characteristics and perceptions of ministry being measured by the instruments valued overall as they were at the study's inception and again in 1987–88? What was the relative value that clergy and laity gave to the items in the survey and in what ways was it the same and how had it changed in the intervening years? What insights could be gleaned from the pattern of clergy and lay responses by denominational family now in contrast to those reported in the 1973–74 and the 1987–88 studies? These questions provide the focus of the next section of this paper.

The thirtieth anniversary study

The findings of the current research project are developed in four sections, the first of which focuses on the responses of clergy and laity to a positive set of traits within the overall area titled "Personal Characteristics." The second section focuses on potentially negative personal traits, attitudes, and behaviors. The third and fourth sections focus on four interrelated sets of "Perceptions of Ministry." In contrast to the earlier two studies, the responses of clergy and laity in the current project were not weighted because the number of respondents from each group was nearly equal.

Separate analyses of the data revealed some statistically significant differences by gender as well as by age. An interpretation of these differences will be explored in a separate article.

Personal characteristics—positive

The *Profiles of Ministry Survey* asked respondents to judge the value of the more than three hundred items, ranking them from "Highly important" (1) to "Not applicable" (7). Choices were to be made in light of the importance of each statement for "a beginning minister" in his or her denomination. The value of the items was reversed for eight of the nine sections of the instrument, the exception being Section VII, The Minister as a Person—Negative.

The printed individual and group profiles for the Profiles of Ministry program devote one page each to Personal Characteristics and Perceptions of Ministry. The division is a logical one insofar as it groups related characteristics and thus provides a helpful framework for the analysis of data that follows.

Scores from clergy and lay respondents on thirty-eight characteristics are presented in this and the following sections. Thirty-five are part of the original research in 1973–74 while three were developed in 1987–88 and continued in the current research project. The three are Christian Spirituality (treated in this section), Concern for Social Justice, and Support for Women in the Church (covered in the section devoted to Perceptions of Ministry II).

All but one of the nine characteristics in the first three sections of Table I (Responsible and Caring, Family Perspective, and Personal Faith) were highly valued by all respondents indicated by mean scores greater than 6.00 (see Table I). Involvement in Caring was not considered quite as important as the others for a beginning minister and in every other instance the characteristics were ranked midway between "Quite important" and "Highly important."

In rank order, the three highest were Commitment Reflecting Religious Piety (PIET), Acknowledgment of Limitations (LIMT), and Christian Spirituality (SPRT). All three signal the importance of various dimensions of a minister's personal spiritual life. The score on PIET was drawn from such items as "Shows the mission of Christ to be first in own life" and "Appears to be sustained by a sense of God's call when the going gets rough." LIMT, on the other hand, supports a realistic appraisal of a minister's gifts and includes "Acknowledges own need for continued growth in faith," and "Shows sufficient awareness of own inadequacies to know when help is needed." Finally, SPRT, a new dimension first measured in 1987–88, includes statements such as "Own life reflects a spirituality that encompasses both contemplation and action," "In teaching and preaching, stresses the importance of growth in prayer," and "Own life gives witness to a personal relationship with God."

Table I

Profiles of Ministry Survey 2002–2004
Personal Characteristics—Positive

	Clergy Mean N=1,138	Lay Mean N=1,295
Responsible and Caring		
Fidelity to Tasks and Persons	6.32	6.31
Personal Responsibility	6.26	6.30
Acknowledgment of Limitations	6.50	6.44
Flexibility of Spirit	6.08	6.14
Involvement in Caring	5.88*	5.77
Perceptive Counseling	6.29	6.27
Family Perspective		
Mutual Family Commitment/ Ministry Precedence Over Family	6.08	6.08
Personal Faith		
Commitment Reflecting Religious Piety	6.55	6.53
Christian Spirituality	6.43	6.50*

*The responses of clergy and laity differed significantly from each other ($p < .001$).

Each of these characteristics reflect a dimension in the spiritual life of a minister or priest. It is far from complete, of course, but it suggests the importance that the respondents, whether clergy or lay, placed on the presence of these traits among their young clergy.

The other six characteristics, all highly valued, measure, for example, the extent to which a young minister is able to work cooperatively and nondefensively with people (Fidelity to Tasks and Persons), keep commitments even under pressure (Personal Responsibility), adapt well to new situations (Flexibility of Spirit), demonstrate interest in and compassion for a parishioner in stress or illness (Involvement in Caring), listen attentively and compassionately in a counseling context (Perceptive Counseling), and understand and incorporate the importance of spouse and family in his or her own life (Mutual Family Commitment).

This set of personal characteristics or traits reflected in the profiles of tens of thousands of seminary and nonseminary students who have completed the Readiness for Ministry and Profiles of Ministry assessment instruments are a mixture of both inherent attitudes and learned skills. The mix contains both of these elements and the value of the RfM and PoM approach is to have placed them in the context of attitudes and skills viewed important in the life of a minister or priest.

There were only two statistically different responses given by clergy and laity in these three sections. Clergy gave greater emphasis to the importance of a compassionate, involved minister (Involvement in Caring) while lay respondents gave more weight than clergy to the importance of young ministers who understand their own spirituality and can nurture spiritual life in others (Christian Spirituality).

Potential negative characteristics

The first three scores in this section were derived from responses to Section VII of the survey instrument, The Minister as Person—Negative. (See Table II.) Respondents were asked to consider the statements in this section from "Highly detrimental" (1) to "Not applicable" (7). The Mean scores, in rank order, for Self-Serving Behavior, Self-Protecting Behavior, and the Pursuit of Personal Advantage indicate that both clergy and laity considered behaviors that reflect these constructs to be between "Quite detrimental" and "Highly detrimental" for a beginning minister. The fourth score, Intuitive Domination of Decision-Making (DMNA), was drawn from responses in Section VIII, The Minister as a Leader. Because the items in this section were not reversed, the response represents more of a "bridge" between a behavior or attitude that might be considered by some a minor asset while by others, a "hindrance in ministry."

What do these scores mean? Self-Serving Behavior captures behaviors and attitudes in which the young minister considers himself or herself as someone who is separate from the congregation, above them, and because of calling, his or her "own opinion as a minister should be accepted without question." This very same individual may use the ministering role "to maintain a sense of superiority" or be one who seeks "preferential treatment." Self-Protecting Behavior (PRTC) is exhibited in much the same way but seems to capture a minister who "Worries excessively about what others think of him/her," fails to let go and delegate, and has a tendency to violate confidences. The behaviors of PRTC reveal a person who is uncertain of self, one who must be in control, and is impatient or demeaning of others. The Pursuit of Personal Advantage joins items that reflect manipulative behavior including an individual who "Entertains ambitions and dreams inconsistent" with ministry and "Seeks constant reassurance" that he or she is doing a good job.

Table II
Profiles of Ministry Survey 2002–2004
Personal Characteristics—Negative

	Clergy Mean N=1,138	Lay Mean N=1,295
Potential Negative Characteristics		
Self-Serving Behavior	1.90	1.89
Pursuit of Personal Advantage	2.15	2.23
Self-Protecting Behavior	1.91	1.93
Intuitive Domination of Decision-Making	3.64	3.78

Intuitive Domination of Decision-Making (DMNA) can be read "more compassionately" because some of the items that form this characteristics are, at times, strengths while at other times they can impede effective ministry. Items joined statistically in this characteristic include "Relies primarily on charisma and intuition in planning parish activities" and "Glosses over differences among people to give the impression of unity." Neither is inherently negative. But DMNA also includes behaviors and attitudes that can derail church life, such as a minister who plans projects without considering financial requirements or seeks to be viewed as the "ultimate authority" in the congregation or parish.

It is easy enough to read the scores in this section as simply negative and thereby provide reasons for the individual who possesses them to be counseled to leave seminary. Rare is the lay or clergy person who has not seen or been affected by these traits. There is, however, a caution at the beginning of this section in the use of the words "Potential Negative Characteristics." Anyone can see how the presence of these attitudes and behaviors would be impediments to effective ministry. The word, "Potential," however, is both a caution and a safeguard to keep in mind for the interpretation of these scores to beginning and graduating seminarians. It is also a call to help the aspiring minister see the potential destructiveness of these traits and to take concrete steps to address them during the years of seminary. It is incumbent on the seminary, as well, to monitor the student's progress for to simply allow an individual with these traits to move forward to a call or ordination is quite simply an injustice to the church.

Perceptions of ministry—church and congregation

The schema used in the Readiness for Ministry project to identify styles of or emphases in ministry have a long history and a useful logic about them. They have been helpful both in research and in discussions of the kinds of ministry to which individuals are called as well as to identify the ministerial styles that frame many denominational traditions. I have joined two of the four clusters in each of the following discussions. Ecclesial Ministry includes a group of measures that focus on the "priestly" or sacramental role of the minister while Community and Congregational Ministry suggests ministerial or priestly outreach. Both the Conversionist Ministry and Social Justice Ministry, on the other hand, highlight particular overarching goals for those who minister. It is within these four areas that the responses of clergy and laity showed the greatest difference. Such differences were evident in all but two of the twenty-four characteristics measured in these four sections. Scores from clergy included fourteen of them while there were eight in the responses of laity.

What are some of the highlights of the research for an ecclesial and a community and congregational ministry? Evidence for the importance of the first area is supported by high scores given by clergy and laity for a Theocentric-Biblical Ministry, Clarity of Thought and Communication, and Relating Faith to the Modern World. (See Table III.) All are viewed within the range of major assets or as "essential or mandatory" for beginning ministers and priests. The items that contribute to each of these characteristics are straightforward and include such statements as "Guides people by relating the Scriptures to their human condition," "Own statements of belief reflect careful thought and evaluation," and "Presents the Gospel in terms understandable to the modern mind."

Denominational Collegiality, a measure of the relationship between a young minister and his or her denomination is also highly valued but slightly less than the first three characteristics. So, too, the scores on Sacramental-Liturgical Ministry and Competent Preaching. All three likely reflect the value different denominational traditions place on each of these characteristics.

Clergy and lay scores differed significantly on five of the six measures in this section. Lay members highlighted the importance of Denominational Collegiality, Competent Preaching, and Sacramental-Liturgical Ministry whereas the clergy emphasized the importance of a Theocentric-Biblical Ministry and Clarity of Thought and Communication. The difference between the two groups is important. Laity, for example, showed a preference for beginning ministers who are "attached" to their denomination and who, in the exercise of their ministry, preach well and exhibit an understanding of the sacramental dimensions of ministry including attention to rite and ritual.

Community and Congregation Ministry, much of the heart of the MDiv, the first professional degree offered by the seminaries and schools of ATS, received high marks by both clergy and laity. Again, the names of the measures provide a clear sense of their meaning. Building Congregation Community (BLDG), Encouragement of World Missions together with a balanced approach to missions (MISN/MSBL), and Sharing Congregational Leadership (LDRS) shared top rankings. The other four measures were not far behind in importance.

Table III
Profiles of Ministry Survey 2002–2004
Perceptions of Ministry I

	Clergy Mean N=1,138	Lay Mean N=1,295
Ecclesial Ministry		
Sacramental-Liturgical Ministry	4.97	5.23*
Relating Faith to Modern World	6.15	6.14
Theocentric-Biblical Ministry	6.47*	6.39
Competent Preaching/Competent Worship Leading	5.86	5.97*
Clarity of Thought and Communication	6.30*	6.17
Denominational Collegiality	5.93	6.12*
Community and Congregational Ministry		
Pastoral Service to All	6.07*	5.98
Relating Well to Children and Youth	5.86	6.05*
Encouragement of World Missions/ Balanced Approach to World Missions	6.19*	5.94
Building Congregational Community	6.17*	6.10
Conflict Utilization	6.06*	5.99
Sharing Congregational Leadership	6.10*	5.95
Promotion of Understanding of Issues	5.65*	5.33

*The responses of clergy and laity differed significantly from each other ($p < .001$).

On all seven measures in Community and Congregational Ministry, there were significant statistical differences, six of the seven for clergy respondents. They highlighted all but Relating Well to Children and Youth (YUTH). That was the emphasis for the lay respondents. Clergy clearly favored a ministerial style that engaged lay members in building the local congregation (BLDG and LDRS), encouraged the spread of the Gospel with attention to the physical needs of the unchurched at home and abroad (MISN/MSBL), moved beyond its doors (Pastoral Service to All), and worked with conflict (Conflict Utilization). To a lesser degree, they endorsed the value of efforts of young clergy to help individuals and congregations understand issues they faced in their lives (Promotion of Understanding of Issues). Laity, by contrast, judged attention to and ministering to children and youth (YUTH) as "a major asset" for a beginning minister. It is also an "assignment" that most new clergy receive.

Perceptions of ministry—conversion and social justice

It was part of common wisdom a decade or so ago that a high commitment to an aggressive evangelical proclamation of the Gospel would yield a low score on issues pertaining to social justice. The converse was held just as strongly. However, many evangelical churches today have a high commitment to issues of social justice and many churches committed to social justice have a high commitment to the active proclamation of the Gospel. One can "be" for both.

For whom then, clergy or laity, is one or the other more central to their expectations for young ministers and priests? The evidence is quite clear. For laity, in descending order of importance, were Assertive Individual Evangelism, the Precedence of Evangelistic Goals (GOAL), Law Orientation to Ethical Issues (LAW), and Concentration on Congregational Concerns (CONG). (See Table IV.) Those differences represent four of the five characteristics measured in this section. Beware, however. Assertive Individual Evangelism, although valued more highly by laity than clergy, was seen only as "somewhat important" while the remaining three were seen as being within the range of "detrimental" or as a "hindrance in ministry." It is clear that lay members of congregations and parishes view as troubling a tendency of a young minister to focus only on the Gospel (GOAL), to address moral issues simply as black and white (LAW), or treat the congregation or parish solely as a shelter from the world (CONG).

Table IV
Profiles of Ministry Survey 2002–2004
Perceptions of Ministry II

	Clergy Mean N=1,138	Lay Mean N=1,295
Conversionist Ministry		
Assertive Individual Evangelism	5.04	5.22*
Precedence of Evangelistic Goals	3.89	4.21*
Concentration on Congregational Concerns	3.65	3.80*
Law Orientation to Ethical Issues	3.60	4.17*
Theologically Oriented Counseling	6.22	6.22
Social Justice Ministry		
Aggressive Political Leadership	4.51*	4.08
Support of Unpopular Causes	5.75*	5.58
Openness to Pluralism	5.71	5.65
Active Concern for the Oppressed	5.40*	4.99
Interest in New Ideas	4.99*	4.58
Concern for Social Justice	5.72*	5.39
Support for Women in the Church	5.97*	5.74

*The responses of clergy and laity differed significantly from each other (p< .001).

Clergy, by contrast, placed greater emphasis on issues related to social justice. In descending order, they more strongly endorsed Support for Women in the Church, the Support of Unpopular Causes, Concern for Social Justice, Active Concern for the Oppressed, Interest in New Ideas, and Aggressive Political Leadership. Only the latter was seen midway between being "Undesirable" and "Somewhat important." The rest of the characteristics were comfortably within the range of "Somewhat important" to "Quite important."

It seems clear from these measures that clergy in general are, at least theoretically, more committed to social justice issues as being important for the beginning clergy than are laity. Laity, on the other hand, expressed more concern about the potential negative impact of young clergy with narrow views in the active proclamation of the Gospel and in their work with people.

Overall, the scores in these two areas were not as high as they were for either Ecclesial Ministry or for Community and Congregational Ministry, the exception being Theologically Oriented Counseling (6.22) that was viewed by both clergy and laity in the range of "major asset" to an "essential" trait for beginning clergy. The scores are likely somewhat lower, in part, because individuals, clergy and lay, have a preference for either the cluster of scores for a Conversionist Ministry or for a Social Justice Ministry. In large surveys such as this, the high and low scores meet in the middle with the Mean. The article planned on each of these and all of the other scores assessed in the study should find "illumination" in the profiles of individual denominational families.

Final thoughts

This report is the first of three reports planned for the Readiness for Ministry and the Profiles of Ministry projects. Its scope is broad enough to provide a unifying thread from the original work in 1973–74 through the revisions in 1987–88, and the current study in 2002–04. The foundation has been laid to be able to explore two other key topics, the first being the denominational shifts in the values given each of the core characteristics over the years. The final piece will be a careful tracing of the assessment instruments as they were originally developed, modified, and in each case, studied for their structural integrity from their beginning to the present.

This report is also narrow enough to have explored the patterns of similarity and difference among the clergy and laity who responded to the *Profiles of Ministry Survey*. While much more can be written about the findings, those reported here give, I trust, helpful insights into the importance of the measures for the preparation of clergy for pastoral ministry and provide a sense of the markers that clergy and laity judged important and helpful to ministry as well as those that are likely to impede or derail it.

Francis Lonsway was a member of the professional staff of ATS at the time of the original project, a consultant for the fifteen-year survey, and director of the Association's Profiles of Ministry program since 1992. He directed the thirty-year study. He retired from ATS in the fall of 2005 and accepted an appointment to the graduate faculty in management and leadership of Webster University in Louisville, Kentucky.

ENDNOTES

1. The name of the Association was changed in 1974 to The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) to reflect more accurately the binational character of its membership.

2. Groundwork for the thirty-year study was begun in 2002 and the analysis of data completed in mid-2005.

3. David Schuller, Milo Brekke, and Merton Strommen, *Readiness for Ministry: Volume I—Criteria* (Vandalia, OH: The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, 1975).

4. David Schuller, Milo Brekke, Merton Strommen, and Daniel Aleshire, *Readiness for Ministry: Volume II—Assessment* (Vandalia, OH: The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, 1976).

5. David Schuller, Milo Brekke, and Merton Strommen, *Ministry in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

6. Daniel O. Aleshire, "The Profiles of Ministry Program," in *Clergy Assessment and Career Development*, eds. R. Hunt, J. Hinkler, Jr., and H. Malony (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

7. The responses of seminary faculty, senior seminarians, alumni/ae, and denominational leaders were combined to form a "clergy" group. The total of their responses was 3,089 and those of the laity was 1,806.

8. The total number of clergy responses was 1,459 and the laity, 1,038. An additional 110 responses could not be classified.

9. The total number of clergy responses was 1,138 and the laity 1,295. The current survey realized nearly equal numbers of the two groups responding to the survey instrument.

10. For example, the cluster of statements that was named "Fidelity to Tasks and Persons" included such items as "Generally finishes what he/she starts," "Does not avoid tasks of ministry that he/she does not enjoy," and "Works at further development of pastoral skills." It was summarized by the researchers and panelists as "Showing competence and responsibility by completing tasks, relating warmly to persons, handling differences of opinion, and growing in skills."

11. Over time, the original number of denominational families was modified. For example, the Evangelical family was divided into Evangelical A and Evangelical B to reflect more accurately the different historical origins of each group while the two Roman Catholic categories, whether from a Religious Order or Congregation or from a Diocese, were merged into a single family. Analysis and interpretation of the findings from the final set of thirteen families were reported in the 1980 volume, *Ministry in America*.

12. Aleshire, "The Profiles of Ministry Program," 123.

13. Ibid. Among the characteristics judged negatively by clergy and laity were "Self Serving Behavior" and "Pursuit of Personal Advantage." Agreement among the two groups about personal characteristics included "Commitment Reflecting Religious Piety," "Acknowledgment of Limitations," and "Fidelity to Tasks and Persons." On the other hand, denominational families showed slight agreement for characteristics that clustered under headings such as "Conversionist Ministry" and "Social Justice Ministry."

Imagining Faith: The Biblical Imagination in Theory and Practice

Sr. Mary Karita Ivancic, SND
Notre Dame College

ABSTRACT: Biblical imagination is a vehicle of divine revelation, a linguistic strategy based on metaphor, and an exercise of faith. Incorporating the arts into Scripture study can stimulate the biblical imagination, especially in adult students. The arts not only facilitate religious experience but also provide interpretive insights into biblical themes, persons, and events. The author suggests some classroom-tested ways to enhance traditional modes of exegesis with "artistic criticism" and also discusses the pedagogical benefits of approaching Scripture through the arts.

To look at a mountain and "see" God, to recognize oneself in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or to realize that Exodus and Exile have indeed occurred in one's life is to experience the biblical imagination. In recent years the imagination has been accorded significant scholarly attention.[1] Theology has been especially interested in the role of the imagination as a vehicle of divine revelation and a mode of faith.

This paper synthesizes three different approaches to the specifically "biblical imagination" into a description of how it functions and then draws some practical implications for those who teach Scripture. The underlying thesis is two-pronged: First, the biblical imagination is a dynamic process by which God communicates with the human person through the metaphorical language of Scripture and thus evokes faith. Second, the arts can stimulate biblical imagination.

Predicated on the Thomistic dictum that "grace builds on nature," biblical imagination is human imagination in a theological mode. Like all human imagination, the biblical imagination is more readily described than defined. It is a complex activity that engages body, mind, and affect. It draws upon a person's past history, present experiences, and future projections in an effort to know and make meaning of reality. It manipulates time, space, and logic quickly and flexibly. It pivots between the external universe and one's internal world, between accessible and inaccessible reality, between thoughts and language, between sense and reason. Transcending purely human imagination, the biblical imagination is also a mode of faith.

The human contact for divine revelation

Can human imagination perceive divine communication? In his discussion of the long-running Barth-Brunner debate on this issue, theologian Garrett Green posits that it is precisely the imagination that is the human locus for divine revelation. Green regards the biblical metaphor of *imago Dei* as the point of divine-human contact for revelation. Both Augustine and Aquinas identified the *imago Dei* with the human soul endowed with intellect and free will, distinguishing human beings from lower forms of material creation. Green interprets this "image of God" as a "family resemblance" between the Creator and human creature that provides a common meeting ground for divinity and humanity.[2]

Green is careful to distinguish between the form and content of imagination. The human capacity to make images is the form for revelation; the specific content of imagination, however, is not derived from its ability to imagine, but rather from the images, or paradigms, it receives as expressions of religious truth.[3] Green describes the imagination as "paradigmatic," meaning that it needs to be given paradigms with which to operate. As a faculty of subjective experience, the imagination can mediate both truth and fiction, because it can fabricate fantasy as well as represent reality. Hence, the need for objective truth as revealed in Scripture.

No scriptural term is an exact conceptual equivalent of "paradigmatic imagination" in all of Scripture. However, as Green observes, the biblical "heart" functions very much like it. Both have intellectual as well as emotional dimensions. The heart is the repository for God's Word (Deut. 30:14), the place where God's law is imprinted (Jer. 31:33), a mode of knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), and the organ of faith (Rom. 10:10).[4] This notion of "heart" describes how the biblical imagination operates. It provides the human contact point for divine revelation. The actual content, divinely inspired analogies and metaphors for God and God's relationship to the world, depends completely on the initiative of divine grace but is mediated through human imagination guided by God's Spirit.

Karl Rahner describes this divine-human encounter as a dynamic process rather than a static point of contact.[5] He situates imagination within the context of the human mind moving toward an intuited, yet incomprehensible, Mystery. Imagination impels the human being to reach for an ever-receding horizon of infinite Mystery and ultimately to stand outside oneself. The paradigms for understanding all reality are drawn from the experience of human existence, which includes both the "human existentials" of self-presence, freedom, historicity, and transcendence as well as the "supernatural existential" of divine grace. Instead of beginning with God as the frame of reference to understand the human person as *imago Dei*, Rahner uses human experience to approach an understanding of God. He describes the dynamism, or process, of divine-human encounter rather than speculating on a static condition of possibility for human nature to engage divine revelation.

Related to the interplay between human imagination and divine revelation is the question of how the finite human intellect, intrinsically tied to sensible data and language, can know and represent the infinite, immaterial God. Theologian Richard Viladesau notes that, as incomprehensible Mystery, God is beyond image, word, and idea; God simply cannot be fully grasped by human sense perception or intellectual concept. However, God has revealed Godself in the events of salvation history, culminating in Jesus Christ, the most perfect image of the invisible God. The human person, made in God's image and thus capable of self-transcendence, is radically open to that revelation. Building on this fundamental premise, Viladesau offers three propositions. First, the human person knows God through a mind, which knows only through the senses. Second, human history, including interpersonal relationships, can embody divine revelation. Third, human beings use language to embody, formulate, interpret, and communicate historical revelation and knowledge of God.[6]

A linguistic strategy

How can human language mediate an encounter with God and enable one to make meaning out of life's experiences? Philosopher and literary critic Paul Ricoeur clarifies the functioning of biblical language as the imaginative vehicle of divine revelation. For Ricoeur, the imagination is not merely a cognitive faculty but, more importantly, a linguistic strategy for creating new meaning. Brought to life by the act of reading, the imagination plays upon existing rules of language.

Ricoeur's description of how the imagination generates new meaning revolves around the notion of metaphor, a figure of speech containing an implied comparison or analogy. A word or phrase normally applied to one thing is used to describe something entirely different. New meaning arises when the reader recognizes a sameness despite the difference. From a linguistic perspective, Ricoeur describes this process as a "collision of semantic fields," creating a "logical absurdity," eloquently meaningful. In less technical terms, Ricoeur describes metaphor as a "poem in miniature," a product of creative imagination that has the power to express deeper truth.[7]

The language of Scripture is metaphorical, challenging the imagination to discover sameness in the difference between two seemingly unrelated realities. For example, Psalm 18:2 describes God as "my rock, my fortress." God, who is pure, living spirit, is described as a geological formation and a military stronghold. At the literal level this makes no sense. However, at the metaphorical level there is a profound truth gleaned from this linguistic collision: God's infinite reliability as deliverer and protector of those facing catastrophic evil.

A sentence is the shortest unit for metaphorical discourse, but the principles for deriving meaning can be extended to larger works involving a plot to express the meaning and value of human actions. For example, the call of Abram (Gen. 12), the sin of David (2 Sam. 11), and the agonized questioning of Job (Job 3:11–12) may be considered extended metaphors in which the world of these biblical characters "collides" with the world of the one who engages their stories. Although we are far removed from Abram, David, or Job by time, place, and culture, there is a metaphorical, or analogical, sense in which we *are* these biblical personae. Though different, they and we are basically alike. Our recognition that our own lives find parallels in their situations creates a resonance with these biblical characters, and their responses to God challenge us to seek out new possibilities in our own relationship with God, others, and ourselves. Moreover, the metaphorical depiction of God as one who calls, who forgives, and who is unquestionably in charge of our lives allows us to imagine God in different ways. A new personalized meaning of the biblical narrative is thus created by the "collision" of the biblical world with our own.

According to Ricoeur, the act of interpretation involves a cycle of understanding, explanation, and new understanding. The initial understanding involves gaining a sense of the whole text in relation to its parts. Explanation includes the explication of its structure, genre, and literary conventions, especially with regard to deciphering the plot. New understanding emerges as a new "event" of meaning derived from the text through the creative imagination of the reader, resonating with the characters and situations presented in the text. As a product of human language, each biblical text follows the structural rules of a particular literary genre. The task of interpretation is not to "get behind" the text in order to access the creative mind of the author, but rather to "get in front of" the text to discover its projected world of possibility for the reader. Imagination and possibility are closely linked, for if one cannot imagine alternatives to the *status quo*, then new possibilities for interpreting and responding to reality remain undetected.

In summary, Ricoeur's distinct contribution to describing how the biblical imagination works is his philosophy of creative imagination based on the functioning of language, the literary symbols that give rise to thought. Through the metaphorical language of Scripture, the ineffable God is imagined in concrete terms that the human person can grasp. Furthermore, in biblical narrative the reader or listener discovers his or her own life with its joys and sorrows, triumphs and failures, hopes and anxieties. An implicit comparison is set up between the reader and various biblical figures, whose responses to grace suggest fresh possibilities for the reader's relationship with God, others, and self. In this way a new meaning in the form of a personal application or insight arises from engaging the scriptural text.

A vehicle of faith

Jesuit literary critic and theologian William Lynch offers yet another approach to imagination, namely, as a vehicle of faith. For Lynch imagination is not a separate faculty like intellect or will. Instead, it draws on all of one's faculties, feelings, experiences, and life history and mediates the outer world to one's inner world.

Grounded in Platonic philosophy, Lynch's foundational premise is that reality is filled with contraries. Contraries, as distinguished from contradictories, are not mutually exclusive; rather, they coexist as interpenetrating structural components of reality. The one and the many, the divine and the human, the infinite and the finite, are examples of the dipolar, but not conflicting, nature of a reality that is relational, changing, and dialectical. Furthermore, each finite existent possesses an analogical structure: it contains sameness and difference within itself. The sameness derives from shared existence with all other beings; the difference results from the unique proportion of its various components.

One of Lynch's key insights is that "the task of the imagination is to imagine the real,"[8] (i.e., to keep the mind in touch with the world of contraries). Unlike Ricoeur, for whom language is the key to imagination, Lynch posits thought as the crucial element in apprehending reality. Thought is the process of creating—not merely discovering—the right image or analogy to describe a specific reality. To imagine something accurately is simply to *know* the truth of the image. True images reveal truth, just as false images distort it. True images unfold aspects of reality at increasingly deeper levels. Religious images include Scripture, symbols, sacraments, and stories, all of which are both a source of knowing Ultimate Reality and a mature blossoming of that knowledge.

Lynch defines faith as a type of imagination, because faith generates images that connect us with Ultimate Reality by means of analogies. Like imagination, faith embraces all our human faculties and touches upon all our human experiences; it both reproduces and produces the reality it encounters. Faith admits contraries (e.g., life and death); in fact, a productive faith needs images that include contraries (e.g., wounded healer).

Lynch's unique contribution in relating faith to imagination is his theory of the ironic Christic imagination. The ironic imagination keeps opposites together in such a way that a given reality is conceptualized *through* its contrary. Examples of this are life through death, light through darkness, and strength through weakness. Irony inheres in the shocking realization that each member of the contrary pair is virtually identical to the other, (e.g., humility is indeed greatness). Moreover, true irony exists only if this realization transforms not only one's ideas but also one's feelings and judgments.[9] The ironic Christic imagination reproduces Christ's pattern of transformation and allows reality to be seen in the light of the risen Lord. For example, eternal life comes to us through Christ's death as experienced in our own death. Uniting the believer with the mind and heart of Christ, faith is not merely an exercise of analogical imagination but rather "the healthy operation of an ironic Christic imagination."[10]

Defining biblical imagination

As the preceding discussion shows, the biblical imagination is variously defined. It is a capacity to receive divine communication, an ability to create new meaning through the use of language, and a mode in which religious faith operates. Neither an exercise in fantasy nor an indulgence in unreality, the biblical imagination is an encounter with the ultimate reality of God in faith by means of the metaphorical language of Scripture.

Infused by God's grace, the biblical imagination transcends the merely human plane. It recognizes in divinely revealed texts one's analogous experience of God, self, and the world. It sees in both material creation and human history the ongoing presence and action of a God who has not only created human beings in the image of God but also personally entered human history. It discovers God "lurking" in the objects, events, and persons of ordinary life and interprets these circumstances as hints of what God is like.[11]

The biblical imagination is a process of divine-human dialogue operating on several levels. It provides a nexus between human experience and a divinely orchestrated salvation history. It uses human discourse to engage divine truth. It nurtures within the human heart a faith-vision integrating visible reality with invisible reality. In brief, the biblical imagination is the process whereby God encounters the human person through images evoked by Scripture texts in order to nurture a faith-relationship.

Implications for teaching Scripture

Biblical studies at their best are formative as well as informative. From a pastoral perspective, teaching Scripture to any audience at any level is more about facilitating an encounter with God than explaining facts about the sacred writings. Teaching and learning about the Scriptures is meant to be a personal, faith-enriching experience of a God who continues to communicate truth, beauty, and goodness to those whose minds and hearts are receptive to God's living Word.

Educators as well as students need to develop a healthy respect for imagination as a means to know reality. This is especially true of the Ultimate Reality that is inaccessible to empirical investigation. As the preceding discussion has claimed, the imagination, not merely the mind, is where the human person engages divine revelation.

Cognitive learning is essential to biblical education. An exegetical approach, in which various types of criticism are applied to scriptural texts, is both helpful and necessary. Social-historical criticism, for example, explicates events, actions, and institutions unfamiliar to contemporary readers. In exploring the genre of a given text, literary criticism identifies its distinctive conventions as well as uncovers the underlying metaphor, allowing it to function *as* metaphor, not merely as rhetorical ornament.

Exegetical instruction is immeasurably enriched, however, by "teaching to the imagination." Liberally incorporating the arts into a biblical studies curriculum not only broadens the spectrum of teaching-learning experiences but also powerfully stimulates the biblical imagination in at least three ways.

First of all, the arts can facilitate contact between God and the human person by providing a lure into the spiritual realm. Some artworks immediately create a resonance between the Source of Ultimate Beauty and the human person questing for joy and delight. Other pieces, which may be aesthetically unappealing, create a hunger for the beauty that is perceived as absent. As a medium of aesthetic experience, art beckons the viewer/listener to enter the spiritual world projected by the artwork and to surrender to its fascinating mystery. Art evokes self-transcendence, creating the possibility of encountering the Sacred.

The arts, moreover, are diverse languages. What Ricoeur said about words as a strategy of the imagination applies equally to the symbolic languages of visual art, music, dance, drama, and film. Like words, artistic symbols give rise to thought, beckoning the viewer/listener to discover "real life" within the fictive world of the artwork.

Finally, the arts can cultivate receptivity to faith. By its very structure, art sensitizes the viewer/listener to the contraries within all reality. Negative and positive space, darkness and light, sound and silence, tension and release create an aesthetic dynamic. Each element of these pairs of contraries is perceived in terms of its opposite. If contraries are mutually constitutive in the world of nature and art, it is plausible that they function similarly in the spiritual realm. For example, the interplay between life and death is more readily understood and believed within this perspective. Furthermore, artworks with overtly religious content allow one to be mentored in faith by artists whose personal relationship with God is revealed through their interpretation of reality.

An arts approach to teaching Scripture

An arts approach to Scripture combines the cognitive formation imparted by exegesis with an affective experience of the sacred via various art media. Because the arts are capable of engaging one's emotions and stimulating religious experience, they may be useful in helping students to encounter God and to understand the Bible at a deeper, more personal level. The arts are not only a fascinating lure into the spiritual realm of human existence but also an evocative language expressing universal human experiences. Music, film, literature, and visual artworks can help a student discover the underlying religious experiences and resonate with the foundational events that inspired the written biblical account. Thus, an arts approach to Scripture is designed to develop or strengthen the student's relationship with God by opening up his or her biblical imagination.[12]

How might such an "arts approach" be carried out? Although the following illustrations are geared primarily to a classroom setting, they can be adapted to other educational contexts.

An effective way to introduce students to the arts approach to Scripture is to present the creation story from three perspectives: scientific, biblical, and artistic.[13] When asked which of these depictions of creation is true, students come to realize that *all* of them are true in different ways and that truth can be communicated in different modes. The legitimacy of art and the metaphorical language of Scripture as conveyors of religious and moral truth are thus established from the outset.

The legends about the patriarchs in Genesis are especially well-suited to the arts approach. Assigned reading material or class lecture can clarify the specific conventions and characteristics of legend as a literary genre as well as differentiate legend from myth.[14] Students will have previously read selected passages from the book of Genesis. Most of the class session is devoted to interpreting these texts with the aid of social-historical data, literary formal insights, and some textual criticism. A visual, musical, videographic, or literary work of art is used to introduce a specific legend, provide some reflection on it, or summarize its content.

For example, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is a legend that has inspired numerous paintings and sculptures. Depictions of this scene by Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, Caravaggio, or Rembrandt capture the drama of this poignant story of child-sacrifice. Contemporary sculptor George Segal provocatively situates this biblical legend within the context of the Kent State University uprising in 1970.[15] Viewing slides of one of these artworks evokes a deeper realization of the enormity of Abraham's sacrifice as well as provokes reflection on one's image of God and relationship with God. In addition to these visual artworks, a musical selection, "God Will Provide a Lamb," by Michael Card, might be used for prayerful reflection on the Christian interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac as a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ.

The passage delineating the fate of Lot's wife likewise presents an opportunity for artistic engagement complementing a discussion of etiology and geographic landmarks. Anselm Kiefer's work titled "Lot's Wife" is reminiscent of both the Holocaust and current environmental devastation. The drably painted canvas, whose dominant images depict train tracks, has been intentionally burned in places to suggest both the Nazi concentration camps and a barren earth, raped by environmental irresponsibility. A second piece focusing on Lot's wife is a poem of that title by contemporary Polish writer Wislawa Szymborska.[16] Her brief poem presents Lot's wife as she explains her various motives for looking back. This honest and sincere verbal self-defense provokes reflection not only on one's level of faith commitment but also on one's priorities.

A brief segment from the film *East of Eden* is reminiscent of the rivalry between Jacob and Esau. In addition to targeting the theme of alienation within the family, this film alludes to biblical characters and situations the students can recognize. Like many of the artworks used in this unit, it is a secular piece with profoundly sacred implications about human relationships.

Using works of art is only one way to educate the biblical imagination. Another important activity that gives students the opportunity to think metaphorically is writing personalized theological reflections in which they draw parallels between themselves and a biblical character. As a follow-up to a unit on Deuteronomistic history, students might journal or write a reflection paper in response to the following essay prompt:

The books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings present significant characters in the history of God's people.

- With which *one* of these characters do you identify most closely at this point in your life? Why?
- Select one or two Scripture passages relating to your biblical figure. Give the biblical reference(s) and briefly summarize the passage(s). What character strengths and weaknesses are evident?
- How does this relate to you? What insights into yourself have you received?

Students find this exercise especially self-revelatory. They also experience the analogical/metaphorical function of biblical imagination by recognizing the biblical characters and events in their own lives. For example, King David is a figure with whom college-level students readily identify. They resonate with his leadership qualities, his sin and subsequent repentance, and his love for music as a composer and performer of psalms. One student, a self-styled artist, still processing his father's death, wrote:

> David faced Goliath alone with only his faith in God. He was extremely creative and thought about nothing but God and his art form. Because he was not the firstborn son in his family, he was probably never thinking of the responsibility that was going to be thrust upon him as the King of Israel. Like David, the furthest thing from my mind was the responsibility given to me when my father died and the leadership of my household was put before me.

A final example of how the arts can be incorporated into Scripture study is through culminating projects enabling students to probe a specific biblical theme or text creatively and to demonstrate their comprehension and appreciation of Scripture artistically. Actual projects submitted by students have included the following:

- Comparing and contrasting Native American creation myths with one or both of the creation accounts in Genesis
- Baking yeast bread from scratch and writing a reflection that interfaces this experience with selected "bread passages" from both the Old and New Testaments
- Building a house as part of a Habitat for Humanity project and using this experience to interpret selected "house" or "home" passages in Scripture
- Visiting a museum or art gallery and locating artworks related to a specific biblical passage; including the insights provided by these artworks in interpreting the text
- Viewing a full-length feature film based on Scripture (e.g., *The Ten Commandments* or *The Passion*) and comparing and contrasting the filmmaker's depiction of events with the actual biblical text
- Analyzing a hymn or religious song by probing the various scriptural allusions and images contained in the text; evaluating how the musical setting supports the message

Benefits for Catholic education and practical theology

The integration of Scripture and the arts offers significant benefits for both Catholic education and the field of practical theology. A liberal inclusion of the fine arts in biblical studies is a boon to learning for several reasons.

First, the arts approach is holistic and integrative. Engaging multiple intelligences,[17] it not only appeals to a wide variety of students with different learning styles but also intensely involves the individual student in the learning process. The same idea can be accessed in several different modes, such as verbal, visual, or musical. Moreover, the arts approach to Scripture involves all domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and even kinesthetic on occasion. As a complement to exegesis, this methodology allows biblical study to be experiential as well as informational, creative as well as critical, and faith-formative as well as informative. Involving the whole person in the study of Scripture enables the student not only to *know about something*, but—more importantly—to *know, to encounter Someone* in the process of learning.

Second, an arts approach to Scripture strengthens the specifically Catholic identity of a Catholic educational institution. The Church has a long tradition of teaching the Bible through the arts. Primitive Christian symbols and depictions in the catacombs, Gregorian chant, stained-glass windows, mystery plays, and the Church's continued patronage of visual artists and musical composers provide historical evidence of a happy marriage between Scripture and the arts. With the renewed emphasis on affirming the overtly Catholic identity of Catholic colleges and universities, as the encyclical *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* mandates, the arts can strengthen the Catholic imagination at the heart of an institution's Catholic identity.

Third, approaching the Bible through the arts is to teach as Jesus did. Jesus employed the art of storytelling and incorporated numerous images from nature and daily life to evoke understanding in his audience. Using metaphors and analogies drawn from ordinary life, Jesus appealed to his hearers' imagination and revealed what God is like. In other words, Jesus preferred concrete images to abstract propositions.

Approaching the Bible through the arts is not only valuable for classroom instruction but is also useful in a parish setting. An adult religious education series, a Bible study group, or instructions for adult catechumens could very well benefit from the same methodology, at the heart of which is cultivating the "Catholic imagination."

The Catholic imagination, according to Greeley, inclines Catholics to see the Holy "lurking in creation" and to perceive that "objects, events, and persons of daily life are revelations of grace."[18] Sensing God's presence and action in water and oil, bread and wine is an integral part of this Catholic "sacramental" imagination. The arts are a secondary order of creation in which elements of the material world—"God's art"—are fashioned into reflections or illustrations of ideas and feelings, according to the creative insight and skill of the human artist. Clay and canvas, light and sound, the human body and mind are some aspects of God's created world that human beings use to re-create an imaginative cosmos of meaning, finding grace in limitation, hope in fragility, and resurrection in death.

Conclusion

An arts approach to Scripture cultivates biblical imagination. Whether visual or aural, videographic or choreographic, artworks provide access to the realm of spiritual experience, disposing one for an encounter with the Sacred. There are certainly degrees of intensity to that experience, but the encounter is nonetheless real and potentially powerful. As John Dixon notes, these engagements with the arts are "traps for meditation."[19] The arts are also interpretive tools, "exegetical instruments at the service of the story."[20] They provide commentaries on scriptural texts in a way that plays with the imagination and transcends reason. Religious truth is thus experienced rather than argued by these artistic commentaries.

Hence, biblical imagination, stimulated by the arts, can strengthen our faith-relationship with God. Through carefully reading the sacred text and being in prayerful dialogue with it, we enter into a dynamic process of discovering the ultimate meaning of all reality revealed through the metaphorical language of the Bible. Resonating with the images conveyed by the inspired words, we not only see our own lives reflected in the pages of Scripture but also discover new ways to imagine God and our relationship with God. This constantly evolving relationship constitutive of faith is, like all other interpersonal relationships, built on knowledge and freedom, attributes that make each human person an image of God. Cultivating the biblical imagination as an integral part of faith development involves *being* an image of God as well as *having* an image of God, whom we encounter not as fantasy but as Ultimate Reality.

Sr. Mary Karita Ivancic, SND, graduated from the Doctor of Ministry program at St. Mary's Seminary and Graduate School of Theology in Wickliffe, Ohio. She is currently assistant professor of theology and music at Notre Dame College in Cleveland, Ohio, where she teaches "Approaching the Bible Through the Arts."

ENDNOTES

1. The American Theological Library Association (ATLA) database lists 285 entries on imagination dating from 2001 until the present time (spring 2006). The Institute for Theology, Imagination, and the Arts (based at St. Mary's College, the divinity school of the University of St. Andrews, Scotland) presents an impressive bibliography of articles by Trevor A. Hart, Jeremy S. Begbie, and Steven R. Guthrie. In addition to the references cited in this article, other outstanding sources include "Imagery and Imagination in Biblical Literature" (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2001). *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Monograph 32. See also Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canons and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 2003).

2. Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 87.

3. Ibid., 84.

4. Ibid., 110.

5. Karl Rahner, "Theology and the Arts," *Thought* 57, no. 224 (March 1982), 20.

6. Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 71.

7. Paul Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerney, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 222; citing Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), 134.

8. William F. Lynch, *Christ and Prometheus: A New Image of the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 23. Lynch credits Martin Buber for the insight that the task of the imagination is to imagine the real.

9. Gerald J. Bednar, *Faith as Imagination: The Contribution of William F. Lynch, S.J.* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1996), 56; citing William Lynch *Images of Faith: An*

Exploration of the Ironic Imagination (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 84–85.

10. Ibid., 78.

11. Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 18.

12. Although the arts may function as a stimulus to spiritual experience, the mysterious element of divine grace must be acknowledged from the outset as the real catalyst transforming that experience into a life-altering encounter with God.

13. A reader-friendly scientific description of the evolution of our solar system, planet, and various creatures is available in Nancy Hathaway, *The Friendly Guide to the Universe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 3–4. An artistic paraphrase of the two biblical creation myths in Genesis 1:1–2:24 is James Weldon Johnson's dramatic poem, "The Creation," in *God's Trombones* (New York: Viking Press, 1927), 17–20.

14. Margaret Nutting Ralph, *And God Said What? An Introduction to Biblical Literary Forms*, rev. ed. (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2003), 54–81.

15. This work was commissioned by Kent State University as a memorial to those who died in the 1970 riot protesting the Vietnam War. Abraham is presented as a bayonet-wielding National guardsman poised to stab a terrified college-age Isaac pleading for his life. The sculpture drew intense criticism and had to be removed from the Kent State University campus. It is now located near the chapel at Princeton University.

16. Wislawa Szymborska, "Lot's Wife," in *View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems*, trans. Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1995), 101.

17. For a discussion of multiple intelligences, see Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). These relatively distinct and autonomous human intellectual competences include linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences.

18. Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 1.

19. John W. Dixon, *Art and the Theological Imagination* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 84.

20. Ibid., 24.

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. The Commission on Accrediting of ATS accredits schools that are members of ATS and approves the degree programs they offer.

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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*, 15th edition, 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).
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