Introduction
Ashland Theological Seminary used its grant money to support a one day faculty retreat for full-time faculty and senior administrators in September 2011. Dr. Terry Muck from Asbury Theological Seminary served as the subject matter expert and main presenter. His lectures revolved around three themes: the increasing multi-faith world, challenging attitudes, and pedagogical issues. Afterward, he moderated a discussion on next steps. The retreat included break-out sessions for faculty reflection. At the end of the moderated discussion, the faculty charged the Global Christianity Committee to review the retreat information, faculty input, and anticipated ATS standards and report back to faculty with recommendations.

In preparation for the retreat, the seminary purchased copies of Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-first Century for full-time faculty and senior administrators. Muck provided the faculty with a reading guide. The Global Christianity Committee distributed a detailed outline of the book that connected the content to ongoing faculty discussions related to globalization and generic missional competencies. The outline included the following themes: reaching out to all; focusing on the questions and concerns of the local community; holding ideas with conviction, acting decisively on those ideas, and not letting those ideas be divisive; honoring the principle of religious choice; allowing the context to determine the form of witnessing; striving for consistency between methods and goal; communicating the gospel in many forms; not disparaging others in order to champion your own faith; not disparaging your own faith in order to respect others; loving those with whom you

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disagree; and practicing mission as the joint project of the church. In a follow-up report, the outline was discussed at the November 2011 faculty meeting.

**Reflection on Retreat**

In retrospect, the retreat moved the seminary toward the ultimate goal of equipping students to minister effectively in the multi-faith context by giving the faculty an intentional forum to explore the topic, discern the need, and discuss curricular implications. Before the retreat, the faculty had not discussed this topic. Moreover, the last curriculum review did not address the theme. It is not reflected in current curriculum mapping.

Additionally, the evaluations spoke very highly of the breakout sessions. Originally, the event organizers planned to group the faculty by department so departments could discuss the content from the perspective of their disciplines before they engaged the larger group in conversations. That did not happen because a department lacked sufficient representation. Consequently, faculty sat wherever they wanted and joined in small group conversations with the people at their tables. However, the faculty agreed that departments needed to have follow-on conversations in which they contemplated discipline specific reflection on the larger issues before the seminary implemented a proposal.

Two factors mitigated the usefulness of the retreat. First, the seminary needed to complete the retreat before the beginning of classes in order to allow sufficient time for follow-on conversations. However, it did not want to fold the retreat into the annual faculty retreat. As a result, faculty from the Cleveland and Detroit campuses did not participate. In fact, a full one-third of the eligible faculty did not attend. Since the faculty from those metropolitan campuses bring contextual, theological, and racial diversity to the seminary, their absence greatly diminished the break-out sessions and the concluding conversation on next steps.

Second, Ashland Theological Seminary self-identifies as an Evangelical seminary that is ecumenical in its composition. Theological diversity exists in the faculty, student body, and constituent denominations. The retreat skirted the issue of theological diversity because it focused on the conceptualization of the multi-faith context and pedagogical issues. However, a curriculum that seeks to prepare a theologically diverse student
body for effective ministry must process theological issues in order to elucidate practical outcomes.\(^2\)

Since denominational affiliations, theological commitments, and personal experiences determine how professors conceptualize effective ministry outcomes, the lack of theological conversations remains an unspoken issue. Some would prioritize hospitality, inter-faith dialogue, community building, and a liberationist praxis. Others would prioritize church planting, faith-sharing, and apologetics. Ultimately, in the evangelical tradition, curricular outcomes have to prepare students to minister in accordance with both sets of priorities because the gospel witnesses to holistic engagement. That is, the Great Commandment and the Great Commission complement each other. Furthermore, local churches need pastoral leaders that do not bifurcate the two. Even when a particular tradition emphasizes one priority over the other, the pastors still need to equip the congregations to do holistic engagement.

**Working toward a Proposal**

After reflecting on the faculty charge and the theological complexities, the Global Christianity Committee determined to move the faculty conversation forward by building on an established foundation. As such, it folded the multi-faith conversation into its ongoing efforts to operationalize the seminary’s *Globalization Statement* that was approved in 2009. According to the revised statement,

> Globalization at Ashland Theological Seminary is a shared vision of the universal reign of God that brings our perceptions, attitudes, and actions in harmony with God’s plans to advance the kingdom through the evangelization of all people groups and the implementation of activities that actualize shalom. This plan, realized in Jesus Christ and his Lordship over all creation, leads us to acknowledge the interdependence of all persons and all aspects of life, and to embrace our neighbor, near or far, as the counterpart and partner without whom we are incomplete. As an expression of its institutional mission, ATS encourages hospitality, witnessing, and mutual exchange between those in different social and geographical locations, thereby contributing to God’s purpose of creating a faithful people composed of men and women from every language, nation, tribe, and people.

\(^2\) Local churches and denominations remain the ultimate arbitrators of effective ministry. As such, this conversation needs to include those constituencies.
In its November 2011 meeting, the Global Christianity Committee asked this author to list four assessable outcomes that connected the multi-faith conversation to the *Globalization Statement*. In response, this author presented an outline for a proposal that brought the desired integration. However, the committee felt uncomfortable with some of the theological implications contained within the proposal. Members sensed that the proposal pushed the seminary in the direction of universalism and theological relativism. Neither is compatible with the seminary’s evangelical heritage. They requested that this author revise the proposal in light of the committee conversation. This push-back was anticipated and well received. In 2010, the committee had requested that the faculty modify the seminary’s *Globalization Statement* so that it included references to the witnessing and the evangelistic mandate for a similar set of reasons.

In the next meeting of the committee, a new proposal was reviewed, modified, and approved after extensive conversations. The new proposal reaches beyond the *Globalization Statement* by acknowledging the seminary’s vision and mission statements. Additionally, it borrows directly from Muck’s lectures and includes material from *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-first Century*. Furthermore, the proposal includes recommendations for the institution, the curriculum, and the faculty in order to envision an integrated approach that equips students to minister effectively in the multi-faith context. It concludes with an implementation statement.

**The Proposal**

In accordance with emerging emphases in The Association of Theological Schools and Ashland Seminary’s commitment to integrate theological education with Christ-centered transformation as it equips men and women for ministry in the church and the world, the Global Christianity Committee submits the following **integrated proposal to equip M.Div. Students to minister effectively in a multi-faith context**:

**The Institution**

1. Equip faculty to model an approach to other faiths that does not disparage or disrespect without diminishing the apostolic calling of the church, impinging on academic freedom, or sanitizing the faith commitments of individuals or the faith traditions to which they belong.

2. Facilitate events on the Ashland Theological Seminary campuses that expose the seminary community to non-Christian faith traditions. Such events should build awareness and allow for community dialog. For example, invite a rabbi to talk about
the Holocaust on Yom Hashoah or a Mormon to explain her faith if a member of the LDS church runs for president.

3. Take advantage of the multi-faith context at Ashland University by connecting faculty and students with Ashland University events and programs that mesh with seminary goals related to this topic.

4. Build awareness of the multi-faith context by exposing students to non-Christian faith traditions through course offerings, field study, class assignments, and/or study abroad. Related to this, each M.Div. student will complete one of the following:

   a. Do a field internship tutoring non-Christian international students, engaging them in conversational English, or teaching English as a second language.

   b. Take a study abroad class like the Global Church.

   c. Take the World Religions class, the Introduction to Islam class, Global Ethics, or the New Religious Movement class. Each class shall require some engagement with practitioners of non-Christian faiths in order to qualify for this assignment.

   d. Write your own option. Students may substitute an equivalent learning experience provided they get prior approval from the Director of Field Education.

   e. Students who have already had extensive contact with practitioners of other faiths may receive credit for this requirement if the Director of Field Study approves. When seeking approval, they will offer substantive reflection on the multi-faith context.

5. All graduating M.Div. students will write a two to three page essay that reflects on their multi-faith learning experience, their working theology of world religions, and how these combine to inform their engagement with practitioners of other faiths. This will be included as an artifact in their graduating portfolios. The Director of Field Education may adjust this requirement to bring it in line with other material in the student’s portfolio.
The Faculty
6. Teach students to engage in pastoral and missional practices that value the practitioners of other faiths as people of sacred worth who should not be exploited, manipulated, or coerced.

7. Sensitize students to issues of religious freedom and religious persecution so they can avoid pejorative attitudes, stereotypes, and actions that diminish practitioners of other faiths and other Christian traditions.

8. Provide the faculty with periodic training on the multi-faith context during faculty meetings, colloquiums, and/or faculty retreats. This could take the form of devotionals, reflections on non-Christian holiday observances, the Global Christianity Committee report, study leave reports, or formal presentations.

9. Encourage faculty to seek out cross-cultural experiences that place them in contact with practitioners of other faiths.
   a. Promote study leaves in a Christian minority location. This could include a research based study leave or one that requires the professor to teach in an international seminary.
   b. Encourage faculty to lead a segment of the Global Church course to an overseas location.
   c. Support faculty involvement with ecumenical associations.

10. Invite international students to reflect on the multi-faith contexts from which they come when appropriate.

Implementation
The Director of Field Education may adjust and modify this proposal as necessary while implementing it. The Global Christianity Committee will work with the faculty and the Director of Field Education in the implementation of the proposal.

Faculty Reception of Proposal
Before going to the faculty, the proposal was vetted by the Academic Dean and the Academic Affairs Committee. With their approval, the proposal was briefed to the faculty in February 2012. Before being considered, the Global Christianity Committee sent the proposal to the faculty with commentary. After a prolonged conversation, the faculty approved the proposal “in principle.” However, due to curricular implications and concerns about field education, it was referred to the Educational Planning
Committee. That committee is composed of the Academic Dean and the department chairs. As of the end of the 2012 academic year, the Educational Planning Committee had not considered the proposal.

In the March faculty meeting, the Faculty Development Committee asked the Global Christianity Committee to present an aspect of the proposal during the faculty development time. The committee focused on sensitizing faculty to attitudes and rhetoric that promote a type of stereotyping that lays a foundation for intolerance and persecution. As an example, it spoke about the global phenomenon of Christian persecution since this was one of the committee’s themes for the year. Some faculty members were unaware of the global persecution of Christians who live as powerless religious minorities. Others had minimized reports of persecution because they tended to associate global Christianity with colonialism and a legacy of injustice. One professor voiced concern because she felt that the example worked against the stated goal since it engendered stereotyping. The presentation produced a great conversation that increased awareness of indigenous churches. Also, it helped to focus the faculties on numbers 6, 7, and 8 of the above proposal.

During another faculty development time, a professor did an excellent summary of the systemic persecution of Native American populations by the dominant culture and the need for indigenous forms of Native American Christianity. His report showed how American Christianity was complicit in the exploitation and destruction of native peoples. Issues of manifest destiny and the “New Israel” were explored. His report encouraged faculty to see the faith through the eyes of a minority people who are often victimized by the majority. Often faculty are unaware of how their majority perspective causes them to skew their teaching.

Concluding Thoughts
The proposal that came out of the Global Christianity Committee was hindered because it lacked broad faculty input. The committee is composed of students and faculty. However, of the five faculty members on the committee, all but one came from the Practical Theology Department. In theory, each department should have representation on each committee. Considering this, the Global Christianity Committee should have solicited direct input from the departments as it moved forward or requested that a member of each department be assigned to the committee for the purposes of this project. The committee did include the director of the metropolitan campuses. However, he did not solicit input from the faculty and students at the other campuses.
before he gave his feedback. Lack of direct input from the metropolitan campuses hindered the overall process.

It would have been easier to push a less complicated proposal. In particular, the curriculum section became a sticking point. In retrospect, the committee should have left out the curriculum and implementation sections until the faculty had a chance to discuss the other parts of the proposal. Once the committee reached generalized agreement on those parts, it could have moved toward the more complicated process of institutional integration.

Since the faculty referred the proposal to the Education Planning Committee, the Global Christianity Committee is no longer responsible for its progress. Additionally, the seminary has a new Academic Dean and a new Director of Field Education. Still, seminaries are quick to respond to curriculum standards that are promulgated by The Association of Theological Schools. I am optimistic that the faculty will re-engage this conversation and the proposal at an appropriate time. Regardless, a groundwork has been laid.