

Workshop discusses potential program evaluation and assessment changes for Catholic seminaries

BY ROBERT F. GOTCHER

Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology (SHSST) hosted a workshop in June to discuss how the new ATS Standards of Accreditation (redeveloped in 2020) and the sixth edition of the Program for Priestly Formation (PPF6) might affect evaluation and assessment programs for Catholic seminaries moving forward.

The ATS An Assessment Workbook for Roman Catholic Seminaries has been helpful for Catholic seminaries as they implement program evaluation and assessment programs. The current workbook, however, is based on the older version of the *ATS Standards* and on the fifth edition of the PPF—a document issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) that governs how formation is organized at Catholic seminaries.

The PPF6 includes several benchmarks for each of the four dimensions of formation: (1) human, (2) spiritual, (3) intellectual, and (4) pastoral. The SHSST workshop—titled “Riding the Assessment Cycle: in light of PPF6” and funded by the *Pathways for Tomorrow* grant—focused on the relationship between the assessment of individual seminarians using the benchmarks from the PPF and the evaluation and improvement of the formation programs. It was structured around a series of sessions involving input from expert presenters followed by robust small group discussions among rectors, deans, assessment coordinators, formators, faculty, and other administrators who focused on generating evaluative frameworks and assessment tools.



Father Jorge Torres speaks to workshop participants.

The small group sessions answered prompts using a “Think, Quad, and Share” method. Among the questions were: “What are the most important benchmarks from the PPF6 in each of the four dimensions of formation?” “How does one integrate the four dimensions of formation—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral?” and “What are some of the practical ‘nuts and bolts’ of program evaluation using the data from the assessment of seminarians?” Participants reflected on the given questions for a few minutes (“Think”), discussed and developed a common answer with their four-member small groups (“Quad”), and then shared their thoughts with the larger group (“Share”).



Notre Dame Seminary—joined one of the sessions via Zoom.

In addition to fruitful discussions, workshop attendees enjoyed a welcome reception, a banquet, and an evening at a game of the local minor-league baseball team—the Milwaukee

Twenty-two people representing 15 Catholic seminaries—approximately half of the major Catholic seminaries in the United States—attended the workshop. Jorge Torres, executive director of the Committee for Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations at the USCCB, served as the keynote speaker and Robert F. Gotcher, director of accreditation and assessment services, student services, and Special Projects Department at SHSST, presented on the challenges of assessing priestly formation.

A panel discussion featured Andrew Turner, rector at St. Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology, Carol Razza, professor of pastoral theology and coordinator of counseling services at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, and Sebastian Mahfood, publisher of *Seminary Journal* and president of En Route Books and Media.

ATS representatives—Stephen Graham, strategic director of context and continuity at ATS, and Rebecca Maloney, a member of the ATS Board of Commissioners and academic dean and director of institutional effectiveness at

Milkmen—(complete with a rain shower and cheese curds).

As a follow-up to the workshop, SHSST is creating a repository that others can use to share instruments and resources involved in their assessment and evaluation

efforts. Mahfood is also developing a revised version of the *An Assessment Workbook for Roman Catholic Seminaries* using input from the workshop.



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