Attending to the Collective Vocation

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Finding affinity with a collective vocation

In the 1996–1997 academic year I was involved with a colleague, Ken Badley, in a qualitative study of long-term vocational vitality of faculty in theological schools in Canada (Roman Catholic, Evangelical, and Mainline Protestant). The project sought to identify the factors that would determine, or at least foster, long-term vocational vitality. To this end, Badley and I interviewed faculty who in their senior years were generally viewed to be highly engaged and alive in their teaching and research. We asked them questions designed to determine if there was any consistent pattern to the choices they made in their life and work in mid-career. From this we hoped to identify the elements in the life and work of theological teachers who would likely thrive in their vocation.

The results confirmed what we suspected: those who were alive and vital in their senior years were individuals with a love of teaching, a love of students, and a well-developed capacity to adapt their teaching to the changing character and needs of their students. However, our research also highlighted elements that we had not anticipated. A theme that came up again and again in the interviews was the relationship between individual theological teachers and the institutions where they had taught or were teaching. In this regard, two things stood out to us.

In some cases the professors we interviewed had been mistreated, sometimes in ways that were astonishing, by the schools where they taught, either by their colleagues acting in concert, or by the administration. Some were forced to resign and leave to seek a position elsewhere. What was striking in each of these interviews was the lack of resentment. They had each moved on in their careers with passion, commitment, and joy without allowing their spirits to be derailed by the setback.

We were also impressed with the degree to which these individuals found themselves, by the time they reached their senior years (which we defined as 55 and older), in institutions where they could enjoy a high degree of congruency between their own vision and values and those of the institution where they were teaching. They were at home vocationally.

Our conclusions have been reinforced by the work of the Auburn Center, particularly Barbara G. Wheeler’s findings in her study on the cultivation of effective theological school faculties. She stresses that “the most effective forms
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of faculty cultivation are those that are deeply and permanently enmeshed in the policies and everyday practices of the schools.”¹ And further, that “The most important steps that a school can take to cultivate its new faculty are those that promote their integration into the institution’s culture.”² It only follows, then, that faculty “should be chosen with the greatest care for their fit with the purpose and mission of the school.”³ In other words, integration with the culture, mission, ethos, and values of the school is a profoundly significant indicator of likely success as a faculty member.

Both of these studies highlight the obvious reality that schools are different. There is no such thing as a generic theological school. And I would suggest that the most helpful way to think of these fundamental differences is through the lens of *vocation*. Just as it is possible to speak of the vocation of the theological teacher, one of the most helpful ways to think about theological schools is to consider the matter of a communal or corporate vocation. The assumption behind such a suggestion is that, from a theological perspective, we cannot speak of the individual vocation except in the context of the community. All vocations are fulfilled in solidarity with others; each person fulfills an individual vocation in partnership with another. In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul uses the image of the body to capture the principle that we do our work and fulfill our vocations with a high degree of mutual interdependence. Our individual potential is achieved in collaboration and partnership with others, whether it is our potential of personal transformation or the potential of making a difference in the world. Therefore it follows that we must determine that we will do our work not merely as individuals with particular and unique commitments, but also as a collective, as a community of scholars who in our work with administrators and trustees embrace and actually serve something that is bigger and more all encompassing than the sum of our individual vocations. Indeed I would go so far as to say that we will only be effective in the fulfillment of our individual vocations if we do so in the light of and in a manner that is congruent with the collective vocation.

I would propose that this will, at the very least, require three commitments: (1) that we discern and do our work in a manner that is congruent with the distinctive vocation of the school where we teach; (2) that we develop the organizational competencies to work with others toward a common goal, a capacity that at heart is the ability to work within a system of shared governance or power; and, (3) that we sustain a healthy distinction between our individual vocations and that of the school in which we serve.

**Discerning a school’s vocation**

We will thrive in our institutional context if we discern the distinctive vocation of the collective of which we are a part—the communal or institutional vocation of the school where we teach. When I joined the faculty of Regent College in the summer of 1998 as dean and associate professor of spiritual theology, I was confronted once more with discerning the unique vocation of a theological school.
I had been the dean and taught at three previous schools: the Alliance Biblical Seminary in Manila, Philippines, and both the Canadian Bible College and the Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina, Saskatchewan. One was an undergraduate college; the other two were denominational seminaries. When I arrived in Vancouver, I came with a growing conviction that vocation is something that applies not merely to individuals but also to the schools in which we fulfill our vocations as theological teachers. I accepted the invitation to Regent College largely because I observed or at least had a preliminary sense that my own values and vision were congruent with those of the school; I suspected that I had found a place in which I could be faithful to my own vocation while contributing enthusiastically to a collective vocation. But Wheeler’s conclusions in the Auburn Series were a reminder that nothing could be taken for granted. Further, I was convinced that ultimately the collective vocation is discerned from within. When joining a theological faculty, one accepts an appointment on the basis of an appreciation of the school’s history and mission statement and perhaps some explicit institutional values. But one only really discerns vocation from within the faculty and within the school. And this of necessity was a central priority to my first year in the role for my own sake, but also for the sake of those I would serve as dean.

The mission statement is an obvious point of departure. But discerning the vocation of a school is much more than merely reading the mission statement, which probably only represents a focus or direction. The distinctive vocation of a theological school is by its very nature something far more complex, nuanced, and more pervasive than a mission statement can express, for it cannot be comprehended except in the context of the institutional and educational culture, which includes what kind of scholarship is valued and how—what role or value is given to teaching and to research. It incorporates the patterns of community life outside of the formal academic agenda, including decision-making processes and formal and informal governance procedures. It includes “the way things are done here,” as well as those underlying dreams and longings within the community that represent both individual and collective hopes and aspirations. Discerning the vocation and character of a school includes appreciating the school’s history and its patterns of institutional life and decision making, which means that we recognize and affirm both distinctive strengths and limitations, which in some cases are probably institutional pathologies or at the least negative propensities. Discerning the culture and vocation of the school also means appreciating the way that the mission of the school is lived out in its spaces, particularly those places where people gather for worship, learning, conversation, or business. In other words, vocation is lived out in a set of practices, patterns of behavior, and attitudes.

But most of all, the vocation of the theological school is found in the unique interplay of two realities: the founding charisma of the school and how that founding vision is to be adapted and lived out in the current context. It requires that the collective understand its present position and possibilities, and how the original founding vision or charisma will find expression today. Invariably in this debate there will be some who would just as soon shed the original founding vision or charisma. There are many schools, for example,
that have concluded that their original purpose is not relevant and that have intentionally distanced themselves from that heritage (for example: schools that have distanced themselves from their original church or religious foundations). On the other hand, there are just as many whose posture is one of resisting change, contending that faithfulness to the original vision requires no adaptation or adjustment to contemporary realities. The end of the matter invariably is one in which the collective is able, doubtless with many internal tensions, to come to clarity about the meaning of the original vision and its implications for the life of the theological school today.

What makes this a unique challenge is that, just as an individual’s vocation evolves over time, so does an institution’s vocation. Even a relatively young school like Regent College, founded in the late 1960s, will live out its vocation differently in the different chapters of the school’s history. Further, many times we find ourselves in institutions in transition where the character or focus of a vocation may well be in flux.

The vocation of Regent College

In some cases, discerning the vocation of a school is a matter of institutional survival. In a recent visit to an Anglo-Catholic episcopal school, I was impressed with both board members and faculty who recognized that in keeping to the original founding vision they were clinging to an impossible ideal, one that had died decades ago, and that their only possibility of thriving (let alone surviving) was to determine how the distinctive Anglo-Catholic vision and ideal would find unique and dynamic expression today. They recognized that it would necessarily mean letting go of some cherished structures and patterns of life and embracing with innovation and creativity some new possibilities. But this takes special discernment: the capacity to determine what lies at the heart of the original vision or charisma and how that founding dynamic can animate the current collective vision and vocation, so that any necessary changes do not so alter the contours of the school that it no longer is faithful to its vocation, so that pragmatic concerns do not leave it disconnected from its defining calling.

In the case of Regent College, the original founding vision was to provide graduate theological education for the laity. The school was established in 1968 by leaders within the Plymouth Brethren, who out of their unease with clergy and all things associated with a professionalization of the ministry sought to establish a school for the “whole people of God.” Consequently, Regent initiated something new for North America: postbaccalaureate academic programs in theology designed for the laity. And while Regent has initiated other programs since then, including the Master of Divinity designed for ministerial formation, this original vision for graduate theological education for people in every walk of life and work continues to be the defining purpose of the college.

However, the original vision also included a particular understanding of scholarship and learning evidenced most fully, perhaps, in the resolve that piety and learning were to be integrated, and that theological education was to be informed by interdisciplinary studies. That original vision or charisma has evolved in a number of ways, and there are many other distinctive features
of the Regent educational philosophy. But my read of this school’s charisma is that these two elements lie at its heart: (1) the focus on the laity; and (2) the character of scholarship (notably the fact that piety and scholarship are integrally related, and that theological learning is informed by interdisciplinary studies). Whatever Regent College becomes and whatever form or shape it takes in its academic programs, its vocation as a theological school is necessarily defined by these two elements.

First, Regent College will only be faithful to our original defining vision if we sustain a resolve and capacity to provide theological education for the whole people of God—theological education for women and men whose vocations will take them into the world and the church. It will likely always be the case (and probably should be the case) that the majority of the students at Regent are those who enroll in degree programs that are not linked to professional religious leadership: they study theology at Regent with a view to being bankers, lawyers, carpenters, school teachers, artists, and politicians. They take their undergraduate and perhaps some graduate studies elsewhere that train them professionally; but at Regent College they study theology with a view to integrate their faith with their God-given vocations. In other words, at the heart of the Regent College vision for theological education is this commitment to provide graduate theological education not for professional religious leadership, but for the empowerment of all of God’s people as they seek to serve Christ in the world.

However, Regent College also has a Master of Divinity (MDiv) program, and many come to Regent with the anticipation that they will from here seek ordination and become, in effect, professional religious leaders within congregations. Given the defining vision of the college, it is no surprise that there has been ambivalence about the program throughout the twenty years that it has been offered. However, there is no inherent reason why Regent should not have a strong MDiv program, with the imperative proviso that it be defined in the light of the college’s original vision and charisma: the formation, equipping, and empowerment of the laity. This will have many potential implications, but at the very least we can hope that a student who graduates with an MDiv appreciates that as she enters into the ministry, she does so as one who has come to appreciate that in all of her theological studies she has learned side by side with lay persons, so that while in ministry she is never the only “learned” one, but rather one who is learning with her people. Second, I would also deeply hope that while being trained and equipped for the ministry a graduate of Regent who assumes a pastorate knows that he is never taking over a role in which he will “run the church” but rather one in which he is entering into a partnership with lay leaders in his congregation, leaders who will share the ministry with him and lead with him.

Further, just as Regent has always had a commitment to “the whole people of God,” the defining charisma of the college has also included a distinctive understanding of scholarship and learning. Regent College is a school with a strong academic reputation, with a remarkable number of students who have gone on to postgraduate studies. But Regent has never allowed its notion of scholarship and learning to be defined by or limited by the disciplinary guilds.
It has through its history appointed full professors in one discipline whose actual doctoral training was in a completely different discipline rather than a cognate one (i.e., Spiritual Theology and Geography); it has appointed full professors whose expertise lay as much in the quality of their devotional writing and the depth of their piety as in their academic credentials. It has fostered an environment in which scholarship for students includes academic assignments that would seem anything but “academic,” including aesthetic projects, or journal-writing or devotional reflections, all of which pushed the boundaries in such a way that one could easily wonder if academic integrity was jeopardized. But while there is no doubt that the boundary was indeed crossed at times, and scholarship was compromised by this kind of flexibility, it has been an inherent part of Regent’s identity to push these boundaries. And it would be a fair observation to say that despite this, the school has never lost credibility as a venue for serious theological scholarship. Just the opposite: Regent is looked to as a school where piety and scholarship are (finally) integrated, and where learning is never bound by the strictures of the academic or disciplinary guilds.

In the case of the first element of the defining vision, there is always a threat on the one hand that the college would exclude those who wish to train for religious leadership in the church (at times they have felt like second-class students here), and the threat on the other hand that the college would succumb to the professionalization of the ministry and fall prey to clericalism. With respect to the second vision, we will always struggle with compromised scholarship on the one hand, or on the other hand the threat of overreacting and falling prey to a narrow definition of scholarship. These tensions will likely never go away; they are, somehow, inherent in the vocation of the college. That is, if my reading of the college is right, whatever shape or form or expression the school takes, it will only be faithful to its vocation if it allows its original defining vision to continue to shape the heart and center of its character and purpose.

This is offered as one example, and only as one person’s reading of that example (and I am very conscious that as a relative newcomer to the college, I am still listening and learning and seeking to discern what it will take for Regent to fulfill its vocation), but nevertheless as an example of the attempt to discern the school’s vocation by attending to both the original founding vision and its contemporary potential. It is also an attempt to address the reality that a theological school does not need to be all things to all people; rather, it is “called” to fulfill a particular agenda, which at root is something that is viewed as a “vocation”: a calling and purpose that ultimately derive from God. Discerning vocation also means that we affirm and accept that there will be many potential faculty members who would not thrive at Regent College; they would not find a vocational “fit” if they came.

The challenge of shared governance

The vocation of the theological teacher is necessarily fulfilled within the context of a collective vocation, the calling of the theological school where one teaches. Ideally, of course, we would find ourselves in schools where there is a
high degree of congruence between our individual vocations and the collective vocation. Working in tandem with a collective vocation is a matter not only of discerning that vocation, together; it also requires that we find a way to fulfill the vocation. And increasingly it is apparent to those in theological education that the context most conducive to this end is one in which we work with a model of shared governance. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) actually identifies this as an essential standard for a good theological school, specifying that “Shared governance follows from the collegial nature of theological education.” This follows from the fundamental assumption behind the ATS [Commission] standard on authority and governance that “Institutional stewardship is the responsibility of all, not just the governing board.”

The matter of shared governance is made all that more complex because of the changing character of theological education and the inevitable need for an effective response to these changes. Theological schools are facing a bewildering number of environmental changes, changes that are in many ways threats to the potential of theological schools, threats that for some schools may place in question their viability, especially if they are dependent on tuition income. Higher education is changing in a manner that is fundamental and permanent; and, further, change itself has become a permanent feature of the landscape of theological schools. Student demographics are changing with an ever-increasing number of part-time students. All theological schools are attempting to make sense of information technology and respond to the demands and the opportunities of these new technologies in ways that are congruent with their philosophy of education. Denominational schools are facing the reality of declining denominational loyalty and the demand that the locus of biblical and theological scholarship shift from the academy to the church. And through and in the midst of all of this, those of us in theological schools—whether we serve on the faculty, the administration, or the trustees—will find that our schools will not thrive, let alone survive, unless we develop the capacity to respond with innovation and courage to these changes. We will not thrive in the midst of the changes unless we come to see that, while many of these changes are threats to the viability and credibility of theological education, they are also opportunities for renewal within our schools.

William A. Barry has made the observation that:

A burning question for our day . . . is how to make those institutions [in which we work and worship] and structures more attuned to God’s will. . . . There is, perhaps, no greater challenge to religion today than to foster the conditions that make communal discernment possible.6

While there are many factors that would foster effective communal discernment, our capacity to discern and respond well to the changing environment in which we work will be in direct proportion to (1) clarity about our collective vocation and (2) the capacity to work with a model of shared governance. Without the first, we will always be driven by the “market” and the pragmatics of mere survival—legitimate to a point, but hardly the basis for a
collective identity and purpose. The commodification of theological education threatens some of the most fundamental values of good theological learning. And the only way we will be able to respond effectively to the changing character of the environment of our work is if we have a clear sense of the vocation of the theological teacher—its character and essential practices—and if we have a clear sense of the distinctive vocation of the theological school. We need to think vocationally and ask the question: What is the inherent and essential calling of this school at this time and place in response to these circumstances and in the light of our essential defining charisma or vision?

But without the second, shared governance, even if we agree on our vocation, we will lack a means by which we can fulfill that vocation together. In other words, even if we were able to come to clarity about our “vocation,” we would be incapable of implementing it. Without a model of shared governance, we will lose our capacity to draw on the wisdom of many and we will alienate key constituencies as we respond to the inevitable changes. A model of shared governance empowers a school to draw on the wisdom and expertise of all while also, as much as possible, assuring a high degree of ownership of the actions that are taken to respond to these changes. We must respond proactively to the changes in our environment; without an empowering model of shared governance we will either be left to a hierarchical model wherein those “at the top” make the decisions, or we will find ourselves in a perpetually conflicted state that makes effective decision making impossible. Only with a model of shared governance will we genuinely be able to own together the appropriate response(s) to these changes.

Shared governance also means that everyone is, in some form or another, involved in governance. No one, whether on the faculty or on the board, can with good conscience determine that others will run the school while they go about their work in their “little” corner. The changing character of theological education demands responsible participation from each trustee and each member of the faculty. Faculty in particular need to hear this and realize that we will thrive in our vocations only if we develop organizational expertise—the capacity to live and work with an astute understanding of the culture, patterns of governance, mission, values, and ethos of the school(s) where we are invited to teach. It is from this posture that we have the opportunity to respond to the changes that are inevitable, changes that invariably shape the contours of our work.

In other words, we cannot be naïve about how our institutions, organizations, or schools “work.” We must develop the organizational and the political competencies that enable us to be active participants in shaping the culture and character of the schools where we serve. Only then can we engage together in the process by which we determine our collective vocation and assure, together, that our vocation is the primary and fundamental point of reference in the decisions we make about curriculum, resources, and personnel.

*Shared governance enables us to be a learning organization*

In a consideration of how organizations work effectively and how individuals can thrive within organizations, there are few resources as helpful as those
produced by Peter Senge and his associates, most notably, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.* Senge and his associates emphasize the need to think *systemically.* We are effective when we see ourselves within a system—a whole and complex network. Senge’s work is valuable in large part because it is written for all who work within organizations. So much literature on the quality of organizations and what makes them effective is written for those in leadership and management. And clearly these roles have a critical part to play. But to thrive in our common efforts, all of us need to see what it is that makes for effective organizations.

Senge and company’s most distinctive contribution is their call for *learning* organizations. He contends that those organizations that are most effective are those that have developed the capacity to foster continuous learning, not merely in the resource and development department, but throughout the organization. Their work is a reminder that all of us at Regent College, for example, need to be attentive to the changing environment in which we do our work and the changing character of the kinds of students who matriculate with us. We need to bear in mind that the changing character of the church as well as of the economy is the context in which our students will live and work when they complete their studies. And while we may have experts who help us describe and interpret these changes, none can choose a posture of passivity. As it is ably stated in the standards of the [ATS Commission on Accrediting], “The collaborative nature of governance provides for institutional learning and self-correction. . . .” At Regent College, for example, we are learning together what it means that the majority of our students enroll in our two-year master’s program rather than being content with our one-year diploma; that the majority of our students are no longer taking a break from their career for eight months of theological study but rather coming for two years and viewing this as a time of vocational discernment; and that all of our students, not only those enrolled in MDiv, must come to terms with the changing character of the church and its mission.

Good learning means that we are able to examine the changes in the environment without always feeling threatened or defensive. It means that we accept the wisdom of those who have been with the institution a long time—the wisdom of those who have been with the institution through changes, perhaps many changes, and observed its capacities to respond and adapt well (or not so well). But it also means that we recognize the distinctive contribution of those who are newer to the community: we must not so limit credibility in decision-making that newcomers are marginalized because they “do not know how we do things around here.” The reality is that in many cases it is new faculty members and board members who may be best positioned to suggest ways in which the school’s vocation can be most effectively sustained and fulfilled.

**The meaning of shared governance:**

**Mutual respect, deference, and accountability**

Shared governance requires mutual respect and mutual submission out of a fundamental acceptance of the distinctive roles within the governance process. It means that trustees necessarily appreciate that their role is that of
support and encouragement of their most valuable and significant resource: the faculty. It is a contradiction in terms for a board to develop an adversarial relationship with the faculty; their very reason for being is to support the mission of the school by assuring the necessary fiscal and infrastructural system that assures that the faculty can do their work. Conversely, there is probably nothing more insidious to the well-being of a theological school than adversarial posture by board members towards members of the faculty.

Yet just as surely, faculty are highly dependent on the expertise of the trustees. And though it is often the case that the culture of the board is that of the corporate world, so seemingly different from the academic culture of the faculty, it is nevertheless imperative that faculty view the board as their partners, not their adversaries. The same could be said of administrators—presidents, deans, and others who provide administrative support and leadership for both trustees and faculty. They play a necessary and critical role in the capacity of the school to be effective in response to change. Indeed, both trustees and faculty depend heavily on those in administrative roles who as often as not are those who profile and anticipate the environmental changes that call both the trustees and the faculty to a creative and courageous response.

Mutual respect requires us to rely on one another, allowing the other to play his or her rightful role within the institution, out of a deeply held conviction that no one person can be all things to the school. This also includes a gracious acknowledgment that we are accountable to one another for our work—faculty to deans and deans to faculty. And if we yield to one another, it means that we acknowledge the legitimate authority of the other, authority that is integral to the role of the other in the school. The trustees, for example, have real authority, and they are only responsible in the exercise of their roles if they exercise that authority. And nothing is gained by faculty members who either resent the fact that the board has such authority or resist it. It is a necessary element in the life of a school. But there is also a distinctive sense in which the board recognizes the necessary and inevitable authority of the faculty. While their authority is less hierarchical, it is no less real, and a board that denies the reality of this authority and power fails to understand the power inherent in presence. The faculty are necessarily at the center of the life and work of the college; they embody its mission and values week by week in the classroom and the places where the common life of the school is sustained and practiced.

To stress the need for shared governance, then, is not to suggest that all share equally in every aspect of governance. I might question, for example, a practice of equal representation from both the faculty and the student body on a key committee if that committee is one in which the faculty should have a privileged voice. The common concern that “everyone would have a say” has the unfortunate effect of minimizing the voice or contribution of those who should have the most influence in a particular decision. Shared governance means that we acknowledge the need of many to speak to a matter while reserving the right of some to make a decision when that decision is inherent in their role or responsibility in the school. In other words, in affirming the place of shared governance, we are highlighting not only a participation in decision
making; we are also affirming a distribution of tasks and responsibilities, a distribution essential to the well-being of the school.

This acknowledgment of the rightful place and even authority of the other, and thus the need for mutual accountability, is required for another reason as well. James Fowler has aptly noted that:

There is likely no area of potential self-knowledge where we are more subject to self-deception and more tempted to resort to self-serving rationalizations than in accounting for our efforts to influence and determine the social collectivities of which we are a part and the lives of those involved in them.9

Accepting a model of shared governance means that we graciously work within structures where our own “self-serving rationalizations” can be challenged.

Finally, mutual respect and accountability also imply a fundamental hospitality, a hospitality in the process of decision making that is reflected in empathetic listening, attentiveness to the legitimate concerns of each one who is affected by the decisions and actions of the collective.

\textit{Shared governance means we accept the reality of conflict}

As soon as we accept the place of divergent voices and perspectives, we assume that conflict will be part of the decision-making process and part of what it means to govern together. Conflict is an inherent part of a lively community and a necessary source of strength to a vital organization. While we will hopefully have a high level of congruence when it comes to identifying the defining vision, charisma, or vocation of our particular theological school, we will never likely agree on the way in which that vision is implemented. In their superb study of the nature of effective leadership, Michael Jinkins and Deborah Bradshaw Jinkins argue that:

Poor leadership attempts to homogenize . . . various and divergent voices into a single voice. Good leadership cultivates [a] discordant plurality for the sake of the good of the society. . . . a society enjoying creative conflict will enjoy vitality, will encourage the vigorous participation in its life of diverse voices, and will be the stronger for it.10

Conflict can, of course, be destructive; some schools can become so conflicted one wonders if there is any possibility of resolution and health with the current players. The institutional pathologies have become so deep-seated that only through extensive and expert help will some level of harmony be found. But we cannot, regardless of previous experience, so fear conflict that we shrink from disagreements or subtly or implicitly shut down discordant voices. Conflict and disagreement is an essential element in shared governance.

This being the case, we do not need to hope for the elimination of conflict. Robert Kegan suggests that a postmodern view of organizations calls us to not merely tolerate the reality of conflict, but actually view disputants as parts,
necessary parts, of a whole. Rather than viewing the other with whom I differ as an enemy, why not view the other as enabling us all to be complete and whole? The reality of conflict is a reminder that our lives, our work, and the issues we face are anything but simple. And we will not appreciate their complexity unless we have diverse opinions and perspectives on the table.

But it should be stressed: conflict can be insidious. And we will consequently only be able to thrive in a model of shared governance if we sustain strong interpersonal skills and capabilities.

**Shared governance means effective communication**

A model of shared governance means that information is not used as a means of control or power. While everyone in a learning community recognizes the need for privacy and confidentiality in matters particular to individuals—whether it is the grade on an assignment or the details that are part of a faculty review and evaluation for performance—the community is served best when it is well informed. As many have noted, there is no such thing as overcommunication.

An essential element of effective communication is good conversation. Good conversation means, among other things, the leisured give and take of empathic listening and honest speech, which in turn form the context for effective communal discernment. It is the conversation that happens before, after, and around the formal business of the faculty and the board, the conversation of the board or faculty when they are on retreat, or the conversation that happens in the common room when there is no formal agenda. This is not the conversation of complaint. Rather, it is the honest conversation about the joys and sorrow of our work, the dreams and aspirations we have for our work, and the shared wisdom of learning to live with grace in the midst of it all. This conversation then becomes the essential backdrop for the formal actions taken in a business meeting, the actions that necessarily shape the contours of the expression of our collective vocation.

I often feel that one of my primary responsibilities as a dean is merely that of fostering good conversation—making sure that the faculty have the time and a plentiful supply of good coffee to be able to step back from the harried pace that so easily besets the academy to talk about their work, their goals and aspirations, the challenges they are facing, and what it is going to take for us to be effective together. In this I recognize that presidents and deans have the capacity either to foster an environment of good conversation and communication or to subtly but essentially “shut it down.”

**Shared governance calls for trust**

Shared governance presumes a posture of trust, a trust that is ultimately nothing more than a resolve to let others make decisions that affect the contours of our common lives. A model of shared governance does not imply that all decisions are made by a committee of the whole; it does not mean that everyone does everything. It rather calls us to accept the legitimate decision-making role of the other and then trust the other to act in our best interests and, ultimately, in the best interests of the whole. It means that we accept that oth-
ers will make choices and decisions that affect the well-being of the institution as a whole; it means that we accept the principle of delegated authority.

This posture of trust seems particularly difficult for some in Western institutions and organizations. Robert Bellah has made the observation that:

Americans often think of individuals pitted against institutions. It is hard for us to think of institutions as affording the necessary context within which we become individuals; of institutions as not just restraining but enabling us; of institutions not as an arena of hostility within which our character is tested but an indispensable source from which character is formed.12

And this deeply felt ambivalence about institutions in general is often translated into a conscious or unconscious distrust of institutions in general and of institutional administrators in particular. In some cases people have good reason to be ambivalent about the exercise of authority and power; many faculty have seen trustees and administrators abuse authority; trustees have experienced the disappointment of having a senior administrator not provide them with all the information they need when called upon to govern well. And the consequence is that people are hesitant to trust.

However understandable, the lack of trust undercuts the capacity of the community to govern well together, to be confident in each other as we serve one another and as we serve on behalf of one another. The irony is that a spirit of mistrust actually fosters a hierarchical climate in which distrust can only fester. The only alternative is a model of shared governance wherein we choose to trust the other—where faculty choose to trust the governing board and where subcommittees of the board and the faculty are able to function without fear that their every move is viewed as suspect, and where administrators are not assumed to have personal agendas. However, this is only possible if there is space for the leisured conversation described above. Further, everything said here presupposes that we need to gain trust, build trust, and keep trust; and that when trust is broken it may not be easily restored. It may take considerable time. However, building trust is essential to the well-being of the collective, a critical element in shared governance.

**Shared governance calls for a fundamental posture of service**

Finally, shared governance assumes that we are servants of one another and, ultimately, of our common vocation. Administrators often speak of the calling to serve, perhaps because presidents and deans are in positions in which authority and power can be abused. Regularly, presidents and deans need to stand back and ask the question so ably posed by Jinkins and Jinkins: “How would I behave as a leader in this organization if the organization’s purpose had a higher claim on me than my own comfort and security?”13 But while it is perhaps doubly imperative that administrators ask this question, surely the posture of service should not be theirs alone. If we are going to fulfill our common vocation, we must choose a posture of self-giving generous service in
which personal agendas are secondary to the fundamental commitment to the goals of the collective. It means that we do not enter into a committee meeting with the assumption that as one individual we happen to know what is the best alternative or outcome of our deliberations. Rather, we acknowledge that the outcome will be the fruit of a group process of deliberation and discernment, and we enter into the process without preconceived notions of what the outcome will be. It means that we come to a committee meeting with our own convictions and perspectives, but that our posture is one of attending to the other, of listening so that one knows the mind of the collective and so that one contributes in one’s speaking to an outcome that is only possible through the deliberation, an outcome that no one could anticipate because it arose out of the collective, and not merely in the accumulation of majority votes. It means, quite simply, that we choose to give priority to the collective vocation and consistently come back to the resolution that our work, our teaching, our research, and our driving concerns are all understood and incorporated within the vocation that we embrace together.

Personal responsibility and differentiation

I am making the case that if we are effective within organizations, it is because we have the capacity to discern, together, our collective vocation and that we have the capacity to work with a model of shared governance. A third commitment is equally essential. If there is a strong interplay between the vocation of the individual and that of the collective, we must sustain the capacity for both engagement and personal autonomy.

Taking personal responsibility

We must take personal responsibility for our lives, our work, and our vocations as theological teachers. We cannot allow ourselves to be victimized by the inevitable changes that are coming to higher education or by the equally inevitable wrongs that will be committed against us by the institutions in which we serve. It means that we never so lose ourselves within the collective that we are alienated or marginalized from our own vocations.

We will only be able, in the end, to respond well to the schools in which we teach if we assume personal responsibility for our own lives and work. Our lives and our work are our own; they do not belong to these organizations, and we must sustain a critical distinction between our own identity and vocations and those of the schools in which we teach. This does not mean that we are independent contractors. But it does mean that we maintain a fundamental detachment. Our vocation is never synonymous with that of the organization(s) where we are employed. They are, rather, both housed within the theological school, and they are exercised in partnership with the theological school and with one another.

Taking personal responsibility also means that we are attentive to those elements within the collective that have the capacity to undermine our individual vocations. For example, every school has organizational or cultural pathologies. Some can be held at bay and kept from poisoning the well; but
some are capable of crippling the school and the individuals who work there. I have found it helpful to be sensitive to the prevailing emotion within the school. I once worked in a situation where the dominant energizing (actually, it was enervating) emotion was anger, and I could not help but conclude that if a person was susceptible to anger, this school would be a highly destructive place to be. But more to the point, I concluded that while it is possible to serve without anger in such a place, it was possible only if one was both conscious of the climate within which one worked and if one consciously chose to sustain a fundamental differentiation from that climate.

**People who are differentiated**

Personal responsibility, then, is only possible if we are differentiated. Success in the collective vocation requires enculturation and assimilation to the ways and values and vision of the collective. But it also requires that we sustain a healthy autonomy. As a senior dean approaching retirement stressed in his counsel to new, younger deans, “Never let them reduce you to your role as dean.” He urged his hearers to not take things personally when they are directed to the dean in the role of dean. To be effective, he stressed, it is imperative to distinguish yourself from the role and constantly strive to be authentic in the role.

The same could be said of trustees and faculty members: our identity is never solely that of one who fulfills a role in the school; neither is our personal vocation continuous and synonymous with that of the school. We work within the collective, but we do so as individuals whose identity and call find expression both within the collective as well as on its own merits, distinct from the collective.

Only with this kind of differentiation can we give ourselves with generosity to our colleagues and to the collective vocation, in a generous service that is given with discernment, courage, and hope. Only then can we say “No” when the dean asks us to do one more thing(!) and we know that to accept is to take on more than we can do with serenity and inner peace. Only as we are differentiated can we truly let go of the collective whole enough to trust another and not demand that we are in on every decision, and every action. And then, of course, only as we are differentiated can we accept with grace that decisions will be made with which we differ, decisions in which we vote in the minority. Such actions, an inevitable aspect of shared governance, will not crush our spirits or leave us dejected or feeling mistreated. We can accept with grace both the times in which the collective agrees with us and those in which it chooses not to agree with us, quite simply because we have not linked our personal identities and vocations too closely with that of the collective. Differentiation also means that as faculty members we can call for and encourage change; we can stand “outside” of the collective and call each other to rethink the way we do our work, engage the changing environment, fulfill our common vocation, and teach effectively.

Then also, only as we are differentiated, can we let go with grace when it is time to resign or retire. Retirement is essentially a call to “let go” and accept that the school, the collective vocation, continues and is held in trust by others.
The individual within the collective

Finally, the call for personal responsibility assumes the reality of communal responsibility. It is essential that we think in terms of the collective vocation and that as faculty and trustees we work together toward a common mission, sustained by a common vision and set of values. But this common identity and commitment never so override the individual that we lose touch, individually, with our own call, our own sense of vocation. Indeed, in many respects the very calling of the trustees is to sustain and maintain an environment in which the vocation of the theological teacher can thrive. They are stewards of an extraordinary resource: the teachers of the Church. And their commitment to the school’s mission, viability, and financial well-being can never be so defined that they lose a sense of their stewardship of the vocations of those who are called to teach. The trustees, in this regard, do not merely react to the changing environment but also act as a buffer to those changes, insofar as the changes threaten the elements that are essential to the viability and integrity of good theological education. Further, they can never think of their faculty as commodities to be retained or dispensed with in response to the whims of a “market.” The very character of theological education demands that trustees view their role as one of sustaining the very environment that makes good teaching possible, an environment in which a student can be confident of a strong residential faculty who are sufficiently protected from the whims of the environment that they can fulfill their vocations with courage and grace.

Ultimately, though, we are each personally responsible for our lives and our work. Even though we have received an appointment to a job, it is our job. We are not owned by the school. We ultimately and finally work for ourselves, “as unto the Lord” (Col. 3:23, KJV), and we are ultimately and finally responsible for our own professional development, our own mental, emotional, and spiritual health, and our own capacity to be effective in our work. But all this is immensely easier when trustees and presidents and deans view their work as enabling faculty to be all that they are called to be.

On the other hand, effective trustees work with faculty to assure that there is an effective response to a changing environment, challenging faculty to think in terms of a changing student body, changes in information technology, and changes in the economy that of necessity affect the contours of theological education and call theological teachers, individually and collectively, to rethink and adapt and adjust and thereby be faithful to their vocation. And the ideal, of course, is that this is all the fruit of good conversation: good conversation that sustains a common awareness of the collective vocation, of what makes for good theological education, and of the discernment that is needed for a courageous, creative response to the changing environment in which we fulfill that vocation.

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ENDNOTES


2. Ibid., 20–21.

3. Ibid., 21.

4. *Bulletin 43* of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, Part 1, specifies standards of accreditation, including Standard 8, Authority and Governance; for this reference, see Standard 8.2.2.

5. ATS Standards of Accreditation, Standard 8 (Introduction).


8. ATS Commission on Accrediting Standards of Accreditation, 8.2.3.


Changes in faculty work

By Stephen R. Graham

It comes as no surprise to anyone reading this magazine that over the past two decades the work of faculty in theological schools has changed. The most noted and most obvious changes have to do with advances in technology that impact communication, educational methods and formats, and scholarly research. But the changes are more numerous and sweeping than just technological developments. Theological schools are institutions of higher education, and the world of higher education has changed dramatically in recent years. Many of the cues for change in theological schools have come from the larger world of higher education. For instance, the move toward ever-greater specialization in doctoral work has affected both chemists and theologians, scholars of literature as well as those who study and teach pastoral care. And then there is committee work. Ever a bane of faculty members, administrative work, including serving on committees, directing degree programs, and a wide variety of other tasks, has been increasing across higher education.

Adding to the pressure have been significant changes in the other shaping force for theological schools: the church they exist to serve. For many, their denominations no longer are able to provide the supply of students, financial support, and place of service for graduates that the schools once could assume. For others, constituents increasingly demand shorter, less expensive, more accessible forms of education—while students frequently come to their graduate theological study with less traditional academic preparation and less ecclesial experience upon which to draw.

Changes in higher education and the church inevitably challenge theological schools. As Daniel Aleshire puts it in his study of theological schools, Earthen Vessels, “Theological schools are hybrid institutions. They are intimately and irrevocably related both to the work of the church and to the patterns and practices of higher education.” Significantly, “This is an era of unrest in both partners.”

The challenges and changes affect all aspects and constituencies of schools but, perhaps, most thoroughly the faculty. Speaking about the higher education community in general in their magisterial study, The American Faculty, Jack H. Schuster and Martin J. Finkelstein declare “We take as our point of departure a bold and unqualified assertion: American higher education and the academic profession that serve it are on the edge of an unprecedented restructuring that is changing the face—indeed, even the very meaning—of higher learning.”

Member schools of ATS must take these challenges seriously and prepare for changes that will impact faculty work for decades to come. To that end, ATS has conducted a survey of member school faculties followed by a focused consultation to discuss changes in their work.

The survey

This past winter ATS surveyed faculty members who have been involved in ATS projects or grant programs over the past few years. A total of 370 faculty members received the survey and 192
submitted responses. Both the survey and the consultation that followed revealed important assumptions and attitudes among faculty members in theological schools.

When asked to identify changes in their work, faculty respondents named two changes as most significant: the growth in administrative responsibilities and the impact of educational technology. *Administrative* was a term used generally to identify work on committees, program oversight, work related to accreditation, and responsibilities not directly related to the more normal work of teaching and research. Educational technology included developments in online teaching and increased use of electronic technology in class, research, and communication. When asked how important online technologies should be in theological education, 2010 respondents (shown in Figure 1) suggested a slightly greater openness to online teaching and learning than did responses to a similar question in 2003 to which faculty participants were described as “negative to cautiously optimistic” about the potential of distance education.

It is interesting and perhaps revealing that very few respondents named changes in the church as having an important direct impact on their work.

When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their doctoral training for their current work as faculty members in theological schools, responses revealed significant gaps. Figure 2 demonstrates the comparison between PhD training and current work responsibilities for the respondents. While it could be argued that it is not the responsibility nor the expertise of doctoral programs to prepare their students in all of these areas and that students develop them in other contexts, the need for faculty development in a number of areas is clear.

Not surprisingly, the most effective area of doctoral training was “scholarship.” It is the only category that was deemed to be a bit less crucial to faculty work compared to the effectiveness of training. In contrast, faculty expressed a notable lack of effectiveness in training for what they viewed as the crucial work of teaching, service, student formation, and administration.

Respondents were also asked to prioritize five areas of their work. Some resisted, arguing that the survey forced them to make choices between areas that they wanted to rank equally. Nevertheless, overall patterns emerged. Not surprisingly, students were named as the highest priority. Somewhat lower and nearly equal were serving the school’s mission and the church. The respondents’ academic guild was substantially lower in fourth place, and service to the public beyond church and guild came in a distant fifth. (See Table 1 on page 41.)

An interesting exercise would be for schools to compare this list of priorities with the policies and practices of their respective schools as well as the requirements for promotion and tenure. Participants in the consultation spoke of work

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**FIGURE 2. Comparison of PhD training and current work responsibilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Effectiveness of PhD training</th>
<th>Importance in current work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student formation</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 = not effective/important  5 = very effective/important
Participants in the consultation spoke of work that is “off the grid,” that is, work that is essential (they hope!) for the school’s mission but that doesn’t fit neatly—or at all—into the grid of work that is recognized and rewarded. Participants also voiced the concern that, for a variety of reasons, off-the-grid work may fall most heavily on female, racial/ethnic, and junior faculty.

of reasons, off-the-grid work may fall most heavily on female, racial/ethnic, and junior faculty.

The challenge of learning the work actually required of theological school faculty members that is not addressed by their formal training was one issue. Simply finding a job was another. According to ATS data, the number of new hires within member schools declined dramatically between fall 2008 and fall 2010, in large part due to the economic downturn. In 2008 there were 420 persons in that category. In 2009 the number declined to 339, and by the fall of 2010, the number of new hires had fallen to 226. While this number will likely increase modestly in coming years as schools experience some financial recovery, higher education experts suggest that smaller faculties and leaner institutions are the “new normal.” The impact on theological schools is acute since, in their efforts to sustain the prevailing financial and educational models, most schools were small and lean before the downturn.

The consultation

In March 2011, ATS hosted a focused consultation of thirty-six faculty members to discuss changes in their work. For a day prior to the larger gathering, nineteen female faculty members discussed how recent changes impacted their work and the challenges and opportunities that the changes brought to them. Nominated by their deans, participants were selected to represent the wide spectrum of ecclesial families and the types of schools within the Association, as well as on the basis of what they could bring to the consultation from their experience and expertise. Panels of participants offered reflections and prompted larger conversations about the change of focus from faculty teaching to student learning, the impact of developments in educational technology, changes in faculty culture, and how changes in the church have affected faculty work.

From faculty teaching to student learning

One of the most perplexing issues for faculty in theological schools is the growing emphasis on outcomes assessment of student learning. The shift has been described as a move from a focus on the quality of faculty teaching to a measurement of what students have learned. How do we know that we are effective? There is an immediate application of the concept of stewardship and the duty to be responsible and faithful to fulfill the missions theological schools have set for themselves. Schools have always done assessment of student learning, but recent
requirements ask for measurement, documentation, and clarification.

Faculty at the consultation wrestled with issues of time and workload associated with assessment as well as philosophical issues such as concerns about “over assessment,” the rigidity of rubrics vs. the flexibility sometimes needed in classes, the possibility of “drowning in a sea of data,” and the difficulty of assessing areas such as character and spiritual formation.

In the midst of these serious and important questions, however, participants noted the excellent work in assessment being done in many places; the benefits of including collaborators, such as recent graduates and others in ministry; and greater clarity of mission that have come from this work. In addition, participants called for attention to

- theological reflection on assessment;
- work on assessment of student formation;
- assessment as “outcome guided vs. outcome driven;”
- work on assessment of learning that utilizes educational technology;
- “staging” of assessment with markers along the way, so it all doesn’t have to happen at the end; and
- developing a “culture of assessment.”

Assessment of student learning outcomes is here to stay, and faculty will play a crucial role in shaping it to be effective and also to fit the distinctive character of theological education.

The impact of educational technology

Like assessment of student learning, changes driven by educational technology will be part of the fabric of theological education for the foreseeable future, with workload issues at the forefront of faculty concern. There is no escaping the fact that advances in educational technology, while including aspects of time and labor savings, also require time, work, and institutional resources to learn and utilize them effectively. There is great benefit from wrestling with the pedagogical issues involved, but there is no getting around the fact that it is a lot of work. Schools need to develop ways to support and compensate faculty for this work.

According to those at the consultation, the most important payoff for that expenditure of resources is greater access, particularly access by students who would not otherwise benefit from formal theological education.

Nearer the heart of the mission of theological schools, though, they named the key question of assuring and assessing student formation (in all its facets) when face-to-face time is reduced or eliminated. How are students formed and how do schools assess student learning and formation when significant portions of their work is done away from the campus? New models and ways of thinking are needed.

Participants also made the following recommendations for schools:

- Avoid placing the burden of being the “tech person” on a faculty member who is leading the way in utilizing educational technology (at least don’t do it without appropriate compensation).
- Recognize, on the other hand, that knowledge of educational technology is a very valuable and career-enhancing skill.
- Recognize for coming generations, as one panelist put it, that social media serve as the “amniotic fluid” in which they have been shaped.
- Attend to intellectual property, security, and boundary issues related to online teaching.
- Be alert both to possibilities and limits of technologies.
- Develop ways for faculties to discuss issues of access and exclusion. Who gains access? What persons or groups are excluded?

As educational technologies develop and are incorporated into theological education, it is crucial that faculty members become engaged in the discussions and provide leadership toward utilizing those technologies with effectiveness and faithfulness to the missions of schools and the needs of the church.

Changes in faculty culture

Especially in response to recent financial challenges in higher education, forces of change are at work that call into question long-accepted assumptions about education and faculty culture. As schools have eliminated staff positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 = Most Important</th>
<th>5 = Least Important</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Mission</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Guild</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and otherwise cut benefits, programs, and budgets, aspects of faculty life and work have come under question. Tenure, sabbatical leave, moderate teaching loads, and traditional academic calendars, just to name a few items, have faced scrutiny. At the same time, especially in small theological schools, faculty members have taken on duties that had been handled by staff that the institutions can no longer afford to employ.

One change currently sweeping higher education that does not appear to be having an impact on theological schools, at least for now, is a rapid decline in tenured and tenure-track faculty and a corresponding growth in “contract” full-time faculty, adjuncts, and part-time faculty. Somewhat remarkably, the percentage of full-time faculty who were tenured or on a tenure-track faculty in ATS schools has remained constant at about 65 percent for the past twenty years. This is in sharp contrast to large declines in that percentage across higher education and rapid growth in the number of part-time faculty as well as categories of full-time faculty who are not tenured or on the tenure track.

While theological schools have avoided this trend in higher education, financial and other pressures might force the issue for theological schools. It is important to consider the possible impact of schools moving away from tenure or other traditional assumptions of faculty life and work.

Somewhat remarkably, the percentage of full-time faculty who were tenured or on a tenure-track faculty in ATS schools has remained constant at about 65 percent for the past twenty years. This is in sharp contrast to large declines in that percentage across higher education and rapid growth in the number of part-time faculty as well as categories of full-time faculty who are not tenured or on the tenure track.

A related question that emerged in the consultation was the changing definition of the faculty. Many spoke of larger, more diverse groups around the faculty table. For example, some institutions have begun hiring and including in the faculty persons who also serve in administrative capacities, such as deans of students, financial officers, and program directors. Participants raised questions about the implications of this trend for academic policies and processes that have been guided in the past by those who might be considered more traditional faculty. Whatever the structure and practice in particular schools, and important element, especially in times of stress, is trust.

Participants made the following notes:

- Faculty members need to become knowledgeable and engaged in discussions of institutional finance. This doesn’t mean that they need to become financial experts, but it does mean that there needs to be greater understanding of financial issues by faculty and engagement with addressing challenges.
- Many participants named trust as vital to institutional health and stressed the need to find ways to bridge the chasm between faculty and administration as well as the gap between faculties and boards. Trust is crucial in negotiating the troubled waters of economic uncertainty, and that trust is both essential and fragile.

Changes in the church and faculty work

A key insight from the consultation’s discussion of how changes in the church have impacted faculty work was to name the prevalence among both faculty and students in theological schools of a “conflicted ecclesial narrative.” That is, while the stated missions of schools and those serving within the schools agree that they are to serve and lead the church, there is not agreement about what the church has been, is, or is becoming. Among faculty there are competing visions of what the church has been, is, and should be. Among students there is a broad spectrum of ecclesial involvement and understanding, from those who are ecclesiastically “insular”—that is, completely embedded within a denomination or tradition and blind to the broader church—to those who are so ecclesiastically eclectic as to have no clear ecclesial identity at all. The students are motivated by mission and by issues of social justice, but they are not clear about how those motivations fit within the church.

One panelist argued that “hybridity” is a key for the future of theological education. Schools need to develop courses that combine work in class with online resources, as well as courses that provide education at ministry sites utilizing forms of contextual learning.

A Roman Catholic panelist noted the shift for many Catholic schools to provide education for laity, including the rapidly growing body of lay ecclesial ministers who now outnumber candidates for the priesthood. This emerging student body—neither full time nor residen-
Faculty—creates a new and challenging context for formation.

Participants recommended the following:

- Theological schools should work to nurture their connections with the church.
- The schools must work hard to prepare students to be able to serve effectively both where they have come from and where they are going.
- ATS should seek to promote engagement of schools with churches and Christian life.
- ATS should recognize and attend to the differences between the situations in the United States and Canada.
- Those in theological schools must be more hopeful, more realistic, more collaborative, more savvy about organizational life, and more creative.

As the church changes, the faculties of theological schools will need to be attuned both to the needs of the changing church and to effective ways to serve that church and its people.

Looking to the future with hope

Among the crucial and important insights in Jack Schuster’s keynote address at the consultation was his observation that despite the unprecedented challenges faced by institutions of higher education in recent years and looking to the future, there is reason for hope.

[W]hile the stated missions of schools and those serving within the schools agree that they are to serve and lead the church, there is not agreement about what the church has been, is, or is becoming. Among faculty there are competing visions of what the church has been, is, and should be.

Higher education is remarkably durable and has survived remarkable challenges in the past. Schuster charged the faculty to be clear about what they finally value in the work they do and the way the work is done. Now more than ever, faculty need to learn to make the case for higher education to a variety of audiences and to become engaged with the issues and challenges of its present and future. Faculty leadership in the processes of change is crucial.

Stephen R. Graham is director, faculty development and initiatives in theological education for The Association of Theological Schools.
GENERAL INSTITUTIONAL STANDARDS

5 Faculty
The members of the faculty of a theological school constitute a collaborative community of faith and learning, and they are crucial to the scholarly activities of teaching, learning, and research in the institution. A theological school’s faculty normally comprises the full-time teachers, continuing part-time teachers, and teachers who are engaged occasionally or for one time. In order for faculty members to accomplish their purposes, theological schools should assure them appropriate structure, support, and opportunities, including training for educational technology.

5.1 Faculty qualifications, responsibilities, development, and employment

5.1.1 Schools should demonstrate that their faculty members have the necessary competencies for their responsibilities. Faculty members shall possess the appropriate credentials for graduate theological education, normally demonstrated by the attainment of a research doctorate or, in certain cases, another earned doctoral degree. In addition to academic preparation, ministerial and ecclesial experience is an important qualification in the composition of the faculty. Also, qualified teachers without a research doctorate may have special expertise in skill areas such as administration, music, or media as well as cross-cultural contextualization for teaching, learning, and research.

5.1.2 In the context of institutional purpose and the confessional commitments affirmed by a faculty member when appointed, faculty members shall be free to seek knowledge and communicate their findings.

5.1.3 Composition of the faculty should be guided by the purpose of the institution, and attention to this composition should be an integral component of long-range planning in the institution. Faculty should be of sufficient diversity and number to meet the multifaceted demands of teaching, learning, and research. Hiring practices should be attentive to the value of diversity in race, ethnicity, and gender. The faculty should also include members who have doctorates from different schools and who exemplify various methods and points of view. At the same time, faculty selection will be guided by the needs and requirements of particular constituencies of the school.

5.1.4 The faculty who teach in a program on a continuing basis shall exercise responsibility for the planning, design, and oversight of its curriculum in the context of institutional purpose and resources and as directed by school administration requirements for recruitment, matriculation, graduation, and service to constituent faith communities.

5.1.5 Each school shall articulate and demonstrate that it follows its policies concerning faculty members in such areas as faculty rights and responsibilities; freedom of inquiry; procedures for recruitment, appointment, retention, promotion, and dismissal; criteria for faculty evaluation; faculty compensation; research leaves; and
other conditions of employment. Policies concerning these matters shall be published in an up-to-date faculty handbook.

5.1.6 Theological scholarship is enriched by continuity within a faculty and safeguards for the freedom of inquiry for individual members. Therefore, each school shall demonstrate effective procedures for the retention of a qualified community of scholars, through tenure or some other appropriate procedure.

5.1.7 The institution should support its faculty through such means as adequate salaries, suitable working conditions, and support services. 5.1.8 The work load of faculty members in teaching and administration shall permit adequate attention to students, to scholarly pursuits, and to other ecclesial and institutional concerns.

5.2 Faculty role in teaching

5.2.1 Teachers shall have freedom in the classroom to discuss the subjects in which they have competence by formal education and practical experience.

5.2.2 Faculty should endeavor to include, within the teaching of their respective disciplines, theological reflection that enables students to integrate their learning from the various disciplines, field education, and personal formation.

5.2.3 Full- and part-time faculty should be afforded opportunities to enhance teaching skills, including the use of educational technology as well as training in instructional design and in modes of advisement appropriate to distance programs, as a regular component of faculty development.

5.2.4 Appropriate resources shall be available to facilitate the teaching task, including but not limited to, classroom space, office space, educational technology, and access to scholarly materials, including library and other information resources.

5.2.5 Schools shall develop and implement mechanisms for evaluating faculty performance, including teaching competence and the use of educational technology. These mechanisms should involve faculty members and students as well as administrators.

5.3 Faculty role in student learning

5.3.1 Faculty shall be involved in evaluating the quality of student learning by identifying appropriate outcomes and assessing the extent to which the learning goals of individual courses and degree programs have been achieved.

5.3.2 To ensure the quality of learning, faculty should be appropriately involved in development of the library collection, educational technology, and other resources necessary for student learning.
5.3.3 Faculty should participate in practices and procedures that contribute to students’ learning, including opportunities for regular advising and interaction with students and attentiveness to the learning needs of diverse student populations.

5.3.4 Faculty should foster integration of the diverse learning objectives of the curriculum so that students may successfully accomplish the purposes of the stated degree programs.

5.4 Faculty role in theological research

5.4.1 Faculty are expected to engage in research, and each school shall articulate clearly its expectations and requirements for faculty research and shall have explicit criteria and procedures for the evaluation of research that are congruent with the purpose of the school and with commonly accepted standards in higher education.

5.4.2 Schools shall provide structured opportunities for faculty research and intellectual growth, such as regular research leaves and faculty colloquia.

5.4.3 In the context of its institutional purpose, each school shall ensure that faculty have freedom to pursue critical questions, to contribute to scholarly discussion, and to publish the findings of their research.

5.4.4 Faculty members should make available the results of their research through such means as scholarly publications, constructive participation in learned societies, and informed contributions to the intellectual life of church and society, as well as through their teaching.

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

ES.6.4 Faculty, students, and trustees

ES.6.4.1 Evaluation of student learning is the responsibility of the faculty. Effective assessment of student learning requires that the faculty review and analyze the results of the assessment activities, discern appropriate changes to curriculum and educational practices, and document the results of both its interpretation of assessment data and decisions about educational changes.

ES.6.4.2 Schools shall communicate the learning goals of degree programs and expected student achievement through the school’s catalog, website, and course syllabi.

ES.6.4.3 The governing board of the school is responsible for ensuring that the school has a program of assessment of student learning and that the results of these activities inform and shape educational and institutional decisions.

ES.6.4.4 The institution shall, on a regular basis, make available to the public a summary evaluation of the educational effectiveness of its approved degree programs. The school shall determine the frequency and manner of this information.