



Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education Project

Innovation Grants, Project Summary

Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California

Pacific School of Religion seeks to create an innovative, single path curriculum that provides greater flexibility in certification and better adapts to students' vocational and personal paths. This curriculum approach will build on the best practices of stackable credentials, be shaped in partnership with both historical and new denominational and social change partners, and strengthen cohort experience by simplifying degree structure.

1-2-3 Stackable Credentials

PSR's stackable credential curriculum would allow students to receive a credential at the end of each academic year. This 1-2-3 stackable credential curriculum would provide vocational value to each year of the education while providing students needed flexibility based on personal or financial circumstances.

The first year at PSR, students would complete a **Certificate of Spirituality and Social Change (CSSC)** or a Certificate in Sexuality and Religion (CSR), preparing them for the work of social changemaking in a wide range of socially innovative vocational paths—whether congregational leadership, social justice advocacy, community organizing, or the visual and performing arts.

During their second year, students would complete a **Masters of Art in Social Transformation**. This degree would further students theological and practical formation, while equipping them to think critically about socio-political dynamics and reflect constructively on the role played by religion and theological traditions in movements for social change. Students would deepen their leadership skills to be applied and practiced in settings related to their vocational goals, either in congregations or other organizations. Benefiting from the work PSR faculty have already done to reframe core courses such as preaching, education, and church history, course offering would prepare students to serve and engage in what David Tracy calls the three publics: church, academy, and society.

A third year would complete the final requirements for a **Masters of Divinity**, preparing students for ordained or lay ministry, related vocations, and further academic study. This final year would provide key pastoral leadership components and advanced field placement, and include critical integrative reflection of the whole course of study through our signature Senior Seminar. Drawing on PSR's extensive experience with adapting requirements for various denominational partners, student would have flexibility through their electives to make progress towards professional leadership in their respective traditions.

This 1-2-3 stackable curriculum would continue to provide excellent pastoral and leadership formation for students pursuing a variety of vocations, while at the same time better serving

students who need to take leaves of absence mid-way through their programs. These students would be able to reach a milestone at each stage of their education, increasing the value of the work completed and improving their ability to return to the education at a later time.

Shaped in Partnership

Religious communities and denominations are responding to the changing financial realities and leadership needs of congregations, and those who seek to serve them, by creating multiple paths to ordination. Responding to these dynamic changes has been the driving force behind PSR's redesigned course offerings and programs, and this innovative review of our curriculum takes the next step in the process. Credential flexibility would allow students to determine the level of theological education they need based on their denominational requirements and/or vocational goals.

This curriculum review will be conducted in close conversation with our denominational and social change partners to ensure we are reflecting the skills and competencies they believe are crucial for leadership in their communities. Given the current and projected demographic shifts shaping our country, we will broaden those conversation partnerships particularly in communities of color and emerging immigrant communities. A critical element of the curriculum review that would need to be tested with partners and prospective students is the integration of people pursuing different vocational paths into a single initial certificate.

Strengthen Cohort Experience by Simplifying Degree Structure

Over the last two decades, PSR has greatly diversified course offerings and certificates in an effort to provide individualized educational options to our students. We have also changed class schedules to provide greater flexibility to a growing number of commuter and part-time students. These expanded options in program and residency have been valuable, but they have also led to the unintended consequence of a diminished sense of cohesion—and the educational benefits that shared experience affords—for a number of our students. We have responded to these change by experimenting with a number of cohort models as part of either specific programs (most notably the Changemaker Fellowship) or denominational and other affinity groups. The envisioned single path curriculum would strengthen the collective experience of students, particularly during the first year when the majority of students would share a set of core courses. Students who plan to become pastors will benefit from greater engagement with those who see their work developing beyond the church. Similarly, students who by vocation or profession do not see themselves involved in traditional religious communities, will gain both networks and insight about the critical role of religious communities in the work of social change. The review of the curriculum will need to be particularly attentive to balancing the value of shared coursework experiences for all students with the specific professional/vocational needs of students.