

Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education

DMin Admission Peer Group Final Report

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The **DMin Admission Peer Group** examined [Commission on Accrediting Degree Program Standards](#) that pertain broadly to the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree and specifically to DMin Admission.¹ The

¹ Advanced Programs Oriented toward Ministerial Leadership. Standard E: Doctor of Ministry (DMin), 20-25.

E.4 Admission

E.4.1 Students must possess an ATS Board of Commissioners-approved MDiv or its educational equivalent from an institution of higher education accredited by a US agency recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation or approved by a Canadian provincial quality assurance agency. Degrees from institutions outside of North America may be accepted provided schools can demonstrate that they meet the Standards of the Board-approved degrees for admission. MDiv equivalency is defined as 72 graduate semester hours or comparable graduate credits in other systems that represent broad-based work in theology, biblical studies, and the arts of

Group gave priority to examining the DMin admissions prerequisites of an MDiv degree or its equivalent and three years of post-MDiv ministry experience and to considering how theological schools might respond to changing ministerial and educational needs to create new potential pathways to DMin admission. The following eleven questions were addressed in the course of the peer group's work, which spanned a period of eighteen months and included three face-to-face meetings by the peer group.

1. **Why** did the schools engage this educational model or practice?

Until recent years, the MDiv degree has provided theological schools with a clear standard for DMin admission. Yet, data from The Association of Theological Schools has projected that by 2022 if present trends continue, the combined number of graduates of two-year master's programs (professional and academic) will exceed that of MDiv graduates. What does this mean for admission to the Doctor of Ministry degree program?

Traditionally, seasoned clergy with MDiv degrees have returned to theological schools for advanced DMin study. However, recent changes in ministry and education appear to indicate a need to create new potential pathways to MDiv equivalency for DMin admission. For example, in the Roman Catholic context, the MDiv is the master's degree required for priests but often not for deacons or lay ecclesial ministers. Yet, advanced ministerial formation for priests, deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers is increasingly needed in the Church.

This is the case in other traditions, as well, where ministerial roles are expanding beyond congregational leadership and more and more ministers wish to build upon their master's-level study by pursuing advanced ministerial study—though their master's is not an MDiv.

Additionally, increasing numbers of ministers bring substantive previous ministerial experience to their master's-level study of theology or pursue a master's degree while in full-time ministry. The current standard requiring three years of experience after an MDiv degree does not take these ministers' previous or concurrent experiences into account. While the current standard allows that "as many as 20 percent of the students in the DMin program may be enrolled without the requisite three years of post-degree ministry experience at the time of admission, provided that the institution can demonstrate objective means..." (Degree Program Standard E.4.3), many schools experience this allowance as restrictive—given a growing number of DMin applicants with substantive ministerial

ministry and that include a master's degree and significant ministerial leadership. Ministerial experience alone is not considered the equivalent of or a substitute for the master's degree

E.4.2 Educational equivalency for these master's degrees shall be determined by the institution through appropriately documented assessment that demonstrates that students have the knowledge, competence, or skills that would normally be provided by specific MDiv-level courses. The process, procedures, and criteria for such determination shall be published in the institution's public documents.

E.4.3 Applicants to the DMin degree program should have at least three years of experience in ministry subsequent to the first graduate theological degree and, as part of the program goal, show evidence of capacity for an advanced level of competence and reflection in the practice of ministry beyond that of the master's level. However, as many as 20 percent of the students in the DMin degree program may be enrolled without the requisite three years of ministry experience at the time of admission, provided that the institution can demonstrate objective means for determining that these persons have been prepared by other ministry experience for the level of competence and reflection appropriate for advanced, professional ministerial studies.

E.4.4 If an institution offers specialized DMin programs, it should set appropriate standards for admission to such programs.

experience prior to or concurrent with their master's-level study of theology.

Finally, as theological schools consider the potential for competency-based ministerial education, it may behoove our schools to address some competency-based questions to the subject of DMin admissions.

2. What are the **most crucial issues and questions** engaged by the group?

The two most crucial issues articulated above (recent changes in ministry education and substantive previous or concurrent ministerial experience in relation to master's degree study) both have to do with the proper standards of assessment of a potential DMin student's prior theological formation and ministerial experience. The answers to these questions as posed by the DMin Admissions Peer Group will influence ministers, congregations and denominations, and seminaries and schools of theology. As potential and active ministers pursue master's-level study of theology in any number of life and ministerial contexts with increasing numbers taking master's degrees other than the MDiv, these vocationally committed and gifted ministers often want to do advanced professional study commensurate with any number of DMin degrees. In the context of the current standards, their question is one of access. Congregations and denominations both want their ministers to excel and recognize a need to open more contextually inclusive and realistic avenues for more women and men to pursue a ministerial calling. Schools increasingly recognize their responsibilities to align their efforts with the contextual realities and needs of the church, and of course schools exist above all to serve real students. Schools are also concerned with assuring academic rigor at both the master's and doctoral levels in terms of systematic theology, biblical studies, church history, biblical languages, practical theology, and ministry. The questions and issues at play in DMin admissions affect the sustainability both of church ministry and theological education.

In an April 2017 Pittsburgh break-out dialogue between the Students without Bachelor's Peer Group and the DMin Admissions Peer Group, similar concerns were expressed about changing patterns of prior education, the desire on the part of the schools to provide variable on-ramps for master's or DMin study, and the success of many students for whom such opportunities are provided. In the case of DMin admissions, current admissions standards require 72 graduate theology credits and put a 20 percent cap on students without three years of post-degree ministerial experience. As described above, these rules no longer align with the diverse contexts and realities of potentially successful DMin students. Can a new way of assessing basic competency for successful DMin study be found?

In April 2017, 44 of the 101 ATS schools offering the DMin responded to an Educational Models and Practices Doctor of Ministry Peer Groups Survey (see Appendices). The data below indicates that freestanding schools report higher percentages of students entering the DMin with an MDiv.

Percent of Entering Students with MDiv by School Structure (% within Structure)		
	Embedded (N=14)	Freestanding (N=30)
Low—30-59% of Entering Students w MDiv	29%	13%
Mid—60-79% of Entering Students w MDiv	50%	13%
High—80-94% of Entering Students w MDiv	14%	57%
Highest—95%+ of Entering Students w MDiv	7%	17%

As seen in the data below in a question about students’ “ability to integrate ministry and theology,” while it appears that having an MDiv supports preparedness to integrate ministry and theology in DMin study, the data also supports a conclusion that at least a number of students without a previous MDiv are also prepared to integrate ministry and theology in DMin study. To hold that more master’s level study is better does not preclude the ability of many students with less master’s level study (and perhaps with additional formational credentials) to succeed. This point is supported anecdotally by the schools in the DMin Admission Peer Group. Again, the DMin Admissions Peer Group is asking this fundamental question: Aside from the current practice of documenting prior degrees and credits, can a new and way of assessing basic competency for successful DMin study be found?

Students’ Ability to Integrate by Students with MDiv (% within MDiv Holder Group)				
	Low—30-59% of Students with MDiv (N=8)	Mid—60-79% of Students with MDiv (N=11)	High—80-94% of Students with MDiv (N=19)	Highest— 95%+ of Students with MDiv (N=6)
Minimally prepared	25%	0%	5%	0%
Somewhat prepared	13%	73%	42%	33%
Well prepared	38%	18%	53%	33%
Very well prepared	25%	9%	0%	33%

3. What are the most significant potential **opportunities/benefits** for this model or practice—for the school, students, faculty, the church, or other stakeholders?

Given that the DMin is an advanced professional degree, all members of the peer group concur about the necessity for all DMin students, as a matter of basic competency, both to hold a master’s degree of a theological nature and to have three years of foundational ministerial experience. The peer group sees all-around benefit to detaching basic competency for beginning DMin study from the MDiv degree *per se* and from a transcript, 72-credit based equivalency formula. Schools, rather, can be invited to determine and demonstrate programmatically and contextually specific outcomes and competency-based processes for assessing basic entry-level competency. In other words, schools can now take

benefit of the opportunity presented by the Association's learnings and best practices in outcomes-based and competency-based assessment in order to give DMin access to a wider range of qualifying students.

The peer group is mindful that some professors perceive the DMin to be a diminished degree compared with the PhD. However, the peer group believes that by taking advantage of the opportunity of more assessment and competency-based standards of admission, the authenticity of this advanced professional degree can only be enhanced.

The peer group also is mindful of concern by some congregations that pastors will move on after completion of a DMin. This peer group, however, sees advanced professional study as an opportunity for potential students to enhance career satisfaction and congregational commitment through a deepening of their skills as reflective practitioners.

The peer group realizes also that schools will need to assure sufficient institutional resources such as teaching and administrative capacity to support potential increase in DMin admissions. Increased numbers of students also will require increased scholarship support from schools, congregations, and denominations in order to mitigate against the negative impact of new student debt.

4. How is the **educational effectiveness** of the model or practice demonstrated?

Under **recommended practices** in question 7 below, the peer group has, in broad terms, articulated four outcomes to be desired for all graduates of all DMin programs, along with four sets of corresponding entry-level competencies needed by students to begin DMin studies. Individual DMin programs differ variously in emphasis, curriculum, teaching-learning modalities, and capstone products. Educational effectiveness of student learning, the curriculum, and the overall program must therefore be defined and measured by each school, as evidenced in the school's academic assessment plan. A school's assessment plan also must define and measure student retention and pragmatic success against the school's initial admissions assessment of a student's basic competency to begin DMin study. Other elements of assessment also will be beneficial, for example, in reviewing longer term impact on student debt, ministerial satisfaction, and congregational retention of graduates.

5. How is the **financial viability** of the educational model or practice demonstrated?

Creating alternative pathways to DMin admission will influence direct costs of faculty salaries and stipends and indirect costs of student services (e.g., admissions services, student services, writing services, hospitality services). Increased enrollment can enhance both a school's financial viability and institutional visibility. Graduates, in turn, can contribute more competently as leaders in their congregations and denominations.

6. What unexpected **insights, innovative ideas, or possibilities** have emerged?

As Dan Aleshire observed in his closing address at the Educational Models and Practices Peer Group Forum in Pittsburgh on April 20, 2017: "What makes a practice theological is its end, not its content or methodology." By defining the basic competencies for DMin admission and the desired outcomes for DMin graduates in terms of theological integration, contextual analysis, strategic planning and integration, and personal and spiritual maturity, the DMin Admissions peer group has sought to keep

“the end” in mind. In doing so, the peer group has realized that each program must particularize these basic competencies and desired outcomes as a school and according to the ministerial contexts, backgrounds, and needs of potential students. Each school must clearly and publicly communicate to its student, faculty, and accrediting stakeholders the policies, processes, and the avenues of accountability by which it will assess basic competency for DMin admission and then advanced competency as it is spelled out for a particular DMin program.

7. Briefly list key **recommended practices** for this educational model or practice.

Peer group representatives from five schools compared their current institutional processes for determining MDiv equivalency. A published list of MDiv equivalency requirements, articulated clearly for applicants, is required by Degree Program Standard E, section E.4.2. When determining MDiv equivalency, an applicant’s transcript is now compared with the school’s MDiv credit requirements based on a 72 minimum credit requirement, and lacunae are identified. Additional courses are required to fill in lacunae. Equivalency is not granted without a master’s degree, and any course with a grade below 3.0 is dismissed from consideration for equivalency. If an applicant possesses sufficient breadth in coursework and sufficient grades, MDiv equivalency is granted. Depending on the school, a year of probation may be stipulated with prescribed check-in points with an academic advisor.

In current practice, a number of theological schools are creating alternative streamlined educational pathways or on-ramps to a DMin program for applicants who lack one or more criteria for MDiv equivalency. These applicants may be admitted pending prerequisites, and program status for these admitted students may be changed once prerequisites are successfully completed. In many DMin programs, applicants who are graduates of two-year master’s programs (professional and academic) complete additional work to achieve MDiv equivalence, specifically, a broad preparation in biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, practical theology, spiritual formation, and field education. Such students may take up to an additional two years to complete the DMin degree. Pedagogical advances, particularly online education, assist theological MA students to achieve MDiv equivalency.

While these practices in many cases will remain relevant, they do not sufficiently provide for the spectrum of potential students who hold a master’s degree of a theological nature and seek to demonstrate basic competency for beginning a DMin. Also, these practices often fail to take sufficiently into account the particularity of DMin programs according to each school’s ministerial priorities and contexts.

The peer group therefore asked, what are the educational criteria necessary for DMin admission to ensure the intended outcomes of a DMin program? After extended discussion as a peer group and also in dialogue with the DMin Identity peer group, the DMin Admissions group identified the following four **Intended Outcomes of a DMin Program** that a school could address in the particularity of its context:

- *Advanced Theological Integration:* The DMin program gives graduates the ability to effectively engage cultural context with advanced theological acumen and critical thinking.
- *In-Depth Contextual Competency:* The DMin program gives graduates the ability to identify and frame crucial ministry issues.
- *Strategic Planning and Implementation:* The DMin program equips graduates to enhance their impacts as ministerial leaders.
- *Personal and Spiritual Maturity:* The DMin program enables graduates to reinvigorate and

deepen vocational call and extend tenure in ministry.

Stemming from these four intended outcomes of a DMin program, the peer group determined the following aligned **Entry-level Competencies** that would be necessary to successfully begin DMin study:

- *Theological Integration*: the ability to exegete and thoughtfully interpret scripture and the theological tradition in the ministerial context
- *Contextual Analysis*: basic understanding and ability to adapt ministry to the fluid context of culture
- *Ministerial and Leadership Identity*: basic self-understanding of one's ministerial identity and call to leadership
- *Personal and Spiritual Formation*: basic readiness and engagement in ongoing spiritual and human growth for ministry

Then, based on the intended outcomes of a DMin program and the entry-level competencies necessary for DMin study, the peer group developed the following statement reflecting its understanding of foundational requirements for DMin admission:

Foundational Requirements for DMin Admission

The DMin presupposes broad foundational competencies of theological integration, contextual analysis, ministerial and leadership identity, and personal and spiritual formation. While an ATS-accredited MDiv degree ordinarily may be accepted by a school as sufficient demonstration of these competencies, DMin applicants who hold a master's degree of a theological nature may qualify by demonstrating a broad foundation in biblical studies, theological and historical studies, ministerial and contextual studies, and ministerial experience as determined by the school to be commensurate with entry level competency for DMin study. All applicants also must have at least three years of substantive ministry experience.

While requirements among schools differ for determining the foundational competency of applicants with three years of substantive ministerial experience and a theological degree other than the MDiv degree, schools are recommended to follow announced processes, procedures, and criteria for reviewing such formative experiences and understandings as:

- Intellectual, pastoral, spiritual, and human formation;
- Demonstrated ability to reflect theologically and personally on ministry;
- Ability to exegete and interpret the scriptures (and possibly knowledge of one or more biblical languages);
- Understanding of church history, including church councils and the reformation;
- Understanding of the Christian theological heritage, as defined by the school;
- Knowledge of theology and the ability to integrate theology into ministry;
- Preaching formation;
- Supervised Field Education;
- Psychological evaluation, as a shared responsibility with ordaining bodies;
- Ability to disciple and be discipled and a sense of mission in God's kingdom;
- Clear personal or ministry call experience;
- An acceptable TOEFL score for students with English as a second language.

8. What **educational principles** are served by the model or practice?

DMin programs offer theologically well-formed men and women with ministry experience the

opportunity to reflect theologically on issues of ministry and to grow in ministerial capacity and spiritual maturity. Ministerial leaders want ongoing, systematic, and accountable educational formation, and churches want this for their leaders too. DMin programs throughout ATS offer collegial learning environments where students actively ministering within diverse ministerial contexts can reflect critically on theological issues in ministry within a learning cohort of ministerial peers.

DMin cohorts across Canada and the United States exemplify the rich ecumenical and cultural diversity that ATS schools so positively associate with the ATS experience. In these changing educational times, the DMin Admissions Peer Group proposes that ATS more formally acknowledge the diverse ways by which successful ministers approach their initial ministerial formations. While the MDiv remains a valued pathway to ministry and then to the DMin, churches clearly sponsor other effective pathways, as well, thanks often to church sponsored formation programs and opportunities afforded by online education. Ministerial learning occurs in multiple ways, and thanks to what ATS schools have learned about outcomes-based assessment and competency-based education, tools now exist to measure basic competencies associated with successful DMin study without narrowly construing the MDiv degree as the only pathway to DMin admission or success.

DMin Values Held by Constituencies of DMin Degree Programs

The DMin Admissions peer group asked, what are the values underlying DMin programs, and how do current DMin admission practices reflect these values? By way of information, the following chart displays twenty possible values of a DMin degree that may be held by the six primary constituencies of DMin degree programs.

Values of a DMin degree as held by six constituencies						
	Admins	Faculty	Grads	Prospects	Congregations	Denominations
Prestige: institutional, social, ecclesial	x		x	x	x	
Ministry skill development		x	x	x	x	
Retool: enhance old and develop new skill			x	x	x	
Lifelong learning: currency and freshness	x					x
Preparation for future ministry			x	x		x
Teaching opportunities	x	x	x	x		
Fruitful ministries			x	x	x	x
Enhance tenure: longevity in congregation			x	x	x	x
Flexibility: scheduling, structure, access		x	x	x	x	
Income: personal, institutional	x	x	x	x		
Collegial investigation: peer learning	x	x	x	x		
Ecclesial leadership: develop and promote	x		x			x
Transformational approach to ministry practice	x		x		x	
Communication skills: writing, speaking		x	x	x	x	
Mission fulfillment: institutional, personal	x		x	x		
Personal growth		x	x	x	x	
Connection to local ministry context	x	x				
Field research: context assessment	x	x	x			
Academic excellence: enhancing ministry	x	x		x		
Diversity: ethnic, gender, generational	x	x	x	x		
Curriculum: major, concentration	x	x	x	x		
Tradition/Denomination ordination training	x			x	x	
Experiential learning: DMin uniqueness	x	x	x	x		

As indicated in a simple listing of these six constituencies—faculty and administration, graduates and prospects, congregations and denominations—Doctor of Ministry education takes place at the permeable interface of the academy and the church. Our job as DMin educators is to foster reflective practice on behalf of mission so that the power and richness of the Christian theological tradition can bring the transformative revelation of the Gospel to life for congregations, ministers, and denominations living lives of discipleship in diverse, changing, and challenging cultural contexts.

9. Are there implications for redevelopment of the **Standards of Accreditation**?

The DMin Admissions peer group concurs with the statement of the Educational Values of Online Education peer group that “standards should focus more on quality improvement, not compliance; educational principles, not practices; student outcomes, not institutional resources; and flexible options, not fixed models.”²

More specifically, the peer group also sees the benefit of allowing local institutions to have the greater burden of DMin admission, while being accountable to ATS by means of programmatic outcomes assessment.

This report of the DMin Admissions peer group suggests two primary implications in respect to a next iteration of the 2012 DMin Standard E:

- The four recommended DMin outcomes discussed in Question 7 above could guide work to rewrite the current Standard E.1.3 on Learning Outcomes.
- The language throughout Standard E and the protocols in Standard E.4 on Admission which tie DMin admission to an MDiv degree or a 72-credit MDiv equivalency and to three years of post MDiv ministry experience all could be reconsidered in light of the changing trend described here toward other degrees of a theological nature and in light of the benefits for individual schools of designing their own competency-based assessments of potential students’ basic competencies for succeeding in DMin study.

10. What are possible implications for the **broader work of theological education**?

Theological educators can replace admissions language of equivalency, credits, and percentages with a process of delineating and ascertaining basic competencies for admission vis-a-vis outcome competencies to be acquired in the course of completing a degree.

It is time to harness all that is being learned about programmatic outcomes assessment and competency-based education in order to give schools broad flexibility in direct oversight of degree program design and admissions.

² Educational Models and Practices Peer Group Forum (April 19–20, 2017), program book, 32.

Appendix

Educational Models and Practices Project Report

Doctor of Ministry Peer Groups Survey (Deborah H. C. Gin, ATS)

101 invitations; 44 completions = 44% response rate

Sample selection: all schools in ATS/COA database that offer the DMin; invites sent to directors of DMin programs at those schools; contacted ADME for assistance with DMin director names where none were listed in the database.

Representative Quality of Response Set

Response Set	Sample Pool	ATS/COA Database
11.4% Canada	5.9% Canada	15% Canada
61.4% EV	56.4% EV	44% EV
29.5% ML	36.6% ML	34% ML
9.1% RC/O	7.9% RC/O	22% RC/O
31.8% Embedded	36.6% Embedded	33% Embedded
2.3% Small (1-74 HC)	5.0% Small	20% Small
11.4% Mid-sized (75-149 HC)	24.8% Mid-sized	28% Mid-sized
40.9% Large (150-299 HC)	35.6% Large	30% Large
45.5% Largest (300+ HC)	35.6% Largest	23% Largest

Key Findings

The following lists several key findings. For further description, see relevant sections below.

- Student preparedness for integrating ministry and theology *is* related to the percentage of students entering with an MDiv. (See Level of Preparedness: Ability to Integrate Ministry and Theology below.)
- Perceptions on the challenge of the 6-year maximum *is* related to whether the school uses cohorts. (See Challenge of Program Duration.)
- Graduation rate (percentage of students graduating within six years of start) *is* related to perceptions on the challenge of the 6-year maximum. (See Challenge of Program Duration.)
- Perceptions on the challenge of the 3-year minimum *is* related to whether the school offers courses by fully online-synchronous delivery. (See Challenge of Program Duration.)
- Graduation rate *is not* related to the percentage of the school's full-time faculty teaching in the DMin program; it *is* related to the percentage of core DMin faculty with empirical (qualitative or quantitative) research expertise. (See Competencies of Core DMin Faculty.)
- Graduation rate *is* also related to whether the school uses cohorts. (See Course Delivery and Registration: Cohorts.)

Descriptives and Comparisons

The following are average responses of all respondents. For selected items, I included comparisons across a particular institutional characteristic or by a group characteristic identified by a particular

survey question (e.g., school uses cohorts or doesn't). Unless otherwise indicated, significance is at the .05 level.

Because of the small number of responses in the dataset, findings reported in this document should not be considered conclusory, even when statistical significance is indicated. Rather, findings in this report are meant to serve as points of discussion and as potential evidence of underlying patterns.

Triangulating these findings with other confirmatory studies is recommended.

Level of Preparedness

- Lowest ratings were for Research Skills (2.70³) and Ability to Implement a Project Plan (2.93); highest rating was for Experience with Practical Application of Theology to Ministry (3.67).
- Note that lowest standard deviations were for Writing Skills (.540) and Time-Management Skills (.625), indicating that responses for these items were not as spread out, as those for Ability to Implement a Project Plan (.873) and Research Skills (.851).

Area of Preparedness	Mean, S.D. (N=44 ⁴)
Research skills	2.70, .851 Somewhat prepared
Writing skills	3.18, .540 Somewhat prepared
Time-management skills	3.43, .625 Between somewhat and well prepared
Ability to implement a project plan	2.93, .873 Somewhat prepared
Ability to integrate ministry and theological or related disciplines	3.55, .791 Between somewhat and well prepared
Experience with practical application of theology to ministry	3.67, .808 (N=43) Between somewhat and well prepared
Financial preparedness for the costs of the program	3.55, .730 Between somewhat and well prepared
Preparedness of the ministry settings for DMin students' participation in the program	3.55, .832 (N=42) Between somewhat and well prepared

- Comparing responses on these items, by various groupings, yielded a mixed picture. No significant differences were found on any student preparedness items, by school structure (embedded versus freestanding) or school denominationality (denominationally affiliated, including Roman Catholic/Orthodox, versus independent).
- Responses to some items did differ statistically⁵ across certain groupings:
 - Student Preparedness in **Research Skills**—significant differences⁶ by school's ecclesial family; do these patterns reflect the type of student, admissions criteria, interpretations of what constitutes good preparation, or some other difference?

³ 5-point scale, ranging from 1=Not prepared to 5=Very well prepared.

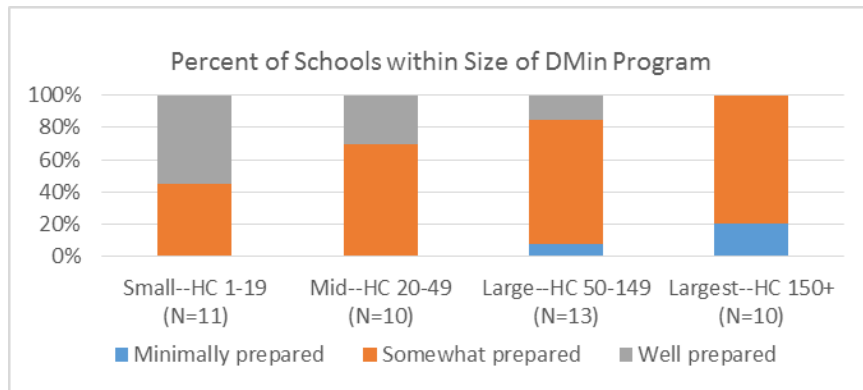
⁴ All items have N=44 unless otherwise stated.

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, statistical significance levels for reports of X² analyses throughout are at the .05 level.

⁶ X²=14.464, df=6.

Students' Research Skills by Ecclesial Family (% within Ecclesial Family)			
	Evangelical Protestant (N=27)	Mainline Protestant (N=13)	Roman Catholic/Orthodox (N=4)
Not prepared	4%	23%	0%
Minimally prepared	26%	39%	0%
Somewhat prepared	63%	15%	50%
Well prepared	7%	23%	50%

- Student Preparedness in **Writing Skills**—significant differences⁷ by size of DMin program; why did smaller programs report better preparation for writing among their entering students? Is there something inherent in the smaller program?



Student Preparedness in **Writing Skills**—significant differences⁸ by size of school as well; similarly, what is it about smaller schools that their students are (perceived to be) better prepared for writing?

Average Rating of Students' Writing Skills by School Size	
	Mean ⁹ , S.D., N
Small (HC 1-299)	3.46, .509, 24 Between somewhat and well prepared
Large (HC 300+)	2.85, .366, 20 Less than somewhat prepared

- Students' **Financial Preparedness**—significant differences¹⁰ by school's ecclesial family; why are students at evangelical schools (perceived to be) better prepared financially? Why didn't more Roman Catholic/Orthodox schools report their students as being very well prepared financially?

⁷ $X^2=12.105$, $df=6$. Significant at .10 level.

⁸ Writing skills: $t(42)=4.464$, $p<.001$, Cohen's $D=1.38$.

⁹ 5-point scale, ranging from 1=Not prepared to 5=Very well prepared.

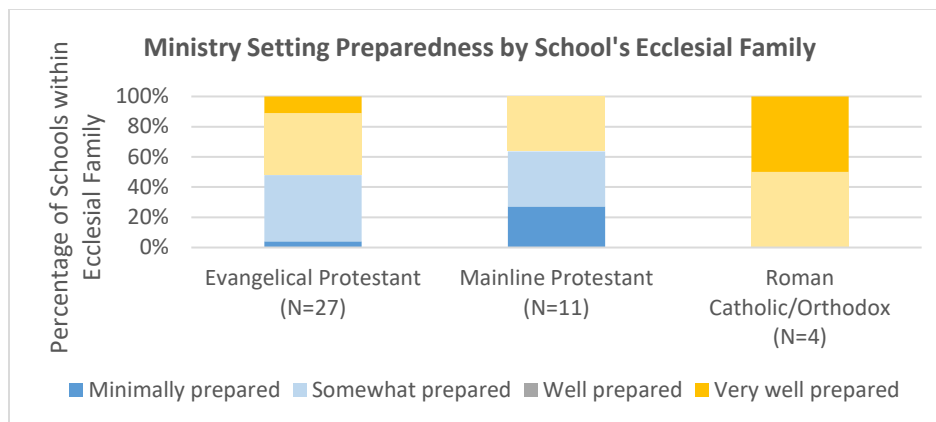
¹⁰ $X^2=13.082$, $df=6$.

Students' Financial Preparedness by Ecclesial Family (% within Ecclesial Family)			
	Evangelical Protestant (N=27)	Mainline Protestant (N=13)	Roman Catholic/Orthodox (N=4)
Minimally prepared	0%	31%	0%
Somewhat prepared	30%	39%	25%
Well prepared	63%	31%	75%
Very well prepared	7%	0%	0%

- Students' **Ability to Integrate Ministry and Theology**—significant differences¹¹ by number of students entering with an MDiv; the largest percentage of minimally prepared students to integrate ministry and theology within any group was found in the Low group (schools where 30-59% of entering students have an MDiv); a predominance of somewhat prepared students within a group was found in the Mid group (schools where 60-79% of entering students have an MDiv); and the largest number of well prepared students within a group, in the High group (schools where 80-94% of entering students have an MDiv). It appears that having an MDiv and preparedness to integrate ministry and theology are related.

Students' Ability to Integrate by Students with MDiv (% within MDiv Holder Group)				
	Low—30-59% of Students with MDiv (N=8)	Mid—60-79% of Students with MDiv (N=11)	High—80-94% of Students with MDiv (N=19)	Highest—95%+ of Students with MDiv (N=6)
Minimally prepared	25%	0%	5%	0%
Somewhat prepared	13%	73%	42%	33%
Well prepared	38%	18%	53%	33%
Very well prepared	25%	9%	0%	33%

- **Ministry Setting Preparedness**—significant differences¹² by school's ecclesial family; the largest percentage of schools reporting minimally prepared ministry settings was among mainline schools; all four of the Roman Catholic/Orthodox schools reported only well prepared or very well prepared ministry settings; evangelical schools reported mainly somewhat or well prepared ministry settings.

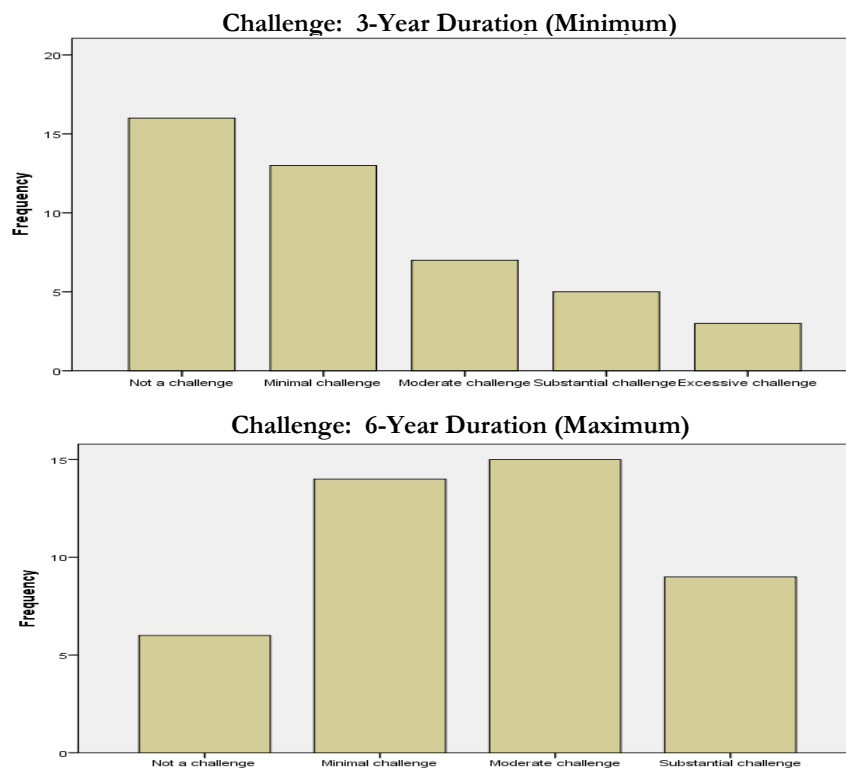


¹¹ $\chi^2=17.480$, $df=9$.

¹² $\chi^2=13.134$, $df=6$.

Challenge of Program Duration

- Responses for the challenge of a 3-year minimum skewed toward Not a Challenge; responses for the challenge of a 6-year maximum followed a normal distribution, peaking between Minimal and Moderate Challenge, with none marking Excessive Challenge.



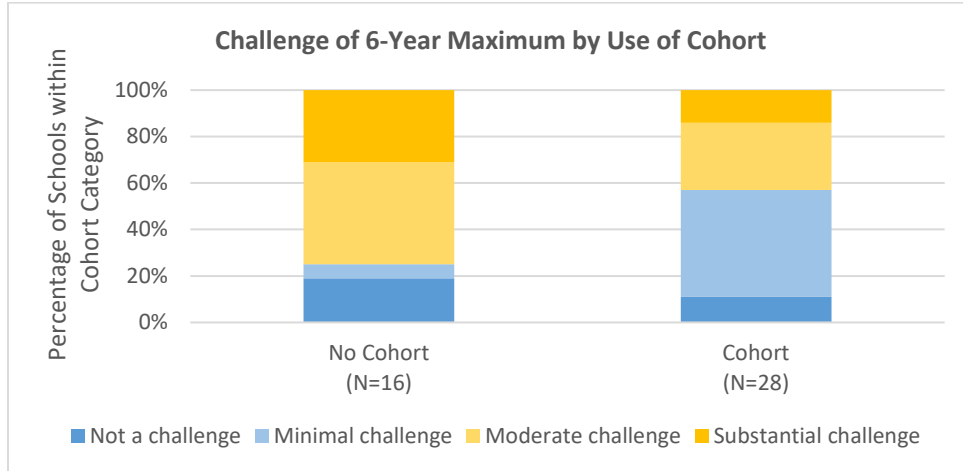
- The extent to which the 6-year duration maximum is a challenge did not differ by a number of groupings: all measures of student preparedness, percent of entering students having an MDiv at the school, percent of full-time faculty who teach in the DMin program, and percent of core faculty with empirical research expertise. No differences were found by school structure, denominationality, size of school, or size of DMin program.
- Perceptions on the challenge of the 6-year maximum differed¹³ by percent of full-time faculty teaching, leading, or supervising in the DMin program. The 6-year maximum is more of a challenge for schools who have fewer full-time faculty teaching in the program than those with more full-time faculty.

Average Rating of Challenge of 6-Year Maximum by Percent FT Faculty in Program	
	Mean ¹⁴ , S.D., N
Low (0-60% of FT Faculty)	2.91, .971, 22 Just under moderate challenge
High (61%+ of FT Faculty)	2.32, .894, 22 Between minimal and moderate challenge

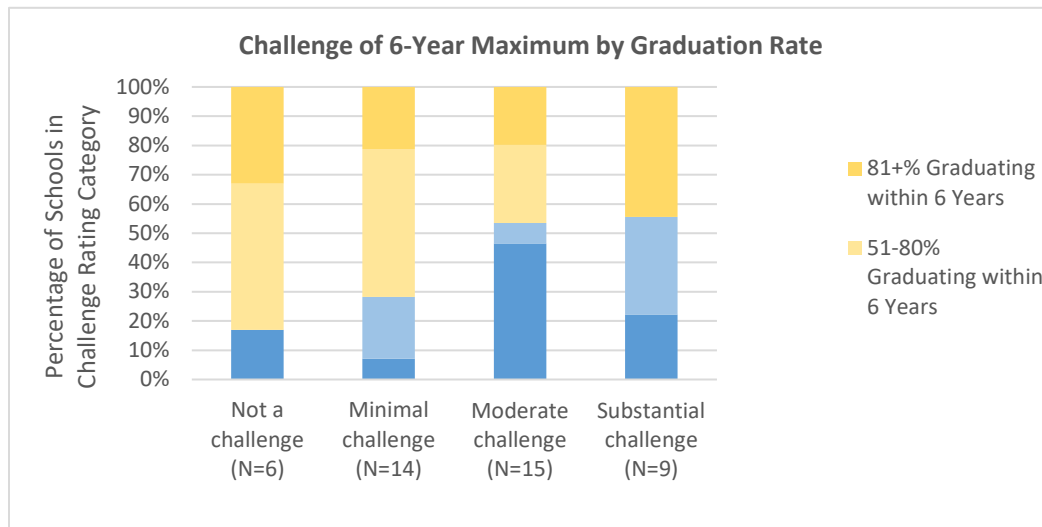
¹³ Challenge of 6-year maximum: $t(42)=2.100$, $p=.898$, Cohen's $D=.63$.

¹⁴ 5-point scale, ranging from 1=Not a challenge to 5=Excessive challenge.

- Views on the challenge of the 6-year maximum also differed¹⁵ by whether the school offers the DMin via cohorts. About 43% of the schools that use cohorts felt the 6-year maximum was a significant challenge (14%, a substantial challenge); whereas, over 75% of the schools that do *not* use cohorts felt the 6-year maximum was a significant challenge (31%, a substantial challenge). (See also discussion below on cohorts).



- Finally, schools' DMin graduation rates¹⁶ differed¹⁷ by perceptions on the challenge of the 6-year maximum. Among schools that felt the 6-year maximum is not much of a challenge (Not or Minimal), over two-thirds had graduation rates of over 50% (i.e., over 50% graduating within 6 years of start). Among schools that felt the 6-year maximum is an important challenge (Moderate or Substantial), less than half had graduation rates of over 50%. The data suggest that graduation rate and challenge of the 6-year maximum are related.

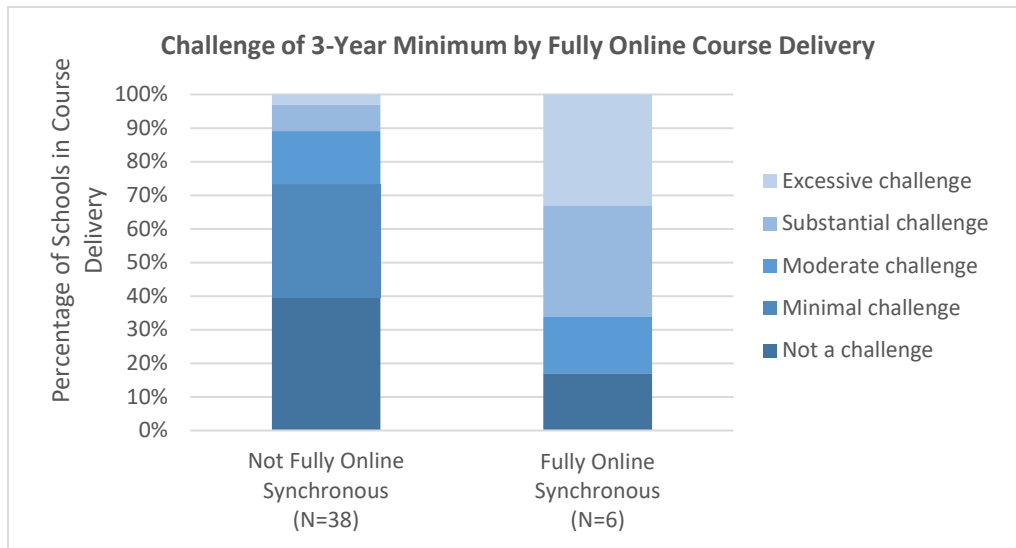


¹⁵ $\chi^2=7.769$, $df=3$. Significant at .10 level.

¹⁶ In this analysis, graduation rate for each school was computed as the percentage of DMin graduates in 2015-16 per the number of DMin graduates in 2015-16 that graduated within 6 years of start.

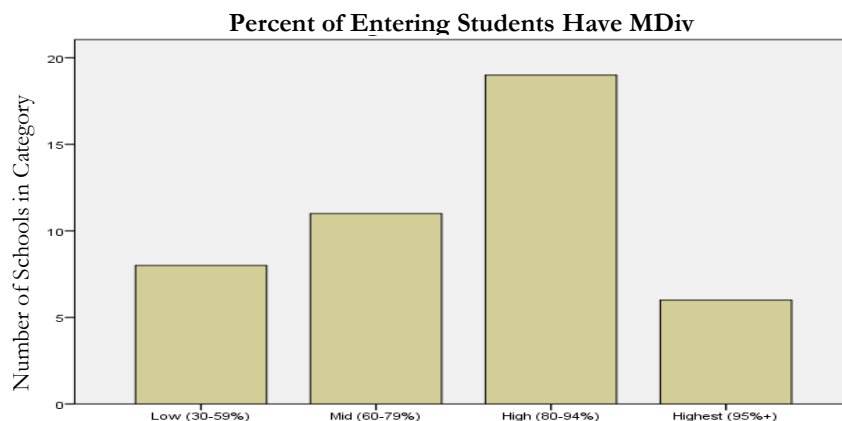
¹⁷ $\chi^2=15.129$, $df=9$. Significant at .10 level.

- Regarding the challenge of a 3-year minimum requirement, no differences by institutional characteristic, student preparedness, faculty characteristic, perceived value by constituent group, graduation rate, or other item surfaced. The only exception was Fully Online Synchronous course delivery¹⁸. The 3-year minimum is much more of a challenge for those schools that offer fully online synchronous course delivery than for schools that do not. Might this reflect a difference in time to complete courses/degree between schools offering fully online degrees and those that do not?



Percent of Entering DMin Students Who Have an MDiv

- Taking all responses and grouping them by Low (30-59% of students), Mid (60-79%), High (80-94%) and Highest (95% or more), most (25 schools) responded that 80% or more of their entering DMin students have an MDiv. Eight schools indicated a percentage of entering students between 30-59% as having an MDiv. The average response landed between Mid and High¹⁹.



¹⁸ $\chi^2=12.911$, $df=4$.

¹⁹ $\mu=2.52$, $S.D.=.952$, $N=44$.

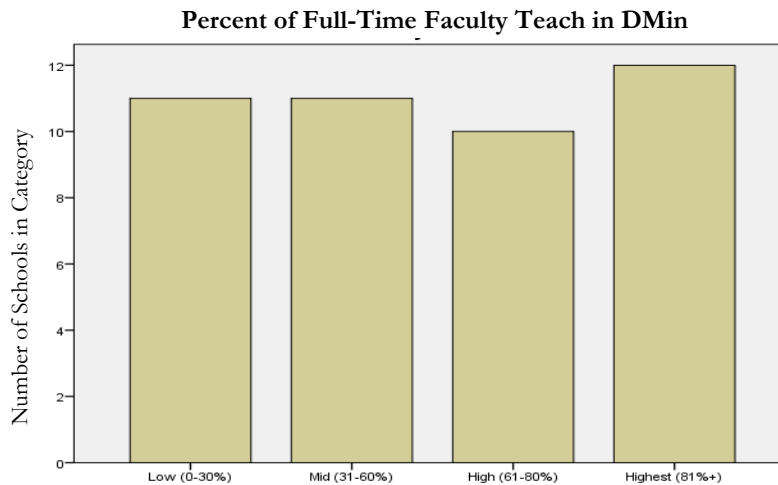
- The only institutional characteristic that proved salient²⁰ on this item was school structure. Freestanding schools reported higher percentages of students entering with the MDiv.

Percent of Entering Students with MDiv by School Structure (% within Structure)		
	Embedded (N=14)	Freestanding (N=30)
Low—30-59% of Entering Students w MDiv	29%	13%
Mid—60-79% of Entering Students w MDiv	50%	13%
High—80-94% of Entering Students w MDiv	14%	57%
Highest—95%+ of Entering Students w MDiv	7%	17%

- Percent entering students who have the MDiv is related to perceived levels of preparedness to integrate ministry with theology, as indicated above (see Level of Preparedness discussion above). No other significant differences were found on this item.

Percent of Full-Time Faculty Who Teach/Lead/Supervise in the DMin Program

- Taking all responses and grouping them by Low (0-30% of faculty), Mid (31-60%), High (61-80%) and Highest (81% or more), half of the schools indicated that over 60% of their full-time faculty teach, lead, and/or supervise in the DMin program. The average responses landed between Mid and High²¹.



- Schools did not differ on the percent of full-time faculty that teach, lead, or supervise in the DMin program, by a number of institutional characteristics.
- The proportion of full-time faculty in the DMin program is also *not* related to graduation rate.

Competencies of Core DMin Faculty

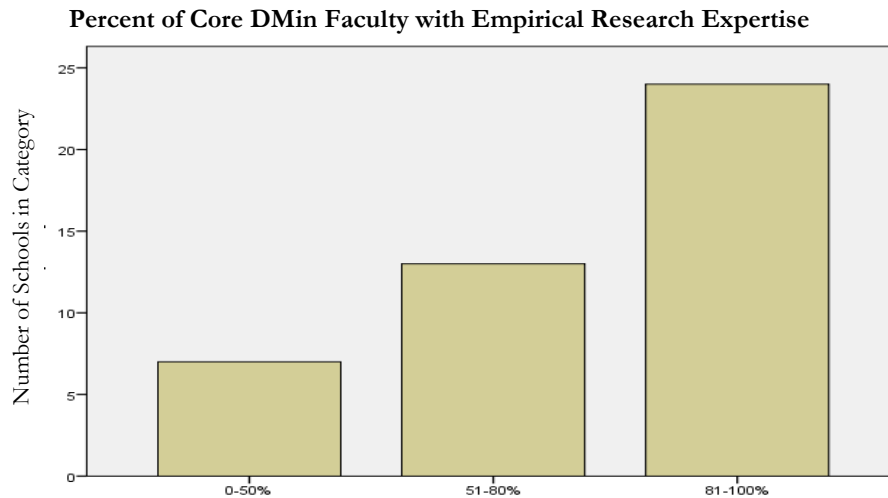
- Respondents were asked to identify up to five core DMin faculty and rate competency levels in five areas. These data were collapsed into a single data point for each measure (i.e.,

²⁰ $\chi^2=10.958$, $df=3$.

²¹ $\mu=2.52$, $S.D.= 1.151$, $N=44$.

ratings for all faculty were aggregated for each school). Additional analysis protocol explanation is given below, per competency type.

- **Empirical research expertise**—this was a yes/no question for each faculty listed; for each school, I divided the number of faculty with research expertise (Yes) by the total number of core faculty listed to provide a measure of the school’s % of core DMin faculty who have empirical research expertise. The following chart indicates that, for more than half (24) the schools, greater than 80% of the faculty have research expertise; for a majority (37) of the schools, greater than 50% of the faculty have research expertise.



- Earlier, I reported that graduation rate is not related to the proportion of full-time faculty teaching in the DMin program; however, perhaps one of the more important findings of the survey is that graduation rate *is* related to the percent of core faculty with empirical (qualitative or quantitative) research expertise²². Graduation rates were higher at schools where there is a greater percentage of core faculty with empirical research expertise.

Percent of Faculty with Empirical Research Expertise by Average Graduation Rate	
	Mean, S.D., N
Low Graduation Rate (0-50% of Students ²³)	71.0%, 29.156, 18
High Graduation Rate (51%+ of Students)	86.9%, 22.609, 26

- **Pastoral competencies**—this item asked for ratings on four competencies (Interpersonal Skills, Congregational Skills, Practical Theology Awareness, Mentoring Skills); rating options included four possibilities (1-Not at all, 2-A little, 3-Some, 4-A lot). I aggregated the ratings for the (up to five) core faculty at each school on each competency. The average ratings across all schools are listed below. Additionally, I pulled the average *lowest* rating across all

²² Percent core faculty with empirical research expertise: $t(42)=-2.029$, $p=.209$, Cohen’s $D=-.61$.

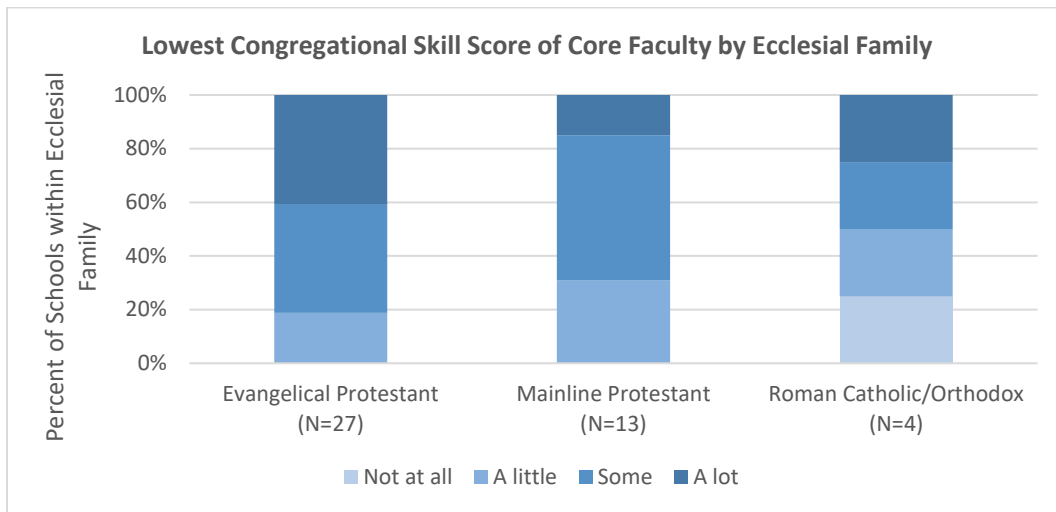
²³ As a reminder: in this analysis, graduation rate for each school was computed as the percentage of DMin graduates in 2015-16 per the number of DMin graduates in 2015-16 that graduated within 6 years of start.

schools for each competency, as these scores showed the greatest variability among the various competencies. These are listed in the table below.

Note that, while ratings were generally high (all between Some and A lot), there was more variability among the lowest faculty ratings, with Congregational Skills averaging at 3.05.

Competency	Average Faculty Rating Across Schools	Average Lowest Faculty Rating Across Schools
Interpersonal Skills	3.82	3.55
Congregational Skills	3.61	3.05
Awareness of Practical Theology	3.78	3.43
Mentoring Skills	3.73	3.34

- Comparisons of lowest pastoral competency skill ratings by various institutional characteristics yielded no significant differences, with one exception. Data suggest that faculty congregational skill is related to ecclesial family of the school²⁴. Why might this be the case? Are there inherent differences in faculty recruiting or hiring strategies, expectations of faculty, institutional and/or faculty culture, or other areas that are reflected in these data?

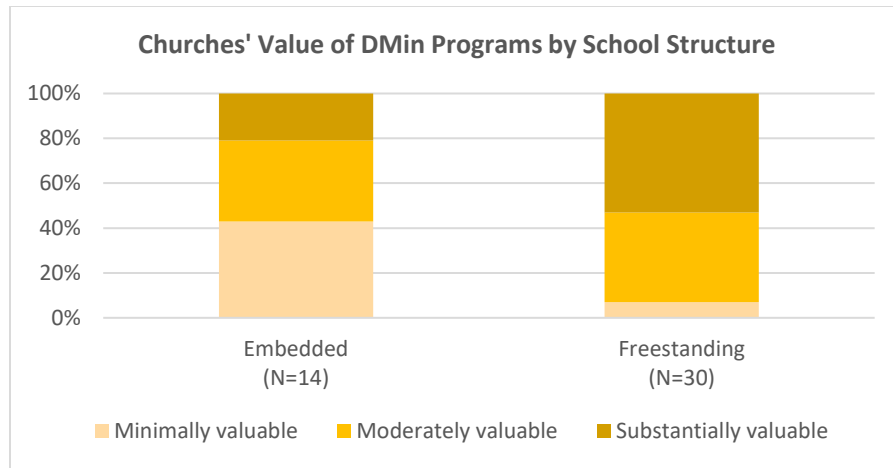


Reasons Students Fail to Complete

- Respondents were given five textboxes to list the most common reasons students fail to complete their DMin programs. The following word cloud depicts the reasons reported, with larger fonts representing higher word frequency.

²⁴ $\chi^2=13.113$, $df=6$.

- Perceptions of the value of a DMin program for churches or congregations differed²⁶ by whether the school is embedded or freestanding. Freestanding schools believe churches value DMin programs more highly than embedded schools do.



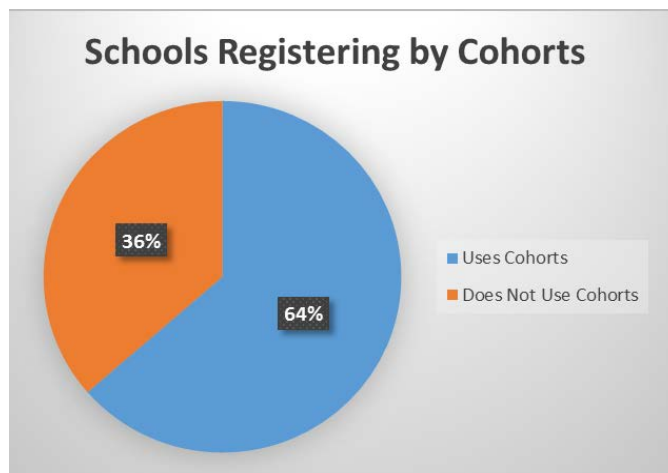
- No other differences in perceptions of value for all constituent groups surfaced by institutional or faculty characteristic.

Research Character of Final Projects

- Over 4/5 of the schools reported that a majority (over 50%) of their students are pursuing empirical research projects.
- Of these schools (35), 16 indicated that 60% or more of their students are using primarily qualitative methods, 1 indicated that 60% of its students are using primarily quantitative methods, and 13 indicated that 60% of their students are using primarily a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

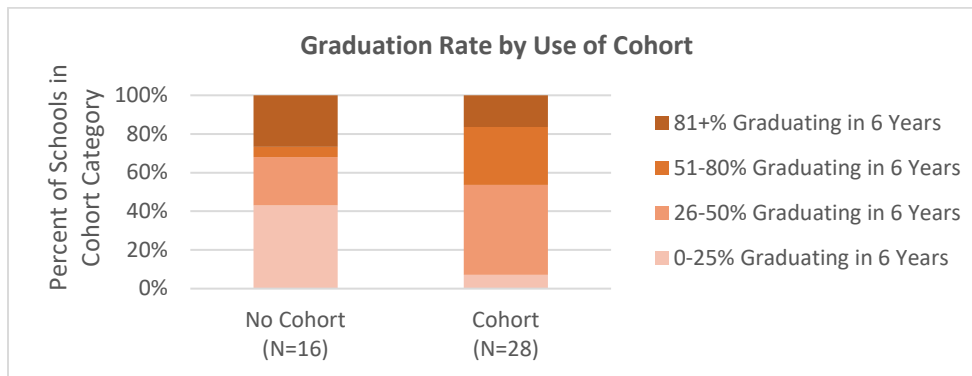
Course Delivery and Registration

- **Cohorts**



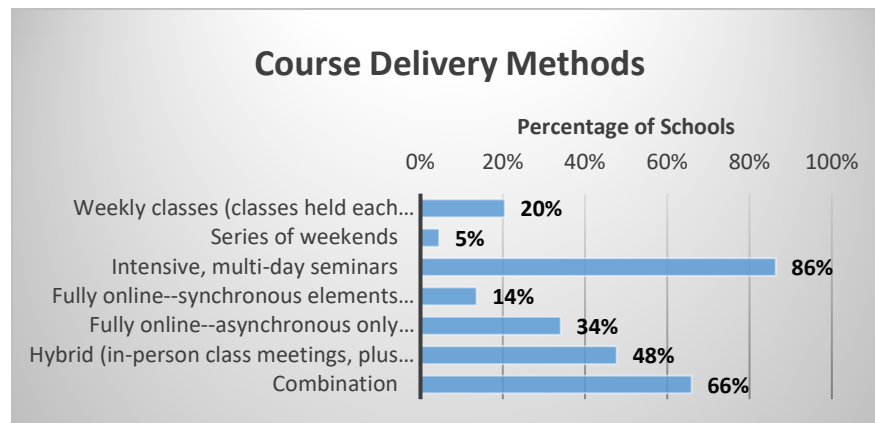
²⁶ $\chi^2=9.172$, $df=2$.

- Another important survey finding is that graduation rate is related to the use of cohorts²⁷. Similar to the report above—that the challenge of the 6-year maximum is perceived to be less among schools that use cohorts—a greater percentage of schools who use cohorts have more students who graduate within six years of starting.



- **Modes of Delivery**

- The most commonly used course delivery method is Intensives (86% of schools).
- Combinations of delivery methods was next frequently named (66% of schools); the most common combination was Intensive-Hybrid course delivery (43% of schools).



- No differences were found in the various course delivery offerings (i.e., intensives, fully online, hybrid) by institutional or faculty characteristic.

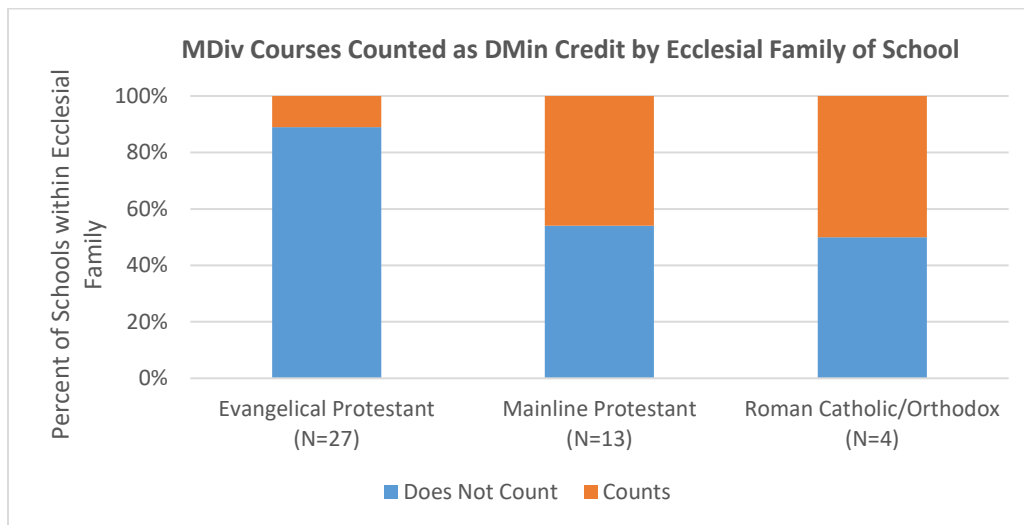
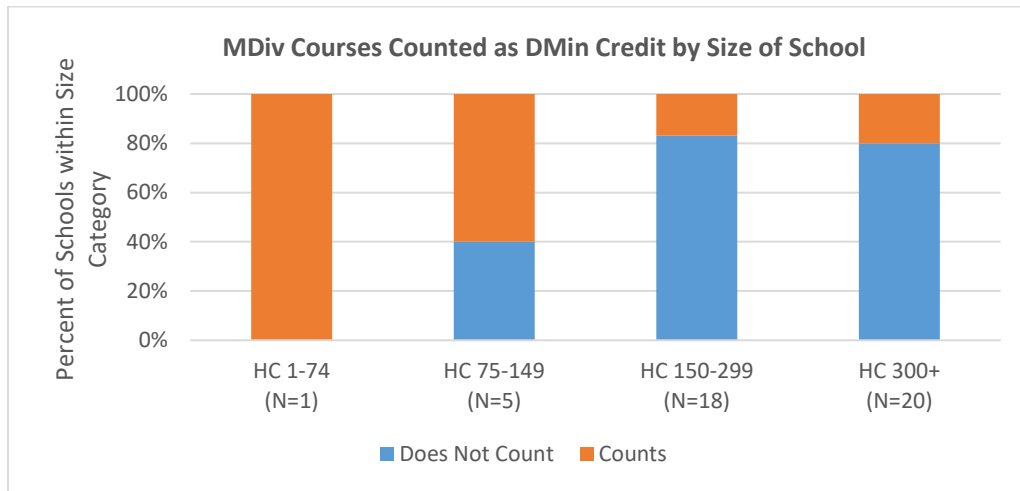
MDiv Courses Counted as DMin Credit

- Nine schools (20%) said they permit MDiv courses to be counted for DMin credit; 1 school marked this item but explained that the practice was used for pre-DMin students trying to meet the minimum credit-hour requirement for matriculation.
- In describing how DMin credit is achieved, respondents named several variations of one main **approval mechanism**—proposal by the DMin director or student and approval by the professor, also approval by committee (minority of schools); **course requirements** generally included some form of extension beyond MDiv course requirements, ranging from additional reading to more

²⁷ X²=11.781, df=3. Significant at .01 level.

demanding assignments (e.g., major papers), an extra presentation, deeper analysis, and flexibility to tailor an assignment for contextual application to ministry settings; one school named a **course credit limit**—up to four [master’s] courses.

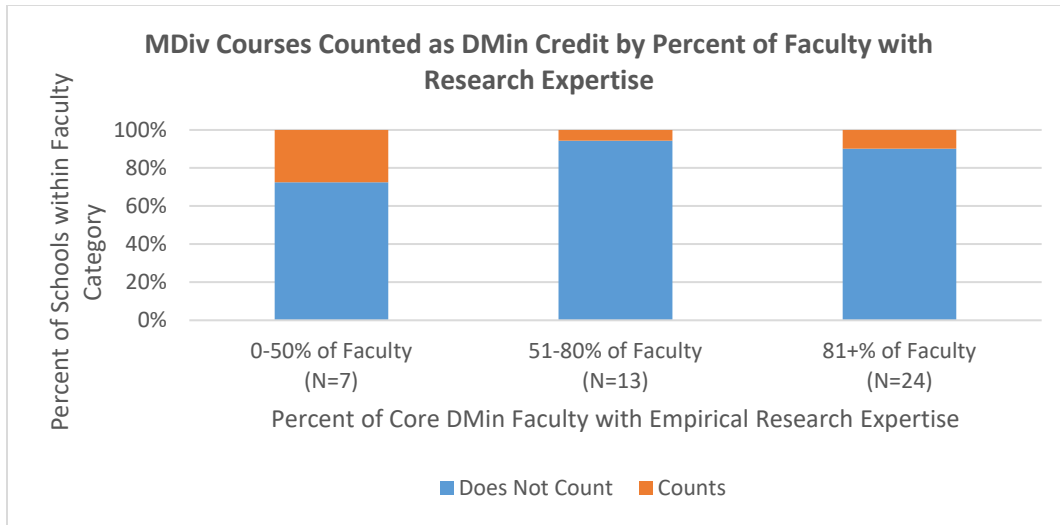
- Two institutional variables and one faculty variable proved salient with respect to whether MDiv courses were counted as DMin credit: size of school²⁸, school’s ecclesial family²⁹, and percent of core DMin faculty with empirical research expertise³⁰. Larger schools, evangelical schools, and schools with greater percentages of faculty with research expertise are the schools that do not count MDiv courses as DMin credit. Why might this be so? Is this reflective of a difference in the way the DMin programs operate, the kinds of resources they have at their disposal, the availability of courses, or some other combination of conditions?



²⁸ $\chi^2=7.200$, $df=3$. Significant at .10 level.

²⁹ $\chi^2=7.214$, $df=2$.

³⁰ $\chi^2=9.578$, $df=2$. Significant at .01 level.



Usefulness of Student Outcomes

- Responses to the usefulness of all three student outcomes skewed toward Very Useful. For one student outcome, 100% of the schools rated it Very Useful: Students’ ability to identify and frame crucial ministry issues. The table below shows the average ratings of each of the three outcomes, on a scale of 1-4 (1=Not Useful, 4=Very Useful).

Student Outcome	Usefulness Mean, S.D. (N=44 ³¹)
Students’ ability to effectively engage cultural context with advanced theological acumen	3.82, .390
Students’ ability to effectively engage cultural context with critical thinking	3.89, .387
Students’ ability to identify and frame crucial ministry issues	4.00, .000

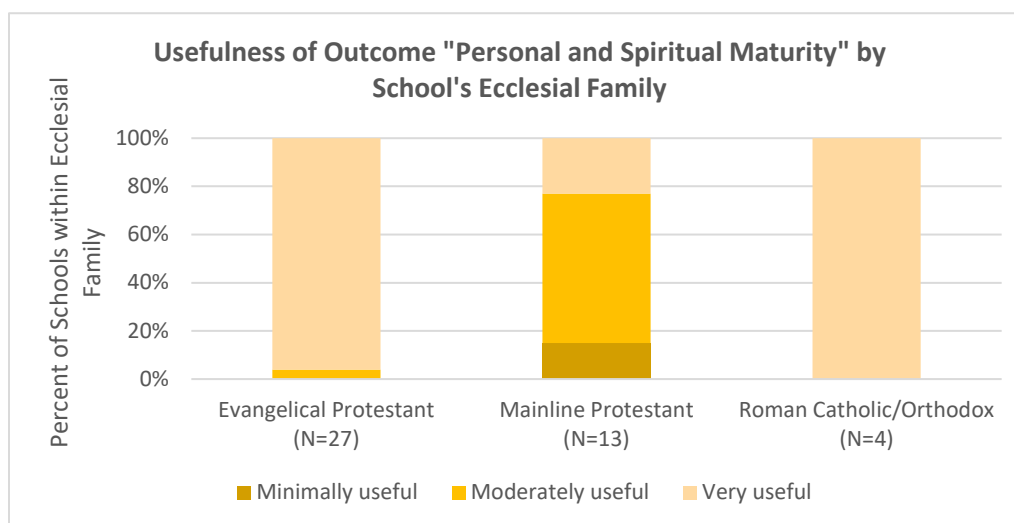
Usefulness of Program Outcomes

- Responses to the usefulness of the four program outcomes showed somewhat greater variability than those of student outcomes. Responses for all program outcomes skewed toward Very Useful, but three outcomes included a handful of schools that felt the outcomes were minimally useful (enhancing impact as ministerial leaders, reinvigorating and deepening vocational call, and enhancing personal and spiritual maturity) and not useful (extending tenure in ministry). The table below shows the average ratings of each of the four outcomes, on a scale of 1-4 (1=Not Useful, 4=Very Useful).
- While the program outcome of extending graduates’ tenure in ministry was the lowest rated for usefulness (3.32), it still fell between Moderately and Very Useful. It also had the largest spread of responses (S.D. .800).

³¹ All items have N=44.

Program Outcome	Usefulness Mean, S.D. (N=44 ³²)
Program's ability to equip graduates to enhance their impact as ministerial leaders	3.93 , .255
Program's ability to enable graduates to reinvigorate and deepen vocational call	3.70 , .509
Program's ability to enhance graduates' personal and spiritual maturity	3.70 , .553
Program's ability to extend graduates' tenure in ministry	3.32 , .800

- Only one program outcome (spiritual maturity) resulted in different responses³³; this was by ecclesial family of the school. While nearly all schools, across ecclesial family, felt this outcome was at least moderately useful, Evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic/Orthodox schools indicated the outcome was very useful. In what ways might this reflect a difference in the mission of schools, by ecclesial family? Does this pattern reflect other inherent differences?



- No other differences were found (all program outcomes) by institutional, program, or faculty characteristic.

Evidence Collected to Indicate Whether Outcome Was Met

- For each outcome marked as Very Useful, respondents were asked to indicate any type of evidence used to assess the success of meeting outcomes. The graph below shows the frequency of response of each type of evidence for each of the seven outcomes.
- Note that the doctoral project and course assignments are used most frequently for all three student outcomes and for the program outcome related to assessing impact as ministerial leaders. Self-assessments on growth/development goals were most important as evidence for

³² All items have N=44.

³³ $\chi^2=26.658$, $df=4$. Significant at .01 level.

program outcomes related to vocational call, spiritual maturity, and tenure in ministry. As direct measures, these are important sources of outcome achievement.

- Note, also, that the least-used measures are comprehensive exams and direct congregational input, even for assessing graduates' impact as ministerial leaders. Instead, the doctoral project and course assignments are used most frequently to indicate impact as ministry leaders. Collection of direct congregational input can be difficult to implement, but, for this particular outcome, it would seem the most appropriate measure. It appears there may be a mismatch between intended outcomes and the measures used to assess achievement of this outcome.

Types of Evidence Collected by Student/Program Outcome

