DEVELOPING A CULTURAL COMPETENCY MODULE (CCM) 
TO FACILITATE CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY AND 
PROMOTE PASTORAL PRACTICES 
IN A MULTI FAITH SOCIETY

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Overview
North Park Theological Seminary is committed to educating our students to lead biblically, spiritually, and culturally. As a denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Church is in the midst of a major cultural transition wherein we are recognizing that minimizing differences in “others” is not an act of Christian hospitality. In order to engage with the multifaith society in which we live and are called to serve today there is an urgent need for ongoing development of our pastoral leadership in the area of intercultural competency beginning at the seminary level. This starts with self-awareness. Towards this end, NPTS’ Field Education Department and the Center for World Christian Studies (CWCS) proposed the development of a Cultural Competency Module (CCM) for all graduating NPTS students as a capstone to their studies as they transition into ministry. This was based on the model of the Theological Reflection Module (TRM) required of students returning from internships. We held a test run CCM in the spring of 2011 but officially started the CCM in the fall of 2011 after receiving the CHAPP grant.

A key component to the CCM is to continue to build self-awareness of one’s personal development towards cultures other than one’s own. In order to assess this NPTS has begun using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) http://www.idiinventory.com/. The IDI was first required for all incoming students this fall. We plan to have students re-take the IDI during their final semester as part of the CCM when they will again debrief the results and then write a life syllabus with goals for continued growth. The CHAPP grant helped NPTS kick start the use of the IDI for in-coming students by funding the training of two individuals who are now part of a multi-ethnic team of four qualified assessors available for personal debriefings of the IDI and the new accompanying Individual Development Plans which outline steps to take to go farther. In addition to training new assessors, funds from CHAPP
also covered the cost of assessment from the initial group who made up our first trial run of the Cultural Competency Module. Other funding was also used to complete the costs of these events.

**What we learned**

1. **Re-tooling the Tool.** NPTS, in conjunction with the denomination’s Department of World Mission (DWM), has been using the IDI to assess levels of cultural competency for ministry for four years. It is not a faith-based tool but it is one that NPTS and DWM have been able to apply towards ministry settings better than other tools we have tested. There are many positive aspects of the IDI however, after listening to feedback over the last four years, we have found that the categorical language used in the IDI is, for the most part, viewed as negative. This naturally heightens the recipient’s resistance to identify with the results of the tool and stifles the process and desire for further growth. With input from members of the initial group NPTS has translated the categories of the IDI into more user-friendly language which we are now promoting. Our revised language for the IDI is attached as Appendix II.

2. **Cultural Competency Modules.** The CCM comes at the end of studies. As of this writing NPTS has now run three CCMs of various sizes and groupings. We have learned several things from these experiences.

CCMs best serve their purpose when they take place at the end of the students’ programs. At this point it is part of our curriculum and students will process through CCMs sometime during their last semesters. They will also retake the IDI and debrief their results with an assessor.

At the beginning of their programs incoming students will take the Vocational Excellence class and take their initial IDI as part of it. One thing that we learned is that having the Vocational Excellence class midway through the student’s first semester was too early. Students at that point have not yet gained their equilibrium as they navigate the steep learning curve of entry into seminary. We have moved the timing of the Vocational Excellence course to the break between the first and second semester.

It is difficult to avoid but often the fact of fast-paced seminary education means that too much material is presented too quickly to allow for it to be internalized or
even understood sometimes. Personal IDI debriefs were actually appreciated by the students early on since it gave a sense of pacing themselves. No one was allowed to dominate another. Processing could happen at an individual pace.

3. **Set and follow ground rules.** Again, using the model of the Theological Reflection Models that follow internships the CCM works best when its purpose is mutually understood and a safe place is provided for discussion of sometimes difficult subjects. A willingness to respectfully listen to one another is modeling, and hopefully instilling, a pattern of dialog that will transfer into ministry in the multifaith world in which we live. For some the CCM requires saying less, for others more. The best CCMS come from trained leadership who have experienced CCMs before and are able to keep them on track. Not every faculty or staff member is able to lead a CCM. Training to understand the outcome is crucial.

**Insights**

1. Students who have participated in them have appreciated the CCMs. The CCM is an important opportunity to voice concerns and face the future better prepared to engage with difference in hospitable ways, rather through defensiveness, romanticizing or minimizing. Students are able to describe, evaluate and plan in meaningful ways addressing controversial interfaith and intercultural issues not normally addressed in Christian ministry.

2. Younger students do better at the CCM. Older students feel that they have been through these things before, tend to be more resistant to change in the future. For older students it feels like simply going through another hoop to get the degree. Again, setting and following some common ground rules is important here so that a genuine dialog can take place.

**Recommendations**

1. As far as it is possible, try to integrate the group of students participating in each CCM even if it means waiting until the next semester. This will provide the opportunity for a more enriching and inclusive perspective of age, race, gender, class, and Christian tradition.

2. Continue to draw from the strengths of the denomination’s Departments of World Mission and Ordered Ministry. The denomination’s Department of Christian Formation should also be invited to be part of this experience. Continue to
integrate the seminary’s own department of Field Education and Center for World Christian Studies. There are other faculty and staff who could be included at various points to make the CCM interdisciplinary and more holistic in focus.

3. Integrate the use of the IDI with other subjects being taught at the Vocational Excellence course which is required at the beginning of each student’s academic career. This will help avoid unnecessary repetition or cross-speaking of topics.

4. Keep the groups small. Try to limit to no more than six or seven participants in each group so that the experience is both meaningful and efficient. Listening to six other people is hard work! More facilitators will be required in the future when more CCMs are required at the end of each semester.

5. We will need to provide at least one CCM every semester and often several once the program is regularly integrated into the process. If we need to train additional IDI assessors, NPTS will need to find new funding to do so.

Sustaining the Progress
North Park Seminary’s department of Field Education will continue to organize CCMS on an on-going basis. At present this is in addition to regular faculty and staff work load. As the need for more CCMs expands it will be important to consider how they should or should not be incorporated into the calculation of faculty loads. The Field Education department will evaluate the progress and continue to fine tune CCMs.

Another part of sustaining the progress comes through Sankofa reunions which take place at Covenant Pastors’ Midwinter Conferences. Sankofa is a Swahili word that means to look back in order to move forward. This has developed into an experiential journey designed by the Evangelical Covenant Church’s department of Compassion, Mercy and Justice that partners blacks with non-blacks on a bus ride from Chicago to Memphis tracing many of the major locations and histories of the civil rights movement. Partners are asked to share personally and interact openly. For many, this is a first step towards Christian hospitality — intentionally engaging outside of one’s own cultural comfort zone. It is hoped that this experience will bring lasting change into the lives and practices of our denomination’s leaders and impact the Covenant as a whole.
In addition to the CCM, North Park Theological Seminary continues to offer courses in the Spiritual Formation field such as “From Hostility to Hospitality” and in the Ministry field such as “Religions and Cultures” that integrate issues of intentional engagement through Christian hospitality with those of other faiths or of no faith. These are offered regularly and will continue to be part of NPTS course offerings. For those in the MDiv program the requirement of CPE still stands. During CPE students are forced to practice hospitality to others outside of their own faith tradition. Using the IDI gives language and perspective on the process. The addition of the CCM augments the development of students’ abilities to verbalize and internalize motivation for Christian hospitality even further as expressed through a variety of pastoral practices both individually and corporately. We believe this will eventually impact both individual churches and the corporate culture of the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination in our effort to become more reflective of kingdom values that welcome all.