An Assessment Workbook for Roman Catholic Seminaries

A collaborative project between
The Seminary Department of the National Catholic Educational Association
and
The Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

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Preface

The purpose of this assessment workbook is to explore the task of educational assessment (and, particularly, of student learning outcomes and degree program effectiveness) with attention to both the *Standards of Accreditation* of the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS/COA) and also to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Program of Priestly Formation* (PPF), currently in its fifth edition, and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Program for Priestly Formation: Ratio Formationis Sacerdotalis Nationalis* (CPPF).

While these emphases make this workbook intentionally well-suited for Roman Catholic seminaries that are accredited by ATS/COA and are exploring assessment strategies for MDiv programs that support priestly formation, the authors of this workbook hope that readers will find it useful in other contexts as well. For example, many of the insights shared here and in the accompanying cases studies may be helpful for Roman Catholic institutions as they assess other (non-MDiv) degree programs or MDiv programs that are less exclusively focused on preparation for the ordained priesthood, or for non-Catholic institutions as they try to imagine new ways to assess spiritual formation or personal character. In addition, while this workbook seeks intentionally to join together the current ATS Commission Standards (as revised in 2010/2012) and the current editions of the PPF/CPPF, it is also hoped that the underlying principles and themes addressed here will remain relevant even as those foundational texts are revised.

The title of "workbook" seeks to highlight that this text is not designed as a guidebook to follow, nor does it present a model to implement or best practices to adopt. Rather, it is designed as one more tool that can help seminaries and other institutions think deeply and in an integrative way about the assessment of student learning. As such, the authors anticipate that it would be read alongside other ATS/COA documents (such as *A Reflective Guide to Effective Assessment of Student Learning*, published as chapter seven of the Commission's *Self-Study Handbook*) and that it should be interpreted in light of the unique mission and context of each individual school.

This workbook is the result of a multi-year project completed by members of the Seminary Department of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) in collaboration with The Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS/COA). Deep gratitude is expressed to Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy, Rev. Mark Latcovich, and Dr. Sebastian Mahfood for their significant work on this project, as well as to all members of the project panel and to each of the participating schools (listed at the conclusion of this workbook). The initial workbook was revised by ATS Commission staff, primarily Dr. Debbie Creamer, and the revised narrative was reviewed by the ATS Board of Commissioners to ensure that it aligns with the Standards of Accreditation and other Commission documents. A final review and edit was done by Dr. Emily Kahm. This project was made possible by the generous support of the Lilly Endowment. For all the participants in this significant project, we express our thanks.

Introduction to Student Learning Assessment

Most Catholic seminaries in the United States and Canada are accredited by ATS/COA and many are also accountable to other accrediting agencies or additional forms of oversight. In response to increased public and governmental requirements for schools to demonstrate that they are effectively achieving stated learning outcomes, accrediting agencies have strengthened requirements for assessment of student learning. And, apart from the more public, fiduciary reasons for the heightened emphasis on demonstrable evidence of effective student learning, there is a deeper, intrinsic value to assessment of student learning. For ATS/COA and other bodies, assessment of student learning supplies concrete data that provides the basis for academic and administrative decisions to improve student learning as well as to allocate the resources needed for improvement.

When we talk about assessment in this context, we mean the gathering of information or evidence to demonstrate that students are achieving the desired learning outcomes for a course and, most importantly, for the full curriculum or degree program in which they are enrolled. In Roman Catholic seminaries, all dimensions of formation are to be assessed. Additionally, a good assessment program holistically evaluates the entire curriculum. It is not enough to conduct appraisals of individual student work (which is an area where many Catholic seminaries excel). The official document governing training of ordained leadership in the Catholic Church, *The Program of Priestly Formation*, is unmatched in its clear expectations for ordained priests. However, the challenge for Catholic seminaries, and for all ATS/COA accredited schools, is to provide evidence that the degree program as a whole—how it serves the entire constituency of enrolled students—is effective. This workbook is designed to help schools with this undertaking.

Assessment of student learning should emerge organically. Thoughtful faculty should ask: "How effective are we in helping our students to learn and achieve the objectives of the curriculum?" This question requires the corporate effort of the faculty and administration and invites them to think about the curriculum as a whole, including the explicit course work and the associated learning activities, such as supervised ministerial placements, internships and other applied learning situations that are essential for quality, professional ministerial education. Assessment should also be regularly documented. This should happen on an ongoing basis (e.g., via annual assessment reports) and should also support the school's comprehensive self-study processes.

This workbook has been designed to offer clear illustrations of how to identify direct (performance-based) indicators of student achievement, as well as indirect (perception-based) indicators, such as student surveys and evaluations of instructional modalities, for the fourfold objectives of the *Program of Priestly Formation* (intellectual, spiritual, human and pastoral formation). In addition to concrete tools for ascertaining student accomplishment of priestly formation objectives throughout the curriculum, the workbook provides concrete examples of how to gather data for a summative appraisal that not only demonstrates individual student performance, but also programmatic effectiveness—as strongly emphasized in the ATS/COA accrediting standards. In short, the workbook provides a mechanism whereby seminaries can translate the results of student performance from discrete instruments (such as achievement on a comprehensive examination or a juried evaluation of a student homily) into a summative document that provides comprehensive evidence of the degree program's efficacy.

Assessment of student learning also informs and shapes the evaluation of institutional effectiveness. Results of student assessment should inform questions such as:

- Are sufficient financial resources allocated to ensure successful learning?
- Are faculty and personnel decisions guided by concern for improving the quality of the curriculum for the various degree programs?
- How do the results of the student learning assessment program influence the strategic planning efforts of the board and administration?

This workbook hopes to provide a clear roadmap for busy faculty members, self-study directors, academic deans, and assessment committees to assess student learning, both individually and programmatically.

As such, the primary goals of this workbook are as follows:

- To help schools, especially Roman Catholic seminaries focused on the preparation of men for ordained ministry, meet the assessment expectations stipulated by ATS and the regional accrediting agencies.
- To provide models of useful rubrics (and other evaluative instruments) so that schools have a common set of resources that can be tailored to their individual programmatic goals.
- To integrate the assessment strategies for each of the four dimensions of the *Program of Priestly Formation* by providing tools to translate data from the annual evaluation documents for each student into a useful report that meets the expectation for programmatic assessment.
- To reduce the workload for faculty members and administrators in preparing self-study reports that address assessment of student learning in preparation for ATS accreditation visits or renewal of accreditation.
- To bring clarity and simplicity to the assessment process by avoiding technical language as much as possible.
- To assist seminaries in developing a limited number of outcomes that aid faculty and administration in discerning, on an ongoing basis, the effectiveness of the institutions' degree programs and individual student learning.
- To help schools incorporate assessment as a regular part of faculty work rather than an additional burden that provides little or no value to the seminary program.

In the chapters that follow, we will explore good practices for assessment. The first chapter will present an overview of how to design an assessment plan, giving particular attention to Roman Catholic seminaries, but also attending to themes that will be relevant to a much wider audience. The next four chapters present an application of assessment according to the four dimensions (areas of formation) of the Program of Priestly Formation. A final chapter offers some concluding thoughts and encouragement for this work.

Chapter 1: How to Design an Assessment Plan

Several key steps make assessment an effective and meaningful exercise.[1] One way to think of this is via the four As of assessment:

- **Alignment**: Develop clear and discernible degree program goals guided by the school's mission statement and align them with particular courses or clusters of courses. Another way to think about alignment is called "curricular mapping." Faculty may look at the curriculum in terms of outcomes and note where those outcomes may be found in particular courses or in a cluster of courses. In this mapping process, faculty can identify direct and indirect evidence of specific outcomes. Each course or cluster of courses could then include activities that demonstrate that it is meeting *its own* student learning outcomes. For example: *the student demonstrates effective oral communication skills*. By reviewing the curriculum, faculty might identify five courses where this skill is already observed (e.g., two homiletics courses and three courses requiring an oral presentation).
- **Aggregate** the data: Take the various artifacts and organize them according to the desired levels of performance established by the faculty. This step creates a benchmark that can be recognized by a rubric as explained below. For example: *80 percent of the students should develop effective oral speaking skills.* One way to aggregate the data is by using a portfolio. A portfolio is a tool for collecting and organizing significant student work that provides evidence that the student has achieved desired learning outcomes. A portfolio is also a means for faculty to coach students about self-evaluation for purposes of ongoing formation and lifelong learning. This workbook utilizes an NCEA resource entitled *In Fulfillment of Their Mission*[2] to introduce the basic notion of a portfolio.
- **Analyze** the data: Interpret the findings. What does the information tell us about how our students are doing? Where does the information suggest areas that need improvement? Where does the information consistently demonstrate that students are performing well? This process simply takes the next step to answer the above questions through the collection of data that is already available.
- **Annotate** the findings: Document your findings. This involves writing a summary report. If assessment is not documented, it does not exist. Assessment done well does not mean that you have to change things. Often, assessment validates what is already being done and that result should be documented. Assessment frequently results in improvement of teaching and learning.

These four themes can be further unpacked as follows:

Be Guided by the Mission Statement

The best starting point for any assessment plan is the seminary's own mission. The mission statement articulates the seminary's overarching purpose and informs everything that the

[1] For a fuller discussion of these themes, see the ATS/COA document "*A Reflective Guide to Effective Assessment of Student Learning.*"

[2] Joseph Ippolito, Rev. Mark A. Latcovich, and Joyce Malyn-Smith, *In Fulfillment of Their Mission The Duties and Tasks of a Roman Catholic Priest: An Assessment Project* (National Catholic Educational Association, 2008).

institution does. The mission statement of the school defines its purpose and identity. It shapes how the institution forms its curriculum to meet the needs of its students and the church that will receive its graduates. The school articulates its purpose through specific outcomes, and those outcomes become linked to specific courses. “Alignment” means developing clear and discernible degree program goals that are guided by the school’s mission statement and aligning them with particular courses or clusters of courses within each degree program. Curricular mapping helps faculty consider how their particular courses contribute to an outcome that the faculty has deemed to be important. The basic idea is to demonstrate effectiveness through measurable outcomes. Faculty can use the mapping process to identify where such outcomes will be evident.

A good example of the curricular implications of a well-framed mission statement can be seen in the mission statement of St. John’s Seminary, Camarillo, California, which reads as follows: “The primary mission of St. John’s Seminary is to prepare candidates for service as Roman Catholic priests by assisting them to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ, discern the vocation to which God calls them, root themselves in Word and Sacrament and the Church’s theological tradition, integrate the spiritual, human, intellectual and pastoral dimensions of their lives, and develop skills for ministry, leadership and evangelization in a culturally diverse Church.” This statement provides guidance for the organization of the curriculum and the adaptation of the *PPF* requirements to equip St. John’s Seminary graduates for the multicultural reality of the church in the Southwestern United States.

Another example can be seen in the mission statement of St. Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology in Wickliffe, Ohio: “Saint Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology of the Diocese of Cleveland prepares candidates for the priesthood while also serving as a center for advanced theological education.” An implication of this mission statement is that the curriculum is shaped to not only provide training for priesthood candidates, but also for lay and diaconal students.

Note that these two examples present different, yet equally useful, ways of expressing the school’s mission. The first mission statement is clear and focused, while the second is broad and comprehensive. The process for assessing student learning should always begin with consulting the mission statement, and it should also involve all appropriate constituencies.

With the mission statement in hand, we are ready to begin!

Define Demonstrable Degree Program Outcomes

Outcomes, goals and objectives of the degree program shape the curriculum and all of the learning activities of the theological school. They respond to such questions as, “Who are our students?” “What do we want them to be, to learn, and to do?” and “How do we design our curriculum to ensure that our students achieve the outcomes, goals, or objectives that we have established?” Program outcomes should be connected to the mission of the school. Degree program outcomes focus on the specific outcomes the school hope to see demonstrated by students in a particular degree program. Outcomes may be identified as specific attributes, traits or key indicators required by formation faculty or the program. These include, for example, critical thinking skills, mastery of the religious tradition or heritage, and spiritual and moral maturity. Key skills should be articulated in one or two statements that show increasing levels of competence over time.

Outcomes should be straightforward and clear. This example from St. Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology in Wickliffe, Ohio, will be further explored later in the workbook in relationship to the *PPF* goal of spiritual formation: "Demonstrates an ability to live a life of prayer centered in the Eucharist."

Outcomes should be expressed with active verbs such as "demonstrates." To evaluate this goal, various criteria can be developed to discern the extent that the student has successfully provided concrete evidence to meet this expectation. For example, criteria could be articulated in the form of a scoring guide (i.e., rubric) and examined by various artifacts (i.e., concrete performance-based activities), which could include the student's self-evaluation and annual faculty evaluation reports.

Faculty need to ask what the outcome looks like in terms of behavior or performance. Assessment criteria emerge from a thoughtful conversation about what matters to the faculty about their students. A person centered in prayer would have many characteristics demonstrating a particular outcome, but a faculty might choose four as follows:

Outcome: *Demonstrates an ability to live a life of prayer centered on the Eucharist*
Criteria: *(1) Actively participates in all scheduled seminary Eucharistic liturgies (daily and Sunday)*
(2) Participates in communal prayer (Liturgy of the Hours)
(3) Schedules quiet time for meditation and devotional practices on a daily basis
(4) Prepares homilies that reflect an ability to incorporate insights from the spiritual (liturgical) tradition

Criteria should be based on observable indicators of student performance. While it is impossible to verify the actual condition of anyone's spiritual state, behavioral indicators provide some evidence of integration.

In addition, these indicators can serve as performance criteria in the life of a student without intruding into the arena of conscience or—to use the terminology of canon law—the "internal forum," which is the arena of absolute confidentiality. We will return to this challenge of assessing spiritual formation later in the workbook. At this point, it is sufficient to be aware of limitations in determining successful achievement of a desired outcome in the realm of personal spirituality and to ensure that the assessment activity is realistic and discernable.

The student's self-evaluation can be confirmed or challenged by the observations of the formation faculty along with information gleaned from other artifacts, such as field education or internship supervisor reports, or reports from the seminarian's summer pastor.

Another example of a clear, well-framed outcome is taken from Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. In the area of intellectual formation, the seminary requires its students "to demonstrate knowledge of Islamic history." In this case, the criteria are named as follows:

Outcome: *Demonstrates knowledge of Islamic history*
Criteria: *(1) Knowledge of historical origins of Islam*
(2) Awareness of major events in the history of Islam
(3) Familiarity with important texts from the Qur'an

In both of these illustrations, the stated outcome and criteria do not try to do everything, but instead focus on a finite range of indicators that provide evidence of specific performance. As seen in the above example on the knowledge of Islamic history, three indicators— knowledge, awareness and familiarity with significant texts—enable those involved in assessment to have an adequate grasp of student performance with relative ease and clarity.

Identify Artifacts

An artifact is a performance-based activity (paper, project, preaching exercise) that can be used to demonstrate that students have met the learning outcomes. The development of artifacts can be an outgrowth of the learning outcomes. What assignments or student performance activities already provide information for purposes of assessment? Faculty may wish to identify specific assignments in various courses (both in the early and later years of a student's tenure) that can serve as benchmarks for comparing growth and student success in meeting programmatic goals. Those doing assessment in any given year may randomly select artifacts to provide data for a juried review of specific degree program outcomes.

This process may be particularly helpful for smaller institutions that could aggregate information over a two- or three-year cycle. Institutions may wish to identify for review artifacts from performance-level courses or other activities such as field education reports, student verbatims drawn from ministerial experiences, or homiletic or liturgical leadership videos. Both direct and indirect evidence should be used, as identified earlier in this chapter.

Good assessment practices include multiple sources of information, both quantitative and qualitative. Sociologist William Bruce Cameron affirms the value of qualitative evidence along with quantitative evidence in stating that "[n]ot everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."[3] For example, juried panels can report the average (mean) performance gleaned from the various scores in rubrics that are being used to evaluate the level of achievement for a particular outcome. In addition, a narrative may be compiled from open-ended comments by specific evaluators that offer additional explanation and context for interpreting the data. This information is helpful in identifying why students are or are not meeting the performance criteria. For example, if over the past three years, 80 percent of the students demonstrate knowledge of Islamic history, this information provides validation for the required course outcome. Specific written comments may provide additional information that show particular strengths or weaknesses in the program.

Good assessment practices include both direct and indirect evidence. Direct evidence is *performance-based*. A demonstration of achievement is provided by direct evidence. A student's

[3] William Bruce Cameron, *Informal Sociology: A Casual Introduction to Sociological Thinking* (New York: Random House), 1963.

performance-based activity (or “artifact,”) can be used to demonstrate learning on a variety of levels. For example, an artifact (which can take the form of a paper, project or preaching exercise) could be a problem-based learning exercise or demonstration. Indirect evidence is *perception-based*. Surveys and feedback tools are examples of indirect evidence. Alumni questionnaires provide useful information about the success of graduates and student evaluations of faculty teaching provide useful information about pedagogical strategies in the classroom. These surveys complement, but do not supplant, the primary importance of direct evidence of student learning. The person responsible for administering the survey should encourage alumni/ae feedback via the annual meeting with bishops and vocation directors to validate or develop assessment projects. The ATS Alumni/ae Questionnaire provides room for five or more institution-specific questions along with the data that are useful for longitudinal purposes. The bishops/vocation directors meeting is a valuable “listening post” and can be a goldmine for assessment purposes.

Overly complex assessment activities drain energy and sap faculty morale. Focusing on collecting and interpreting sources of information that are already available saves times and often proves just as useful. The ATS Board of Commissioners, based upon numerous visits for reaffirmation of accreditation, has observed that most schools possess abundant data that they have not effectively interpreted or analyzed in their self- study process.

For example, most schools usually collect:

- Year-end student evaluations based on the four dimensions of the *Program of Priestly Formation* (Other ATS schools may have a Middler or Ordination Board review or exam that provides similar data)
- Field education or Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) reports
- Internship evaluations
- Juried evaluations of preaching, capstone comprehensive essays, papers or seminars, liturgical leadership reviews

Portfolios, whether paper or electronic, offer a means of documenting student work that can be easily used for outcomes assessment of individual students, as well as for summative assessment of a group of graduates in a particular year.[4] Outcomes assessment is summative assessment that occurs at the end of the learning process. It assesses components within a degree to which students have achieved the stated learning goals (or outcomes). This type of assessment is cohort driven because it examines the learning artifacts of a specific group of students in order to understand the degree to which that group has achieved mastery of skills, objectives and goals within a particular program. According to the ATS/COA Standards, the Master of Divinity degree “should be related to the institution’s mission and foster students’ knowledge of religious heritage, understanding of the cultural context, growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity, and capacity for ministerial and public leadership” (Standard A, section A.1.2). These multilayered qualities, goals, traits and skills become the criteria that students and faculty use as specific benchmarks.

The Midwestern Association of Theological Schools (now called the National Association of

[4] Note: This section cites the work done in *In Fulfillment of Their Mission* regarding the use of an assessment portfolio as part of the formation process. See especially pages 64–85.

Catholic Theological Schools) panel, involved in the creation of *In Fulfillment of Their Mission* and its scoring rubrics, considered the advantages of adopting portfolios as an assessment tool at their institutions. They note that both faculty and seminarians stand to benefit from adopting portfolio assessment. In the panel's view:

> *Portfolios can also enlarge the perspective of faculty members. Seminarian portfolios provide faculty with a more robust means of assessing their students, and can stimulate a shift in seminary culture. They prompt instructors to move away from an emphasis on grades and individual courses to a stronger regard for an overall composite of student learning. Portfolios naturally encourage the integration of skills and knowledge. As a result, instructors are inclined to move beyond an isolated, departmental perspective toward a deeper awareness of the whole program of formation. At the same time, portfolios offer evidence to accrediting institutions that seminaries are doing what they claim to be doing.*
>
> *Portfolios can enlarge the educational experience of students because they place greater responsibility on learners to determine how best to demonstrate their learning. Portfolios encourage seminarians to engage in self-reflection and to take ownership of their education and formation.*
>
> *Seminarians are accountable for aspects of priestly formation within the parameters of the external forum, which include participation in spiritual exercises, the spiritual direction program, liturgical exercises, and community life as well as the academic and pastoral dimensions of priestly formation. This approach is taken because all aspects of priestly formation are "intimately interwoven and should not be separated from one another."*[5]

Develop an Ongoing Process to Collect and Analyze Data

Assessment expert John Harris has observed, "assessment's only value is in the improvement it stimulates and guides."[6] If information is regularly not analyzed and reviewed, it merely gathers dust and quickly becomes useless.

Some schools (particularly ones with large student populations) may choose to use a sample of artifacts. A sample of artifacts would include, for example, a random selection 10 to 15 percent of a student's work (ensuring that confidentiality is protected through the removal of information that would identify individual students). Random sampling simplifies the process for a busy faculty and administration. The information should be used to help answer particular questions or concerns that faculty have about the students. In other words, the process should be manageable. Faculty energy should be targeted so that assessment does not become an unwieldy burden. Cultivating faculty buy-in and participation in the process is essential.

Once the artifacts are selected, a panel of evaluators reviews the artifacts from various courses or

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[5] Ippolito, *In Fulfillment of Their Mission*, pp. 64-65.

[6] John Harris, "A Guide for Evaluating Theological Learning," *The Association of Theological Schools of the United States and Canada.*

learning activities in order to validate the effectiveness of the degree program. Jurors should primarily be members of the faculty; however, it may be helpful to invite outside jurors, such as educators from neighboring colleges familiar with the seminary mission, to assist the faculty. This will provide a broader perspective that may be of benefit to the school. The panel's findings are written into an assessment report that faculty, vocation directors and bishops may find useful for future discernment. This provides an independent way to audit an institution's entire assessment process.

A **rubric** is an articulation of the criteria on which a student's work or performance will be evaluated. Rubrics can be developed and adapted by faculty to fit different formation outcomes. These criteria can be used to rate student performance and growth in a particular assignment or activity and used for student evaluation at the course or degree level. Over time, these results can be aggregated as a cohort for purposes of programmatic assessment. Of course, not everything has to be addressed in a rubric–but, it can be a helpful tool for programmatic assessment, and can also be a way of articulating to students what is expected of them, as these criteria make explicit what is often assumed in individual grading decisions.[7]

In order to make assessment instruments meaningful and effective, faculty members should engage each other in conversations about the qualities, skills and attributes that they want to see in students. Rubrics should include rating options that are finite, measurable, and flexible. The rubric may begin with a scale for measuring performance, ranging from minimal performance (e.g., "meets expectations") to maximal performance (e.g., "exceeds expectations"), or might use numerical ratings (e.g., from 1 to 4). However, for faculty and other evaluators to effectively use the scale, and to ensure consistency, more precise criteria should be established for making these evaluations. In other words, more faculty conversation is necessary to provide clarity and guidance for faculty judgment. For example, a school should articulate what counts as "meeting expectations" with respect to student achievement of the desired outcome in spiritual formation, which then could be indicated by a more precise criterion (e.g., "consistently attends Eucharist and other liturgical events"). Similar kinds of criteria can be developed for other items on the performance scale. For example, "exceeds expectations" could be identified by a criterion such as "the student not only consistently attends Eucharist and liturgical events, but also takes an active role in planning and participating in these obligations." Examples of rubrics can be found in Appendix 2 of this workbook.

Document the Results of the Assessment Process

A short, 3- to 5-page report of assessment data taken from various artifacts, reflecting analysis and interpretation, gives institutions solid evidence for the success of the program, its strengths and areas that need improvement. Appendix 3 has an example of such a report taken from St. Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology in Wickliffe, Ohio. (We chose this school because it was one of the pilot schools participating in the development of this workbook.) Note in this report that the school aligned the data with its five degree programmatic outcomes:

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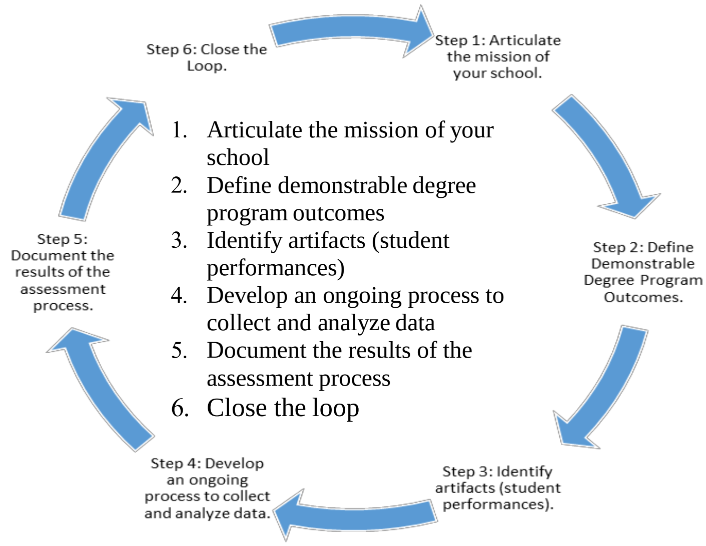
[7] For a fuller discussion of these themes, see the ATS/COA document *A Reflective Guide to Effective Assessment of Student Learning.* In addition, a practical and faculty-friendly guide to assessment, grading, and student learning can be found in Linda Suskie's book, *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*, second edition (NY: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

Christian Discipleship, Formation, Theological Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration. Both quantitative and qualitative data are included in the sample report.

Now that we've looked at the individual steps, here is what the overall process looks like as a whole:



The flow chart shown above illustrates closing the loop, an essential set of steps involving interpreting and analyzing the information, developing an intervention strategy and evaluating the success of the intervention. Schools should use the information so that it contributes to institutional and programmatic effectiveness and to planning so that it can help the institution make wise use of resources. These decisions in turn have an impact on improvement of student learning; the ongoing assessment either contributes to validation or provides an impetus for change.

A good example of closing the loop can be found in Chapter 4, as part of the discussion of intellectual formation. In this example, after a school discovered that only 60 percent of students were meeting a stated outcome, the dean and faculty identified two areas of concern, one having to do with writing skills and the other having to do with pastoral application of theological learning. To address the first concern, the school took steps to enable the writing coach and academic faculty to be more proactive in addressing these issues earlier in a student's academic career. In the second area of concern, the school determined that more monitoring was needed, and two individuals (the dean and field education director) were tasked with engaging in further exploration of the issue. Other times, closing the loop might mean making a change to the assessment strategy itself (e.g., if an artifact is not giving the sorts of information that are needed, or if a learning outcome needs to be reviewed). And, in all cases, the change that was made (to the curriculum, co-curriculum, or assessment strategy) would itself need to be evaluated, to determine whether the change had the desired effect (in this first example, to see whether there was an increase in the percentage of students meeting the outcome).

Of course, the hope is that the work of assessment will demonstrate that students are successfully achieving their learning outcomes on a consistent basis. Occasionally, even when a school sees consistently good outcomes, a review of the assessment plan may be called for, as it could indicate that benchmarks have been set too low or that the learning goals are less useful than they might be. Good assessment work should provide valuable information about student learning, and so if this work does not lead to new insights, it might be time to revisit the assessment process. But successful outcomes can also be cause for celebration, and can also be helpful in institutional planning; not only does it validate the school's work but also can affirm how the school is spending its time, money, and energy.

Chapter 2: Human Formation

In these next four chapters, the workbook gives attention to each dimension of the *PPF/CPPF*. Each section begins with a brief description of the goals and attributes of each dimension. Artifacts and rubrics are suggested for measuring how assessment may be done for each dimension within the seminary context.

These examples are not intended to be exhaustive or definitive, but to illustrate how the assessment process can be developed for each dimension. The artifacts and rubrics include room for creativity and contextualization and should be modified to fit the particular needs and mission of individual seminary communities.

The other important objective of this workbook is to make the link between individual student assessments and programmatic effectiveness. As noted in the introduction, the ATS Commission on Accrediting and the regional accrediting agencies emphasize programmatic effectiveness. This exercise accomplishes both careful, individual student assessment and translation of this valuable information into a resource for assessing the effectiveness of the overall degree program.

As cited in Section 280 of the *PPF*, [8] the elements of human formation include:

- The human qualities of truthfulness, respect for others, justice, humility, integrity, affability, generosity, kindness, courtesy, integrity and prudence
- The capacity to relate to others in a positive manner, and the ability to get along with others and work with them in the community
- Good self-knowledge, self-discipline, and self-mastery, including emotional self-control
- Good physical and mental health
- A balanced lifestyle and balance in making judgments
- Affective maturity and healthy psychosexual development; clarity of male sexual identity; an ability to establish and maintain wholesome friendships; and the capacity to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships
- Skills for leadership and collaboration with women and men
- Capacity to receive and integrate constructive criticism
- Simplicity of life, stewardship of resources, and responsibility for financial obligations
- Mature respect for, and cooperation with, church authority
- Engagement in the community life of the seminary

[8] The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops equivalent of this text can be found on pages 15–17 (§§29–31) of the *Canadian Program for Priestly Formation*, available online at https://secure.cccb.ca/pubs/pdf/184-093%20Priestly%20Formation.pdf.

> *Every seminary must have a program of human formation appropriate to the stage of the candidates' preparation, which seeks to prepare men to be bridges for, not obstacles to, the spread of the Gospel* (*PPF*, §83).
>
> *The qualities to be fostered in a human formation program are freedom, openness, honesty and flexibility, joy and inner peace, generosity and justice, personal maturity, interpersonal skills, common sense, aptitude for ministry, and growth "in moral sensibility and character"* (*PPF*, §85).

A variety of characteristics, practices (seminary activities), attributes, and skills are required to satisfy the goal of human formation, including preparation for celibacy, simplicity of life and obedience. While it would be difficult to create a single, master rubric for each of the attributes listed, three to five key areas may provide sufficient indicators for assessing this dimension. As faculty begin to design the areas to be measured, the question should be asked: What do these characteristics, qualities, and attributes look like in our students? For example, **affective maturity** may be hard to evaluate because it seems abstract, but what does it look like? One indicator is a seminarian who is able to relate to young people, peers and older adults with appropriate boundaries. In working with young adults, the seminarian does not need to be like them in order to interact with them. The seminarian develops appropriate interpersonal skills; for example, he is able to listen to different points of view in a meeting. Another quality a seminarian with affective maturity demonstrates is behaviors that are appropriate to his age group. In other words, it is not necessary to have an overwhelming number of assessment tools in order to demonstrate how the seminary is achieving an effective formation program as described in the *PPF* or *CPPF*. Notice how this plays out in the criteria below.

Outcome: *Demonstrates affective maturity*
Criteria: *(1) Cultivates friendships with others*
(2) Sets appropriate boundaries in relationships
(3) Demonstrates an ability to work well in social settings
(4) Manifests a balanced lifestyle that is rooted in prayer

From this, a rubric could be developed that evaluates these four indicators of affective maturity that can be observed in a candidate. While the *PPF*, *CPPF* and other church documents list a myriad of qualities and traits, these indicators specifically look at relationships, boundaries, social interaction and a lifestyle sustained through prayer.

Formation faculty can discern evidence that a candidate fulfills this goal with a variety of artifacts. These artifacts may include the student's own self-reflection, which is often submitted to the formation faculty as part of the annual evaluation; the formation advisor's report summarizing the candidate's yearly discussions about family and friends; relationships in community and ministry; the field education report; peer evaluations; and observations by the entire formation faculty.

These artifacts are sufficiently robust to prove useful for attending to this critical area of priestly formation without being overly exhaustive in detail. For example, a candidate who meets this expectation could demonstrate a sense of being "comfortable in his own skin," relates comfortably and easily with men and women, is not anxious or nervous in the company of women, has the ability to laugh at himself, and demonstrates a stable sense of self, (e.g., he lives on an even keel and does not have mood swings, depression, or manic behaviors). In other words, faculty can develop a more detailed sense of what additional characteristics provide evidence that "meets" expectations according to the rubric. Where the faculty may discern deficiencies in the candidate, the faculty can use this information for devising an intervention strategy to help the candidate improve.

In this sample, no more than four attributes are listed as indicators for assessment purposes. These attributes can easily be measured by examining several readily available artifacts (or evidence of student performance). Examples of useful artifacts for this purpose include the field education report or classroom observation by faculty (e.g., presentations in class, how criticism from faculty members is received, or feedback from peer evaluations).

After using these artifacts for the individual student assessment, a jury or panel of faculty members could then take a representative sample from individual assessments (with due regard to protect student confidentiality) to establish an aggregated profile that assesses a cohort or class of students. This information should be compiled into a brief narrative that identifies strengths and weaknesses, using both quantitative and qualitative information, in order to develop a concrete strategy for improvement.

For example, using the above topic of affective maturity, a sample narrative summary could look like this:

> *Using data from graduates from the last three years, the faculty panel (jury) reviewed the assessment information based on the artifact for evaluating the level of capacity rubric for affective maturity and the various artifacts that provided the source of this evidence (faculty observations, field education reports, student self-assessments, etc.). The faculty panel observes that 91 percent of the students (N=11, the random sample for this purpose) have demonstrated successful achievement of the desired outcome. It was noted that one student appeared to fall short in the area of affective maturity (lack of ease in relationships with women peers in ministry) according to two annual evaluations. The evidence does not indicate a trend in need of programmatic attention, but may be an issue for further discussion regarding admissions procedures with the vocation director of the sending diocese.*

Another example in human formation is the following outcome and criteria that address the capacity for ministerial leadership. After stating the desired outcome, the faculty have identified four attributes that provide useful, observable indicators of pastoral leadership. Note that these attributes are limited in number, but offer sufficient information to make informed judgments about student capacities in this area.

Outcome: *A capacity for pastoral leadership*
Criteria: *(1) Demonstrates the ability to work collaboratively with others*

(2) Demonstrates effective communication skills
(3) Is able to identify traits, strengths, and weaknesses of personal leadership style
(4) Accepts feedback and constructive criticism

Once the cycle of individual assessment has been concluded, a representative group of the faculty forms a panel to aggregate the individual reports for purposes of programmatic effectiveness. The panel reviews all of the rubrics (or, for a larger institution, might select a sample) and then writes a brief narrative summarizing the results of the aggregated assessment. For example, using terminology from the rubric ("meets," "improvement required" or "fails to meet"), the following results were noted:

> *The review of the sample indicates that 85 percent of the students demonstrate that they meet the capacity to work collaboratively with others, 90 percent demonstrate effective communication skills, and nearly all students (97 percent) demonstrate sufficient self-awareness and can successfully identify strengths, weaknesses, and accept constructive criticism. From the above open-ended comments, the faculty panel observes that the students who lacked effective communication skills came from the cohort of international students in the community.*
>
> *Accordingly, based on this analysis, the faculty panel recommends that the seminary develop a more detailed mentoring program to help this cohort of students acquire greater facility and competency in communication.*

Chapter 3: Spiritual Formation

As cited in Section 280 of the *PPF*, "there should be accountability in the external forum for seminarians' participation in spiritual exercises of the seminary and their growth as men of faith. Within the parameters of the external forum, habits of prayer and personal piety are also areas of accountability."[9] Elements of spiritual formation include the following:

- Commitment to a life of prayer and the ability to assist others in their spiritual growth
- Abiding love for the sacramental life of the church, especially the Holy Eucharist and Penance
- A loving knowledge of the Word of God and prayerful familiarity with that Word
- Appreciation of, and commitment to, the Liturgy of the Hours
- Fidelity to the liturgical and spiritual program of the seminary, including the daily celebration of the Eucharist
- Fidelity to regular spiritual direction and regular celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and a habit of spiritual reading
- Positively embracing a lifelong commitment to chaste celibacy, obedience and simplicity of life
- A love for Jesus Christ and the church, for the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints
- A spirit of self-giving charity toward others

> *For every priest his spiritual formation is the core which unifies and gives life to his* ***being*** *a priest and* ***acting*** *as a priest.* (Pastores dabo vobis, §45).
>
> *The seminary should identify those characteristics and practices that foster its growth. It is a formation that includes [the following elements]: Holy Eucharist, Sacrament of Penance, Liturgy of the Hours, Spiritual Direction, Bible, Retreats and Days of Recollection, Personal Meditation, Devotions, Apostolic Dimensions, Celibacy, Simplicity of Life, Reconciliation, Solidarity, Solitude and Ongoing Spiritual Formation* (*PPF*, §110).

The depth and breadth of these attributes, along with internal forum considerations, may make assessment appear to be a daunting task. However, carefully chosen practices or behaviors within the rubric can provide useful indicators that cover a wide range of desired skills and capacities.

The example below identifies a number of observable behaviors indicative of the spiritual life. Seminary formators have often commented on the difficulty of assessing spiritual formation due to their place in the arena of conscience or internal forum. The seminary itself, however, has

[9] The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops equivalent of this text can be found on pages 17–18 (§§32–37) of the *Canadian Program for Priestly Formation*, available online at https://secure.cccb.ca/pubs/pdf/184-093%20Priestly%20Formation.pdf.

records in the external forum such as publicly observable behavior, attendance records and dialogue with formation advisers that provide at least some indication of student performance in this area. Assessment of this dimension of priestly formation will—understandably—be more strongly shaped by indirect sources of evidence due to the nature of the internal forum issues. Sources of evidence (artifacts) may include student self-reporting of his internal attitudes that, to some extent, manifest the integration of these activities into his life. In this arena, seminary faculties could identify behavioral indicators that provide more direct evidence of meeting this objective.

Outcome: *Exhibits a maturing priestly spirituality*
Criteria: *(1) Daily prays the Liturgy of the Hours, privately, or in common*
(2) Participates in daily Eucharist
(3) Schedules private time for self-reflection and engages in private meditation on a daily basis
(4) Receives the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis[10]
(5) Receives spiritual direction on a regular basis
(6) Does spiritual reading
(7) Engages in devotional prayer (e.g., rosary, Stations of the Cross, Novena)

As assessment expert John Harris has said, "One can get a sense of what the wind is doing by observing the leaves on the trees."[11] In other words, according to the scriptural admonition in Matthew 7:16, "by their fruits you will know them," it is possible to get a sense of student growth in spiritual formation by observing virtues and attitudes.

After using a rubric to assess (measure) the practices (behaviors) of each student, a panel of faculty members can proceed with translating the data into useful information for evaluating the overall spiritual formation program. Following the pattern of narrative display indicated in the area of human formation above, the narrative could take the following form:

> *The faculty panel notes that the random sample (N=19) of individuals currently in formation indicates a very high level of affirmation and support for the quality of the spiritual formation program. Based on the comment field in the rubric, however, the heightened level of student absence at spiritual activities during the final days of the semester consistently emerges as an issue. The faculty panel suggests that the student body's corporate behavior requires attention by the formation faculty and could be addressed by a rector's conference to the student body.*

In light of the above narrative, it is important to consider whether or not an issue that surfaces from the assessment process requires immediate attention. One need not make programmatic changes when issues emerge from the data that affect only a relatively small number of students.

[10] Note that this is a behavior. The *PPF* suggests that a spiritual director should report whether or not a candidate receives spiritual direction to the formation director or head spiritual director. In the year-end written evaluation, the seminarian self-reports as to whether or not he attends daily Eucharist, makes use of the sacrament of confession and prays the Liturgy of the Hours. These are external practices or behaviors—they do not go into the internal forum of asking what he says in confession, spiritual direction, etc.

[11] John Harris, personal discussion with Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy, Pittsburgh, PA, 2008.

Some items that arise on assessment may be statistical anomalies and may not represent a trend. Monitoring, rather than fixing, may be the right response to some situations. In other words, be careful not to overreact to the information, but take time to determine whether or not there is a significant trend under way that may require an intervention.

Chapter 4: Intellectual Formation

As cited in Section 280 of the *PPF*,[12] elements of intellectual formation include:

- Love for truth as discovered by faith and reason
- Fidelity to the Word of God and to the Magisterium
- Knowledge of Catholic doctrine and adherence to it
- Interest and diligence in seminary studies
- Successful completion of seminary academic requirements
- Ability to exercise the ministry of the Word: to proclaim, explain and defend the faith
- Knowledge of languages that will be necessary or suitable for the exercise of their pastoral ministry

> *There is a reciprocal relationship between spiritual and intellectual formation. The intellectual life nourishes the spiritual life, but the spiritual life also opens vistas of understanding … Intellectual formation is integral to what it means to be human* (*PPF*, §136).
>
> *In the seminary program, intellectual formation culminates in a deepened understanding of the mysteries of faith that is pastorally oriented toward effective priestly ministry, especially preaching* (*PPF*, §138).

In the area of intellectual formation, many courses in the curriculum require written work to demonstrate the student's ability to think and to write theologically. A common concern registered by many in the higher education community is the need for remedial work in analytical and writing skills, even at the graduate level. The introductory courses at some theological schools require students to write a paper in a particular discipline, for example, a biblical, exegetical paper or an essay in historical theology; other such examples can be cited. Many schools insert a writing artifact in a particular course syllabus to assist students in meeting the requirements for the stated course outcome, which is also identified as a degree program outcome (i.e., the student demonstrates the ability to think and to write theologically). A sample rubric for intellectual formation is found in Appendix 2. The data collected through this rubric can be used not only for documenting individual student growth in writing skills, but also for aggregating into a comprehensive view of the effectiveness of theological writing throughout the degree program. Thus, this sample rubric serves multiple purposes: assess individual student performance and provide an assessment of programmatic effectiveness.

Outcome: Demonstrates the ability to write theologically
Criteria: (1) Articulates doctrine, tradition, exegesis and historical theology with accuracy and understanding

[12] The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops equivalent of this text can be found on page 19 (§§38–41) of the *Canadian Program for Priestly Formation*, available online at https://secure.cccb.ca/pubs/pdf/184-093%20Priestly%20Formation.pdf.

(2) Writing demonstrates the capacity to do research on a graduate level
(3) Writing demonstrates analytical and critical thinking
(4) Demonstrates ability to apply theological learning to pastoral situations

In the proposed scenario, the academic dean and three faculty members (biblical studies, systematic theology and moral theology) review a random sample of portfolio materials from the past three graduating classes to determine how effective the degree program has been in helping students to think and write theologically.

In this scenario, after aggregating the data, the dean and the three faculty members summarized their findings and made the following determination:

> *According to the rubric, 60 percent of the students meet the stated outcome. Twenty percent require improvement in one or more of the areas specified in the scoring rubric and 20 percent did not demonstrate the ability to apply theological learning to pastoral situations. The panel (dean and selected faculty) determined that the common weakness among the 20 percent requiring improvement was in the area of grammatical skills and clarity in developing a thesis or theological topic. This information will be shared with the writing coach and the academic faculty in order to be more proactive in ascertaining writing deficiencies much earlier in the student's academic formation. With respect to the 20 percent who are weak in the pastoral application of theological learning, the panel determined that more monitoring is needed to discern if there is a pattern or trend emerging. It is not yet clear what the root cause for the deficiency is, but the dean and the field education director will undertake further investigation. It appears that the theological reflection seminar could be strengthened with more writing requirements in social analysis and pastoral application to improve the situation.*

Chapter 5: Pastoral Formation

As cited in Section 280 of the *PPF*,[13] elements of pastoral formation include:

- ❖ A missionary spirit, zeal for evangelization and ecumenical commitment
- ❖ A spirit of pastoral charity, a quest for justice and an openness to serve all people
- ❖ A special love for and commitment to the sick and suffering, the poor and outcasts, prisoners, immigrants and refugees
- ❖ Demonstration of appropriate pastoral and administrative skills and competencies for ministry
- ❖ Ability to exercise pastoral leadership
- ❖ Ability to collaboratively carry out pastoral work and an appreciation for the different charisms and vocations within the church
- ❖ The ability to work in a multicultural setting with people of different ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds
- ❖ A commitment to the proclamation, celebration and service of the Gospel of life
- ❖ Energy and zeal for pastoral ministry

> *To be a true "shepherd of souls" means standing with and for Christ in the community, the Christ who teaches and sanctifies and guides or leads the community* (*PPF*, §238).
>
> *The aim of pastoral formation … implies that formation must include a number of essential elements.… [PPF, §239 lists the major attributes, including]: Proclamation of the Word; The sacramental dimension; The missionary dimension; The community dimension; Skills for effective public ministry; A personal synthesis for practical use; An invitation to various practical pastoral experiences, especially in parishes; Cultural sensitivity; Religious pluralism; Formation for a particular presbyterate and the local Church; The poor; Leadership development; and The cultivation of personal qualities.*

To assess student achievement of pastoral formation, multiple traits, skills or attributes must be listed. In the pastoral formation program, the process begins with the foregoing *PPF* outcomes[14] as a basis for faculty discussion. Section 280 and onward of *PPF* synthesizes issues in each area of pastoral formation that are to be considered and "are to be applied according to the principle of gradualism at each level of formation."

The second step is to define three or four outcomes that provide sufficient indications for determining both individual student success and programmatic effectiveness of the pastoral formation program. Note that it is not necessary (nor is it practical) to devise a complex

[13] The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops equivalent of this is located on page 20 (paragraphs 42-44) of the *Canadian Program for Priestly Formation.* Available online at https://secure.cccb.ca/pubs/pdf/184-093%20Priestly%20Formation.pdf.
[14] See *CPPF*, §42, p. 20.

instrument that attempts to assess every aspect of a particular dimension in the *PPF*. The attributes listed within the rubric should be flexible enough to provide the information that faculty want to know about their students and the pastoral formation program. Observe that attributes on the rubric should be finite, measurable and flexible; not everything has to be addressed. If, over time, faculty are interested in items other than those reflected on the rubric, attributes can be appropriately modified to address new or emerging issues. It is important, however, to avoid the temptation to "do everything," which exhausts the faculty and prevents effective, timely assessment of student performance.

The third step is to identify three or four traits for each outcome selected that can be easily measured by student performance. Faculty may want to identify artifacts the seminary already possesses that can be linked to each trait as a source of information. As an example, let's say the faculty wants to highlight as one of their outcomes for the degree program "that students will demonstrate energy and zeal for pastoral ministry (*PPF*, §280)." This sentence is the outcome for the attributes. Notice that there is an active verb, "demonstrates," that characterizes the formulation of an outcome.

Outcome: *Demonstrates energy and zeal for pastoral ministry*
Criteria: *(1) Completes all of the field education verbatims and has met with his FE supervisor*
(2) Takes initiative with parish groups and ministerial projects
(3) Is punctual and follows through on assigned tasks
(4) Demonstrates an ability to think theologically about pastoral issues

One question that may come to mind is how to devise criteria for determining whether or not a student has effectively demonstrated "energy and zeal." The answer comes from thinking in terms of behavioral, measurable attributes that provide the desired information. In this example, the faculty have determined that four behaviors will provide the information from the available artifacts and may be evaluated and measured according to the rubric.

After using the attributes in this rubric to assess the performance of each of the third-year students (N=8) who completed a summer internship at several parishes, a panel of faculty members (the Field Education Director, a Pastoral Theology professor and the Church History professor) reviewed the artifacts (parish internship reports by the supervisor, key parish staff members and lay board). After discussing each student based on these reports, the faculty panel completed the above rubric. A few students received open-ended comments about their performance. The panel agreed that seven of the students were punctual, took initiative and had a high level of quality in the verbatim reports, which addressed pastoral issues. Three of the students demonstrated theological astuteness in addressing pastoral issues; however, five of the students were marked as "Fails to Meet" the expectation.

By analyzing the results, the Field Education Director observed that similar discrepancies in performance occurred over the last two years. A trend appeared to be emerging, indicating a need to strengthen the theological reflection seminar in order to equip students to engage more successfully with the theological dimensions of pastoral ministry. It was also noted that many of the supervisors needed further training in how to conduct theological reflection with the interns.

The panel recommended that the Field Education Director meet with the Academic Committee and the Academic Dean to explore ways to strengthen the capacity for theological reflection across the curriculum and to provide more in-service training for intern supervisors.

Note that the faculty interpreted and analyzed the information and took steps to improve aspects of the program, thereby “closing the loop.” The next step is to monitor the proposed interventions and determine whether or not the interventions are successful over the next two years.

The second outcome example that follows was designed by a southwestern seminary serving a large diocese that is experiencing enormous growth of Catholic immigrants. Many of the immigrants represent diverse cultures as well as varying ecclesiologies and faith experiences. Bishops asked the seminary to pay particular attention to the pastoral skills (languages needed for ministry, cultural sensitivity or intercultural competency) deemed necessary to minister in an increasingly complex, multicultural setting that characterizes the pastoral life of the dioceses who send students to the seminary. These seminarians are required to demonstrate proficiency in a pastoral language other than English. Fourth-year students (N=15), all ordained to the diaconate, are expected to meet this outcome.

To achieve this outcome, the faculty selected four observable, behavioral attributes to assess multicultural competency. Each attribute represents areas of concern that the faculty has been asked to address in their annual reports to the bishops and vocation directors. One can see that language competency and intercultural competency are both required for effective ministry in the multicultural setting. In addition, the ability to effectively lead parishes that are culturally diverse—with sensitivity to popular devotions, ethnic spiritual traditions and the capacity to connect with the diverse communities in preaching and teaching—are essential pastoral skills for prospective ordinands.

Outcome: *The student demonstrates an ability to minister in a multicultural setting with people of different ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds*

Criteria: *(1) Incorporates examples from different cultural perspectives into preaching and teaching*
(2) Makes contact with the leaders of various ethnic communities
(3) Speaks the language(s) of the parish community
(4) Integrates the devotions and religious customs of the various cultural groups into the life of the parish

The faculty uses a rubric to measure the artifacts that provide data for assessment. Artifacts might include the midterm and final reports from the pastor supervisors for each of the deacon candidates, reports from the parish lay boards, videos or texts of homilies and the student self-assessment reports. In this scenario, after using the rubric to score each artifact, the faculty jury (consisting of the field education director, two homiletics professors and an adjunct faculty member fluent in pastoral languages) aggregated the information from all of the deacons and developed a short narrative analyzing the results.

Findings indicate that 80 percent of the students possess high levels of linguistic skills, which affirms the effectiveness of the language studies program in the seminary.

Furthermore, the content of the homilies demonstrated cultural sensitivity and appreciation for diverse ethnic and racial groups. Two students appear to need further assistance with collaborative skills in working with ethnic leaders in the respective parishes. This information was gleaned from the comments recorded in the scored rubric after the panelists compiled the data. The panel realized that these were individual shortcomings and did not reflect a need for a programmatic intervention.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this workbook has been to provide ideas and tools to enable seminaries to translate evidence of individual student achievement into comprehensive educational assessment and programmatic evaluation. We conclude with some additional observations:

(1) The examples of helpful outcomes and artifacts for each of the four dimensions described within the *PPF* and *CPPF* are meant to be suggestive and illustrative. The rubrics that measure them are extremely flexible tools. These tools can accommodate a wide range of concerns about student learning. The artifacts and the rubrics that measure them, in order to be maximally effective, should not be overly complex, nor should they attempt to address too many issues at once. Getting too "fine-grained" in the analysis can make a rubric cumbersome and unwieldy. A good image to keep in mind is a "dashboard indicator." A dashboard indicator identifies a few important items to gauge how things are going in the institution or academic environment. Not every component has to show up on the list of items; rather, a few key factors serve as proxy indicators for how the whole program is performing.

(2) A summative statement is an essential—yet often overlooked—step in determining how well an outcome has been achieved based on the information gleaned from the rubrics. If the information is not analyzed and documented, it frequently does not inform institutional decision making, nor does it help faculty track and monitor progress in its assessment efforts. The summary statement does not have to be long, but it does need to be accurate and provide evidence of action. It is also important to note that action does not automatically mean change. Rather, action means that the information has been reviewed and appropriate decisions have been made about the outcome. If the resulting information indicates that efforts are working and are effective, then a statement validating that finding is sufficient. If further action or change is needed, however, then next steps should be identified that includes time lines, accountable agents (who will be responsible for implementing the changes) and resources to accomplish the follow-up tasks (such as budgetary commitments, additional personnel, etc.).

(3) When designing an effective rubric, it is helpful to identify the sources of evidence that will provide the desired information. These sources are direct indicators of student performance. The term that we have used for this throughout the document is an "artifact."

(4) When analyzing the information, it is important to identify the root causes of problems, rather than the symptoms of those problems. In addition, it is advisable to take sufficient time to determine whether or not an issue stems from situational, short-term factors, or is, indeed, a significant trend that warrants sustained, systematic attention in order to come to successful resolution. In the former case, it is sufficient to monitor what is happening, whereas, in the latter case, a course of action and follow-up is required.

(5) As faculties gain experience with using outcomes, artifacts and rubrics for program evaluation, additional value can be obtained by looking at the curriculum as a whole to identify particular courses or clusters of courses as particular locations for assessing desired outcomes and to align them with these outcomes. This process is called

curricular mapping. For example, if a desired outcome is "demonstrated skill in oral communication of biblical texts," perhaps the New Testament course in exegesis and the homiletics course can be "mapped" as sources for demonstrating this kind of information. The student homily, captured on a DVD (serving as the artifact in this case), can be used by professors for both courses to measure skill in exegesis of scripture as well as skill in oral communication.

(6) An additional benefit of using rubrics for assessing student learning is the opportunity for faculty to share criteria for grading student work. The shared grading rubric can be used in individual course syllabi. Students benefit from greater clarity in understanding how their work will be evaluated across the curriculum.

(7) Help faculty recognize that grading rubrics for course syllabi can also be used for programmatic evaluation. In other words, when rubrics serve multiple purposes it cuts down workload and faculty fatigue.

In addition, while most of this workbook has focused on the role of the faculty in educational assessment, the involvement of the governing board is also essential. The board should regularly ask the rector/president and the faculty about student learning and the assessment program. Is it working? Is it effective? What needs to be adjusted in order to help the seminary respond appropriately to a rapidly changing demographic reality in the church (e.g., increased numbers of international seminarians and priests)? In the *Program of Priestly Formation,* how does faculty assessment of the overall program inform critical decisions about allocation of resources? Does the data generated by good assessment (both quantitative and qualitative as outlined above) contribute to stakeholder buy-in to the seminary from sending dioceses? Does the information provide the basis for strategic decisions about facilities development, fund-raising activities, new faculty hires and other initiatives?

In addition, while the board has the responsibility to monitor (not manage) the assessment activities already in place, it should invest in its own development and take time to assess its own effectiveness on an ongoing basis, thereby modeling best practices for the organization as a whole. Healthy learning organizations and effective boards are "data-driven" in their analysis of trends, strengths, challenges and opportunities. Assessment activities are the best tools to help the board become more effective in its mission and service to the school or institution. Good student assessment practices offer models for comprehensive, institutional effectiveness. They also provide clear evidence to potential donors, as well as present stakeholders, that the seminary is indeed delivering what it promises in its mission statement.

Assessment can be a difficult process, even for experienced teachers and formators. Faculty and formators often feel overwhelmed when asked to participate in assessment of student learning. They may be confused by assessment terminology or may need to be convinced that assessment activities add significant value to teaching and learning. They may consider programmatic assessment a burdensome intrusion to the entire school. It is understandable that faculty members who are already overworked by normal teaching duties and school governance may be resistant to aspects of programmatic assessment and assessment of student learning.

However, when assessment is done well, it can assist the entire faculty in helping students achieve curricular goals. This comprehensive assessment does not exclusively focus on student learners but also on how the entire cohort of students performs in their degree programs. Good assessment results from having more than one source of information and from using multiple perspectives. In addition to providing useful, real-time feedback about student learning, the overarching value of good assessment is the careful process of thinking critically about the program as a whole. As such, the work of assessment is central to good theological education.

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Intellectual Formation
Mount Angel Seminary
Mundelein Seminary
Oblate School of Theology

Human Formation
St. John’s Seminary (Collegeville, MN)
St. Joseph’s Seminary and College
Mount St. Mary’s Seminary

Spiritual Formation
Pontifical College Josephinum
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Appendix 1: Sample Student Portfolio Elements

The sample elements based on *In Fulfillment of Their Mission* provide good examples of how portfolio assessment can guide seminaries in collecting examples of evidence from students. Using performance areas related to specific duties, examples are provided for using various assessment models and methods to retrieve learning artifacts from students. This is done by using specific courses within a given year of formation along with many reviewers associated with a seminary community to provide concrete feedback. Examples of specific projects that illustrate best practices have been included. An example is as follows:

Celebrates Liturgy and Sacraments			
Performance Areas Related to Duty	**Examples of Evidence to Be Reviewed**	**Courses and Other Learning Experiences**	**Reviewers**
• Celebrates the Eucharist • Preaches liturgical homilies • Initiates children and adults • Celebrates sacraments of healing • Officiates at weddings • Celebrates funerals • Leads devotional practices • Coordinates liturgical events and training	• Video celebrating the rite • Sample of written homily • Feedback from mentor or congregation (e.g., surveys, Likert scales, focus group) • Preparation journals that incorporate goals for preaching and feedback (e.g., social analysis, exegesis, pastoral application) • Written feedback on role play for practica (e.g., reconciliation, weddings) • Self-reflection papers • Written or oral feedback from pastoral supervisors and lay boards • Observation checklists completed by faculty • Listing in seminary bulletin of homiletic study group organized by students • Schedule, topics and participant list of student-created support groups • Web blog of stories and anecdotes to be developed into homilies	*Courses* • Sacramental Theology with Practica • Liturgical Leadership • Homiletics • Liturgical Planning *Other Learning Experiences* • Internships • Theological Field Education • Exercise of Diaconal Ministry • Formation conferences	• Faculty • Formators • Pastoral supervisors • Lay boards • Laypeople • Peers

Schools may find it helpful to begin by brainstorming all possible portfolio elements, and then select the ones that will be most useful for the purposes the school has in mind. When using portfolios as an assessment device, it is also important to note that not everything has to be evaluated every year. At the end of each academic year, schools that use a portfolio often select which courses to evaluate. One year, for example, a school might look at homiletic and pastoral artifacts, while it might look at theological writing and oral presentation skills another year. Furthermore, a school does not have to assess all artifacts within a given collection, but may randomly select samples from within that collection. A random sample needs to be contextually appropriate and should take into account the context of the school (including the size of the student population) as well as which questions that the assessment plan is seeking to answer. The aggregate portfolio should maintain confidentiality by removing any personal identifying information from artifacts.

Appendix 2: Sample Assessment Rubrics

The sample criteria contained in this workbook identify several behaviors, activities and learning exercises that can be used to provide evidence of student achievement of the desired outcome(s). A rubric provides a scale for measuring performance in light of each of these criteria, ranging from minimal performance (e.g., "meets expectations") to maximal performance (e.g., "exceeds expectations"). For faculty to effectively use the scale and to ensure consistency of faculty judgment, more precise criteria should be established for making these evaluations, as seen in the samples below.

For example, this numerical rubric might be utilized for grading a research paper, and then compiled as evidence for a learning outcome related to intellectual formation:

Numerical Rubric

Research Paper Artifacts	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
Development of Thesis	The paper formulates an important scholarly question and offers a thesis that is clearly articulated	The paper formulates a reasonable scholarly question and offers a thesis that is adequately articulated	The paper does not clearly articulate a scholarly question and thesis, although it attempts one	The paper does not have a clear thesis
Theological Content	The student correctly uses theological terms and concepts and demonstrates a solid grasp of the theological and pastoral issues at hand	The student uses theological terms and concepts correctly for the most part and demonstrates a good grasp of the theological and pastoral issues at hand	The student often misuses terms and concepts and does not offer much theological or pastoral development of the issues at hand	The student shows very little grasp of theological terms, concepts and issues at hand
Use of Quality Resources	The paper uses excellent resources, skillfully relates the thesis to what authors offer and develops their points with his/her own insights	The paper uses good resources, adequately relates the thesis to what authors offer, and provides some good personal insights related to the authors	The paper makes use of some non-scholarly or out-dated sources with limited connection to the thesis; little personal insight offered	The paper does not use quality resources nor offer sufficient research that connects with the thesis; no quality personal insight offered

Style of Writing	The paper maintains its focus; transitions from one point to another are evident and smooth; the paper flows well; it is written in a readable manner		The paper mostly maintains its focus and transitions well from one point to another; it mostly flows well and is fairly readable and interesting		The paper often loses focus and fails to make transitions; it is at times hard to follow and does not always hold the reader's interest		The paper substantially lacks focus, transitions, and readability	
Mechanics of Writing	The paper shows mastery of the following elements of scholarly writing: grammar, length, punctuation, spelling, formatting, citation of sources in the footnotes and bibliography		The paper shows competence in the important elements of scholarly writing		The paper shows deficiencies in some aspects of scholarly writing		The paper reflects serious deficiencies in scholarly writing skills	
Total Rubric Points	18–20	17	16	13–15	12	11	10	9 and below
Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	Not qualifying

Rubrics can also be developed for subject-specific learning outcomes, again both at the course level and for degree program assessment. For example, the outcome of "Demonstrates knowledge of Islamic history" was mentioned in Chapter 1 as demonstrable degree program outcome. A rubric to assess that outcome might look as follows:

Outcome: Demonstrates knowledge of Islamic history	**Rubric**		
Criteria:	**Exceeds**	**Meets**	**Does Not Meet**
Knowledge of historical origins of Islam	The student's oral presentation in WR204 includes an accurate description of the historical origins	The student's presentation in WR204 does not address this topic but the student can answer questions when prompted	The student is not able to accurately describe the historical origins of Islam, even when prompted
Awareness of major events in the history of Islam	Student scores at least 90% in timeline activity in WR204	Student scores at least 80% in timeline activity in WR204	Student scores below 80% in timeline activity in WR204
Familiarity with important texts from the Qur'an	The student's research paper in WR204 identifies all major texts.	The student's research paper in WR204 identifies some major texts	The student's research paper in WR204 misidentifies major texts

While it is sometimes easier for faculty to envision rubrics for the areas of intellectual formation, once outcomes and criteria have been identified in other areas of formation (as discussed earlier in this workbook), faculty can have fruitful conversation about "what would this look like," which can then be used to develop detailed rubrics. For example, taking another example from Chapter 1, the outcome of "demonstrates an ability to live a life of prayer centered on the Eucharist" could be developed into a rubric such as the following:

Outcome: Demonstrates an ability to live a life of prayer centered on the Eucharist	**Rubric**			
Criteria:	**Exceeds**	**Meets**	**Does Not Meet**	**No Evidence**
Actively participates in all scheduled seminary Eucharistic liturgies (daily and Sunday)	Student reports consistent, active, and eager participation	Student reports frequent participation with some unexcused absences	Student has numerous unexcused absences	Student did not fill out self-report
Participates in communal prayer (Liturgy of the Hours)	Student reports regular participation and notes this as increasingly significant in his prayer life	Student participates but also reports this as an area of ongoing growth	Student does not seem to understand the significance of this participation	Student did not fill out self-report
Schedules quiet time for meditation and devotional practices on a daily basis	Student consistently schedules quiet time without prompting	Student schedules time and follows through on most occasions	Student does not adequately attend to this or seem to understand its significance.	Student did not fill out self-report
Prepares homilies that reflect an ability to incorporate insights from the spiritual (liturgical) tradition	Sample sermon for W201 included insightful observations on the spiritual tradition	Sample sermon for W201 adequately addressed the spiritual tradition	Sample sermon for W201 did not address this topic, even though this was a course requirement	Student did not complete sample sermon for W201

Rubrics can also provide an opportunity for the formation faculty to include comments that are open-ended (qualitative data) along with the ability to quantify where the student stands in his formation process. Such a rubric, which assesses individual student achievement, can be easily aggregated into a more comprehensive document to demonstrate whether or not the entire degree program is achieving its purposes.

Just like all elements of a school's assessment plan, rubrics themselves should be regularly evaluated to ensure that they are helpful and effective.

Appendix 3: Sample Master of Divinity Degree Program Report

Annual Assessment Report, Academic Year 20xx-20xx
[based on work by Saint Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology in Wickliffe, Ohio

Artifacts Used for Program Assessment:

- Year-end evaluation rubric
- M.Div. exit interview survey
- Selected artifacts by faculty
- Integration Seminar rubric

Total faculty responses: N=116 ratings. A scale from 1 (low) to 4 (high) was used to rate faculty responses. What follows is a summary of juried faculty members assessing the program. They have used the above, anonymously reviewed (through the use of programmatic rubrics) artifacts to indicate whether or not seminarians in the MDiv program are meeting stated outcomes.

Christian Discipleship

Of the combined 116 responses, 72 percent rated this outcome as a 4 (highest); 26 percent rated it a 3. Overall, 98 percent of respondents agree that students are committed to *Christian Discipleship*. Evidence included the growing dedication of the Master of Divinity students to Christian service. Students exhibited dedication to the parish and parishioners, especially during their Internship Year. Aware of their strengths for ministerial service, the students exhibited a zeal for ministry both locally, in Field Education assignments, and globally, in their participation in the Mission Immersion experiences both in El Salvador and the Catholic Relief Services. Christian discipleship was evident, not only in [ministerial] service, but also in the students' greater commitment to prayer and growth in the spiritual life, appreciation for the Church's teaching and Tradition and commitment to celibate living.

In the Master of Divinity Integration Seminar, Christian Discipleship was evident in the students' commitment to prayer and their personal commitment to the spiritual life. The tradition and values of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours and a sense of mission and ministry were integrated into the students' lives.

Formation

Of the combined 116 responses, 64 percent rated the institutional outcome of *Formation* with a score of 4 (highest) and 34 percent rated it with a score of 3. Overall, the formation program is meeting the needs of students and assisting them to integrate the four dimensions of priestly formation. Evidence included the seriousness of commitment to the program of formation, growth in self-understanding and self-awareness, as well as a growing awareness of strengths and weaknesses in the process of formation. Respondents said the Master of Divinity program contributed to the development of a well-balanced experience of formation, particularly human and academic formation with pastoral involvement.

Some questions that were proposed centered on those men who seemed to lack self-motivation for the formation process. Some of the younger men, particularly those in the first two years of formation, need to be challenged in the area of human formation and helped to grow in self-awareness. The discussion also included ways to provide sustained support to the men dealing with issues of human formation.

The Integration Seminar focused on the seminarian taking responsibility for the integration of the four dimensions of formation. There was evidence of definite growth in the depth of self-knowledge, the awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses, and growth in his own priestly identity and lifestyle.

Theological Thinking

Of the combined 116 responses, the institutional outcome of *Theological Thinking* was rated at 4 by 57 percent of respondents. Forty- one percent rated it a 3. Obvious growth in this area was evident, and students were able to articulate and translate theological concepts at an understandable level. Respondents saw evidence that connections were being made between theology and ministry, between theology and philosophy, [and with] magisterial teaching. Some stated concerns centered on the need to stimulate those who do not value academics or who lack motivation for study, and ways to help students move from a pious theology to a “something deeper.”

Theological Thinking was evident in the Integration Seminar by the students’ ability to integrate and articulate the Faith and to interiorize the process. Students also noted that they needed to grow in their theological thinking.

Communication

Of the combined 116 responses, 97 percent of respondents rated the institutional outcome of *Communication* at 3 or above. Data seem to indicate that the Master of Divinity program assists the students to be effective communicators. This is particularly evident in field education placements. At the same time, beginning students need improvement in oral proclamation, public speaking and sharing ideas in class. Respondents also noted the efforts of students for whom English is a second language.

The Integration Seminar provided evidence that most of the students communicate clearly and well with a surprising depth. Those who did not go deeply enough into the questions were few.

Collaboration

Ninety-four percent rated the area of *Collaboration* with a score of 3 or higher. Among the influences on formation for collaborative ministry, respondents cited the seminary formation program, academic opportunities and field education placements. Interpersonal skills fostered collaborative leadership and a growing pastoral sensitivity. Some areas of improvement were evident in those who were reserved, or who were selective in their community involvement. These elements may be priorities in the Master of Divinity program going forward.

Integration Seminar students spoke of collaboration as a style of ministry that they were mastering as they gained experience. Some students indicated that, even though collaboration was not their strength, they were committed to using this skill in ministry.

Master of Divinity Program Assessment Summary: Evidence of Program Effectiveness

In summary, the Master of Divinity program assessment indicated a high degree of attainment of institutional and student learning outcomes. Students’ growth over the duration of the program was clearly evident. Areas for further consideration focused on ways that the M.Div. program could more effectively support younger men in the development of self- motivation for the formation process, particularly in the areas of human formation, overall academic effort, depth of theological thinking and internalization of collaboration as a style of leadership and ministry.