

# Theological Education

Volume 39, Number 1  
2003

## ISSUE FOCUS

*The Character and Assessment of Learning for  
Religious Vocation*

**The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation:  
M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites**  
*Daniel O. Aleshire*

**Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in Theological  
Schools: A Preliminary Survey**  
*Gordon T. Smith and Charles M. Wood*

**Knowing and Caring**  
*Charles M. Wood*

**Getting to the Question:  
Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry**  
*Victor J. Klimoski*

**What is the Literature Saying about Learning and Assessment  
in Higher Education?**  
*Carolyn M. Jurkowitz*

**Exploring the Process of Learning and Assessment:  
Report on the ATS Workshop on Assessing Theological Learning**  
*Eleanor A. Daniel*

**Assessing Assessment:  
An Accreditation Visitor's View of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards**  
*Loyde H. Hartley*

## OPEN FORUM

**Worship and Learning**  
*E. Byron Anderson*

**Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum with  
Education about Disability**  
*Robert C. Anderson*

**Judicatory-Based Theological Education**  
*Lance R. Barker and B. Edmon Martin*



The Association of Theological Schools  
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

ISSN 0040-5620

*Theological Education*  
is published semiannually by  
The Association of Theological Schools  
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA  
10 Summit Park Drive  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15275-1103

DANIEL O. ALESHIRE  
JEREMIAH J. McCARTHY  
NANCY MERRILL  
LISA DAMICO

Executive Editor  
Editor  
Managing Editor  
Production Assistant

For subscription information or to order  
additional copies or selected back issues,  
please contact the Association.  
e-mail: [giehll@ats.edu](mailto:giehll@ats.edu)  
website: [www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu)  
phone: 412-788-6505  
fax: 412-788-6510

© 2003

The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by means of any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act, or in writing from the publisher.

Permission is hereby granted without charge for the reproduction and distribution of this work, or any of its parts, for educational purposes by the faculty or administration of member institutions of The Association of Theological Schools, provided that no fee or compensation is charged for copies, use of, or access to such information beyond the actual cost of reproduction or access, and that the copyright notice is included intact.

Requests for permission for all other uses of any part of this work should be addressed to the author(s).

Views expressed in the journal are those of the writers. Publication does not necessarily signify endorsement by *Theological Education* or The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Drive, 16th Floor, Chicago, IL 60606; E-mail: [atla@atla.com](mailto:atla@atla.com); WWW: <http://www.atla.com/>.

# Theological Education

Volume 39, Number 1  
2003

**Editor's Introduction: Unraveling the "Mysteries" of  
Assessment and Evaluation** iii  
*Jeremiah J. McCarthy*

## ISSUE FOCUS

### *The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation*

**The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation:  
M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites** 1  
*Daniel O. Aleshire*

**Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in Theological Schools:  
A Preliminary Survey** 17  
*Gordon T. Smith and Charles M. Wood*

**Knowing and Caring** 31  
*Charles M. Wood*

**Getting to the Question:  
Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry** 35  
*Victor J. Klimoski*

**What is the Literature Saying about Learning and Assessment in  
Higher Education?** 53  
*Carolyn M. Jurkowitz*

**Exploring the Process of Assessment: Report on the ATS Workshop on  
Assessing Theological Learning** 93  
*Eleanor A. Daniel*

**Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View of  
ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards** 101  
*Loyde H. Hartley*

## OPENFORUM

**Worship and Theological Education** 117  
*E. Byron Anderson*

**Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum with Education  
about Disability** 131  
*Robert C. Anderson*

**Judicatory-Based Theological Education** 155  
*Lance R. Barker and B. Edmon Martin*

## *Continuing the Conversation*

*Theological Education* invites responses, of up to 1500 words, to articles published in the journal in order to foster conversation among its readers. Reader responses may be e-mailed to the Managing Editor at <merrill@ats.edu>. Responses are published at the discretion of the editors and may be edited for length.

### **2002-2004 Editorial Board**

Glenn T. Miller, Chair  
Bangor Theological Seminary

Lawrence Brennan  
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary

Christopher Lind  
St. Andrew's College

Sherwood Lingenfelter  
Fuller Theological Seminary

Martha Stortz  
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

Emilie Townes  
Union Theological Seminary

# Editor's Introduction: Unraveling the "Mysteries" of Assessment and Evaluation

*Jeremiah J. McCarthy*

To be an ATS accreditor is, among other things, to be an inveterate habitue of airports and multiple time zone travel. In the course of these journeys within the community of ATS schools, I am fascinated by the reading interests of fellow travelers. There's a lot of business-related reading and ample computer time devoted to spreadsheets and e-mail, but also comfort reading in the form of novels and that most seductive genre, the mystery novel. The assorted heroes and heroines of Patricia Cornwell, Michael Connelly, Sue Grafton, and Elmore Leonard, unravel complicated puzzles resulting in a tidy and satisfactory resolution of the "hidden" clues that frame the story's plotline. Certainly, at the core of the Greek and Latin roots of the word "mystery" lies the notion of that which is "hidden" or "secret,"—a notion that is shared with the religious understanding of "mystery," whose full-time pursuit is the passionate love of ATS seminaries and schools of theology.

However, there is a deeper texture to the theological meaning of "mystery." The hidden reality of God's purposes, fully disclosed in the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth's paschal mystery, requires more than unaided human reason. Faith-filled disciples and theologians, unlike our likeable and capable sleuths, do not "solve" the puzzle, so much as they enter more deeply into a reality whose unfathomable depths elude our best efforts at comprehension. This "mysterium," as Rudolf Otto has so famously stated, is "tremendum et fascinosum," vast and intriguing, inspiring us to awe and praise. At least part of the allure of the police procedural genre is the process of interrogation and pursuit of evidence. The quality of the questions raised is central to the success of the enterprise. And yet, no matter how insightful and skillful the questions are, they are but means to a measurable outcome, finding out "whodunit" and rendering swift and certain justice.

The outcomes of a theological investigation are of a different order, but no less demanding of our best intellectual efforts to pose the right questions and deepen our understanding. The task of theology is an ongoing journey of getting "fewer and fewer answers to better and better questions." While the tools for the assessment and evaluation of a detective thriller (the bad "guys" are caught), or a successful business ("profit and loss" statements) can be relatively straightforward, tools for measuring the outcomes of theological education (an integrated, theologically astute, pastorally effective, spiritually mature pastoral agent),

require, it seems, much more specificity and capacity. The pursuit of such tools, refining and honing the kinds of questions needed to judge quality theological education, is the central mission of the Lilly Endowment funded partnership with ATS, "The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation."

This current issue of *Theological Education* is devoted to a set of reflections which emerged from the inaugural, fall 2002 convocation of the thirty-nine seminaries undergoing the self-study and reaccreditation process between now and 2006. These ATS schools, along with the ATS staff and a team of researchers and consultants, are using their resources to develop effective instruments whereby the specific qualities and capacities of good theological education can be identified and developed over time. Good theologians invariably resist the lure of "reductionism," sacrificing the complexity of the "mysteries of faith" to superficial and inadequate categories of understanding and evaluation, but making judgments of quality and excellence is essential to all forms of human inquiry, including theological education. The real issue for ATS schools, as this project unfolds, is not merely to respond to the legitimate "assessment and evaluation" imperatives of the higher education establishment, but rather to discover, together, how and in what form might questions be framed that lead us to deeper insight into the effectiveness and improvement of theological education. How do we know that what we are doing in our classrooms, given the complex goals of the Master of Divinity curriculum ("It should educate students for a comprehensive range of pastoral responsibilities and skills by providing opportunities for the appropriation of theological disciplines, for deepening understanding of the life of the church, for ongoing intellectual and ministerial formation, and for exercising the arts of ministry." *ATS Degree Program Standards A. Master of Divinity, Bulletin 45, Part 1 2002, p. 95*), is being accomplished?

To help with this question, five research studies have been commissioned as part of the "Character and Assessment" project, three of which have been completed and are reported in this issue. Charles Wood and Gordon Smith, provide an insightful reflection on the results of a preliminary survey of the present situation of ATS schools regarding learning goals and the assessment of this learning. Carolyn Jurkowitz provides an excellent summary of the vast assessment literature in higher education and the implications of this literature for evaluating theological learning. Vic Klimoski has researched assessment in professions that are parallel to theological education in an effort to distill commonalities and trends that may be useful to ATS schools as they evaluate their own programs. Klimoski's research mines the experience and practices of three schools noted for their excellence in professional education: the School of Social Work at the College of St. Catherine-University of St. Thomas in the Twin Cities, the School of Nursing at the University of Pittsburgh, and the Master of Arts in Teacher Education at Alverno College in Milwaukee. ATS executive director, Daniel Aleshire, in his essay "Numbering the Levites," provides not only a history of the assessment and evaluation process in theological education, but

also frames the goals and objectives of this current ATS/Lilly funded partnership as crucial to the effort to demonstrate quality and accountability in theological education.

The fall 2002 workshop in Pittsburgh of the thirty-nine participating schools provided a stimulating environment for conversation and discussion of these insightful reports. Eleanor Daniel and Loyde Hartley, graciously accepted the invitation to reflect on the table discussions and to share their summary observations of the deliberations, as well as to suggest items for further conversation. These reflections, along with the research reports, capture a truly engaging and fruitful direction for ATS work that will further enhance the capacity of member schools to fulfill the drive for excellence and improvement that is built into the spirit of the redeveloped standards of accreditation.

The "Open Forum" feature of the journal highlights three timely and significant issues for theological educators. E. Byron Anderson undertakes a thoughtful review of the role of worship and liturgical practice in theological education. Robert Anderson provides a theological appraisal of the importance of human disability in the theological curriculum and its implications for the formation of future ministers. Linking both of these essays is a concern to enhance the "integration" of these elements in the theological curriculum. Lance Barker and B. Edmon Martin examine the challenges and prospects of "Judiciary-Based Theological Education" and suggest opportunities for collaboration and synergy with seminaries and theological schools to achieve the goals of quality theological education. Finally, an issue that is affecting the context of theological education and established delivery systems is the emergence of alternative formats, including regionally based centers preparing people for various forms of service and ministry to the churches.

The current issue will, I hope, provide valuable resources and insights for you as ATS works to define and articulate practices and tools that will make assessment and evaluation hospitable to the task of understanding how to do the work of theological education with excellence and care. While "assessment and evaluation" may appear to be invested with the trappings of "mystery" appropriate to the doctrines and practices of our faith traditions, I think this effort of ATS will help to "de-mystify" the puzzles of assessment and make them more amenable and valuable for the purposes of theological education.





# The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation: M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites

*Daniel O. Aleshire*

*ABSTRACT: The educational assessment movement has both external and internal aspects. This article provides an overview of educational assessment and the challenges it presents to theological education, the problems that the assessment of theological learning present to theological schools, and the current project of ATS on the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation. The author outlines both the internal and external factors influencing this movement, principles for assessing the goals of the theological curriculum (with particular attention to the Master of Divinity degree program), and the Association's efforts to assist member schools in developing and refining their educational assessment practices.*

## Introduction

We are in the midst of an educational sea change. It is massive, pervasive, and gathering momentum. It has been going on for a quarter century, and the result is that a new issue is thoroughly and unmistakably on the table. It is not an educational fad or whimsey. It reflects changing cultural perceptions about education and the increasing expectation of observable results for educational dollars spent. "It" is educational outcomes assessment. This is my thirteenth year at ATS, and the outcomes assessment movement has ceased being a movement. It has established itself as a fixture in higher education, as it has in elementary and secondary education. It will not go away, and it cannot be avoided by theological schools if they wish to be a part of the ecology of higher education.

This paper addresses three issues related to the ATS project on the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation: (1) educational assessment and the problems it presents for theological education; (2) theological education and the problems it presents for assessment; and (3) the work of ATS over the past decade, especially the ATS Character and Assessment of Learning project, related to the assessment of learning in theological schools.

I want to begin with a text in Numbers. It seems appropriate to use a text for a paper about assessment in theological education from a book in the Hebrew Bible that is called "In the Wilderness." The book begins with the Lord

*The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation:  
M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites*

telling Moses to “Take a census of the whole congregation of the Israelites, in their clans, by their ancestral houses. . . .” The text proceeds by telling how the numbering would be conducted for each tribe. Then we get to the Levites, and the Lord tells Moses “only the tribe of Levi you shall not enroll, and you shall not take a census of them with the other Israelites.” The Levites, whose job was to attend to the tabernacle of the covenant were to be left unnumbered. The census, it appears, was for determining military strength, and the Levites received a ministerial exemption. Even apart from military service, there is something about this exemption from numbering that theological education would like to claim. We are happy to have engineers assessed. (We would like to think they know how to design bridges that don’t fall down as we cross them.) We would generally agree to numbering surgeons to determine if they can cut well and sew things back together correctly when they are finished. (We probably wouldn’t even mind if student surgeons who failed the assessment were barred from operating on people). We would generally support numbering student pilots to make sure they know how to take off and to land, as well as to perform other tasks in between. We are less certain, however, about numbering the Levites. We are not confident that assessment is a good or desirable thing in theological education, particularly quantitative assessment. While there may be value in numbering other professional clans and tribes, our tribe is different. The idea of a ministerial exemption is attractive.

This is the post-modern era, or at least not the old-modern-as-it-used-to-be era, and it is appropriate for me to begin with some self-description so that the reader can determine the hermeneutical lens through which my words should be interpreted. My Ph.D. is in psychology, and the program in which I earned it was very empirically oriented. It required a significant number of graduate hours in research design and statistics, and I spent three years between my tenure as a pastor and professor as a research scientist at the Search Institute in Minneapolis, where all our work was statistical. My first semester in graduate school exposed me, in more than one class, to the short version of psychologist E.L. Thorndike’s conclusion: “If something exists, it exists in some amount. If it exists in some amount, it can be measured.”

I have, on the one hand, been intrigued my entire career about how things can be measured and the kind of understanding and insight that can accrue from appropriate analyses of statistical data. On the other hand, I do not think that all that is worth knowing can be known statistically. John Harris, a thoughtful assessment theorist, cites a quote that reportedly hung on the wall in Albert Einstein’s Princeton office: “Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.” I commend Einstein’s opinion. So, I bring a friendly but critical stance to the topic before us. I am ready neither to dismiss the knowledge that can be derived by empirical methods nor am I ready to assume that knowledge should be limited to what can be verified empirically.

## **The assessment movement and its problems for theological education**

Like any social or higher education phenomenon, the assessment movement is the result of the confluence of many external and internal factors, and its story can be told in many ways. I will provide my perspective on it as a theological educator, observing the movement from the world of higher education accreditation.

### *External factors that influence this movement*

I believe that the outcomes assessment movement has been heavily influenced by cultural factors outside of education. It is deeply rooted in an industrial, consumerist way of thinking and has been promoted more by external political forces than internal educational values.

#### *Industrial images*

In the 2002 gubernatorial race in Pennsylvania, the funding of education was a hot issue. The Democratic candidate's position was that education has to be less dependent on property taxes, and while not increasing other taxes, this candidate wanted to improve the "educational product" offered in Pennsylvania. It strikes me as odd that he thinks of education as producing a "product." Product is an industrial term. Factories make products like cars and widgets. It is less clear to me that schools make educational products. However, if they do, then one can determine whether or not the product is good, just as a well-made car can be distinguished from a poorly made car. I do not think people were talking about educational "products" thirty-five years ago when I graduated from high school. They may have talked about the quality of education, even good schools, but industrial language was not the normative discourse for education. Thinking about education as a product changes educational thinking.

#### *Consumerist perspectives*

If education needs students and products need consumers, then the more education becomes a product, the more students become consumers. In the case of schools, constituents also become consumers, and funders become investors. Consumers look to *US News and World Report* to find a best-value educational product. Investors want data that indicate what the return on their investment has been. ATS occasionally receives calls from persons asking if the Association ranks theological schools. Often, the real question is, in effect, which schools are the best values. The callers seem perplexed when we tell them there is no such ranking or value rating in theological education. These questions are new to the discourse of education. Every decade or so I buy a car, and when I do, I am a consumer concerned about product quality and value.

*The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation:  
M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites*

I bought a grey Camry in 1990, and another grey Camry in 2001. I may be a boring consumer, but I am a consumer. In North America, we have imported a perspective very appropriate for widgets and cars into the world of education, where it may be less appropriate.

*Political demands*

The major influence in the assessment movement has been political. If American students do not perform as well on a test as Japanese students do, it is a political problem more than an educational one. When more money is needed for education, the problem is a political one more than an educational one. The *politics* that influence education demand observable results. Politicians want to be able to demonstrate value for tax dollars expended. The *learning* of education doesn't necessarily want these same things, at least in these same ways. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the politics of education is the passion for simple criteria to determine educational success—like results on a test.

My daughter completed two years of service in the Teach for America program last year and decided to stay in the same, very under-funded, school for a third year. It is a middle school, where she teaches art and one session of remedial reading. The eighth graders have to pass the state reading test or they cannot go on to high school. She has eighteen students in the remedial reading class, three of whom read at the third-grade level and all the rest at lower levels. Her job in that class is to prepare them to pass the test. These children have been failed by society in almost every way a society can fail its children. Their education has been severely under-funded, their parents have been under-employed, their teachers have been under-paid. Now, they will take a test, and if they under-perform, they fail. Students cannot move beyond middle school until they pass the test, and most will drop out of school before they pass it. The state legislature will talk nobly about standards and accountability. Meanwhile, a test becomes a prison that locks these children out of the future that many of them—with a well-funded education and eight years of instruction—could have entered. Richard Elmore, in a recent article in *Harvard Magazine*, worries that the most recent federal legislation is “now accelerating the worst trend of the current accountability movement: that performance-based accountability has come to mean testing alone.” Elmore goes on to note that “relying only on standardized tests dodges the complicated questions of what tests actually measure and of how schools and students react when tests are the sole yardstick of performance.”<sup>1</sup> My daughter will do her best with her students, but she has not had a single course on teaching children how to read. She is the only hope the children have of passing the test. Her energy, imagination, and care for them will be enough for some. But the children who fail, or the school that fails, will take the rap for the society and the politicians who, in my judgment, have failed.

## The assessment movement in higher education

Thus far, I have reflected on the assessment movement in education in general. The movement began with elementary and secondary education, and its greatest impact, in terms of social policies and social consequences, has been in elementary and secondary education. For the past twenty years, however, the movement has been descending on higher education, and once again, the primary impetus has been external.

Since the 1980s, and greatly intensified in the United States by the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, accrediting agencies have been required to demonstrate that the institutions they accredit are assessing “educational effectiveness.” In the ensuing reauthorizations of this bill, the regulation of accrediting agency standards on assessment has grown increasingly precise, demanding, and inescapable—which is exactly what Congress has wanted. Failure by ATS to address educational effectiveness will lead to withdrawal of recognition by the U.S. Secretary of Education, and without that recognition, ATS accreditation does not provide the eligibility needed for seminaries to participate in the federally guaranteed student loan program. The participation of theological students in this loan program is increasing. In 1991, fewer than half of the students in ATS schools graduated with seminary educational debt. In 2001, more than half of the graduates had debt. Of the students who graduated with seminary educational debt, the amount of debt more than doubled between 1991 and 2001. The external, federal influence, although indirect, is strong and getting stronger in theological education in the United States.

### *Internal influences*

A perceptive reader can detect that I do not warm up to the external factors that have pushed the assessment movement forward. I think these factors are philosophically flawed, educationally flawed, psychometrically flawed, and social-policy flawed. However, these flaws do not mean that assessment is a flawed concept. Elementary and secondary teachers have a long and good history of assessing their students, and the results have helped teachers learn more effective strategies for teaching. *Assessment* is a value in education. My critique is perhaps better identified with the “*accountability* movement”—an externally imposed effort that asks the wrong questions for the wrong reasons. I want to affirm the value of the “*assessment* movement” as an internally driven work of educators to improve student learning and increase the professional capacity of teachers. There are internal reasons for assessing theological learning, and I find them as important to affirm as I find the external factors for “*accountability*” reason for worry.

*The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation:  
M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites*

*Assessing student learning is a long-standing practice*

I was a professor for twelve years in a seminary prior to joining the ATS staff. In every course I taught, I devoted considerable effort to assessment. There were tests, papers, projects, and other activities in each course that, I hoped, would facilitate student learning and provide some assessment of that learning. The faculty was sufficiently concerned about assessment that the last week of each semester—and we only had fifteen weeks—was devoted exclusively to assessment. We called it final exam week. Combined with the other tests or assessment-oriented class sessions, my students probably averaged two weeks out of every semester—almost fifteen percent of their total educational “contact” time—in assessment. No one was making me do it. There was no institutional requirement that it be done. So why did my colleagues and I do it? The reasons were internal, not external, and these reasons are instructive for ATS accrediting expectations about assessment.

*Internal reasons for assessing student learning*

Consider the following as possible explanations for my tendency to assess student learning: (1) I cared about the subjects I taught and engaged in assessment as a way of encouraging students to learn what I thought was important for them to know. I may have been wrong, and no doubt, the subjects I taught were less central to ministerial capacity than I thought. Ministry should be an informed profession, if not a learned one, and educational assessment supports the process of learning. (2) I value critical thinking and would like to think that I could be self-critical about my work as a teacher. If the students never learned any of the things I thought they should know, then it seemed to me that, as a self-critical teacher, I would ask if there were something about the course design or my work as a teacher that impeded, rather than facilitated, learning. In this sense, assessment is a form of intellectual self-discipline, a willingness to stand aside from my work critically, in much the same way that I wanted students to stand aside from their ideas or others’ ideas in order to make critical assessments. (3) I cared about the people I would never meet who would be served by my students after they graduated. I wanted students who could be good ministers for my mother and my children, and others’ mothers and children. So, as an act of care for the people I did not know, I was interested in whether or not students were learning the sensitivities and skills, along with the knowledge, that good ministry requires.

I will admit that I spent most semesters just happy to make it through to exam week, let alone thinking that any good would ever come of it. I failed often as a teacher, including giving many tests that were ineffective assessment instruments. Most days I was too busy to function thoughtfully. But, when I was reflective about the work, I did wonder about what I was doing and if I were doing it as effectively as it should be done. These are reasons for educational assessment that are *internal* to our work as teachers, *that grow out*

*of the care and values we bring to our work.* For me, the internal factors for assessment are compelling.

As students have become more diverse, as information has become more prolific, as ministry has become more complex, as religion in North America has become more stressed, theological educators need to become more skilled at assessing the attainment of educational goals for the sake of communities of faith and the faith that shapes those communities.

*The problem of assessment for theological education*

Frankly, I want theological schools to become more committed to, more intentional with, and more skillful about outcomes assessment. I do not think the Levites should get an exemption. I think their work is every bit as crucial as the work of any surgeon, any engineer, or any pilot. Because the work that graduates of ATS schools do is important work, it is our responsibility as theological educators to make sure they know what is necessary to do this work well. In the end, theological schools do not have a choice about developing more intentional and skillful practices of educational assessment. Our choice is either to learn to do this kind of educational work *grumpily* because it has been externally mandated, or to learn how to do it *faithfully* because we care about the work our graduates do and the communities they serve.

### **Theological education and the problems it presents for assessment**

Assessing the outcomes of education is complex work, but it follows a simple form of logic: the activity of teaching has results, and if education has been conducted effectively, the educational results should be evident. So, if my daughter educates her special class of eighth graders effectively, they will pass the eighth-grade reading proficiency test. If they pass the test, we will assume they can *read* and that, with no training and very few resources, my daughter did her job well. Education leads to results, and assessment is the simple task of determining what kind and how much of those results have been attained.

Consider this logic imposed upon the work of a theological faculty member. The professor teaches students about the love, justice, and mercy of God. Because education has results, learning about the love, justice, and mercy of God should have result. But what is it? Is it that the student will be able to say "God is a God of love, justice, and mercy?" Or that the student will know the theological meaning of these categories and the limitations with which we can claim any knowledge of God at all? Or is it that students will order their lives by this vision of God? Or is the preferred result that students will be able to help other people perceive of God in this way and order their lives by such perceptions?



*The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation:  
M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites*

***Identifying outcomes to be assessed***

The first problem with outcomes assessment in theological education is the outcomes, not the assessment. Theological faculties are not always certain what they want theological education to accomplish. In the 1980s, ATS and Lilly Endowment engaged in a variety of activities to discern the aims and purposes of theological education. The Basic Issues Research, as the effort was known, gave considerable attention to the goals of theological education, and it resulted in a small library of articles and monographs on the subject. Between 1992 and 1996, ATS conducted a major study to redevelop the ATS standards of accreditation, and considerable attention was given to this research. The statement on the theological curriculum in the ATS accrediting standards is a paragraph with a shelf full of books behind it. This is how it reads:

4.1.1. In a theological school, the over-arching goal is the development of theological understanding, that is, aptitude for theological reflection and wisdom pertaining to responsible life in faith. Comprehended in this over-arching goal are others such as deepening spiritual awareness, growing in moral sensibility and character, gaining an intellectual grasp of the tradition of a faith community, and acquiring the abilities requisite to the exercise of ministry in that community. These goals, and the processes and practices leading to their attainment, are normally intimately interwoven and should not be separated from one another.

The article I cited earlier by Richard Elmore argues that improving student learning requires that “*internal* accountability. . . precede *external* accountability. That is, school personnel must share a coherent, explicit set of norms and expectations about what a good school looks like before they can use signals from the outside to improve student learning.” ATS, in its effort to identify the core of the theological curriculum and to adopt an accreditation standard about the curriculum, took at least the first step in saying what good theological education should do. The accrediting standards implement this general statement about the curriculum through specific statements for each degree program offered in ATS accredited schools. For the M.Div., the educational goals include: “knowledge of the religious heritage; understanding of the cultural context; growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity; and the capacity for ministerial and public leadership.”

Given these educational goals for the M.Div. program, the proper answer to the question posed earlier about the “learning” professors might hope would result from teaching students about the love, justice, and mercy of God is “all of the above.” The goals for the M.Div. require students to learn the theological affirmations and limitations related to a God of love, justice, and mercy (intellectual grasp of the tradition), that they order their lives by this



vision of God (deepening spiritual awareness), and will be able to help other people perceive God in this way (acquiring the abilities requisite to the exercise of ministry).

While schools are free to adapt and implement these goals in ways that are appropriate to their educational and ecclesial contexts, they are not free to ignore these goals. This lack of freedom is externally imposed by ATS only in the sense that the schools, as a community, adopted these standards as an act of mutual accountability.

The Association has a clear and comprehensive statement about what theological degree programs should accomplish educationally. That leaves us, however, with the second and more vexing question, how do we assess what we hope is accomplished? That is the problem that theological education poses for the assessment movement: How do we assess what we most care about achieving in M.Div. education?

### *Principles for assessing the goals of the theological curriculum*

The more I have worked in this area and observed schools struggling with assessment, the more I have concluded that the outcomes that theological educators most want to be attained are the most difficult to assess, and the goals that are more secondary are the easiest to assess. We can assess, for example, the ability to match thirty-five dates to the dates of birth of thirty-five historical figures. While I do not want to minimize church history, matching dates to people may not be as central to the work of ministry as the ability pastorally to help grieving parents deal with the death of their child. The second ability is much more difficult to assess than the first.

There are several general principles that schools need to keep in mind as they wander into the complex world of assessing the attainment of goals in the M.Div. program. I want to share a short list with you.

#### *There is no one way*

Unlike the narrow way the Gospels talk about, the road that leads to good assessment is a wide one. Good assessment uses many indicators in many ways to arrive at nuanced judgments about educational effects.

#### *Numbers and quantitative information can be very helpful forms of assessment*

You can determine if someone gets thirty or ninety answers right on a 100-question Bible content exam. This can be very helpful, and my statistical background leads me to think that quantitative assessment can be very revealing and informative. But, numbers cannot tell a school if the right answers to these 100 questions truly reflect mastery of biblical content, nor can numbers tell what an acceptable score should be. Quantitative information can be helpful, but it has always been the case that numbers do not make decisions; people do. In fact, one of my worries about the assessment movement is the

*The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation:  
M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites*

tendency to think that numbers can make decisions. That is like thinking that a stop sign should stop your car. A driver will do better to step on the brake. Stop signs indicate an appropriate action; they do not take the action.

*Qualitative methods of assessment are as good as, sometimes better than, quantitative methods*

“Assessment” is not synonymous with “quantitative,” even though there is increasing pressure on accrediting agencies to value numerical assessment over qualitative assessment. This would be tragic in theological education. At the heart of ministerial work are practices that are more like art than technical skill. While the performing arts have always been evaluated, they have seldom been evaluated by numbers. Theological education needs efforts of assessment that are useful, truthful, and qualitative, and not necessarily metric.

*The goals of theological education need to be carefully distinguished*

I remember a faculty lounge conversation from a few decades ago. One of our seminary’s graduates had just devastated a congregation with unprofessional behavior and sexual misconduct. One faculty member expressed surprise because the graduate was such a fine theologian. His statement assumed that if graduates know the right or good, they will do what they know, but, as we discerned in that faculty lounge conversation, bad professional performance or sexual misconduct is not necessarily related to inadequate knowledge of theology or Bible content. Something else is at work. The educational goal to know theology differs from the educational goal to learn responsible professional conduct. Effective assessment requires a careful delineation of the differences in educational goals.

*Different forms of assessment are needed for different educational goals*

Abraham Kaplan, an influential philosopher of science, wrote about the law of the hammer: “Give a child a hammer and suddenly everything needs pounding.” Because assessment is difficult, we have sometimes wanted to use one form of assessment to assess everything. It is as if we had a good scale for measuring weight, and then used it to measure height and hair color. We need to appreciate the multiple ways of knowing that vocational religious work requires, and the multiple forms of assessment these multiple ways of knowing require.

*Assessment specialists can help us with our efforts, but they do not have our answers as theological educators*

We do not have to invent everything, but not everything that we need has been invented. We need to pay careful attention to what has been done in other professions and in other theological schools, but we will need to develop skill in doing this work ourselves.

### **Educational assessment does not end with the assessment of student learning**

It also requires analyses of educational programs. The ATS degree program standards expect educational evaluation in two areas. The first is the one I have discussed the most, assessing student learning, but the second is also important—assessing educational programs.

The standards read:

A.5.1 The institution offering the M.Div. shall be able to demonstrate the extent to which students have met the various goals of the degree program.

A.5.2 The institution shall also maintain an ongoing evaluation by which it determines the extent to which the degree program is meeting the needs of students and the institution's overall goals for the program, including measures such as the percentage of students who complete the program and the percentage of graduates who find placement appropriate to their vocational intentions.

It is altogether possible that a student could graduate knowing everything she was taught, and because she was taught all the wrong things, not function thoughtfully or well in ministry. So, as if assessing educational effectiveness were not enough, the standards add the expectation that a school evaluate its degree programs to determine how they are succeeding in meeting their goals.

Evaluating the effectiveness of a degree program points to one of the greatest difficulties in this work. Theological faculties seem to be comfortable with assessment as an individual activity: An individual faculty member develops a test for the content in his or her course, and individual students take the test, which forms the basis for assigning individual grades. Our discomfort rises when faculty members, as a whole, must decide on the educational goals of the degree program and develop corporate evaluation practices that help faculty make decisions about the outcomes achieved by all the students. Each point in this corporate evaluation is riddled with more difficulty than all the points combined in individual assessment.

### **ATS efforts and the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation Project**

The assessment expectations in the ATS standards are unavoidable. We can argue about their theological correctness, about their implausibility, or about the philosophical flaws in the assessment movement. These arguments

*The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation:  
M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites*

will not make the standard go away, and the Commission on Accrediting cannot reaffirm a school's accreditation on the basis of the elegance of their theological argument against assessment. The task of ATS as an association of schools is to reach deeply into the things we care about in theological education, find the *internal* accountability that will guide efforts to develop appropriate and effective means of assessment, and use our intellectual and institutional skills to become good at this work. ATS seeks to serve the schools as well as to accredit them, and so we have been engaged in work for a decade of which this project is the culmination.

***Redeveloped accrediting standards***

A decade ago, ATS began the difficult task of rethinking its accrediting standards. This was a comprehensive review and redevelopment of accrediting standards, perhaps the most comprehensive review that ATS has ever undertaken. The result is an articulation of the goals of theological degree programs and an articulation of what ATS means by evaluation, educational assessment, and degree program evaluation. As a result, we have agreed-upon expectations about educational goals and educational evaluation.

***Pilot School Project***

Following the adoption of the redeveloped accrediting standards, ATS invited eight of the schools that were among the first to be reviewed according to the redeveloped standards to participate in the Pilot School Project. This effort provided guidance by consultants about the development and implementation of models of educational assessment. The eight schools developed models of evaluation and wrote case studies describing their work that were published in *Theological Education* in spring 2000 and presented at the 2000 ATS Biennial Meeting. These schools have been trying to implement systems of assessment for several years now, and they know about the problems of starting a comprehensive assessment program and the even greater problems associated with continuing it over time.

***Increasing accountability to the standards***

The Commission on Accrediting has taken a phased approach to the implementation of the full expectations of the educational assessment elements in the standards. This is a new educational practice, and ATS schools are acquiring the in-house expertise that colleges and universities also are developing. For the past four years, the Commission has been emphasizing the level of expectation in this area. Most of the schools participating in this Character and Assessment of Learning project were chosen because they are preparing for accrediting visits in 2004, 2005, and 2006. They will be among the last schools to be evaluated by the standards that were adopted in 1996. ATS has both enlisted the schools' help in this current project and intends to help them attain the knowledge necessary to meet the full expectations of the standards.

### ***The Character and Assessment Project***

The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project is a four-to-five year effort, funded by Lilly Endowment, that has several goals, including two central ones: (1) increased understanding of the character of theological learning and (2) increased skill in assessing the attainment of learning for religious vocation. In addition, the hope is that this project will provide better understanding about the relationship between the goals of learning and some characteristics of the students who are the learners, and the development of resources that will both help the schools participating in the project and help other schools in the Association.

The project uses the term “learning for religious vocation” as a means of focusing on the learning that theological educators most care about and the learning that the communities of faith most need their leaders to achieve. “Vocation” is not a reference to office or role, but to the deep ordering of ministerial and priestly work. This is the kind of learning that we want to learn how to assess, because this is the learning, or lack thereof, that can have the largest impact in communities of faith. The project entails two major areas of work: research and institutional implementation of effective assessment strategies.

### ***Research projects***

The project includes five research projects. (1) The first one was completed by Charles Wood and Gordon Smith and is reported in this issue of *Theological Education*. ATS schools were surveyed in an open-ended manner to identify what they are currently doing about assessment. Some interesting skills have been developing, although the report shows there is still much work to do. (2) Carolyn Jurkowitz, in the second study, reviewed the rather massive amount of literature on assessment in higher education. The report of her research is contained within this issue as well. (3) A third study, conducted by Victor Klimoski, examined the ways in which other helping professions, such as social work, education, and nursing, are addressing the issue of assessment. His report is published herein. (4) The fourth study is the most complex and is being coordinated by Katarina Schuth and Gary Peluso-Verdend. They, with their colleagues, are interviewing individual M.Div. students and groups of faculty to get at the deeper and substantive issues that influence learning for religious vocation. This study is seeking to identify the ways in which characteristics of students contribute to or detract from the educational goals of the M.Div. degree program. The results of this study will be available in 2004. (5) A fifth study will involve an assessment of the literature on ministerial performance of graduates of ATS schools. It will explore some denominational studies of clergy and provide a second-order analysis of the findings of those and other research projects that can inform the evaluation of current seminary students. This fifth project is not yet under way but will be conducted in 2003. Together,

*The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation:  
M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites*

this research will make a range of information available to the participating schools to help them invent, implement, or reinvent their efforts to assess student learning and degree program effectiveness.

***Participating schools***

In addition to the research components, the project is involving forty schools that are, or soon will be, preparing for a comprehensive ATS accreditation evaluation. The primary role of schools as participants in this project is anchored to focused work on their self-studies. As part of that work, schools will carefully evaluate the educational goals of their degree programs in the context of the ATS accrediting standards and develop and implement systems for assessing student learning.

As a result of this project, a significant number of ATS schools will have thought about the outcomes they most want to be the results of their educational efforts, ways of assessing the attainment of these outcomes or educational goals, and ways of assessing the overall effectiveness of their school's degree programs. As a peer organization, ATS plans to share the learning of the schools participating in this project through publication in this journal of their case studies and in other venues, and thereby increase the amount of useful information that is available to ATS member institutions. As an accrediting agency, ATS will seek to use its accrediting process both to motivate and to help schools to identify goals that are at the heart of theological education and to assess them with skill and sensitivity.

**Conclusion**

Identifying the goals that theological educators most want their students to attain and developing strategies to assess learning are critically important for theological schools. The importance is not vested so much in the external expectations of educational institutions as it is in the schools' internal commitments to educate students well. Educating students well is important not so much because educators value good work that is done well, as it is that the quality of education of seminary students has a direct bearing on communities of faith and their work in the world. In the end, for theological schools, assessing educational attainment is an act of stewardship because so much that is good is at stake.

*Daniel O. Aleshire is executive director of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.*

ENDNOTE

1. Richard F. Elmore, "Testing Trap," *Harvard Magazine*, September-October 2002, 105:1.

# Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey

*Gordon T. Smith*  
*Regent College*

*Charles M. Wood*  
*Perkins School of Theology*

*ABSTRACT: In this article, Charles Wood and Gordon Smith provide an overview of the state of assessment of learning for religious vocation. They review the background of this issue, especially as it has emerged out of the redeveloped ATS Standards of Accreditation and the momentum for assessment and evaluation now widespread throughout higher education for the professions. A survey instrument consisting of four questions was sent to the ATS member schools, with reliable rates of return, and the authors summarize the findings. The essay contains many intriguing insights and offers provisional conclusions. It also provides an excellent orientation to the overarching purposes of the Lilly Endowment-funded grant to assist ATS member schools in the development of tools to accomplish the complex task of assessing the multifaceted competencies expected of the graduates of the Master of Divinity program.*

## **Introduction: background and findings**

In 1996, The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) adopted a new body of accreditation standards. These standards, developed through a broadly participatory process of reflection and conversation between 1992 and 1996, were meant to do more than bring up to date a set of minimal expectations that theological schools must meet in order to gain and maintain accreditation—the conventional “floor” or “threshold” approach to accreditation. They were meant also to articulate some common aims and aspirations (“What are the characteristics of a good theological school?”) and to provide the resources whereby each school might work out its own vision of excellence and its own process for ongoing self-criticism and growth toward that vision.

These standards put a new emphasis on the activities of teaching and learning that are at the heart of a theological school’s work, and they include



*Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in  
Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey*

for the first time a comprehensive statement of the goals of the theological curriculum:

The theological curriculum is the means by which teaching and learning are formally ordered to educational goals. . . . In a theological school, the over-arching goal is the development of theological understanding, that is, aptitude for theological reflection and wisdom pertaining to responsible life in faith. Comprehended in this over-arching goal are others such as deepening spiritual awareness, growing in moral sensibility and character, gaining an intellectual grasp of the tradition of a faith community, and acquiring the abilities requisite to the exercise of ministry in that community. These goals, and the processes and practices leading to their attainment, are normally intimately interwoven and should not be separated from one another.<sup>1</sup>

These goals are then further specified for particular sorts of degree programs: basic and advanced programs for ministerial leadership, basic and advanced programs in general theological study and theological research and teaching.

Having adopted these new standards, the Association turned to the task of implementing them. The change in the nature and aims of the standards led to a number of fundamental questions. What does a self-study conducted in light of these standards involve? How does this change the work of a visiting committee? How is a school to internalize these standards in its ongoing procedures of planning and evaluation? Various ways of addressing these and other issues have been employed as the new standards have been brought into operation.

In the case of the new, comprehensive standards on curriculum and educational programs, questions such as these have arisen: How does a curriculum properly aim at “wisdom” or “moral sensibility?” How, if at all, are such things taught and learned in a program of study? By what processes of assessment might an instructor or a school determine the extent to which such aims are being achieved, or are these merely vague aspirations? How is a school responsibly to sort out its educational priorities, and to design and implement programs of instruction that have some reasonable chance of fulfilling those priorities? The holistic character of the curricular goals articulated in the new standards presented a new set of issues for reflection. With funding secured from Lilly Endowment, the Association established a project and task force on The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation to pursue these issues in some depth, focusing (as the task force’s title suggests) on basic programs in education for ministry.

The first activity of the task force was to conduct a preliminary study of the state of the question within the member schools. This study is the subject of this report. Its main findings can be summarized in the following five points:

1. A theological school that is making progress on its understanding of “the character and assessment of learning for religious vocation” has a reasonably coherent normative vision of the vocation of ministerial leadership toward which its basic ministerial degree program is oriented.
2. Such a school also has a fairly comprehensive, i.e., non-reductionistic, understanding of what preparation for ministerial leadership involves.
3. The school is reasonably clear as to what aspects of that preparation the school can and should undertake to provide, and what aspects are to be left to other agencies. It displays a corresponding clarity as to what sorts of judgments, with what sorts of standing, the school can and should offer concerning its students’ or graduates’ qualifications for ministerial office.
4. The school has a good working understanding of the relations among educational goals, curricular components, and practices of assessment for both students and programs.
5. Finally, the school possesses a readiness and an ability actually to make the judgments that are called for.

### **The study**

In the spring of 2001, a set of four open-ended questions was sent to each member school in the Association, requesting that the school arrange a faculty discussion of the questions early in the fall term and send a brief report on the discussion to the ATS office. We had three similarly open-ended aims in making this request. The first was to encourage conversation and reflection about these matters among faculty and administrators in theological schools. The second was to gain some informed impression of the current situation in theological schools with regard to the articulation of learning goals for the Master of Divinity degree program, the modes of assessment currently in use, and how the relationship between the two is perceived. The third was to identify, in a provisional way, some of the more promising approaches to both goals and assessment to see what might be learned from them.

This brief report will address each of these three aims in turn. Given the nature of the questions posed and of the discussions held, the responses give us little in the way of reliably quantifiable data. However, they do give us what we were seeking: a sense of the variety of ways these matters are being perceived and approached in our schools, and a sampling of the insights that have been gained as well as of the perplexities with which we struggle in this area of our work.

*Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in  
Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey*

***Conversations under way***

Responses were received from eighty-four schools—roughly one-third of the institutions to whom questionnaires were sent. The university-related divinity schools were significantly underrepresented in the responses, but otherwise the responses were roughly proportionate to the membership of ATS so far as the standard broad categories of schools were concerned. Around ninety percent of the respondents indicated that the questions had been discussed in one or more general faculty meetings (often as part of a retreat or conference), usually with some advance preparation. In many cases, the respondent provided a sampling of the range of comments made in response to each question, or a summary of the course of the discussion. In a few instances in which a broader discussion could not be organized, the questions were considered and a response prepared by some appropriate standing or ad hoc committee. A number of the reporting schools had recently completed accreditation reviews or curricular reviews, so that this discussion was an occasion to revisit issues recently discussed—perhaps from a different angle or with some new participants. Other schools were anticipating such reviews in the very near future, so that this discussion was an opportunity for a preliminary stocktaking on questions to be faced in that context.

There is clearly a good deal of interest in or concern about the issues raised in these questions. Aside from the new ATS standards themselves and the schools' own ongoing self-evaluations, the concern would appear to have two main sources. First, the emphasis on goals and assessment in several of the regional accrediting associations, and the particular ways this emphasis is taking shape in accreditation practice (e.g., in close attention to “outcomes assessment” and “measurable objectives”), are creating an interest in finding ways of articulating the goals and objectives of theological education for ministry that are both appropriate to that task and explicable in the broader context of educational assessment. Secondly, the alarming rise in publicized instances of pastoral misconduct is prompting many schools—either directly or through the churches to which they relate—to reconsider their roles in the cultivation, evaluation, and certification of students' fitness for ministry. Ecclesial expectations and guidelines—either formal and explicit, or informal and implicit—are an additional factor in the thinking of many schools. For example, for most Roman Catholic schools, Pope John Paul II's 1992 apostolic exhortation on the formation of priests, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, and the subsequent fourth (1993) edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, have had significant influence. For schools in other traditions, denominational ordination examinations or the expectations of those who interview candidates for ordination are important reference points.

Conversations about learning goals and the assessment of learning are, in fact, going on in most places and do not need much encouragement to get

started. Still, a good number of the respondents expressed appreciation for the opportunity this request created to have such a conversation outside of the immediate context of an accreditation review when, perhaps, more basic questions of purpose and principle might be raised. Several expressed the hope that this project might yield insights and conceptual resources that will be useful to individual schools and to the Association as a whole.

The discussions provoked by these questions tend to confirm two impressions widely held by observers of current theological education. The first is that there is something of a crisis of confidence in assessment. There is widespread suspicion both within and outside our schools that the assessment of ministerial students generally lacks method or rigor or both, and thus has little meaning or effect. The same suspicion extends, *mutatis mutandis*, to the assessment of the programs and schools in which these students are enrolled. The reasons for the suspicion vary a great deal, but they seem to be of two main kinds. There are doubts as to whether those who are entrusted with the task of rendering assessments are actually equipped to do so (that is, whether they have the pertinent data, instruments, and abilities to make the appropriate judgments, or even whether the pertinent data, etc., can be had); and there are doubts as to whether those who are entrusted with the task, however well prepared they may be, are willing to assume that burden. A number of factors conspire to make the task of assessment a very difficult one, and the pressure to abdicate, e.g., to pass the problem along and leave it to someone else to make the hard call, is very strong.

The second impression confirmed by these discussions, however, is that suspicion has not entirely degenerated into cynicism. There is interest in addressing the problems, and there is evidence that solutions may be found. The serious engagement of so many theological faculties in this preliminary discussion is a good sign.

### *An overview of the responses*

1. *How would you describe the learning goals of your basic ministerial degree program (ordinarily the M.Div. degree)? (What are you hoping that students will gain from the program? What is the relation between your formal statement of the degree program's goals and the faculty's current working understanding of those goals?)* Most respondents quoted or summarized the institution's current catalog statement of program goals, indicated the statement had been fairly recently reviewed or reworked and that there was a good degree of understanding and "ownership" of it on the part of the faculty, and they went on to provide some elaboration or reflection based on the faculty's discussion of the question. A few acknowledged that their current statement was due for an overhaul, or that it played little role in actual curricular planning or course design, but in most schools the current formal statement of program goals appears from these reports to be widely affirmed and at least basically functional.

*Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in  
Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey*

The majority of responding schools employ some version of a threefold distinction with regard to the goals of the M.Div. program. They speak of what the person entering upon pastoral leadership is to *be*, what he or she is to *know*, and what he or she is to be *able to do*. In many cases, this threefold distinction is explicit and is theologically grounded, e.g., in some account of the nature of ministry or church. Most of the Roman Catholic schools make explicit use of the threefold scheme of spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation as laid out in the *Program of Priestly Formation*, with appropriate adjustments in specific goals when speaking of the formation of persons for leadership other than ministerial priesthood.<sup>2</sup> Some evangelical schools, utilizing different conventions in terminology, speak of the ways their programs are intended to contribute to the minister's "being," "knowing," and "doing." Even where some version of the distinction is not explicitly invoked, it is often implicit in the way ministry and preparation for ministry are described in the school's statement of learning goals. The pervasiveness of this pattern is understandable: in all traditions in which the church and its ministry are understood to have something to do with the threefold office of Christ, ministry is likely somehow to involve prophetic, priestly, and pastoral elements ("teaching, sanctifying, and leading" the people of God, or "Word, Sacrament, and Order"); and the triad of "knowing, being, and doing," or that of intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral formation, has at least some rough, but persistent, correlation to these dimensions of ministry.

To say this threefold distinction is common in these reports is not to say each school gives equal emphasis to each part. Schools vary a great deal in the weight they give to "knowing," "being," and "doing" in their statements of learning goals. There are at least three reasons for this variation. First, there are different paradigms of ministry or church leadership informing these statements. Some traditions (and some schools serving these traditions) tend to think of ministry primarily in practical terms—the minister is a "doer," and there is a task-oriented approach to his or her education. Others tend to emphasize the teaching or "traditioning" role of the leader as the bearer of the community's wisdom; others, the leader's own holiness or sacramentality. The priority given to one of these areas by a school's own theological heritage or primary constituency, and the way the other areas are understood in relation to that priority, may well be determinative for the school's articulation of learning goals.

Secondly, however, there are differences as to how these schools understand their own responsibilities so far as ministerial preparation is concerned. Some schools include goals pertaining to all three of these broad areas within their learning goals for the degree program, but will make it clear that the priority of the school lies with one area—academic preparation, perhaps, or competence in particular ministerial functions. A school's faculty, administration, and/or sponsoring body may well believe that, for example, spiritual formation is of the utmost importance in ministerial preparation, but also

believe that the theological school as such cannot or should not bear major responsibility for this task. The responses of a number of schools indicated that such a delimitation of responsibility informed their own goal statements. Two or three, reflecting the language of the ATS Standards, noted that the school provided “opportunities” for students’ ongoing personal and spiritual growth, and that these were regarded as important aspects of preparation for ministry, but that the assessment of students’ maturity in these areas was beyond the school’s purview. A few displayed a similar reserve, at least implicitly, with regard to students’ pastoral formation: they could, they thought, equip a student for entry into the ministerial office, but whether the student has what it takes for leadership over the long haul is really outside the scope of the curriculum.

Thirdly, there are differences occasioned by the schools’ interaction with their accrediting agencies and analogous bodies. The current popularity of “outcomes assessment” among accrediting bodies in North America has met with a variety of responses from ATS schools, ranging from appreciation and ready adaptation to skepticism and resistance. Some schools have drafted or revised their statements of learning goals in order to focus primarily on behavioral outcomes, and have further specified these goals and the means for their assessment at various levels, e.g., with regard to the objectives of major curricular divisions and particular courses. Some of these evince a high level of confidence as to what it is that their graduates may be expected to be able to do. Others have either avoided “outcomes” language or, more commonly, have supplemented it with other sorts of language. Expressions of worry as to what important features of learning and preparation elude objective measures were fairly frequent in these responses, and a few articulated the concern at greater length: Can the schools comprising the ATS develop an understanding of learning goals and of the assessment of learning rich enough to encompass all that properly belongs to theological education for ministry, and strong enough to withstand reductionistic pressures, whether internal or external? Can we perhaps even contribute something to the broader conversation about assessment in higher education?

2. *What are the principal practices of assessment through which you measure the attainment of these learning goals? (How do you determine the extent to which individual students have achieved the learning goals of the program, and how do you determine the extent to which the program itself is achieving its aims for your students?)*

This question attempted—perhaps unwisely—to ask about two related issues: the assessment of individual students’ learning and the assessment of the programs intended to foster that learning. Most respondents addressed both, and most also said more about the first than about the second. Some respondents, in explanation of this, noted that faculty members generally have



*Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in  
Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey*

more experience with student assessment than with program assessment, and often regard the latter as an “extra” task—outside their normal duties—for which they are neither especially well-equipped nor especially motivated. Some respondents concentrated exclusively on student assessment; one, bucking the trend, concentrated almost exclusively on program assessment.

*Student assessment*

Here again, a threefold distinction was often employed in relating practices of assessment (and the corresponding curricular areas) to general learning goals. The typical curriculum is portrayed as having a classroom-instruction component that addresses what the aspiring minister needs to know, a field education component that addresses what he or she needs to be able to do, and a personal and spiritual formation component that addresses the issues of ministerial “being.” Some—perhaps most—responses treated these as quite discrete operations. A few commented on the substantial overlapping among them, (e.g., “testing and writing papers have not only to do with ‘book’ learning, but also with a number of character qualities: integrity, discipline, ability to focus, emotional stability”; learning exegesis is learning a practice, just as is learning to lead in worship; field education can be the testing-ground not only for pastoral formation but also for intellectual and spiritual formation).

The conventional practices of academic evaluation, e.g., examinations, reports, research papers, and the like, appear to have a prominent place in most of the reporting schools in connection with the first of these components, and generally it is the course instructor who serves as evaluator of the work. Occasionally, peer assessments or self-assessments will figure into the process, but these are more commonly utilized in the second and third components than in the first. In the second component, field education—understood for the moment to include various sorts of focused practica as well as Clinical Pastoral Education, student pastorates, and internships—assessment normally consists of evaluation based on observation of practice. The evaluators may include supervising pastors, laity in the placement setting, consultants, peers, and the students themselves, as well as (or in place of) faculty members. In the third component, personal and spiritual formation, evaluation takes the greatest variety of forms, depending upon the sort of program in place, the extent to which expectations are articulated, and other factors. In some settings, formation directors serve as the principal evaluators; in others, each student is reviewed at stated points in his or her progress toward the degree by the faculty as a whole; in some, the evaluative process involves student peers, faculty members, and church officials or representative church members. In some schools, detailed lists of criteria are used; in others, not. Sometimes the student being evaluated is an active participant in the evaluative process (e.g., contributing a self-assessment, meeting with an evaluating team, and/or receiving a

summary of results indicating strengths and areas for improvement); sometimes the student need not even be aware of the process. Sometimes the evaluation leads to some sort of formal positive endorsement or certification of the student's personal fitness for ministry; sometimes it is simply an opportunity to weed out seriously problematic cases, and no positive judgment is offered concerning those who survive.

The assessment of students with regard to personal, moral, and spiritual qualities often takes place within the context of a more comprehensive review of the student's total progress and readiness for ministry—a review that may occur at the end of each semester, once a year, or midpoint in the student's program. A high number of the reporting schools feature such holistic reviews. For some, these have assumed a major role in the ongoing formative evaluation of students, and there are some very thoughtfully developed procedures in place for their conduct, including several involving student "portfolios" or other cumulative, integrated representations of student's attainments, individualized learning goals, and meetings at regular intervals in which students take stock of their progress and needs, in conversation with their advisors or others.

#### *Program assessment*

The familiar practices of curricular assessment—student course evaluations, faculty discussions, cumulative reviews of student performance, entry and exit interviews or questionnaires (whether standardized or homegrown), other surveys of students and recent graduates, reviews of graduates' experiences with ordination examinations or in the pastoral placement process, reports from church officials or local congregations on graduates' strengths and weaknesses—are mentioned in these responses. There appears to be wide variation as to the regularity, manner, and scope of such assessment. The variation can be attributed partly to differences in schools' sizes and situations, and partly to the degree to which program assessment has become integrated into the schools' normal operations.

3. *How close is the fit between these current practices of assessment and the overall goals of the program? (Where are you most confident of the results of your assessment practices, and where are you least confident? What modes appear to work well, giving you the information you need? What modes appear not to work well, or what aspects—if any—seem to elude assessment by your current practices?)*

This question elicited comments not only on the fit between practices of assessment and learning goals, but also on the fit between learning goals and curriculum. An occasional response was to this effect: "We assume there is a close link between the courses we teach and the overall goals of the program, but do we have sufficient evidence that the link is really there?" Or: "Our goals give priority to x; but unfortunately, while our curriculum is very strong in y



*Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in  
Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey*

and z, it provides for relatively little attention to x." The "x," in such cases, was usually (but not always) in the area of ministerial "being"—matters of character and commitment, vocational clarity, and fundamental dispositions. Generally, however, the responses to this question began by expressing overall—if vague—satisfaction as to the way learning goals, curricular elements, and evaluative practices cohere, and then went on to indicate reservations or worries at particular points.

Many expressed higher confidence in conventional practices of academic assessment—examinations, research papers, and the like—for conventional academic learning goals (e.g., mastery of data, modes of analysis, criticism, and interpretation), and lower confidence in practices of assessment for pastoral competence and qualities of personhood. ("How do we know how they're going to do in the long run?" "How do we effectively assess the interior?") Some essentially reversed this scale. At many of the reporting institutions, grade inflation is perceived as so severe a problem as to render academic assessment meaningless. (Grades at Harvard College these days are said to "run the gamut from A to B." At a number of theological schools grades seem to run the gamut from A to A-minus.) In the absence of any rigorous evaluation of academic performance, other considerations may well take on greater significance.

Several explanations for grade inflation were suggested in the comments reported. Some attributed it to cultural expectations: this is a problem the theological school inherits, not one that it creates. Others mentioned ecclesiastical factors: the school's job is to prepare the church's candidates for ministry as well as it can, but not to expect more of them than they can deliver, so academic deficiencies are generally overlooked. For others, it is the ethos of the school itself that inflates grades to downplay academic achievement for some reason, e.g., in an attempt to foster collaboration rather than competition among students. The generous bestowal of high grades is meant to lower the academic pressure so that students can give attention to other matters. A few schools have adopted pass/fail systems or narrative evaluations of student performance in place of grades, but it is not clear from these responses whether either alternative has been found to resolve the underlying difficulties. No school reported a successful attempt to deflate its grades.

In the area of field education or pastoral formation, the complaint most commonly registered concerned the unevenness of the quality of both supervision and assessment. Insufficient training for field supervisors, insufficient communication between those supervisors and the faculty, and serious variations in the quality of the field experience itself, all were mentioned as factors rightly undermining confidence—in many cases—that the process yields any reliable assessment of students' ministerial competence. There were notable exceptions to this, i.e., schools with strong supervised ministry programs that include effective systems of evaluation. In these, the field education experience

often appears to become the main context for “putting it all together” and for arriving at a synoptic judgment as to how well the student has it together.

Not surprisingly, it was in the area of personal or spiritual formation that the most doubts as to the meaningfulness and accuracy of assessment were voiced. The degree of confidence about assessment seems independent of the amount or quality of attention given by a school to this component of ministerial preparation. (If anything, there may be an inverse correlation: faculties in settings with the most experience in this area sometimes show the greatest reserve.) In schools with or related to substantial, well-articulated programs of spiritual formation stressing accountability and evaluation, it is normally still recognized that deep problems may evade detection, and that students may, as one respondent put it, “cooperate to graduate.” In several schools without such extensive programs and resources in the area, faculty comments revealed a worry about the discrepancy between the firm judgments the faculty is sometimes expected to render as to students’ personal fitness and the often skimpy, superficial, and anecdotal evidence on which those judgments are based. Several responses expressed feelings of faculty frustration over the absence of mechanisms for the sharing of information from various sources of assessment (e.g., field education, formation experience, classes, community life, and the like) that might permit a fuller view of the student to emerge.

*4. What other approaches to the assessment of learning has the faculty considered? (Why were they considered? If implemented, what were the results? If not implemented, what were the obstacles?)*

There were two main areas in which schools reported considering or experimenting with new approaches. First, many schools whose programs do not presently feature some sort of comprehensive, integrative exercise—a senior seminar, comprehensive exams, a culminating project or thesis, or the development and review of a portfolio—are giving thought to such a requirement. A few schools have moved in the opposite direction, having tried comprehensive examinations or an integrative seminar and found the experiment discouraging. Secondly, a number of initiatives in the direction of program assessment seem to be in the works, particularly ones involving the regular gathering of information and judgments from the school’s external constituencies through survey instruments, focus groups, meetings on and off campus, and so forth.

There were a few—but relatively few—indications of curiosity or concern about distance learning or online education, and its impact upon both the learning process and the assessment of student learning. How to get issues of personal formation in community and the World Wide Web into the same frame of vision is a question with which many schools are wrestling, but for whatever reason, it is not a prominent one in these responses. Given the increasing use of Web-based instructional technology not only for distance education but in conjunction with conventional, in-residence courses, and also

*Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in  
Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey*

given the growing body of reflection on Web-based teaching and learning and on related questions, this is a puzzling omission.

### **Some provisional conclusions**

In this concluding section, we want to return to the “findings” sketched in the opening section, and elaborate on them only slightly in light of the foregoing summary of the responses. We hope in this way to offer for discussion a sort of composite picture of a theological school that is making progress on its understanding of “the character and assessment of learning for religious vocation.” The following features seem especially pertinent:

1. A theological school that is making progress in these matters has a reasonably coherent normative vision of the vocation of ministerial leadership toward which its basic ministerial degree program is oriented. Schools with homogeneous constituencies may have an easier time of this, but it is not impossible for a school with a very diverse constituency to formulate an account of the basic character and qualities of religious leadership it seeks to cultivate—an account that, while theologically grounded and articulated, could be acknowledged across a wide range of religious traditions, and applicable to a wide range of ministerial roles or offices. In any case, the coherence and grounding of this vision are worth emphasis: the point is not merely to have a list of desirable qualities, abilities, etc. (generated, for example, by consulting a range of focus groups), but to have some sense of how the essential elements hang together, even require one another, in the ministerial vocation.
2. Such a school also has a fairly comprehensive, i.e., non-reductionistic, understanding of what preparation for ministerial leadership involves. However the school prioritizes the various aspects or ingredients of the educational task, it does not play some of these off against others (head versus heart, for instance), but is attentive to their need for one another.
3. The school is reasonably clear as to what aspects of that preparation the school can and should undertake to provide, and what aspects are to be left to other agencies. It also shows a corresponding clarity in its practices as to what sorts of judgments, with what sorts of standing, the school can and should offer concerning its students’ or graduates’ qualifications for ministerial office. Here again, the interrelatedness of the various aspects of preparation—the mutual implication of “being, knowing, and doing,” to instance that scheme once more—cannot be overlooked, however the responsibilities for preparation and assessment are allocated.
4. The school has a good working understanding of the relations among educational goals, curricular components, and practices of assessment so that it provides the resources and experiences through which the goals may be

realized, and has access to modes of assessment—of individual students, of teaching and of courses, and of the entire educational program—appropriate to those goals.

5. Finally, the school possesses a readiness and an ability actually to make the judgments that are called for. This means that individual faculty members and other supervisors entrusted with the task understand and accept their responsibility to exercise genuine, discriminating judgment in their evaluation of students, and that they are supported in this exercise by the administration, governing board, and general ethos of the school. It means further that this affirmative approach to assessment extends to every aspect of the life of the institution. At this point, the reader may suspect that this composite picture, while dabbling in fiction before, has irrevocably entered that realm. However, the manifold consequences of a long-standing cultural and ecclesiastical evasion of the task of assessment have become painfully clear in our recent history. A reminder of the connection between judgment and redemption may not be out of place. To the extent that theological schools honor that connection in their educational and administrative practices, they are signs of hope.

*Gordon T. Smith, recently dean and associate professor of theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, has been appointed president of Overseas Council Canada. Charles M. Wood is Lehman Professor of Christian Doctrine in Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. Both are members of the Task Force on the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation.*

#### ENDNOTES

1. Standard 4: The Theological Curriculum, Statement 4.1.1, *Bulletin 45*, Part 1 (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools, 2002), 54.
2. The third edition (1981) of the *Program of Priestly Formation* typically spoke of “personal and spiritual formation,” “academic formation,” and “pastoral formation” as the three main areas. In the current fourth edition (1993), following *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, the triad is “spiritual,” “intellectual,” and “pastoral,” with “human formation”—personal growth and the development of character—both presupposed by and accompanying them all (see especially sections 92 and 264). We understand that the fifth edition, now in preparation, is to give fuller attention than did the fourth edition to the role of “human formation” in preparation for ministry.

# Knowing and Caring

*Charles M. Wood*

*Perkins School of Theology*

*ABSTRACT: This brief presentation aims to initiate some reflection on the preceding report by calling attention to some of its more interesting findings—for instance, the common recognition of a significant variety of learning goals for ministerial education, and an equally common skepticism about the adequacy of our approaches to the assessment of learning—and then by proposing that the distinction between abilities and dispositions might be an important one to keep in mind as work on these issues proceeds.*

I have taken minutes of enough meetings and have written reports on enough conferences to understand that “reporting” is nearly always a creative act. While I believe that the report that Gordon Smith and I prepared for this project is faithful to the data, we had to engage in some critical and constructive interaction with the data in order to interpret them. Now that we have completed that task, I want to move more fully from a reporting mode to a reflective mode, and think out loud about two or three features of what we might call the state of the question among our schools with regard to the character and assessment of learning.

One thing I was interested to discover through this survey was the degree of correlation between the learning goals articulated by our schools’ faculties for their ministerial degree programs and the learning goals identified in the current ATS standards. The standards talk about those goals in a pretty ambitious and comprehensive way, and we found that, by and large, the reporting faculties did too, as they expressed in their own distinctive vocabularies what theological education for ministry involves. From the ways that this subject was addressed in most of the accounts we read, I gained the impression that this is not a matter of the schools’ trying to make their goals fit the ATS standards. Rather, it would appear that the ATS standards do serve to articulate, in commonly recognizable language, our schools’ own aspirations. The pervasiveness of something like the three-aspect pattern of “knowing,” “being,” and “doing”—of intellectual, personal/spiritual, and pastoral formation—in the schools’ ways of talking about their goals might be taken as evidence of the grounding of their learning goals in some understanding of what ministerial leadership really requires. That triad does not appear explicitly in the ATS standards when they speak of curricular goals, either in general (4.1) or with reference to basic ministerial degree programs (4.2.1) or to the M.Div. degree in particular (A.2.0). However, the various things mentioned in the statement can be arranged into that pattern without much difficulty: things

## *Knowing and Caring*

relating to moral, emotional, and spiritual maturity can be assigned to ministerial “being,” things such as the reflective grasp of a religious tradition and of the socio-cultural context can be assigned to “knowing,” and specific abilities for leadership can be assigned to “doing.” There are, of course, both advantages and disadvantages to this three-aspect pattern. On the positive side, it can help combat reductionism: it is an affirmation that theological education rightly involves several different things. On the negative side, the distinction can promote compartmentalization and lead us to ignore the interdependence and mutual implication of these three factors. A great deal depends on our realizing just how fully these three elements of ministerial preparation require each other, and stand or fall together.

Both in the ATS statement and in what we heard from the reporting schools, what might be called “ability-language” and what might be called “disposition-language” are intermixed. This mixture is something to which I want to return in a moment. But first I want to call attention to another pervasive feature of the accounts we studied: the relatively low level of confidence we on theological faculties seem to have that we are actually making the assessments we need to make—again, not to satisfy accrediting agencies, but for the good of the church and its ministry. There are many reasons for that low level of confidence, and I think the phenomenon requires a good deal of discriminating analysis. But there is one area in which I think some initial conceptual clarity could be very helpful to us. That is, I think we would be helped both to relate “knowing,” “being,” and “doing” appropriately, and to think about the assessment of learning in all three, if we were to pursue the distinction I mentioned a moment ago between ability-language and disposition-language. This distinction cuts across all three aspects of learning. That is, all three—the intellectual, the personal, and the pastoral dimensions of ministerial preparation—involve both abilities and dispositions.

I am going to oversimplify somewhat now just to get the distinction before us; you can supply the qualifications and refinements in your spare time. Abilities can be taught and learned through the specific components of a degree program: through courses, practica, workshops, and so forth. The ability to memorize and reproduce information on demand is perhaps a relatively low-level ability, but it is definitely one we can teach, and can test for. The ability to follow and construct arguments, the ability to conduct biblical exegesis according to certain complex methods, to assess a theological claim, to prepare and preach a sermon, to lead a congregation in a planning process, to recognize cultural differences, to analyze an instance of conduct and form a defensible moral judgment about it, to give counsel to the perplexed—these, too, are abilities that can be taught and learned, and they are abilities whose presence or absence we are actually fairly good at detecting.

But learning an ability, even a reasonably complex ability, is one thing. Being disposed to exercise it is another. This distinction is recognized, in its painfully negative form, in the law. According to Mary Angela Shaughnessy, an authority on ministry and the law, ministerial malpractice may involve “either a lack of competence to perform appropriate duties or a willful decision to perform such duties badly.”<sup>1</sup> One may have the ability, but lack the disposition. To internalize the relevant competences, to make them a part of oneself so that one will not fail to exercise them in the relevant circumstances, is to combine ability and disposition, knowing and caring, into genuine aptitude. Preparation for ministerial leadership involves not only acquiring abilities, but also acquiring dispositions.

Dispositions, like abilities, are taught and learned in theological curricula, partly in courses and other curricular components devoted to the corresponding abilities. But they are taught and learned differently. It may be that dispositions are mainly taught and learned through the educational program as a whole, and through the life of the school as a whole, rather than in discrete units. They are taught and learned through the way the various components of the educational program cohere, through the quality of the common life of the school, its ethos, its institutional practices, its relation to the churches it serves, and so forth.

While the assessment of students’ abilities can be carried on to a great extent at the level of courses and practica, the assessment of dispositions requires other approaches and other contexts. We can much more readily and reliably assess what a person can do than we can assess the person’s disposition to do it when we are not providing the incentive of a passing grade on the exercise. How do you know (to use one of the categories of the ATS standards) when a person possesses a certain moral sensibility? You put them in situations where that sensibility can be expected to manifest itself, and see what happens. But suppose a student says to himself or herself, “Aha. This is where I’m supposed to manifest moral sensibility . . . .”—well, you see the problem. Disposition shows up precisely when one is *not* being graded. Character, as the old maxim has it, shows in what you’d do if you knew you would never be found out. So we are in something of a bind when it comes to the assessment of dispositions in the context of a theological curriculum. Students can, as one of our respondents put it, “cooperate to graduate.” Or, as another old maxim has it, “The main thing is integrity; once you’ve learned to fake that, you’ve got it made!” Often, perhaps, it’s not a matter of deliberate faking, but only of too little internalization; the roots remain too shallow.

This difference between abilities and dispositions leads me to think that theological schools would be well advised to keep their claims very modest when it comes to certifying students’ possession of the dispositions or the character requisite to responsible ministerial leadership. There is no doubt that schools do play a role in the formation of students’ dispositions. There is also



## *Knowing and Caring*

no doubt that there are better and worse ways of doing so, and that it is well for schools to give some thought to the various ways they shape students' dispositions, both deliberately and inadvertently. Schools will of course ordinarily want to help students cultivate and strengthen the dispositions needed for ministerial leadership. This requires attention to the entire life of the institution as well as to what goes on in particular courses. But the effectiveness of the school or of the educational program in that task may well be a matter for long-term program and institutional evaluation rather than a matter for confident assessment in individual cases.

This is just a sample, and perhaps not a very good sample, of the sort of reflection that our survey report on the state of the question provokes. I look forward to hearing the results of more and better reflection on the part of other readers as our thinking on these issues continues.

*Charles M. Wood is Lehman Professor of Christian Doctrine in Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, and a member of the Task Force on the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation.*

### ENDNOTE

1. Mary Angela Shaughnessy, S.C.N., *Ministry and the Law: What You Need to Know* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 23.



# Getting to the Question: Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry

Victor J. Klimoski

St. John's University School of Theology

*ABSTRACT: Drawing on site visits to three professional schools, the author identifies three key practices that account for their successful use of assessment: working from well-defined criteria, developing a structure that integrates data into the decision-making processes of the faculty, and building capacity with the faculty to tailor assessment to the character and focus of the school. Included are two discussion "maps" using dimensions of professional training to assist faculties as they determine how assessment can best serve ongoing improvement of teaching and learning.*

Discussions about assessment in seminary faculties are seldom dispassionate. In such a conversation recently, a professor asserted, "You people need to recognize that we are experts in our work. We have been hired to make expert judgments about student progress. Let us do our work and stop complicating our lives and the lives of our schools with proposals for measuring what cannot be measured." Let me begin this article with insights about assessment from other professions by first parsing this statement.

*You people* captures the opinion that forces outside higher education are imposing assessment on institutions. Mandated assessment is not something, these voices would say, that is congenial to the culture of seminary life. Furthermore, those who promote assessment are presumed to be administrator-types who have fallen prey to the false notion that if it is not measurable, it is not learned. *We are experts in our work* reflects the frustration people feel when they enter territory unfamiliar and strange. The reflex response is to claim and fence off the area of expertise they are sure about. *Let us do our work and stop complicating our lives* assert that assessment is intrusive, unhelpful, and distracting. For faculties who are already scrambling to carve out time for their research and for preparing their classes, working on assessment plans can appear as one more burden they are forced to manage.

*Proposals for measurement of what cannot be measured* contains an accusation that cuts both ways. On the one hand, advocates of assessment have often been careless in acknowledging that some important aspects of learning cannot be counted. In a seminary this is crucial. How shall we measure one's love of God? How can we determine that one has grown in discipleship or opened herself to God's formative grace? These are questions important to faculty and not easily reduced to quantifiable measures. On the other hand, faculty members can be tempted to tag as unmeasurable all sorts of learning outcomes they would

*Getting to the Question: Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry*

prefer not to consider. Does how one teaches actually affect what a student in the end knows? Can one just teach Bible or systematics or church history, leaving issues of pastoral competence and spiritual growth to other departments? Does the classical model of graduate education serve the professional and ecclesial purposes of ministry? Such questions and the information they generate can disturb the patterns of academic life as we know them. When we take such questions seriously, undisputed assumptions come under closer scrutiny and structures we thought were so well-crafted no longer appear as stable.

In the course of researching this article and thinking about the challenges of assessment as a vital educational practice, I have recalled conversations like that noted above with a faculty I led as dean and with other faculties with whom I have worked as a consultant. What is it that seems to make such an awkward place for assessment as part of the ordinary work we do? My conclusion is that too often proponents have been inattentive to the question for which assessment is the response. In fact, at times the dissonance between the answer that is assessment and the realities of the school has been glaring. One school, for example, was told by its regional accreditor that it had to add, to an already-stretched thin budget, a full-time professional in assessment; another school has masses of data for which there is no apparent use; and yet another, as it prepared for its annual decennial review, was cautioned by a regional staff person that the state of its assessment plan put in jeopardy its entire accreditation status. Assuming these are exceptions rather than the norm, such stories become the stuff of legend and feed the notion that someone somewhere has found assessment to be an answer to a question that is not quite clear.

As the Smith and Wood article in this volume shows, the state of affairs in ATS schools around assessment is far from dismal. After some fits and starts, the question of “why assessment” is loosing some of its industrial armor and being adapted to the culture of theological schools. That is what needs to happen because foundational to effective assessment is the interest in knowing “how we are doing.” It is an interest theological faculties pursue in many varied and elegant ways as they seek to gauge the impact of a curriculum and program on graduates and their work in the church.

What the assessment movement has done is to raise the ante about when and how a school determines how it is doing. Undergraduate colleges have been in the vanguard of the movement and provide a rich literature around key dimensions of institutional assessment. Surprisingly, graduate schools have been slow to join in the discussions until regional and professional accreditation agencies began to respond to pressures for accountability.<sup>1</sup> It is not the case that seminaries were indifferent to outcomes. In fact, the decennial preparations for reaccreditation by ATS and periodic reviews by denominational bodies prompted purposeful action to take the pulse of graduates and their constituencies about the graduate’s proficiency in the role of minister and the

effectiveness of the school that prepared her or him. The significance of such data, however, has escalated as seminaries are asked far more pointedly than in the past whether they indeed deliver on their stated purposes.

As theological schools continue to sort through the issues and insights posed by the assessment movement, it is wise to explore what other professional schools have learned. Some have been at this work longer or had more public and legal accountability because of licensure to justify the quality of their training. This does not suggest that other professional schools are necessarily more expert nor does it imply an easy parallel between what they do and what we do. Nonetheless, the lessons learned can enrich the efforts of theological schools to adapt the principles and strategies of assessment to its particular work and move conversations from compliance to creative exploration of and response to the question, “How *are* we doing?”

### **Design of the study**

The decision of the ATS Task Force on the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation originally was to focus on three helping professions with which we would share some broad humanistic goals of service: teaching, social work, and nursing. Rather than attempt an exhaustive study of assessment in those three professions for which there is already some research,<sup>2</sup> the committee agreed to my proposal to use site visits to exemplary schools in each field in an effort to learn what earned each of them a reputation for excellence in regard to assessment. Identifying sites became a matter of contacting national associations and others who would be qualified to recommend professional schools for consideration. By this means, three schools emerged with some regularity: the School of Social Work at the College of St. Catherine-University of St. Thomas in the Twin Cities, the School of Nursing at the University of Pittsburgh, and the Master of Arts in Teacher Education at Alverno College in Milwaukee.

A simple protocol guided each site visit and included attention to the following items:

Institutionalization of assessment: the degree to which the practices of assessment have been incorporated into the rhythms of school life

Faculty issues with assessment

Impact of assessment on student learning

Significant issues for the profession

*Getting to the Question: Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry*

Best insights about assessment as an educational practice

Best practices for assessment: those that produced the best data

The point of the site visits was not to accumulate evidence favoring any particular assertions about assessment, rather to discover why others thought each school was exemplary and what its experience might offer to inspire innovation or to confirm what we find in the literature on assessment. In other words, the representatives of the schools became partners in an ongoing conversation.

The working definition of assessment for this study was a process for determining how institutional activities (instructional and extracurricular) foster student progress in meeting stated programs and institutional outcomes. This is a longer version of “How are we doing?” Assessment differs from evaluation in that the latter focuses on measures of performance (“How well did Martha do in her course on Matthew’s Gospel?”) while the former looks at overall effectiveness (“In general, how well do our graduates demonstrate the capacity to think critically about the theological and strategic issues in pastoral leadership?”). There is not full agreement on distinguishing these two concepts in this way, and in fact, readers will find in some literature that the terms are used interchangeably. What seems to stand out is that it is important in assessment to focus on cumulative results across students so that variability among individuals does not skew interpretation of results, especially when one is discussing institutional or program outcomes.

### **Observations from the study**

#### *A science not yet an art*

As I interviewed deans or program directors at the schools, they reinforced the fact that assessment has become a refined science even as it remains an imperfect art. Some of the imperfection is due to ongoing efforts of faculties to tailor assessment models to the needs and scope of the fields in which they teach. At the College of St. Catherine-University of St. Thomas School of Social Work, Dean Barbara Shank and her colleagues have designed a structure that links together professional standards, institutional mission, departmental missions (undergraduate and graduate), pedagogical practice, supervised field work, and faculty, student, and alumni/ae feedback to bring unity and focus to the assessment process. With the structure in place and operational, Shank noted that there is always a danger of being lulled into a data-induced stupor, especially when results do not vary from assessment to assessment. This means that structures, no matter how well conceived, do not alone guarantee an effective assessment program. This is one of the reasons Lynda Davidson, formerly the associate dean of the school of nursing at the University

of Pittsburgh and now at Robert Morris University, is such an advocate of the standards and assessment policies of the Commission of Nursing Education. They provide a framework that encourages improvement so that any resulting plan of action in a nursing program becomes an opportunity rather than a matter of compliance to an external mandate. Even Alverno College, where there is a fundamental commitment to assessment as an integral institutional practice, does not follow an inflexible template, but continually tests its assumptions and practices against faculty and student experience.<sup>3</sup>

### *Assessment and criteria for program effectiveness*

While this finding is obvious for many, it was underscored in all three professional schools. Davidson believes articulating programs' convictions and core values is the most important part of the assessment process. While accountability is one of the core values for the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, it is not first on the list, but is situated in an array of other values such as trust, integrity, innovation, self-assessment, and professional and socially responsible citizenship. The standards for nursing education then embody these values in clear, precise ways. In similar fashion, the School of Social Work—working with standards from the Council on Social Work Education—crafted goals and objectives for its undergraduate and graduate programs that would lend themselves to measurability. Measurability was not an end in itself, but a means to keep outcomes precise and clear. Barbara Shank noted that the faculty found it difficult to assess non-concrete elements in the program such as developing an identity as a social worker. Rather than coming up with vague indications about something relatively intangible, the outcomes for assessment focused on what the faculty could validly assess that were nonetheless keyed to the knowledge, behavior, and attitudes important for one who called herself a social worker. Alverno College has based its approach to assessment on a set of eight core competencies around which all faculty members teach at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Because faculty members also teach one other about what they learn as they work with students, the competencies have gained increased clarity even as the faculty has become more precise about the varied ways in which they can be demonstrated by students.<sup>4</sup>

The clarity of outcomes, especially in terms of their shared meaning within the faculty, cannot be assumed. One school that was working on its assessment plan, for example, discovered the general purposes of the Master of Divinity degree had not been changed in the catalogue for many years. This became apparent when the new dean listed out on newsprint the purposes named in the catalogue and most faculty members present did not recognize them. If assessment is to be tailored to the culture of a school, there is no shortcut to hammering out program purposes that are clear, specific, reasonably concrete, and share consensus within the current faculty. This need not eliminate other

*Getting to the Question: Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry*

program outcomes that are less concrete, rather, it means being more attentive to claiming what can be done directly and what one hopes occurs indirectly as a result of the total learning experience. What we can do directly anchors our efforts to determine at regular intervals *how we are doing*.

***The absence of a theory-practice split***

Because there is such a deep clinical or practical dimension to each of these three professions, it will come as no surprise that there is little evidence of tension between theory and practice. That does not imply that there is no tension or that social work, nursing, or teacher education students seldom equate the significance of an idea with its immediate usability. The flow, however, between the classroom and the field appears to be relatively smooth. This is significant for assessment for several reasons. First of all, it increases faculty interest in goals related to application of knowledge. While it is very important to other professional schools that their graduates are able to be licensed, knowing “what” is incomplete without knowing “how,” which leads to my second observation. Field or practicum supervisors play a significant role in all three of these professional schools. These persons are able to provide critical insight into how students make connections between what is happening in the classroom and what is required in a professional setting. Alverno College even includes practitioners in curriculum planning because the faculty finds that they bring to the preparation of teachers perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked or underemphasized.

***The simplicity of best practices***

Suggesting that best practices mentioned by these three professional schools are “simple” does not suggest that they require no heavy lifting. There is a discipline to asking assessment questions, whatever the vehicle, that should not be compromised. The best practices of the schools visited for this study seem “simple” because the information faculties sought came from manageable sources. All three use surveys of their graduates, formative assessment over the course of studies, feedback from students, use of focus groups, and skillful use of field supervisors. It was not the complexity of data-gathering strategies that was important, but the clarity of the questions built into those strategies.

Alverno College is in a class of its own. Even those who recommended it as a site for the study noted that its commitment to assessment as development of the individual student *is* complex and labor-intensive. Mary Diez, who directs the master of arts program, responds that Alverno’s assessment processes emerged over time, are anchored in faculty agreement on what assessment seeks to accomplish, and are sustained by collegial dialogue. While there are standardized assessment instruments produced by the Educational Testing Service and others, their utility does not rest on their scientific validity. On

the contrary, any strategy that generates data that do not answer the questions of the faculty about how the school is doing will end up unused. Furthermore, while faculties tend to be most comfortable (and most expert) about assessing for knowledge, these three schools are attentive to multiple sources of data that help provide insight into what students can do with what they know.

### *The link between effective assessment and faculty development*

While being curious about the success of one's efforts is intrinsic to the life of an educator, the assessment movement has ratcheted up the level at which such pondering occurs. Assessment now calls for more formalized, systematic efforts by faculties to explore together the impact of their corporate work. The faculty member cited in the opening of this article shared an illustrative anecdote from his school. His seminary has a capstone project in which students write an integrative ministry paper that all faculty read. Two members of the faculty subsequently meet with each student to discuss his or her work. "At our next faculty meeting," he said, "we spontaneously discussed what we learned from the process—where students were strong, where they were weak, what we needed to emphasize, and so on." His point was that these sorts of conversations happen. When he was asked, however, whether the faculty discussed changes needed in the curriculum or in pedagogical approaches or whether there was a decision to do this more regularly, he said no to all inquiries. This important conversation within the faculty occurred much like spontaneous combustion. Linking it to a systematic approach to assessment takes conscious effort so that the evaluative questions that draw scholarly curiosity find their way into the patterns of faculty and institutional life.

The approach to assessment at Alverno College is extensive and institutionally defining—that would never be possible to sustain without purposeful attention to faculty development. The Alverno faculty meets three times a year in institutes two to five days in length that they themselves largely staff. The expectation is that colleagues will share what they are doing, identify what they are learning as they teach and as they participate in their students' own self-assessment processes, and how their teaching is changing in light of what students are (or are not) learning. The Alverno faculty is not left to "catch on" to assessment, but engages in practices of learning and skill building integral to faculty life. The result of such intentional effort, I would argue, positions faculty to view the discussions of assessment as a scholarly activity grounded in lived reality rather than as some sort of oxymoron.

The School of Social Work at the College of St. Catherine-University of St. Thomas approaches the issue of faculty development on assessment from a different angle. Its carefully designed structure is a means of giving assessment the attention it needs within the ongoing life of the school—not something that pops up every eight years.<sup>5</sup> As a structural feature of the school, it becomes the work of the faculty and is not relegated to the dean or an administrative staff



*Getting to the Question: Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry*

person. The structure was built around clear, measurable objectives linked to the core of what the faculty seeks to accomplish. As a result, faculty members have a high degree of confidence that what they know about the program reflects what students learn and graduates are able to do as a result of all the components in the social work program.

***The student factor in assessment***

Students are obviously an important source of feedback regarding how an institution is doing. As is typical in most schools, students in these three professional schools have the opportunity to evaluate instruction in their courses. The School of Nursing at the University of Pittsburgh conducts focus group discussions with students as they progress through the program. Field and floor supervisors in all three professional schools provide feedback as they work with students in applied and /or clinical settings. Alverno College brings in members of the profession as external assessors and trains them to provide feedback so that as students do self-assessment, they have the benefit of the practical demands of the profession itself. Strategies for drawing on students in assessment are enriched to the degree that students are coached in how to evaluate instruction, their field experience, and other aspects of the program. Without coaching, student feedback can become idiosyncratic and consumed with issues of satisfaction and preference.

Comments on the changing character of students offered some interesting insights. Barbara Shank at the University of St. Thomas-College of St. Catherine observed that incoming students often have the same confused understanding of social work as the general population. There is a perception that “anybody can be a social worker,” which is in part a simplistic understanding of the complexities of human development work, and in part the continuing challenge of gaining recognition of social work as a distinct profession. In Ramsey County, Minnesota, for example, it is not uncommon because of budget cuts to use paraprofessionals to replace credentialed, degreed, social workers. Social workers often act as independent contractors whose very range of focus (family, community action, therapy, medical, psychiatric) dilutes a shared sense of common focus. In addition, Shank notes, some people enroll in a social work program as a way to deal with their own issues or come from another career with a fairly fixed notion of the sort of social worker they will be. The School works diligently to move students from a sense that “this is about me” to the sort of altruistic expertise expected of someone who claims professional status.

In a parallel way, Davidson described nursing as a profession that still struggles with what is sufficient for entry into the profession of nursing and what distinctions exist between an A.A., R.N., B.A., and M.S. in nursing when those who hold any one of those degrees call themselves a “nurse.” Moreover, students enrolling in recent years tend to approach their education with the

attitude, “Here is what I will do. What will you do for me?” As a result, even in a population of very bright students, there can be a lack of openness to learn. Alverno College, on the other hand, because of its expectation that students will be engaged in ongoing, progressive self-assessment, has discovered that the college’s programs work best for learning-oriented students (i.e., less dependent on the teacher), those who can be motivated by their progress toward core competencies rather than grades (Alverno does not give grades), and those who can “learn in public” (i.e., they are not seeking anonymity in the learning process: go to class, do the work, get the grade).

The point of these interesting comments underscores yet another value of assessment done well. Who is the student? What does she bring to the teaching-learning encounter? How does he respond to various pedagogical strategies? What factors contribute to integration of learning whether conceptual, applied, or reflective? In the face of what they learned about their students, the faculty at the School of Social Work required a course on the history and philosophy of the profession for all entering students, and every faculty member continually reinforces the professional character of social work in each course. The School of Nursing relies on the mentoring that occurs as faculty work with students in clinical settings where the students’ knowledge of nursing finds its test in the analysis they need to make with their professors about real human beings with real health problems. As seminaries across denominations wonder about the new generations of learners who sit in their classrooms and as faculties puzzle over the demands for more skillful classroom teaching, assessment becomes a vital resource in learning who the student is, what the student brings, how the student responds to instruction, and other opportunities to learn what being a member of the profession means.

### **Getting to the question**

The three professional schools that served as conversation partners in this study confirm in many ways what the best of assessment literature is telling us. Briefly summarized, effectiveness and institutionalization of assessment is directly correlated to the degree of faculty ownership. Administrators might manage a fine assessment program in terms of output; without faculty buy-in, they may end up floundering in data. Secondly, buy-in is not just a matter of being persuasive. It requires thoughtful, consistent attention to faculty development in the knowledge and skills required to engage assessment well. The benefits of such development do not end with assessment, but cultivate a spirit of mutual learning that bridges other areas of traditional faculty life, most notably classroom teaching. Thirdly, if assessment is about learning, it demands the creation of criteria for learning and professional development whose precision captures faculty convictions and the core values of the profession itself. This short-circuits measuring something that might be inter-

*Getting to the Question: Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry*

esting, but hardly crucial to what we strive to accomplish. Lastly, putting in place a structure or process guides the practice of assessment and specifies how its learning will influence decisions about curriculum, teaching, evaluation of students, and decisions about faculty and institutional priorities. Structure can feed the dark side of bureaucratization, but relying on spontaneous combustion regarding assessment can result in momentary bursts of heat with little sustaining energy.

These observations can help expand the discussions about assessment so that proponents are no longer referred to as *you people*. In the course of this study, however, I have also learned that finding a way to the question for which assessment is the answer would benefit from some sort of map. How does a faculty sort through its questions about the effectiveness of curricula and programs so the formal work of inquiry does not become a tangle of issues that does in fact require adding new professional staff? As I reviewed literature for this study, I discovered research by Joan Stark and her colleagues that identified key clusters of outcomes across twelve professions.<sup>6</sup> They then divided these outcomes into two categories: professional competencies and professional attitudes—these are discussed below. The utility of this research lies in its ability to provide a framework for deciding what it is we need to know for our work as a faculty. There is something in each of the eleven outcome clusters that would be interesting. The challenge is to determine which have the most salience at this time in the institution's life and in light of the issues, concerns, and needs raised by constituent groups. To assist the conversation, I have developed a map that combines the cluster of outcomes developed by Stark and her colleagues with questions that encourage specificity that can lead to setting some priorities about the areas of inquiry (See Figures 1 and 2). Before offering details on the assessment planning maps, let me comment briefly on the significance of focusing on professionalism.

Talking about the minister as a professional can perhaps appear to compromise the theological richness of vocational call. Yet, the conversations with leaders in other professions suggest to me that professionalism is a critical element in a discussion about assessment as we focus on the purposes of the Master of Divinity degree for the practice of ministry. The attention to *how we are doing* in the end comes from a need to be confident that our efforts in the seminary prepare a person to exercise public religious leadership at a level of informed, disciplined skill that distinguishes her or him from others who are involved in the work of the church. The classical criteria for a profession holds true, it seems, for those in ministry who earn a Master of Divinity degree: the minister is one who has mastered a body of expert knowledge, demonstrated proficiency and artistry as a skilled practitioner after lengthy training, is accountable to a code of ethics, and is committed to a lifetime of learning.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps an underlying difficulty in ministry is that we are not sure the minister is a professional in this classical sense. We do not license ministers as a society.

In fact, someone can simply rent space and declare that she or he has opened a church. Perhaps we are unclear about what it is a minister does that any other reasonably well-educated person could not do. If we are not clear, it becomes easier to train seminarians intellectually and assume that over time in the ministry they will learn what a pastor does.

The assessment maps, then, might be a way to sharpen our understanding of the professional character of the ministerial vocation and how that character is manifested in the structures, opportunities, processes, and expectations of a Master of Divinity curriculum.

***Outcomes related to professional competencies.***

As Stark and her associates examined the missions and purposes of twelve professional fields, six clusters of professional competencies emerged (Figure 1). *Conceptual competence* means understanding the theoretical foundations of the profession. In short, it is the mastery of a body of expert knowledge. What does the minister with a Master of Divinity degree need to know about? Clearly, conceptual competence embraces the traditional disciplines of theological study, but always, I would argue, in relation to the wider issues of practice. This is not reducing knowledge to technique, but to the relationship between expertise and the purposes it serves. *Technical competence* has to do with the ability to perform tasks required of the profession. The ministry student, for example, cannot “kind of” preach or “sort of” know how to counsel a distressed couple. She needs to know the critical steps to competently perform expected tasks while understanding how those tasks are rooted in the theological and scriptural traditions of the church.

*Contextual competence* involves an understanding of the societal context in which one ministers, and the ability to do a multiperspective analysis of the environment. This expansive view of the setting for ministry cultivates a deeper awareness of how to direct the practices of ministry. *Interpersonal communication competence* calls for the ability to use written and oral communication effectively for the sake of the profession. As such, the decline of writing skills among entering seminarians is not simply annoying; it is a cause for alarm about the quality of professional service. *Integrative competence* moves technical competence to the level of reflective practice, for it requires the professional to meld theory and skills in response to specific situations. In short, it is never sufficient either to know about (theology) or to know how (to do something)—one is incomplete without the other. Finally, *adaptive competence* entails the ability to anticipate and accommodate changes important to the practices of ministry by gaining new knowledge, new skills, and a new focus on context for the sake of the church’s mission.

**FIGURE 1: ASSESSMENT MAP**  
**Outcomes Associated with Professional Competencies**

COMPETENCY AND KEY OUTCOMES	Why do we want to know about these outcomes?	What are the criteria for judging success?	What are the three best sources of information?	How will information collection be used?	Who will collect & help process this information?	Level of priority?
Conceptual Competence: KEY OUTCOMES						
Technical Competence: KEY OUTCOMES						
Contextual Competence: KEY OUTCOMES						
Interpersonal Communication Competence: KEY OUTCOMES						
Integrative Competence: KEY OUTCOMES						
Adaptive Competence: KEY OUTCOMES						

**FIGURE 2: ASSESSMENT MAP**  
**Outcomes Associated with Professional Attitudes**

ATTITUDES AND KEY OUTCOMES	Why do we want to know about these outcomes?	What are the criteria for judging success?	What are the three best sources of information?	How will information collection be used?	Who will collect & help process this information?	Level of priority?
Career Sustainability: KEY OUTCOMES						
Identity with the Profession: KEY OUTCOMES						
Adherence to Ethical Standards: KEY OUTCOMES						
Scholarly Improvement of the Profession: KEY OUTCOMES						
Motivation for Continuing Education: KEY OUTCOMES						

***Outcomes related to professional attitudes***

The five clusters of outcomes in Figure 2 attempt to define internal processes over which a faculty has less direct control and therefore less capacity to measure with objective certainty. As a result, we often rely on what students or graduates tell us directly and what we learn from others who see behaviors that reflect in action what the student or graduate claims. *Career sustainability* (Stark et al. use the term *career marketability*) has to do with obtaining and maintaining a position in the profession. While the least persuasive in this list, the consistent inability of a seminary graduate to find a position might suggest that she or he is not able to convey to prospective employers a sense of internal capacity and personal authority to do the work. *Professional identity* means internalizing the norms, values, and competencies of the profession as defined by the profession, not the individual. This raises important questions about the degree to which there is consensus about what constitutes the identity of a minister. Without consensus, the tendency of students to self-define based on individual preference may ill-serve the larger needs of the church and community. *Ethical standards*, of course, refers to both the knowledge and embrace of the standards of practice and behavior deemed critical to the integrity of the ministry. *Scholarly improvement of the profession*, at first, might seem an odd item on this list of competencies. It argues, however, against any sort of cleavage between going to school and entering the practice. Stark et al. note this competency means the professional person recognizes the need for research to develop the knowledge base of the profession and for maintaining active relationships with scholars so the questions of practice become part of the research agenda. What are pastors learning that tests assertions about the meaning of revelation and the nature of pastoral care? How does the minister take responsibility for her or his role in deepening the relationship between theory and practice? A technician perhaps would be worried about how something works; a professional puzzles over why something works or does not, what that might mean, and how to find out. Finally, in this set of competencies, there is the *motivation for continuing education*—the degree to which graduates continue to update knowledge and skills. A minister with a Master of Divinity degree who is not a purposeful lifelong learner will generally fall short in rendering consistently high quality service.

***Questions for completing the assessment map***

Assuming the value of these clusters of competencies for discussion purposes, there are six key questions one can ask. First, *what are the key outcomes for this area of competence?* This does not presume that faculties do not have shared meaning about outcomes, but the question can occasion the sort of discussion that breaks through dangerous assumptions we all are reading from the same page or agree to where the text leads. Secondly, *why do we want to know*



*about this area?* This may seem obvious, but again, it helps distinguish something that would be interesting from something that is essential. The question should build on information already available and encourage a faculty to pursue questions directly related to institutional and program priorities. Thirdly, *are there shared criteria for success in this area?* This question moves implicit standards and criteria to an explicit level where faculty can define indicators of success. People may be operating on a presumed consensus about what signs of success for achieving competence look like and may well hold opinions on the matter that confuse rather than enlighten students and other constituents. This question provides for a vigorous discussion. Fourthly, *what are the three best methods or sources for gathering information on this area of competence?* The number three is not meant to be prescriptive, but to illustrate the expectation that good assessment draws on multiple sources, and helps develop appreciation for the various direct and indirect ways we measure performance. Five, *how will information gathered about this area of competence be used?* This underscores the importance of having a structure for disciplined inquiry about what data might offer for improving the quality of teaching and learning. How data will be used can also help determine what sort of priority should be placed on gathering it. The final question is *who will collect and help process the information?* In the end, the job needs to get done. More importantly, it needs to have the leadership to see that information reaches faculty in a timely fashion and in a usable form. Leadership includes keeping a record of what is being learned, which questions have proven to be dead-end, methods that are particularly useful, and so forth so the work of the faculty continually builds on what has already been accomplished. Finally, it is helpful to see how the work associated with assessment is distributed so an effective and equitable division of labor can facilitate the entire process.

This conversational tool for mapping the questions of assessment against outcomes based on clusters of professional competency and attitudes is not scientifically tested. Questions about the sufficiency and/or naming of the clusters will certainly be raised. At the same time, even at this stage, the map exists as a way for a faculty to “build a fence” to contain all that could be asked as it engages the discussion of assessment and as it translates the broad purposes proposed by accrediting agencies into the language and culture of a particular seminary. It is incorrect to assert that faculties are indifferent to the concerns of assessment or somehow opposed to the intrinsic notion of accountability. Faculties do resist efforts to introduce elements into an educational culture that seem to trivialize the deeper purposes to which faculty members dedicate their lives by overemphasizing measurement against determining thoughtfully and critically how educational and programmatic practices achieve their desired ends.

Alverno College has integrated assessment as a way of life that is rooted in a clear, consensual understanding among faculty of what the teacher is like as

*Getting to the Question: Assessment and the Professional Character of Ministry*

a result of earning a Master of Arts degree. The level of integration exists not simply because of standards for teacher education, but because the faculty of Alverno has internalized those standards in light of their shared understanding of how those core competencies inform and reform the core competencies that equip students for self-assessment. The School of Social Work at the College of St. Catherine-University of St. Thomas has a well-defined structure for its assessment efforts created by the faculty so that its members are equipped to respond to their accreditors, but more importantly to form generations of social workers who have a clear, distinct understanding of their professional role in society. The School of Nursing at the University of Pittsburgh, finally, is able to do the sort of self-critique necessary to advance the quality of nursing education because of standards that invite the school to look at its successes and shortfalls in light of central values and convictions critical to the service professional nurses render.

None of the academic leaders in these three schools would claim that the processes, issues, strategies, and concerns that comprise assessment come easily. They all take time, but with time, they become an invaluable resource for doing what it is the faculty in each institution gathers to do. While The Association of Theological Schools would never impose a theology of ministry on any of its members, its role of returning to a discussion of how the Master of Divinity degree equips individuals for effective public religious leadership is a valuable way to reposition the importance of assessment as an institutional practice. Despite the vocation crisis and despite open enrollment at many theological seminaries, there is an implicit responsibility to prepare people to a level of professional competence suitable for leadership of congregations. Asking *how are we doing* is not a curiosity but rather a profound inquiry into our commitment to provide the church and society at large with well-prepared professional leaders.

*Victor Klimoski is currently director of lifelong learning at St. John's School of Theology in Collegeville and was previously academic dean at The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is on the ATS Task Force for The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation and consults on a variety of issues related to teaching and learning, including outcomes assessment.*

ENDNOTES

1. Anne E. Bilder and Clifton F. Conrad, "Challenges for Assessing Outcomes in Graduate and Professional Education," *Assessing Graduate and Professional Education: Current Realities and Future Prospects*, Jennifer Grant Haworth, ed., New Directions for Institutional Research, Number 92, Winter, 1996 (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers), 5-17.
2. Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta, *Assessing Student Competence in Accredited Disciplines: Pioneering Approaches to Assessment in Higher Education* (Sterling: Stylus Publications, 2001).

3. I met with a key person associated with each program recognized as a leader in the fields. My intent is not to generalize to all schools of social work, education, or nursing. The conclusions I draw, unless specifically noted, are my own. I am indebted to Dean Barbara Shank at the University of St. Thomas, Associate Dean Lynda Davidson at the University of Pittsburgh (who has subsequently moved to Robert Morris University), and Mary Diez at Alverno College for their generosity in sharing of their experience and perspectives.
4. The issue of measurement is not easily unraveled. Not everything can be reduced to a set of discrete numbers. The important starting point, I suggest, is determining what our expectations are for the Master of Divinity student and how they are framed in the official outcomes of the seminary. Grandiose, sweeping rhetoric offers us imprecise ways to determine (a) whether our students are moving progressively toward the achievement of program outcomes and (b) whether what we do in class and out of class impacts that achievement in notable ways. Descriptions of outcomes that express clearly what it is our students will need to know about and know how to do as ministers credentialed with a Master of Divinity degree facilitate the way we can help them—and us—determine the progress made across the program and across the time in the practice of ministry.
5. Palomba and Banta, *op.cit.*, 114.
6. J.S. Stark, M.A, Lowther, and B.M.K. Haggerty, *Responsive Professional Education: Balancing Outcomes and Opportunities*, ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, no. 3 (Washington: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1986).
7. While there is not a universal definition of professional, the various ways in which “professional character” is defined almost always contain these four. See, for instance, the *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1554 or the *Encyclopedia of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 432. For an interesting discussion of professionalism, see Lee S. Shulman, “Professing the Liberal Arts,” found at [www.ntlf.com/html/lib/carnegie/84shul.htm](http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/carnegie/84shul.htm)

# What is the Literature Saying about Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?

*Carolyn M. Jurkowitz*  
*Catholic Conference of Ohio*

*ABSTRACT: Improved student learning depends upon systems and structures that integrate the school's mission; connect processes of learning, assessment, planning and development; acknowledge the roles of tacit knowing and professional judgment; and promote a community of learning—that is the most consistent message in the literature on learning and assessment in higher education. The writings reflect a wide spectrum of beliefs, values, and emphases. They address some of the goals important to theological education, but not all of them. Among the most enlightening and potentially useful insights are those offered by the literature in parallel professions, K-12 education, and related fields of inquiry.*

## **Introduction**

*What is the literature saying about assessment in higher education?* There is a lot of it, for one thing. Yet, in another sense, there is not nearly enough of it, at least not for purposes of theological education. Much of the literature on assessment in higher education does not lend itself to immediate use by those whose primary interests are promoting student learning and improving educational programs. Furthermore, most of the literature has been written by persons outside theological education and does not speak adequately to goals distinctive to theological education as articulated in the ATS Standards. Far more has been published on how to assess knowledge and understanding than on how to assess skills and reflective practice. Performance assessment<sup>1</sup> is on the rise in higher education (particularly in pre-professional programs such as teaching, nursing, and social work) and the literature surrounding it may help faculty determine a student's capacity for ministerial and public leadership, but performance assessment offers little assistance for judging a student's growth in personal and spiritual formation. Moreover, it is not much help in assessing how a student's knowledge, understanding, reflection, emotional maturity, personal faith, spiritual growth, moral sensibility, and ministerial skill interrelate in practice. Still to be developed are means for ascertaining how the goals of theological education are interwoven in educational policies, programs, and processes, and how they impact the lives of students. It is likely that the literature most immediately and particularly helpful for assessing

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

learning in theological education will be written by faculty in theological schools, themselves.

Nevertheless, the literature is worth noting. It includes reflections on issues of meaning, value, and practicality that have been raised and inspected in other educational contexts, developments in philosophy, psychology, physiology, pedagogy, organizational theory and practice and technology that provide lenses for looking at the learning and assessment that happen in theological schools, and questions that remain pertinent, if unresolved in all of these arenas. This paper distills recent writings for insights they offer to faculty and administrators in theological schools as they develop and implement assessments intended to improve student learning, enrich academic programs, and increase institutional effectiveness.

### **Concepts, paradigms, and perspectives**

Thirty years ago, a literature search on educational *assessment* would have gone by the term *evaluation*. Some writers are beginning to make helpful distinctions between the two terms (e.g., evaluation places more emphasis on judgment; [or] the reach of *assessment* is wider—stretching from assessment of the individual to assessment of the institution; [or] *assessment* addresses the evaluative interests of a broader range of stakeholders).<sup>2</sup> Historically, the transition from *evaluation* to *assessment* began in the 1980s and coincided with the accountability movement in public elementary and secondary education. In professional practice, *assessment* has replaced *evaluation* as the term of choice, and the literature provides little evidence to support widespread intentionality around this substitution.<sup>3</sup>

Educators engage in assessment in order to bring about improvement (e.g., of learning), provide a measure of accountability, or do both. The twin purposes of improvement and accountability reflect a second transition in educational assessment evidenced since the 1980s. This transition shows up in the literature not only as a change in terminology, but as a change in paradigm: from teaching-centered classrooms, programs, and institutions to learning-centered ones. In the paradigm shift, the critical questions of instruction move from “What shall we teach, and how shall we teach it?” to “What is most important for students to learn, and how can they best learn it?”<sup>4</sup>

The paradigmatic transition from teaching to learning in educational settings corresponded to growing interest in how learning occurs and can be facilitated in corporate settings. As educators were asking their new questions, organizational theorists and practitioners were asking similar ones: “Why do organizations (like businesses and schools) work the way they work?” “What do we mean when we say that human endeavors are *systems*?” “How do people in organizations change deeply embedded policies and practices?” “What roles do organizational ‘disciplines’ such as personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning play in the life of a learning organization?”<sup>5</sup>

While some of the literature on assessment in education focuses solely on the classroom, most of the texts reviewed here extend their range of vision to programs and institutions as well. A recurring message in the literature of the past ten years is that improved student learning depends upon systems and structures that integrate the school's mission, connect processes of assessment, planning and development as they occur at all institutional levels,<sup>6</sup> and promote a community of learning.<sup>7</sup> Building such connections is both a complicated and labor-intensive process.<sup>8</sup>

Educators do not come to assessment with a blank slate, but they come with a perspective on the task—either an articulated one or an unspoken one. This perspective not only determines how they regard the work of assessment, but how they carry it out, and how they use its results. The perspective understands the nature of learning in a particular way, has its own way for describing the variables critical to learning, and its own way of explaining how the variables relate to one another. The perspective carries a position on which data (about the learner) constitute acceptable indicators of learning, how data about learning are revealed, and what qualities mark an assessment of worth. The perspective directs the forms assessment can and cannot take, and what criteria will guide the selection of assessment methods and strategies.

Those who approach assessment with a perspective I will call *objectivist/positivistic*, view what is assessed (e.g., learning) as an objective reality. All variables in the learning process can be clearly identified and all relationships measured. The most important data come through objective indicators of knowledge and performance, such as correct responses on a multiple-choice test. Information can be counted, weighed, or similarly measured. Ideally, this information can be expressed in numbers for ease in calculating statistics and comparing results. The ability to generalize and to predict are preeminent values. Pre-established (at best, standardized) tools and strategies for conducting assessments are considered to increase objectivity and assure validity and reliability of results. These reduce the need for interpretations and judgments regarded as subjective (i.e., untrustworthy and unreliable).

In contrast, those who approach assessment with a perspective I will call *subjectivist/interpretivist* view what is assessed (e.g., learning) as a reality that breaks out of experience and is personally and/or socially constructed.<sup>9</sup> Variables in the learning process are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure. Much relevant data are tacit, have aesthetic and moral dimensions, and carry personal and interpersonal meaning resistant to being counted, weighed, or measured. Feelings and relationships are relevant to learning even though they are not susceptible to empirical measurement. Contextualization, understanding, and interpretation have value, as does the learner's ability to create new frameworks, practices, and meanings. Legitimate means for assessing learning include self-reflection, intuitive processes, and judgments rendered by experienced practitioners, learning peers, and other stakeholders.

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

I have distinguished these perspectives sharply in order to draw out their contrasts. In practice, educators design and use assessments that combine elements of both perspectives. For some kinds of learning (like memorization of chronologies), educators know they can confidently identify learning outcomes ahead of time, readily recognize information for assessing what has been learned, and measure it objectively. For other kinds of learning—even within the same academic course—educators recognize that the most important outcomes cannot be predetermined: they emerge during the learning process. Information for assessing what has been learned is constructed from shreds of evidence that include intuitions, reflections, and judgments, and learning carries a variety of meanings for the student, the teacher, and others involved in the learning process.

Although educators can and do combine features of the objectivist/positivist and the subjectivist/interpretivist approaches, a healthy tension between the two perspectives remains. Assessments focused on improvement might tend toward either an objectivist/positivist approach or a subjectivist/interpretivist approach, but when accountability is the overriding purpose—when assessment is marshaled to explain the impact of theological education on persons unfamiliar with its terminology and value premises, or to advocate for resources, or to report to organizations and agencies that operate on an objectivist/positivist model—the assessor most likely will take an objectivist/positivist approach. A person who sincerely sees assessment through an objectivist/positivist lens is likely to claim that assessments carried out with a subjectivist/interpretivist approach lack rigor, validity, and credibility. On the other hand, a person who brings a subjectivist/interpretivist lens to assessment, is likely to claim that assessments carried out with an objectivist/positivist approach are too narrow, disregard the complexities of human lives and social enterprises, and ultimately have limited use.

### **Learning as the basis for assessment**

Particularly at the classroom level, learning provides the basis for assessment. An educator's understanding of learning and the decisions that he or she makes about the processes of learning frame and direct decisions regarding the purposes, methods, and uses of assessment. It is not possible to probe very far into the literature on assessment without confronting issues of learning.<sup>10</sup> Some of these issues are embedded in the objectivist/positivist and subjectivist/interpretivist perspectives, but others arise out of the distinctive features of the academic disciplines, themselves.

Teaching and learning in higher education are highly discipline-specific. As Joseph Schwab noted forty years ago, "disciplines have contrasting substance and syntax . . . ways of organizing themselves and of defining the rules for making arguments and claims that others will warrant. They have different



ways of talking about themselves and about the problems, topics, and issues that constitute their subject matters."<sup>11</sup> Academic disciplines engage in inquiry in distinct ways, and the methods and metaphors that characterize teaching and learning in the various disciplines reflect those differences.

When faculties of theological schools gather around issues of learning and assessment, questions like these arise: What counts as "learning" in the preparation of persons for ministerial vocation and in each of the disciplines that comprise such preparation? How does this learning occur? What learnings matter most? What is the role of the ministerial student in his or her own learning? How do individual differences (including, but not limited to cultural differences, denominational differences, differences in age, career trajectory, and developmental level) figure into the learning process? How are learning outcomes affected and learning processes changed by online learning, including participation in virtual classrooms? What is the impact of shifting patterns of student attendance on learning for ministerial vocation? (e.g., What happens to learning when learning cohorts shift from primarily residential students to commuter students and students in other nontraditional attendance patterns?).<sup>12</sup> Where student learning occurs beyond formalized instructional settings (e.g., through institutional structures, traditions, activities, and expectations) how is its relationship to classroom learning determined and utilized? Are faculty learners, also? If so, how does faculty learning inform student learning?

Responses to these questions lead to those which specifically target assessment: What purposes should assessment serve, and whose purposes are these? What uses should be made of the results of assessment? How should the results of assessment be represented and communicated? How much assessment, in how many forms, over how long a period of time, should be carried out?

In order to explore how the literature on assessment in higher education responds to questions such as these, let me offer four "angles of vision" provided by recently published texts on assessment in higher education. Like the other writings included in this review, these texts have been chosen not because they necessarily represent the best of the literature on assessment, but because they are readable, accessible, and adaptable to theological education. They demonstrate the inherent connection between the educator's understanding of learning and his or her approach to assessment. They illustrate a range of assessment methods and strategies relevant for assessing one or more of the goals included in the ATS Standards. They suggest how one's philosophical perspective, purposes, and level of commitment to a systems approach to assessment, along with the meanings one attaches to assessment, can influence an educator to select certain assessment methods and strategies over others.

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

**Toohey**

In *Designing Courses for Higher Education*, Susan Toohey expresses a bias for a *deep approach* to learning. A deep approach is associated with higher learning outcomes. Elements shown to foster deep learning include: “an appropriate motivational context, a high degree of learner activity, interaction with others, both peers and teachers, and a well structured knowledge base.”<sup>13</sup> These elements must be built into course design.

Course design begins with the course planner’s explicit or implicit response to the question, *What is most important for these students to know and what might be the best ways for them to learn it?* Decisions about learning lead to matters of assessment: “What purposes do we need assessment to serve and what forms should it take?” Embedded in the course planner’s answers to these interrelated concerns is his or her “curriculum ideology,” a term coined by Elliot Eisner to describe the value premises which ground educational decision-making.<sup>14</sup> Over the years, course planners have framed their curriculum ideologies in various ways. Toohey categorizes them into five approaches: traditional or discipline-based, performance based, cognitive, personal relevance/experiential, and socially critical.

In each approach, assessment serves as a means for determining what students have learned. However, the distinctive value premises of each approach ground the assessment: they make certain assessment strategies preferable to others. In the *traditional* or discipline-based approach, knowledge has an independent existence, waiting to be accessed by students. The purpose of assessment is to confirm the extent to which students have acquired knowledge deemed important, and objective testing becomes the assessment method of choice. In the *performance-based* approach, what students demonstrate that they can do forms the primary evidence of learning. Learning goals are expressed as observable competences to be demonstrated. A major purpose for assessment is instructional intervention, and the performance of criterion-referenced tasks becomes the means for assessment. The *cognitive* approach holds that students personally construct knowledge. However, such knowledge is cultivated and mentored by “experts” in the field. In this view, assessment provides evidence of complex understanding and increased intellectual abilities. Problem-solving frequently characterizes assessment tasks, and students are required to take the context of the assessment situation into account. Because the assessment requires a high degree of judgment on the part of the assessor, assessors must articulate the evidence on which they will make their judgments. The *personal relevance/experiential* approach encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and involves criteria mutually developed by teacher and student, often in a contractual form. The primary purpose for assessment is for students to develop their own judgments. This approach places high importance on self-evaluation and peer-evaluation. The *socially critical* approach aims to develop students’ critical consciousness. Students and

teachers construct knowledge collaboratively, within a specific cultural context. Assessment emphasizes group projects and self and peer-assessments, and is negotiated between teachers and students.

A systems thinker, Toohey holds that the coherent curricular framework leading to deep learning cannot be developed piecemeal, but requires intentional activity at the programmatic level by academic and administrative staff working across disciplines.

### ***Huba and Freed***

Mary Huba and Jann Freed draw an even tighter connection between learning and assessment. *Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses* starts with the assumption that higher education should be concerned with learning rather than teaching. Huba and Freed suggest the primary pedagogical question on college campuses ought not to be, "How will I teach this?" but "How will students learn this?" Assessment becomes the vehicle not just for monitoring learning, but for directing it.<sup>15</sup>

Huba and Freed both explore and apply a constructivist<sup>16</sup> model of learning to their beliefs. They begin each chapter with an exercise intended to help readers identify and connect what they already know about the topic to what will be presented. In this model:

Students construct knowledge through gathering and synthesizing information and integrating it with the general skills of inquiry, communication, critical thinking [and] problem solving; students are actively involved in their own learning; the emphasis is on using and communicating knowledge effectively to address enduring and emerging issues and problems in real-life contexts; teachers and students evaluate learning together; assessment is used to diagnose learning; and both teachers and students are considered learners in the educational process.<sup>17</sup>

Learning and its assessment start with a set of explicitly stated intended learning outcomes by which faculty describe what students should know, understand, and be able to do. Faculty develop common learning outcomes for all students at the institution. They construct specific learning outcomes reflecting the disciplines involved in each academic program, and they write related learning outcomes for every course.

Huba and Freed devote the majority of their book to strategies for assessing learning and specific techniques for implementing the strategies. The five strategies they promote are: setting direction through statements of learning outcomes, soliciting feedback from students to improve learning (through strategies such as Classroom Assessment Techniques [CATs] and Continuous Quality Improvement Techniques [CQIs]), providing feedback to students

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

through the use of rubrics, assessing students' abilities to think critically and solve problems (through strategies such as projects, products, papers/theses, exhibits, performances, case studies, clinical evaluations, interviews, and oral exams), and using portfolios to promote, support, and evaluate learning.

Huba and Freed are strong advocates of a systems approach to learning and assessment. Assessment of how well a program is accomplishing its purposes depends in part on how well faculty assess learning in individual courses.

In turn, the quality of student learning in courses depends in part on the type of information yielded by program assessment data. . . . Do the programmatic data . . . indicate that a particular concept is poorly understood by graduates and needs greater coverage? Do students report that . . . a prerequisite is misplaced? Program assessment and classroom assessment interact to enhance student learning.<sup>18</sup>

***Palomba and Banta***

In Catherine Palomba and Trudy Banta's *Assessing Student Competence in Accredited Disciplines*, student *competence* supersedes *learning* as the critical concept for preparing students to work in professional fields. Beyond its initial and concluding chapters, the book is a collection of individually-authored chapters on assessment in various disciplines. Contributing authors were chosen by the leadership of accrediting bodies in the fields of teacher education, pharmacy, nursing, social work, business, computer science, engineering, and the visual arts. Each was asked to describe how student learning is assessed in his or her respective field and to raise implications for the assessment of student learning for faculty in other fields.

In their own chapters, editors Palomba and Banta point to student competence as the quality that employers and other constituency groups most consistently demand of college graduates in professional fields.<sup>19</sup> They strongly advocate that statements about intended learning outcomes or competences form the basis for both learning and assessment. These statements should provide specific descriptions of student learning, rather than descriptions of teacher behavior or subject matter coverage. The best assessment methods are those that contribute to learning. Such "best practices" include setting high expectations for students, creating synthesizing experiences, promoting active learning and ongoing practice of learned skills, encouraging collaborative learning, and providing prompt feedback.

Palomba is an advocate of performance assessments. Because performance assessments are often integrated into course content, they serve to connect the processes of instruction and assessment. Other benefits of performance assessments are: criteria for evaluation are made public, students are required to

synthesize learnings, and students receive feedback from multiple sources. Palomba acknowledges that despite their advantages, performance assessments are fraught with problems of reliability, validity, and generalizability.

In her summarizing chapter, Palomba lists promising assessment methods that recur in the separately-authored chapters. First among these is the use of multiple assessment measures in a single course or program. Also on the list are capstone projects requiring students to synthesize their knowledge and skills and engage in the kinds of experiences they are likely to encounter in their first professional jobs, narratives (to evaluate students' abilities to identify problems and exercise professional judgment), public exhibitions of student work, self-assessment measures, juried critiques and oral defenses of written papers to evaluate cognitive skills, and student portfolios.

As systems thinkers, Palomba and Banta concern themselves both with the learning of individual students and with the collective impact that courses have on students learning within programs and institutions.

### ***Mentkowski and Associates***

*Learning That Lasts*, authored by Marcia Mentkowski and other researchers, faculty, and administrators at Alverno College, synthesizes twenty years of inquiry (most of it longitudinal) on student learning at Alverno. "*Learning that lasts* refers to an integration of learning, development, and performance"<sup>20</sup> that happens during a student's education and extends at least five years after the student graduates. In the Alverno model, "learning is both process and outcomes, often interwoven."<sup>21</sup> It integrates the student's knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs.

The Alverno model is a rare example of the systematic integration of learning and assessment at classroom, programmatic, and institutional levels described in Toohey, Huba and Freed, Palomba and Banta, and other texts reporting promising practices in assessment in higher education.<sup>22</sup> At Alverno, student assessment provides a framework for learning. In fact, assessment is termed *assessment-as-learning*. The framework consists of eight "developmental, ability-based and performance-based learning outcomes [that] detail the nature and sequence of ability levels, the interaction of abilities integrated with content, and how students might build outcomes over time."<sup>23</sup> The outcomes are public and explicit. A student's academic progress is measured by validation of the abilities the student accumulates over her college career. As a student completes a course, she is assessed for the eight abilities as they are integrated in the course. The eight abilities are: communication, analysis, problem solving, valuing in decision-making, social interaction, global perspectives, effective citizenship, and aesthetic responsiveness. All course assessments are based on the abilities. This helps the student to recognize that the same basic ability has relevance in multiple course contexts and that she can refine her ability through multiple and diverse applications.

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

Assessment requires articulating each of the eight abilities as “a series of developmental levels corresponding to student progress across her college career, from general education (levels one through four) to specialized work in the majors and supporting areas of study (levels five and six).” For each level of ability, Alverno staff have devised criteria for the ability being performed. For example, for the ability *communication*, the student at level one is expected “to demonstrate her own strengths and weaknesses as a communicator.” At level five, she is expected to “communicate [in her academic major and areas of specialization] with habitual effectiveness in relation to disciplinary/professional positions or theories.”<sup>24</sup> The criteria provide the student with tangible goals for her learning, and they give the faculty a standard for judging and certifying that she has demonstrated the ability. The criteria are generic (i.e. not tied to specific courses); each faculty member translates them into language appropriate to the content of specific courses.

Assessment in the Alverno model is marked by four characteristics. It is multidimensional, ongoing, cumulative, and systems-based. First, it is a multidimensional process. Through both course-based assessments and integrative assessments focused on student learning across several courses, Alverno staff elicit samples of performance representing the expected learning outcomes of each course and program. Students draw on both the diagnostic observations and judgments of trained assessors and the reflective practice of self-assessment throughout the learning process. Faculty develop or choose methods of assessment on the following bases: “ they are experiential, integrative, and judge performance; they have clear outcomes, explicit public criteria, and provide for student self-assessment; they include feedback and external perspectives as well as performance; they are cumulative and expansive; they are multiple in mode and context.”<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, assessment at Alverno is ongoing, and thirdly, it is cumulative. Students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate specific abilities, and individual assessments engage students in multiple ways: as writers, speakers, and creators of artifacts. The developmental framework for assessment at Alverno describes typical behaviors of the beginning student, developing student, and advanced student. The behaviors fall into three categories: self-assessment, using feedback from others, and commitment to improvement of learning.

Finally, the Alverno model is systems-based. From its inception, it has required full administrative support, faculty-wide buy-in, and campus-wide implementation. Learning and assessment are public enterprises for both faculty and students. Ongoing staff development for all persons involved in the process (“outside assessors” as well as faculty) is the norm. No aspect of faculty life or student life has been unaffected:



Connecting learning outcomes across disciplines led to designing a parallel administrative structure with both discipline departments and interdisciplinary ability-based departments . . . Connecting emerging faculty roles and responsibilities implied creating periods of time for extended discussions, workshops, and evaluations of progress; . . . restructuring the academic schedule; . . . developing a college-wide assessment system; . . . developing an assessment center that recruited [and trained] hundreds of external assessors from the community to work with faculty in specified areas; . . . establishing experiential learning through internships; . . . structuring an advising program; . . . [and] revised guidelines for faculty hiring, development, and criteria for promotion<sup>26</sup>

**Partners in learning about learning and assessment:  
Insights from parallel professions, K-12 education, and related  
fields of inquiry**

In addition to looking at the literature on assessment in higher education, faculty in theological education also might tap the experiences of their colleagues in parallel professions, K-12 education, and in fields of inquiry such as cognitive psychology and the neurosciences. These fields have a high stake in how learning occurs, what processes and practices facilitate learning, how instruction and assessment relate to one another, and “best practices” emerging from studies of learning and assessment.

Reflecting on the mistakes of the “competency-based education” movement, for example, led teacher-educators Mary Diez and Peggy Blackwell to promote the development of broad learning outcomes (rather than numerous specific ones) to guide learning and assessment in the professional preparation of teachers. Competency-based education highly influenced both K-12 education and teacher preparation during the 1970s. When applied to teacher preparation, it called for the creation of hundreds of discrete competencies that often fragmented the learning process and prevented teaching candidates from seeing the teaching enterprise as an integrated whole.

Learning and assessment in a particular discipline are guided by that discipline’s substance, structure, and language. However, teachers in higher education can benefit from the questions, styles, and methods of presentation characteristic of other disciplines and other academic levels. There is also something to be gained from translating one’s own disciplinary experiences for foreign ears. Peter Gallison calls this collaborating and raiding across academic fields and academic levels a “trading zone” where educators “from different disciplinary cultures can fill in whatever their own disciplinary communities do not provide.”<sup>27</sup>



*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

***From “instruction-influenced assessment” to “assessment-influenced instruction”***

Diez and Blackwell’s work on learning and assessment in teacher preparation coincides with the work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTigue at the K-12 level. Both teams of educators recommend a reordering of the classic steps for instructional planning that were first articulated by Ralph Tyler in the 1940s and furnished the textbook on instructional planning for more than half a century. Tyler set up a linear four-step process: (1) state the instructional objectives; (2) select “learning experiences”; (3) organize these experiences for instruction; and (4) determine means for evaluation.<sup>28</sup> To Diez and Blackwell, Wiggins and McTigue, this model interrupts the critical connection between learning outcomes and their assessment. The authors favor a shift “from instruction-influenced assessment to assessment influenced instruction.”<sup>29</sup> In the latter approach, educators develop learning outcomes and assessments concurrently. As they develop each learning outcome, teachers ask: “What will count as evidence that this outcome has been learned?” Not the outcomes alone, but the combination of learning outcomes and means for providing evidence of learning direct instructional planning.

Diez and Blackwell coin the term *assessment for development* to describe this process as it is applied to pre-professional education for teachers. Assessment for development is performance-based (“sampling actual knowledge, skills, and dispositions desired of teachers as they are used in teaching and learning contexts”). Its criteria for judging performance are public and explicit. Furthermore, it provides ongoing feedback to the learner, offers opportunities for self-assessment, involves multiple modes of assessment, uses external assessors, aligns assessments with students’ developmental levels, relies upon cumulative assessments, and emphasizes assessments which take the long view of the student’s future.<sup>30</sup>

Wiggins and McTigue call the shift from instruction-influenced assessment to assessment-influenced instruction *backward design* because educators start with desired learning outcomes, and then devise learning experiences and instructional strategies from the evidence of learning (student performance) required by the outcomes.<sup>31</sup>

***The role of outcomes in learning and assessment***

For many educators, Toohey’s primary instructional question (“*What is most important for these students to know, and what might be the best ways for them to learn it?*”) translates into a requirement that all learning outcomes—or at least those that will “count” in assessment—be predetermined and explicitly and publicly stated.<sup>32</sup> Traditional forms of outcomes assessment at all educational levels are premised on this requirement.

Reporting on the collaborative efforts of twenty-six colleges and universities to create a framework for making student learning a central focus for higher

education, the Alverno Institute names “achieving clarity about learning outcomes” as the first of the framework’s four primary characteristics.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Diez and Blackwell cite “explicit outcomes” as the first principle for guiding assessment in the professional preparation of teachers.<sup>34</sup>

### *The role of feedback in learning and assessment*

In the work of Diez and Blackwell, Wiggins and McTigue, *feedback* is a critical component of both learning and assessment. “Feedback serves the diagnostic aspect of assessment, literally ‘feeding into’ the next level of learning and growth . . . The message of feedback is that the assessment is a learning opportunity.”<sup>35</sup> The etymological meaning of *assess* is *to sit down beside*. Feedback communicates that assessment is not only an endgame, but a means for diagnosing the learner’s needs. According to Wiggins, “you can’t learn without feedback; . . . feedback is what you [teachers and learners] did and did not do, whether you realized it or intended it.” When it is built into assessment, feedback confronts participants in the learning process with the effect of their work.<sup>36</sup>

In the literature on learning and assessment, feedback cuts two ways: providing feedback *to* students offers them data for improving their learning, while soliciting feedback *from* students on a regular basis (not just at the end of a course) enables faculty to monitor learning and identifies places where teachers can readjust instructional strategies to improve student learning.

Huba and Freed devote an entire chapter of their book to the use of rubrics as an assessment strategy for providing feedback *to* students. A rubric “explains to students the criteria against which their work will be judged, . . . [and] makes public key criteria that student can use in developing, revising, and judging their own work.”<sup>37</sup> A well-designed rubric identifies the elements that must be present in the student’s work to ensure that it is of high quality. It indicates various levels of achievement, describes performance in each element at each level, specifies the consequences of performing at each level of quality, and explains the rubric’s rating scheme.

Huba and Freed devote another chapter to strategies for soliciting feedback *from* students in order to improve learning. Primary among these strategies are classroom assessment techniques (CATs) developed and refined by Thomas Angelo and K. Patricia Cross for use at the college level. Classroom assessment techniques are specific, uncomplicated procedures or activities for collecting data on student learning in order to improve it. They provide teachers and students with “fast feedback” on whether and how well students are learning. Angelo and Cross intend CATs to complement, but not replace, traditional forms of instructional assessment. CATs are learner-centered, teacher-directed, context-specific, and meant to be used on an ongoing basis. One example of a CAT is the “minute paper,” which requires students to write short responses to two questions: “What is the most important thing you

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

learned in class today?” and “What is the main unanswered question you leave class with today?”<sup>38</sup> A second example is the “diagnostic learning log” which directs students to analyze their own learning processes by responding to a few probing questions. Such questions might be: “Briefly describe the assignment you just completed. What was it about? Give one or two examples of your most successful response. Try to explain what things you did that made them successful.”<sup>39</sup>

The CAT approach to assessment is based on several assumptions. Among them are: the effectiveness of teaching and learning can be increased by providing students with comprehensible feedback on the extent to which they are meeting explicitly stated instructional goals; students need feedback early and often, and they need to learn how to assess their own learning; the type of assessment most likely to improve teaching and learning is that conducted by faculty to answer questions they, themselves, have formulated in response to issues and problems in their own teaching; and classroom assessment does not require specialized training and can be carried out by teachers in all disciplines.

Angelo and Cross’s *Classroom Assessment Techniques* contains a compendium of fifty different CATs, twelve case studies detailing implementation of CATs in various academic disciplines, and several indices to help teachers select appropriate CATs for collecting feedback from students on a variety of course-related knowledge and skills (e.g., analysis, critical thinking, and problem-solving). The book also includes tools for soliciting feedback regarding students’ attitudes, values, and self-awareness.

## **Assessment of learning for specific learning outcomes**

### *Learning for understanding*

Among potential candidates for learning outcomes in theological education is *understanding*. ATS Statement 4.1 says that “in a theological school the overarching goal is theological understanding, that is, aptitude for theological reflection and wisdom pertaining to responsible life in faith.” ATS Content Statement A.3.1 for the Master of Divinity degree requires the academic program to provide opportunities for students to develop specific types of understanding, including understanding of the religious heritage and understanding of cultural realities within which the church lives and carries out its mission.

What does the literature say about learning outcomes in *understanding* and how they might be assessed? In the introduction to *The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, Benjamin Bloom’s classic effort to classify educational objectives, Bloom acknowledges that *understanding* is a slippery concept. In fact, he backs away from it altogether, favoring instead a categorization that divides mental abilities and skills into five classifications: comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Wiggins and McTigue bite

the bullet on *understanding*. Taking it to be the primary outcome of learning, they make it the focus of their text and elucidate the concept as a family of six facets or interrelated learnings: explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge (specifically, awareness of one's limits).

Their approach to instructional planning involves four steps that start with the identification of learning outcomes ("overarching understandings") and move next to the development of "essential questions" (e.g., the questions that gave rise to content knowledge). Wiggins and McTigue aim for students to "get at matters of deep and enduring understanding . . . [through] provocative and multilayered questions that reveal the richness and complexities of a subject."<sup>41</sup> The third step in instructional planning is determining sufficient and revealing evidence of understanding, and the fourth step is designing learning experiences and instruction.

In Wiggins and McTigue's scheme, the purpose of assessment is to reveal the extent of students' understanding. An educator can assess understanding by using a variety of tools (e.g., oral questions, observations, traditional tests, etc.). However, performance is the key indicator to understanding. Wiggins and McTigue develop a rubric for judging student performance in each facet of understanding and for differentiating levels of understanding in all six facets. The rubric reflects a continuum of performance in understanding, ranging from naive understanding to sophisticated understanding. Assessments that implement this rubric must meet six criteria: they must be valid, reliable, sufficient, grounded in authentic performance, feasible, and student-friendly. The authors suggest strategies for assessing understanding in each of the six facets. For example, strategies for assessing *explanation* include: dialogue, oral defense, reiterative core performance tasks to assess whether understanding is becoming more sophisticated, planted misconceptions, a series of novice-to-expert questions, introduction of concept webs or maps, introduction of unanswerable questions, use of synthesizing questions, and posing a balance of situations testing for breadth of understanding independent of depth of understanding.<sup>42</sup>

For Wiggins and McTigue, as for Huba and Freed, Diez and Blackwell, and Mentkowski, assessment is a cumulative process (i.e., "a collection of evidence over time instead of an event").<sup>43</sup>

### ***Learning for knowledge of subject matter***

Knowledge of subject matter is the learning outcome most extensively researched and probably most familiar to educators at all levels. Recently, efforts have been made to synthesize the research on learning for knowledge of subject matter. More specifically, writers have synthesized the research on strategies shown to have the highest probability of increasing academic achievement across disciplines. Most of this research has been done at the K-12 level,

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

but as in other matters regarding learning and assessment, the findings have relevance for higher education, as well.

Robert Marzano and his associates at Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning conducted a meta-analysis of selected research studies on instructional strategies. In *Classroom Instruction that Works*, Marzano classifies the findings into two groups: general instructional strategies that cross subject matter boundaries and strategies matched to specific types of knowledge. The book's individual chapters summarize the research and theory behind each strategy and describe specific instructional applications and implications for assessment.

The nine general instructional strategies are: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note-taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representation, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and questions, cues, and advance organizers. The knowledge-specific strategies address two types of knowledge: declarative knowledge (vocabulary terms and phrases, details, and organizing ideas), and procedural knowledge (skills and tactics, and processes). While traditional paper-and-pencil testing adequately assesses learning of certain types of knowledge, the learning of other types of knowledge requires alternative forms of assessment, such as demonstrations, projects, graphic representations, creation of physical models, verbal analysis, or the generation and testing of hypotheses.<sup>44</sup>

Marzano's work rests on three principles of cognitive psychology: learning is enhanced when a teacher identifies specific types of knowledge as the focus of instruction, learning requires engagement in tasks that are structured or are sufficiently similar to allow for effective transfer of knowledge, and learning requires multiple exposure to and complex interactions with knowledge. Marzano translates these principles into five analogous action steps for instruction. All the action steps emphasize the teacher's responsibility for structuring students' learning experiences. One step recommends that teachers provide students with multiple exposures to content by using a variety of input modes, both direct (e.g., real and simulated activity) and indirect (e.g., observations, reading, lectures). Another action step advises teachers to engage students in complex tasks that require them to address content in unique ways. This last step explicitly calls for alternative assessment strategies, such as problem solving, systems analysis, and oral or written defenses of claims or judgments.<sup>45</sup>

***Learning for professional practice***

Learning and the assessment of learning for professional practice call for an integration of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, values, and practices deemed critical to the profession. In her synthesis of the separately-authored contributions to *Assessing Student Competence in Accredited Disci-*

plines, Palomba concludes that professionals are expected to be generalists as well as specialists. Her list of skills of the professional generalist include: utilization of intuition and critical thinking skills in evaluating one's own work and the work of others, commitment to continued learning, working collaboratively and cooperatively with members of the professional community, communicating clearly and effectively, professional flexibility and adaptability, and professional ethics (i.e., the ability and willingness to apply a consistent value system to one's work).<sup>46</sup>

Among contributions to the literature on learning for professional practice is Joan Stark's framework for studying preservice professional preparation programs in higher education. Stark's framework identifies two categories of primary "professional preparation outcomes." The first category, "professional competence," names six components of the technically competent practitioner. The second category, "professional attitudes," names characteristics of professional commitment. The six components of professional competence are: conceptual competence, technical competence, integrative competence (i.e., "the ability to meld conceptual and technical competences in order to practice effectively and efficiently"), contextual competence (i.e., "understanding of the broad social, economic, and cultural setting in which the profession is practiced"), adaptive competence (i.e., the professional's "ability to adjust to new conditions inherent in a rapidly changing society"), and interpersonal communication. The professional attitudes are: professional identity, professional ethics, career marketability (i.e., the ability of professionals to compete in the job market), scholarly concern for improvement, and motivation for continued learning.<sup>47</sup>

Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* exemplifies Stark's framework. Embedded in Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* are standards shared by the major professional groups involved with preparing and licensing teachers.<sup>48</sup> The framework is based on formal analyses of tasks required for beginning teachers, reviews of research on teaching activities that influence improved student learning, analyses of state regulations for teacher licensing, and extensive field work, including pilot testing of the criteria and the assessment process. *A Framework for Teaching* is grounded in a constructivist approach to learning. It divides the complex activity of teaching into twenty-two components of professional practice, clustered into four domains of a teacher's responsibility. The four domains are: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. The components identify distinct aspects of the domain. They incorporate commonalities that underlie professional practice in all subject areas and at all grade levels. They also evidence the "professional competences" and "professional attitudes" identified by Stark.<sup>49</sup> Danielson's framework functions as a rubric, much like that described by Huba and Freed. For each component, there is a description of teacher performance at four levels ranging



*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

from unsatisfactory to distinguished. The framework assumes that good teaching can and should be demonstrated in diverse ways, depending upon the context and the practitioner.

In Danielson's framework, learning and assessment are intertwined. The framework is rooted in the Educational Testing Service's *PRAXIS Series: Professional Assessments for Beginning Teachers*, specifically in *PRAXIS III: Classroom Performance Assessments*, which was specifically developed for use by state and local agencies that make decisions regarding the licensure of teachers.<sup>50</sup> During the development and validation of the PRAXIS Series, Danielson served as designer of the training program for PRAXIS assessors. She then wrote and published the framework separately. She intended the framework to extend over the career lifetime of the professional, beginning with professional preparation at the undergraduate level, then following the professional into the licensing process, induction into the profession, mentorship, supervision, mastery teaching, and ongoing professional development.

In Danielson's model, assessment involves demonstration of performance that represents and documents what the teacher knows and is able to do in an authentic setting. As teaching candidates grow into the profession, they are expected to document their performances in a portfolio. The portfolio contains such items as video recordings of classrooms, instructional artifacts, samples of student work, logs demonstrating participation in other teaching functions, professional activities, and self-reflections. Performance documented in the portfolio is verified on-site by a trained PRAXIS III assessor. Danielson's model includes a professional development component. PRAXIS III assessors hired by state or local agencies are trained in portfolio assessment. They also are trained in how to assess actual teaching behaviors (as observed in the classroom) on each of the twenty-two components at the four levels of performance.

As in most other approaches to assessment contained in this review, Danielson's model is systems-based, relying for its effectiveness on collaboration by faculty involved in teacher preparation, colleges of education engaged in program planning and assessment, accrediting agencies, state licensing agencies, hiring institutions (e.g., schools and school districts), and professional associations of practicing teachers (e.g., the National Education Association and its state affiliates).

### **Learning from related fields**

At the 1997 American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) Conference on Assessment and Quality, Theodore Marchese suggested that college educators investigate recent work in the study of learning as it is being explored within the fields of cognitive psychology, the neurosciences and brain research, the cognitive sciences, anthropology, and workplace studies.<sup>51</sup> Contributors to the 2000 Yearbook of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development made similar recommendations.



### ***Learning from cognitive psychology***

In the early part of the twentieth century, cognitive psychology yielded the theory of behaviorism, which for all its limits, introduced the critical role of environment on learning, emphasized human adaptability in the face of environmental influences, and spoke to the importance of motivation and reinforcement.<sup>52</sup> Further developments in cognitive psychology revealed the power of feedback, the impact of prior beliefs, and the need people have to make meaning out of experience. These led to the development of constructivism as a philosophical and psychological principle in learning, and to the notion that learning and thinking involve interactive systems. The latter notion, in turn, prompted the creation of complex models for learning, such as Danielson's framework for learning the profession of teaching.

### ***Learning from the neurosciences and brain research***

From the neurosciences and brain research has come growing evidence that intelligence is a family of capacities linking brain activity to many human traits, behaviors, and functions. In *Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardner draws on biological and anthropological evidence to suggest eight distinct criteria for an intelligence. Gardner proposes seven intelligences that meet these criteria. They are: linguistic, logical mathematical, musical, spatial ("the capacities to . . . perform visual modifications upon one's initial visual perceptions, and to be able to recreate aspects of one's visual experience, even in the absence of relevant physical stimuli"), bodily kinesthetic (as used, for example, by dancers, mimes, and athletes), personal intelligence aimed toward self ("access to one's own feeling life," including the capacity to draw upon them for guiding behavior), and personal intelligence aimed toward others (characterized primarily by "the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals").<sup>53</sup> Gardner regards the intelligences both as means to acquire information and as intellectual material to be mastered (e.g., musical intelligences). He also acknowledges that at least five "higher order" cognitive operations "seem inexplicable in terms of individual intelligences." These five are: common sense, originality, metaphoric capacity, synthesizing power or vision, and sense of self (a capacity beyond the personal intelligences that allows a person to use the other intelligences to make meaning).<sup>54</sup>

Robert Sternberg suggests the theory of "successful intelligence" to explain how people engage integrated sets of abilities to negotiate the demands of life. Successfully intelligent people "recognize their strengths and make the most of them; recognize their weaknesses and find ways to correct or compensate for them; and adapt to, shape, and select environments by finding a balance in their use of analytical, creative, and practical abilities." Sternberg suggests that when students fail to achieve at a level that matches their potential, this failure often results from teaching and assessment that are "narrow in conceptualization and rigid in implementation." To enhance suc-

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

cessful intelligence, Sternberg recommends: providing numerous examples of concepts that cover a wide range of applications, giving students multiple and diverse options in assessment, teaching and assessing to students' weaknesses as well as to their strengths, creating learning environments that encourage students to represent points of view contrary to their own, setting up learning situations where students have to take risks and overcome obstacles, and putting students into learning situations where they must create, discover, invent, and imagine what they do not know and apply what they do know.<sup>55</sup>

Other findings from brain research that hold implications for learning and assessment include the following:

1. General human capabilities, such as language, have a neuronal substrate, so they are not developed solely through experience; on the other hand, the organization of the brain does change in direct response to experience.
2. "Memories that are recalled from time to time are retained because the connections among neurons are strengthened; . . . tasks done frequently. . . require less conscious attention and less brain energy."
3. "Memories are not stored whole, but are reconstructed by recombining aspects of an original experience, so experiences most likely to be remembered are those that are targets of elaborate encoding processes."
4. "Each brain attempts to make sense of the input it constantly receives by matching incoming sensations with related information stored from previous experiences." This activity gives humans the illusion that their thinking is coherent and consistent, even though memory is unreliable and individuals' interpretations of reality differ dramatically.<sup>56</sup>

*Learning from the cognitive sciences*

The cognitive sciences, which grew alongside the development of computer information systems following World War II, continue to study the ways humans process information. These sciences focus on cognitive ways of knowing and related issues of learning, such as the formation of judgments, decision-making, creativity, critical thinking, and the role of emotions in intelligence.<sup>57</sup> In 1995, Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* established emotion as not only a critical dimension of human development, but a viable focus for learning. Goleman holds that emotional intelligence is key to personal relationships, workplace relationships, and physical health. His work sheds light on the biological link between neurological functioning and emotional behavior. It moves beyond Gardner's exploration of the cognitive dimension of emotion (i.e., thinking about feelings) and investigates emotions, themselves. Goleman defines *emotion* as "a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and

biological states, and range of propensities to act.”<sup>58</sup> He identifies five abilities that comprise emotional intelligence: emotional self awareness, the ability to manage one’s emotions, the ability to marshal one’s emotions purposefully, empathy, and the ability to engage in interpersonal relationships. Goleman contends that genetics play a role in emotional intelligence, but he also claims that emotional intelligence is malleable. The latter sections of *Emotional Intelligence* demonstrate how emotional habits are learned and relearned (for example, following traumatic experiences). Because Goleman believes that the primary windows of opportunity for learning emotional habits appear at the developmental stages of childhood and early adolescence, his examples for educating the emotions are drawn from K-12 curricula. However, the subcomponents of the five abilities provide raw material for reframing these examples for use in higher education. Other researcher have confirmed the influence of emotions on the learning process and noted that the motivating force of emotions often outstrips that of values and beliefs.<sup>59</sup>

#### ***Learning from anthropology and workplace studies***

From anthropological studies, Marchese finds that the most “natural” way of learning, across cultures, is apprenticeship. From workplace studies, he uncovers growing evidence of John Dewey’s “learning by doing” that puts perception and activity ahead of conceptual representation—not the other way around—as typically occurs in classroom learning.<sup>60</sup>

#### ***Implications from related fields for learning and assessment***

Research in the neurosciences and cognitive sciences has enabled educators to see how mental functions map onto brain structures, but it has done little to translate findings about how the brain works into guidelines for learning and assessment.<sup>61</sup> Recognizing the need to bridge that gap, the National Research Council, with support from the National Science Foundation, convened the Committee on the Foundations of Assessment in 1998. The Committee was composed of representatives from cognitive and developmental psychology, the neurosciences, learning technologies, mathematics and science education, and other fields. They embarked on a three-year study to review advances in their respective fields and “to consider implications for reshaping educational assessment.”<sup>62</sup> The Committee concluded that the most widely used assessments of academic achievement in K-12 education are based on highly restrictive beliefs about learning and competence—beliefs at odds with current knowledge about human cognition and learning.

The Committee recommended that “assessment practices . . . move beyond a focus on component skills and discrete bits of knowledge to encompass the more complex aspects of student achievement.”<sup>63</sup> The Committee found that typical assessment practices disregard not only the importance of long term memory, but the fact that what people know is domain-specific and task-

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

specific and organized into schemas (“previously learned . . . methods . . . for organizing knowledge in memory in ways that are useful for solving problems”).<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the Committee also recommended that assessments evaluate what schemas an individual has and under what circumstances the person regards the information as relevant. This evaluation should include how a person organizes acquired information. The Committee further recommended that assessments require students to engage in problem solving and chunking relevant information into manageable units.

Noting that an important aspect of cognition is metacognition (i.e., the process of reflecting on and directing one’s own thinking), the Committee advised educators to assess student’s metacognitive skills. Like numerous other researchers, the Committee recommended that assessments make students’ learning visible. The Committee also emphasized the importance of feedback.

The Committee reported that knowledge frequently develops in a highly contextualized form and does not transfer easily. Therefore, “assessments of academic achievement need to consider carefully the knowledge and skills required to understand and answer a question and solve a problem, including the context in which it is presented,” and they need to consider whether or not students have been taught how to apply what has been learned in other contexts.<sup>65</sup>

In order to be valid, assessments must match with desired learning outcomes. Toward this end, the Committee recommended that teachers engage techniques such as requiring students to think aloud as they work problems so that teachers can analyze students’ errors during the instructional process and provide appropriate interventions.

***Specific assessment strategies***

Few writers have tackled the task of collecting, explaining, and illustrating strategies for the assessment of learning across types of learning outcomes and academic disciplines. A notable exception is Richard Stiggins, whose *Student-Involved Classroom Assessment* is now in its third edition. The text evolved from the work of Stiggins and his associates at the Assessment Training Institute. Its research base is strengthened by many examples drawn from ATI’s interactions with classroom teachers at the K-12 level.<sup>66</sup>

Stiggins works from the premise that assessment *for* learning is vastly different from assessment *of* learning. He criticizes assessments *of* learning (i.e., practices designed primarily to hold students, teachers, and schools accountable for learning, such as high stakes testing programs) because they undermine learning by intimidating both students and teachers. Assessments *for* learning, on the other hand, capitalize on the research on student motivation to boost students’ confidence and promote competence. Practices that promote assessment *for* learning include involving students in classroom assessment,

translating assessment results into descriptive (rather than judgmental) feedback, and engaging students in documenting their own progress.<sup>67</sup>

In *Student-Involved Classroom Assessment*, Stiggins addresses methods for assessing five types of learning outcomes: knowledge and understanding, reasoning, performance skills, product development, and dispositions. He describes four basic assessment methods applicable to all five types of outcomes, analyzes the benefits and drawbacks of each, and illustrates how the methods might be used to assess each type of learning outcome. The four basic assessment methods are: selected response (e.g., multiple choice), essay, performance assessment, and personal communication (e.g., student-teacher conferences, oral exams).

Stiggins devotes a major portion of the text to step-by-step procedures for constructing valid assessments in each of the four assessment methods. He describes numerous strategies for carrying out each method. He provides examples from a variety of academic disciplines. He identifies common pitfalls and barriers to effective implementation and suggests ways to remedy them. In another section of the text, Stiggins reframes the assessment task by considering the five types of learning outcomes individually. He then addresses assessment issues specific to each type of outcome (e.g., What does reasoning proficiency look like in different academic disciplines? How does one establish performance criteria (a rubric) for performance skills? What data might an assessment of students' dispositions yield?). In the book's final section, Stiggins describes ways to communicate assessment results. He explores issues involved in grading and discusses the development, uses, practicalities, and pitfalls of portfolios.

A word about portfolios: Portfolios are featured heavily in much of the recent literature on classroom assessment. "Portfolios can . . . serve instruction or assessment; they can be focused primarily on documentation or on evaluation; their contents can be defined by the student or by the teacher; they can be seen as a . . . representative sample of overall performance, or as a constantly changing exhibit."<sup>68</sup> Wiggins regards the assessment portfolio as evidence of learning, and he likens it to an anthology of the student's work. Huba and Freed offer an entire chapter on using portfolios to promote, support, and evaluate learning. They categorize portfolios by type (all-inclusive or selection), explain how portfolios can serve as a tool for assessing student learning, demonstrate how portfolios can contribute to self-assessment by the learner, and show how portfolios can involve other stakeholders in learning and assessment.<sup>69</sup>

Danielson builds the creation of a professional portfolio into her framework for teacher education and assessment. Her treatment of portfolios includes the portfolio's contents and potential uses. She sees three purposes for the portfolio: to document the teaching candidate's attainment of the components in the teaching framework, to encourage the candidate's self-reflection and analysis, and to "stimulate professional conversation" between the teaching candidate and others involved in his or her professional preparation.<sup>70</sup>

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

For Stiggins, the portfolio “is a collection of student work to provide a representation of student achievement.” It is not an assessment per se (since it might include information from multiple forms of assessment gathered over an extended period of time), but a tool for communicating information. Like Wiggins, Danielson, and Huba and Freed, Stiggins devotes an entire chapter to portfolios, and describes possible uses, considerations for design, pitfalls, and practicalities associated with portfolios.<sup>71</sup>

**Alternative voices in learning and assessment**

*A framework for learning and assessment in theological education?*

One could argue that Stark’s framework for studying preservice programs of professional preparation provides an appropriate lens for looking at theological education. One also could argue that, pushed to the task, faculty and administrators in theological schools might develop a model for ministerial vocation similar to Danielson’s framework for teaching, and with a similar purpose: to provide a map for guiding theological students through their educational experiences, a structure for helping experienced ministers become more effective, and a means to focus efforts toward improvement in education and practice. Danielson’s framework is premised on a belief, not far from that grounding theological education, that teaching is a complex set of interrelated factors which together describe what a teacher knows and does. A checklist of behaviors cannot adequately describe or assess professional practice in either teaching or ministry. Danielson’s framework assumes that commonalities underlie the teaching profession. It also assumes that a teacher’s specific actions vary with the context and with the individual. In an important sense, Danielson’s framework represents for teacher preparation what ATS Statement 4.1.1 requires of ministerial preparation, namely that the “goals [of theological education], and the processes and practices leading to their attainment, are normally intimately interwoven and should not be separated from one another.”

However, when Danielson’s framework, in its assessment form, functions as the gatekeeper for state licensure (which is required to practice the teaching profession in public schools), those who use it make two critical claims. They claim that all participants in the learning and assessment process share a common understanding of what constitutes effective teaching, agree upon its components, and can recognize these components in action at various levels of mastery. They also claim that this particular framework validly and reliably distinguishes persons who are qualified to teach from those who are not. Dependence upon the framework as the legal grounds for granting or withholding state teaching licenses draws on these claims.

Were faculties so inclined, what would it take to adapt Danielson’s framework to theological education? Faculties in theological schools would face at least three daunting tasks. First, they would need to express the significant



learning outcomes of theological education in subcomponents that are grounded in commonly recognized effective practices or accepted theory. Secondly, they would need to translate the subcomponents into performance indicators at differentiating levels of mastery. Thirdly, they would need to obtain consensus among persons in decisionmaking roles to use the framework for the purpose of assessing fitness for ministry.<sup>72</sup>

Alternative voices in learning and assessment—those frequently speaking from a subjectivist/interpretivist perspective—might well challenge all three undertakings. The first task assumes that the learning outcomes of theological education named in ATS Standards can be encoded in a framework for ministry similar to Danielson's. This task is frustrated by a scarcity of literature on learning and assessment of goals distinctive to preparation for ministerial vocation (e.g., "deepening spiritual awareness" and "growing in moral sensibility and character" [ATS Statement 4.1.1]). The task also disregards the tacit dimension of learning and a whole classification of learning outcomes that Elliott Eisner terms *personalized* or *idiosyncratic*.<sup>73</sup> The second task rests on an illusion of order, predictability, and control in human experience. The third undertaking embraces the other two and extends them to minimize the role of professional judgment in assessment and the role of reflective practice in learning.

In the sections below, these alternative voices comment on the suitability of a Danielson-type framework of learning and assessment for theological education.

### *The distinctive goals of theological education*

Some of the goals of theological education pose unique challenges for designing learning opportunities and assessments. For example, what is the relationship between *learning* (a concept rooted in psychology) and *spiritual formation*? How does one structure learning opportunities for personal growth? Almost nothing related to these questions exists in the published literature on learning and assessment.

Among the texts that offer possible assistance is *Changing Life Patterns*, in which Elizabeth Liebert applies structural theories of human development to the practice of spiritual direction. Liebert places the developmental theories "within a wider theological/spiritual view of the goal of human life and growth."<sup>74</sup> In this view, the theories represent stages of *meaning-making* and articulate the human competences that persons bring to spiritual direction. Liebert believes that as spiritual directors better understand the process of developmental change, they can strengthen their ability to facilitate whatever changes lie within the scope of the spiritual direction relationship.

Liebert weaves assessment into the process of spiritual guidance. The developmental theories function as a "tool for assessing the potential a given directee has for 'working inside,' for noticing and naming feelings, desires, hopes, values, and long-term goals."<sup>75</sup> The theories also enable the spiritual



*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

director to look at how the director's listening, style, and goals are informed and limited by his or her own developmental stage. Liebert suggests asking specific questions around two rubrics—"Symbolic Communication" and "Self-Other Perspectives" as a strategy for locating a person's developmental complexity and meaning-making system.

Danielson's framework is silent on goals distinctive to theological education.

***The tacit dimension of knowing***

In *Discerning Is More Than Counting*, John Harris and Dennis Sansom dig at the roots of the difficulties involved in adequately assessing learning for ministerial vocation. They begin with issues of epistemology. In dealing with learning and assessment, it is difficult to avoid such classic epistemological questions as: "What does it mean to know?" "How do we know what we know?" "Are there different ways of knowing for the various human powers and actions?"<sup>76</sup> Michael Polanyi, a physical chemist who argues for the tacit dimension of knowledge, maintains that we know far more than we can tell. This leads him to conclude that "a true understanding of science and mathematics includes the capacity for a contemplative experience of them, and the teaching of these sciences must aim at imparting this capacity to the pupil."<sup>77</sup>

For Polanyi, contemplation requires "living in the experience of the discipline." A student learns this kind of knowing in ways unique to the discipline. One practical example of Polanyi's sense of contemplation can be seen in Elizabeth Liebert's article, "The Role of Practice in the Study of Christian Spirituality." Liebert contends that *practice* ("the intentional and repeated bringing of one's lived spirituality into . . . scholarly work and attending to what happens when one does") is not ancillary to the study of spirituality, "but it is a *constitutive* dimension of the discipline."<sup>78</sup> Inviting students to engage in spiritual practices while they study them, creates a space "where the self-implicating and transformative nature of our discipline can potentially take root."<sup>79</sup> Liebert does not exclude the traditional study of spiritual texts, but she draws upon Howard Gardner's recent work, *The Disciplined Mind*, to point to *practice* as a means for engaging students with academic content at more than one level.<sup>80</sup> While Liebert does not discuss how practice is assessed, she does provide an example of what bringing spiritual practice into academic study in a discipline might look like.

Danielson's framework does not acknowledge the tacit dimension of knowing.

***Professional judgment in assessment***

A student is likely to emerge from learning "in the experience of the discipline" with personalized and idiosyncratic outcomes beyond those predetermined by the teacher. In order to assess these outcomes, the teacher needs

to provide students with opportunities to communicate personal meaning. Eisner contends that “people communicate through different expressive modalities. . . . Each modality has the power to convey different kinds of understanding.”<sup>81</sup> Objective measures are good for conveying certain kinds of understandings, but not all. Written descriptions (essays, for example) may help students communicate other learnings, but still others call for oral or interactive processes (such as interviews), visual representation, performance, or creation of a product or a virtual reality. In Eisner’s view of assessment, particularly the assessment of personalized and idiosyncratic outcomes, educators must exercise professional judgment.

Teachers exercise professional judgment in ways akin to professional artists: they act as *connoisseurs* and as *critics*. As connoisseurs, teachers make refined intuitive judgments (i.e., appreciating and valuing according to norms of practice appropriate to the discipline). As critics, teachers use *structural corroboration*, as practiced in jurisprudence. Structural corroboration involves using several pieces of evidence to validate one another and make sense of a whole. In assessing student learning, teachers also use *referential adequacy*, as practiced in the evaluation of literary works or paintings. Teachers engage referential adequacy when they rely upon evidence that the student’s work creates a new, more adequate understanding of an event or subject. In these forms of assessment, teachers make their judgments public not through test scores and ratings, but through descriptive, interpretive, evaluative, and thematic renderings of the student’s learning experience.

There is little room in Danielson’s framework for the roles of connoisseurship, criticism, or similar exercises of professional judgment in the assessment of learning outcomes.

### *The reflective practitioner*

In his classic text, *The Reflective Practitioner*, Donald Schon argues that evidence of professional knowledge rests not only in the competence, but in the artistry embedded in skillful practice. This artistry manifests itself in the “reflection-in-action” that practitioners bring to situations of uncertainty, uniqueness, and conflict—situations hardly strange to either teaching or ministry.<sup>82</sup>

Schon takes issue with professional education that “treats professional competence as the application of privileged knowledge to instrumental problems of practice.” He claims that by leaving little room for reflection-in-action, the traditional model of professional education sacrifices relevance for rigor. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* is his response to the question, “What kind of professional education would be appropriate to an epistemology of practice based on reflection-in-action?”

For Schon, the artistry that competent professionals exhibit is a distinct form of intelligence—not mysterious, but rigorous in its own terms. Students

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

begin their professional education by studying the performance of unusually competent professionals. Applied science and research-based techniques are important to this education, but they are “bounded on several sides by artistry. There are an art of problem framing, an art of implementation, and an art of improvisation—all necessary to mediate the use in practice of applied science and technique.”<sup>83</sup>

Schon contends that professional education should immerse students in “learning-by-doing” within a long-term practicum involving dialogic interaction between and among students and instructors. Students observe and reflect upon actions in order to uncover the tacit knowing implicit in professional behavior. During reflection-in-action, students rethink parts of their tacit knowing. This encourages on-the-spot experimentation that influences what students do in the situation at hand and what they will do in future similar situations.

Schon believes that traditional professional education often reflects an objectivist/positivist perspective in which professional competence consists in the correct application of theories and techniques. He admits that professionals do solve some problems by routine application of facts, rules, and procedures. In other cases, where circumstances are unfamiliar and there is no obvious fit between the situation at hand and a repertoire of theories and techniques, professionals solve problems by “thinking like a (e.g., doctor)” and following rules implicit in the professional tradition. However, other situations facing professional practitioners are unique or fraught with uncertainties or conflicts that evade the application of rules, formulas, or traditional frames of reference.

The reflective practitioner approach to professional education reflects a subjectivist/interpretivist perspective on professional competence. It recognizes that professionals not only apply rules of inquiry and think “inside the box,” but invent rules, restructure strategies, reframe problems, and invent on-the-spot experiments in order to make new sense of uncertain, unique, or conflicted situations.

Through the practicum, students are both initiated into the tradition of a community of professional practitioners and encouraged to stretch its boundaries. Students learn the profession’s conventions, constraints, languages, and appreciative systems, its repertoire of exemplars, systematic knowledge, and patterns of knowing-in-action. Students are coached into professional knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and ways of thinking. They also use reflection-in-action, under the supervision of a trained coach, to think “outside the box” and construct and test new categories of understanding, strategies, and ways of framing problems.

Danielson’s framework does provide teaching candidates with opportunities to demonstrate identified competences, to “think like a teacher” (as an effective teacher has been envisioned), to solve typical teaching problems, and to evidence the ability to carry out expected responsibilities. The framework encourages teachers to be “reflective practitioners.” In fact, a key component

of the framework's fourth domain is "reflecting on teaching," but the framework leaves the candidate little space to invent new ways for understanding the role of teacher, structuring the teaching task, framing problems, improvising strategies, or dealing with uncertainties.

### ***Faculty participation in communities of learning***

Harris and Sansom, Eisner, and Schon, among others cited in this review, emphasize the role of the professional community in learning and assessment. For all of these writers, reliable intuitive and intersubjective judgments stem from intimate, sustained involvement with the disciplinary roots of a field and the translation of those roots into professional practice.

In their work with participants in the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL), Mary Taylor Huber and her colleagues have found that student learning improves when teachers in higher education become "communities of scholars" within their disciplines. Such communities are formed by persons willing to document what happens in their courses, share and critique their classroom experiences, and build upon each other's work. In CASTL, these communities are discipline-based, not only because the academic discipline is central to a college teacher's identity, but because college teaching "is not a generic technique, but a process that comes out of one's view of one's field and what it means to know it deeply."<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Harris and Sansom recommend that assessment purposes and methods arise from faculties formed into "communities of judgment" who reflect upon a discipline's inherent mode of inquiry and the way it interacts with relevant learning.

The goals of theological education embrace and integrate a number of academic disciplines and ways of learning. How do faculty members and others involved in theological education develop as communities of learning? In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer offers one model, again drawn from the professional field of teaching.

For Palmer, teaching has both an inner terrain (composed of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions) and an outer territory in the forms of community that teaching and learning require. He speaks directly to the book's intended audience of practicing teachers: "If we want to grow in our practice, we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn more about ourselves and our craft."<sup>85</sup>

Palmer believes the professional community is a necessity, not simply a nicety or an opportunity for professional growth. He connects the privatization of teaching to the field's abysmally slow evolution into a profession and to teaching incompetence within academic institutions at all levels. He contends that teaching will not grow into a craft without "shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it."<sup>86</sup> The dialogue that leads to a reconnection of "soul and role" does not revolve around teaching techniques, but around

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

such formational matters as what it means to be a teacher, ways of knowing and how they shape teaching and learning, relationships and conditions that evoke the “teacher” inside the teacher, gifts and limits, critical moments in teaching and learning, and the vocabulary and metaphors through which teachers reveal their sense of self and work.

*The Courage To Teach* has deep roots in the Teacher Formation Program which Palmer developed and has helped to lead since 1994. Directed toward teachers in public schools, the program is composed of a two-year sequence of renewal retreats. Its genesis lies in the disconnect that practicing teachers experience when their work feels lifeless and their vocation a sham. The disconnect between “soul and role” divides teachers from their students, their subject matters, their colleagues, and their sense of self. It leads many to leave the profession as the only conceivable escape from a “divided life.”

Palmer does not shy away from the word “formation” to describe processes for coming to the identity and integrity necessary for professional practice. During the retreats, teachers engage with one another, a trained facilitator, and (between retreats) with students and colleagues in an exploration of who they are as teachers and how the “teaching self” relates with students and others who share their professional lives. The eight retreats are held quarterly and center on seasonal themes and images drawn from the natural world (e.g., dormancy, seeding, abundance, decline).

The Teacher Formation Program offers a model for classroom learning centered in “communities of truth.” Unlike therapeutic communities (which rely upon psychological intimacy), or civic communities (which depend upon political civility) communities of truth concern themselves with creating space for the interrelated actions of knowing, teaching, and learning. Classrooms that function as “communities of truth” are neither teacher-centered nor learner-centered, but learning-centered. Palmer’s model of learning does not require that the boundaries between teachers and students evaporate or that assessment cease. It does require an interdependence among teachers and students and an ecological understanding of truth as: “an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline.”<sup>87</sup> Like Polanyi, Palmer believes that reality, whether chemistry, theology, or teaching, is “a web of communal relationships, and [that] we can know reality only by being in community with it.”<sup>88</sup>

## **Summary**

The published literature on learning and assessment addresses some, but not all, of the goals important to theological education. Like the literature in other fields, the writing on learning and assessment represents a spectrum of beliefs, values, and emphases. There are gaps in the literature, as well as inconsistencies. Some of the most enlightening and potentially useful material

comes not only from the literature of higher education, but from K-12 education, the parallel professions, and related studies, including cognitive psychology, the neurosciences, and the cognitive sciences. Among insights offered by the literature are these:

1. *Assessment*, as now used in the literature, includes writing that formerly was categorized under the term, *evaluation*. While some writers are beginning to distinguish these terms, there is no evidence of intentionality around the replacement of *evaluation* with the term, *assessment*.
2. Assessment may focus on improvement (e.g., of learning), on accountability for performance, or on both.
3. Some of the literature on assessment deals specifically with learning at the classroom level. However, most contemporary treatments of assessment take a systems approach: improved student learning depends upon systems and structures that integrate the school's mission, connect processes of assessment, planning and development, and promote a community of learning.
4. It is impossible to probe assessment without grappling with issues of learning.
5. Decisions about how learning and assessment will proceed begin in an implicit or explicitly stated philosophical perspective that addresses such matters as the nature of learning, how people know and reveal what they know, and what knowledge is of most worth.
6. The purposes of assessment are guided by one's perspective on learning. Methods of assessment emerge from purposes of assessment and the uses to be made of assessment during and following learning.
7. Two concepts with widespread impact on the assessment of learning are *constructivism* and *outcomes assessment*.
  - a. *Constructivism* emphasizes the active role of the learner in creating understanding.
  - b. Outcomes assessment is assessment that requires that all learning outcomes that will "count" in the assessment process be predetermined and explicitly and publicly stated.
8. There is a growing body of literature on assessment in the professions. This literature places value on the use of multiple assessments, problem-solving assignments, and performance assessments that require the synthesizing of knowledge and skills.
9. The model of assessment developed and implemented at Alverno College shows evidence of promoting "learning that lasts." Alverno utilizes a framework that directs assessment in every course on campus. It treats assessment as a form of learning. Learning and assessment are grounded in ability-based, performance-based learning outcomes. The Alverno model systematically integrates assessment at the classroom, programmatic, and institutional levels. It is a complex and labor-intensive model.



*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

10. Learning is enhanced when learning outcomes and the means for assessing them are developed concurrently. Taken together, these activities direct instructional planning (i.e., instruction-influenced assessment" rather than "assessment-influenced instruction").
11. Assessment not only communicates the outcomes of learning, it serves as a learning tool. Feedback—both soliciting feed back *from* students and providing feedback *to* students—is a critical component of learning and assessment. The rubric (which explains to students how their work will be judged) is one strategy for providing feedback. Among the better known strategies for soliciting feedback from students are the classroom assessment techniques (CATs) developed by Angelo and Cross.
12. Researched methods exist for promoting learning and the assessment of learning for the goals of understanding, knowledge of subject matter, and preparation for professional practice.
  - a. *Understanding* can be viewed as a multifaceted concept. One way to promote understanding is to ask "essential questions" in a discipline and then to provide learning opportunities that yield evidence of growth in understanding. Toward this end, educators can engage a rubric that includes criteria for judging student performance in each facet of understanding at various levels of mastery.
  - b. Research at the K-12 level has revealed general instructional strategies and subject-specific instructional strategies that have a high correlation with increased learning of subject-matter knowledge.
  - c. It is possible to construct a framework for learning and assessment in the professions. Danielson has developed a framework for the professional preparation of teachers from a formal study and analysis of teaching tasks. The commonalities of teaching incorporate Stark's "professional competences" and "professional attitudes." The framework translates the commonalities into performance indicators at varying levels of mastery. Both teacher preparation and state licensing of teachers utilize this framework.
13. In the literature on assessment, especially assessment of learning for professional practice, there is much support for self-assessment, peer-assessment, and the involvement of assessors from outside the classroom.
14. Among the particular contributions of cognitive psychology to learning and assessment are: the importance of motivation and feedback, constructivism, and an understanding of learning and thinking as interactive systems.
15. The neurosciences and brain research have yielded findings on how memory functions and on the existence of multiple intelligences both as means for acquiring information and as intellectual material to be mastered.



16. The cognitive sciences have identified the abilities that comprise emotional intelligence and the role emotional intelligence plays in personal relationships, workplace relationships, and physical health. Emotional habits have a genetic root, but they can be learned and relearned.
17. Anthropology and workplace studies have reinforced the importance of apprenticeship and “learning by doing.”
18. Efforts are just beginning to translate findings from the neurosciences, brain research, and the cognitive sciences into specific guidelines for learning and assessment.
19. Selection of assessment strategies should consider their effectiveness for implementing specific methods of assessment and for assessing particular types of learning.
20. As a form of evidence of assessment, portfolios offer unique advantages, and harbor distinctive pitfalls.
21. Among the alternative voices in learning and assessment that might interest educators in theological schools are those speaking to the distinctive goals of theological education, the tacit dimension of knowing, the role of professional judgment in assessment, reflective practice, and the place of the professional community in learning.
  - a. Very little exists in the literature to guide theological educators in providing learning opportunities and assessment for goals such as growth in personal and spiritual formation. Among the texts that suggest direction is Liebert’s application of the theories of structural developmental psychology to the practice of spiritual direction.
  - b. The tacit dimension of knowing is critical to learning in the liberal arts and to goals of theological education such as “deepening spiritual awareness.” Drawing on the study of spirituality, Liebert offers one example of “living in the experience of the discipline.”
  - c. Alternative means for exercising professional judgment (extending beyond the boundaries of a rubric), include structural corroboration and referential adequacy.
  - d. Professional learning happens in communities where students not only learn through reflective practice how to apply knowledge, rules, and procedures and to think like a particular type of professional, but where they are coached to invent new rules, reframe problems, and make new sense out of uncertain, unique, or conflicted situations.
  - e. Assessment appropriate for a particular discipline or set of disciplines (e.g., theological education) ought to arise within a community of learning whose members can reflect upon the way the discipline’s inherent modes of inquiry interact with relevant learning. Palmer offers one model for forming faculties into communities of learning.

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

*Carolyn Jurkowitz is associate director, Department on Education, Catholic Conference of Ohio. She is a member of the Task Force of the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation Project and a former member of the ATS Commission on Accrediting.*

ENDNOTES

1. *Performance assessment* refers to forms of assessment that require students to demonstrate their mastery of complex learning outcomes in direct, observable ways. Examples include: projects, papers, models, and portfolios. For a discussion of this and other educational concepts used in this paper, see: *Handbook of Research on Teaching, Fourth Edition*, ed. Virginia Richardson (Washington: American Educational Research Association, 2001).
2. ATS Standards treat *evaluation* as the more comprehensive concept, and *assessment* as a component of evaluation: "Evaluation is a process that includes: (1) the identification of desired goals or outcomes for an educational program, institutional service, or personnel performance (2) a system of gathering quantitative or qualitative information related to the required goals (3) the assessment of the performance of the program, service, or person based on this information and (4) the establishment of revised goals or activities based on the assessment" (ATS Statement 1.2.2).
3. For other examples of the use of these terms, see: Peter T. Ewell, "A Brief History of Assessment" and Peter J. Gray, "The Roots of Assessment: Tensions, Solutions, and Research Directions," both in *Building a Scholarship of Assessment*, ed. Trudy A. Banta and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2002); Mary E. Diez and Peggy J. Blackwell, *Quality Assessment for Quality Outcomes: Implications for the Design and Implementation of Advanced Masters Programs* (Washington: National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2001).
4. In "Leading-Edge Efforts to Improve Teaching and Learning" *Change* (July/August 2001: 31-37), K. Patricia Cross details the developments that led to the transition from *teaching* to *learning* in higher education. The same article describes institutions that have "change[ed] the learning environment . . . by creating 'learning-centered colleges.'" While institutions have gone about such changes in various ways, all the examples cited attend to: faculty development, aligning institutional policies, practices, and programs with mission, and reorienting the relationships between and among learning, teaching, and research.
5. Personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking are the five dimensions of learning organizations described in Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990). It is difficult to determine the impact of Senge's work on educational assessment. However, Senge is referenced in many of the texts on educational assessment published since 1990.
6. In 2002, the Alverno Institute, published *Student Learning: A Central Focus of Institutions of Higher Education* (Milwaukee: Alverno College Institute). The report, based on the collaboration of twenty-six colleges and universities over a two-year period, was intended to generate a framework for describing principles and practices to facilitate student learning. The framework that emerged contains four basic principles, among them: "working continuously to improve the environment for learning." This principle is based on the finding that linked systems of student assessment, program assessment, and institutional assessment "create processes that assist faculty, staff, and administrators to improve student learning, judge program value and

effectiveness for fostering student learning, generate multiple sources of feedback to faculty, staff, and administrators about patterns of student and alumni performance, . . . and guide curricular . . . and institution-wide improvements," 22. Similar findings are reported by Peter Gray and Trudy Banta in *The Campus Level Impact of Assessment: Progress, Problems, Possibilities* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1997), which presents longitudinal case studies of five campuses first profiled three or more years prior to 1994. In *Quality Assessment for Quality Outcomes*, Diez and Blackwell encourage the use of student assessment data in program planning, and program assessment data in institutional planning. "Used in this manner, program evaluation becomes formative" (19). Likewise, *Learning Through Assessment: A Resource Guide for Higher Education*, ed. Lion F. Gardiner, Caitlin Anderson, and Barbara Cambridge (Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 1997) presumes that those hunting for resources on assessment are coming at it from one or more institutional levels and for one or more purposes (1). Therefore, this volume, an outcome of the AAHE Assessment fora, does not distinguish among levels of assessment or purposes of assessment in its extensive listing of print, internet, audiovisual, and organizational resources.

7. The phrase, *community of learning* appears often in the literature on learning and assessment in higher education published during the past ten years. Thomas Angelo defines learning communities as "carefully designed groupings of students and faculty working intensively and collaboratively toward shared, significant learning goals often focusing on themes that cut across several traditional disciplines" ("Doing Assessment as if Learning Matters Most," *AAHE Bulletin* (May 1999), reprinted in *AAHE Bulletin.com* (2003), 1-6. This article proposes that institutions serious about developing learning communities with students, first develop what Peter Senge calls collective "personal mastery" among faculty and administrators. Angelo offers suggestions for using Senge's model to build shared trust, shared vision, shared language, and research-based guidelines for using assessment to promote learning.

8. See, for example, Marcia Mentkowski and Associates, *Learning That Lasts: Integrating Learning, Development, and Performance in College and Beyond* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000), which synthesizes over twenty years of research (mostly longitudinal) on the application of the learning theory developed and implemented at Alverno College. The Alverno program represents a highly complex, integrated model of learning and assessment that engages all persons and all dimensions of the college. Despite Alverno's widely researched and publicized success in providing "learning that lasts," few institutions have chosen to undertake the Alverno model.

9. Peter Gray provides a similar analysis of these two perspectives. He identifies them as an inherent source of the tension that exists in assessment (Gray, in Banta and Associates). Gray suggests that a process of assessment that synthesizes the two perspectives (e.g., Daniel Stufflebeam's decision/accountability approach . . .) may provide the best tool for combining the improvement and accountability purposes that assessment often is required to serve (See Stufflebeam, *Evaluation Models*. New Directions for Evaluation, no. 89. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2001). Corrine Glesne also describes and contrasts these perspectives and the distinct predispositions they bring to disciplined inquiry, (*Becoming Qualitative Researchers* (New York: Longman, 1999).

10. See, for example, Theodore J. Marchese's presentation at the 1997 AAHE Conference on Assessment and Learning: "In making choices about what to teach and how to assess it, clarity about the character of learning we intend for students must be an essential bedrock for what we do." ("The New Conversations About Learning: Insights from Neuroscience and Anthropology, Cognitive Science and Workplace Studies," AAHE Conference on Assessment and Quality, *Assessing Impact: Evidence and Quality* (Washington: American Association for Higher Education, 1997), 80.

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

11. Lee S. Shulman, "Forward," *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Exploring Common Ground*, Mary Taylor Huber and Sherwyn P. Morreale, eds. (Washington: The American Association for Higher Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2002), vi-vii. Shulman's reference is to Joseph Schwab's "Structure of the Disciplines," *The Structure of Knowledge and the Curriculum*, G.W. Ford and L. Pugno, eds. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964). Huber and Morreale's text emerged out of issues raised at the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. The editors claim that in recent years, higher education, across the disciplines, has begun to take greater interest in how learning occurs. At least four historical developments have prompted this concern: changing student demographics, national priorities, public demands for accountability, and the development of increasingly sophisticated technological tools for learning, 6.

12. These were some of the concerns consistently articulated during ATS's "Initial Gathering and Workshop" for the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation Project (November 1-3, 2002) when participants were asked to name current practices and challenges regarding theological learning and its assessment in their respective institutions.

13. Susan Toohey, *Designing Courses for Higher Education* (Buckingham, MK: The Society for Research Into Higher Education & Open University Press, 1999).

14. Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (Upper Saddle River: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2002), 47.

15. Mary E. Huba and Jann E. Freed, *Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000). Huba and Freed define assessment in this way:

*"Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning."* Ibid., 8. [italics in original]

16. As Charlotte Danielson notes, "a constructivist approach to learning has become *de rigueur* in [many] educational circles and is reflected in the new curriculum standards begun by the NCTM [National Council of Teachers of Mathematics] and followed by other professional organizations," *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1996), 23. "Constructivism refers to a learning or meaning-making theory that suggests that individuals create their own new understandings, which are based upon the interaction of what they already know and believe and the ideas with which they come into contact." Virginia Richardson and Peggy Placier, "Teacher Change" in *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 913.

17. Ibid., 5.

18. Ibid., 9.

19. Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta, *Assessing Student Competence in Accredited Disciplines: Pioneering Approaches to Assessment in Higher Education* (Sterling: Stylus Publishing, 2001). They define competence as "the integration of skills, abilities and knowledge as focused on a particular task," 3.

20. Mentkowski and Associates, xv.

21. Ibid., 7.

22. See, for example: Peter T. Ewell, "To Capture the Ineffable: New Forms of Assessment in Higher Education," *Review of Research in Education*, 17 (1991): 75-125.

23. Mentkowski and Associates, 320.

24. Ibid., 419-420.
25. Ibid., 60.
26. Ibid., 378-379.
27. Peter Gallison, *Image and Logic: A Material Culture of Microphysics* (Chicago: University Press, 1997), 781-884.
28. Ralph Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).
29. Diez and Blackwell, 3.
30. Diez and Blackwell describe their assessment process as *cumulative*. They prefer this term over the more traditional distinction between *formative* and *summative* forms of evaluations. "Terms like 'formative' and 'summative' suggest a major break between practice and the 'real thing,'" and presume that one needs highly controlled and standardized settings in order to validly and reliably assess a teaching candidate's competence. "The proponents of assessment for development argue that . . . evidence of a candidate's performance over time, across multiple assessment, using varied methods, is a different, but also valid picture of the candidate's level of performance" (9).
31. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTigue, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998), 8.
32. See, for example, Huba and Freed; Palomba and Banta. See also: Thomas Angelo and K. Patricia Cross, *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1993), 8.
33. Alverno Institute, 3. The other three primary characteristics of the framework are: coordinating the processes of instruction and assessment; aligning structures and resources; and approaching assessment systematically.
34. More specifically, they say: "educators . . . need to provide a clear picture of the expectations of a candidate's knowledge and performance in teacher education and in the disciplinary areas through the outcomes that guide course and program development and through the assessments that candidates complete as they move through the program," 10.
35. Diez and Blackwell, 8, 11.
36. Grant Wiggins, "Feedback: How Learning Occurs," in AAHE Conference on Assessment and Quality, 38, 39.
37. Huba and Freed, 155.
38. Angelo and Cross, 149.
39. Ibid., 313. For further examples of the use of CATs in the classroom as well as for staff development and for linking classroom assessment with programmatic assessment, see Thomas Angelo, ed. *Classroom Assessment and Research: An Update on Uses, Approaches, and Research Findings* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1998).
40. Benjamin Bloom, ed. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1956), 204-207.
41. Wiggins and McTigue, 28. Examples of such questions are: "Must a story have a beginning, a middle, and an end?" "Is there enough to go around?" "How can liberty and security be balanced?" "What do we fear?"
42. Ibid., 85-89.
43. Ibid., 13.

*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

44. Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollock, *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001). "Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups through which students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning." D.W. Johnson, R.T. Johnson, and E.J. Holubec, *Cooperative Learning in the Classroom* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1994), 4.
45. Robert J. Marzano, *What Works in Schools: Translating Research Into Action* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003), 109. As previously noted, constructivism currently enjoys wide appeal as an approach to learning. However, Marzano challenges its suitability for the learning of both declarative and procedural content knowledge. He questions whether the learning of knowledge always is the flexible and negotiable commodity frequently portrayed in constructivist literature.
46. Palomba and Banta, 248-249.
47. Joan S. Stark, "A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Preservice Professional Preparation Programs in Colleges and Universities," *Journal of Higher Education*, 57:3 (May/June 1986), 232-258.
48. Danielson's framework has been correlated with the INTASC Standards (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium), NCATE Standards (National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education), and the standards of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.
49. E.g., demonstrating knowledge of content (conceptual) ; using questioning and discussion techniques (technical); engaging students in learning (integrative); demonstrating knowledge of students (contextual); demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness (adaptive); communicating clearly and accurately (interpersonal communication); service to the profession (professional identity); showing professionalism (professional ethics); contributing to the school and district (career marketability) ; reflecting on teaching (scholarly concern for improvement); and growing and developing professionally (motivation for continued learning).
50. Educational Testing Service, *PRAXIS III: Classroom Performance Assessments* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2001).
51. Marchese, 81-88.
52. Behaviorism is grounded in the notion that mental processes are invisible, and therefore, not subject to scientific investigation. What is observable is outward behavior, so rather than speculating about internal causes, behaviorists focused on how organisms respond to stimuli. Much of their work studied the effects of positive and negative reinforcement—rewards and punishments—on learning. (See Ronald S. Brandt and David N. Perkins, "The Evolving Science of Learning," in *Education in a New Era: The 2000 ASCD Yearbook*, ed. Ronald S. Brandt (Arlington: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000), 161.
53. Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, 2nd ed. (London: Fontana, 1993), 239.
54. *Ibid.*, 287.
55. Robert J. Sternberg and Elena L. Grigorenko, "The Theory of Successful Intelligence As a Basis for Instruction and Assessment in Higher Education," *Applying the Science of Learning to University Teaching and Beyond*, eds. Diane F. Halpern and Milton D. Hakel in *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 89. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Spring, 2002), 45-53.



56. Brandt and Perkins, 175-176.
57. Ibid., 165
58. Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 289.
59. See, for example: J.E. LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).
60. Marchese, 87.
61. Brandt and Perkins, 174
62. Committee on the Foundations of Assessment, *Knowing What Students Know: The Science and Design of Educational Assessment*, ed. James W. Pellegrino, Naomi Chudowsky, and Robert Glaser (Washington: National Academy Press, 2001), xii.
63. Ibid., 3.
64. Ibid., 70. "Schemas help people interpret complex data by weaving them into sensible patterns. A schema may be as simple as 'Thirty days hath September' or more complex, such as the structure of a chemical formula. Schemas help move the burden of thinking from working memory to long term memory. They help competent performers to recognize situations as instances of problems they already know how to solve."
65. Ibid., 4-5.
66. Richard J. Stiggins, *Student-Involved Classroom Assessment* (Upper Saddle River: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2001).
67. See: Stiggins, "Assessment Crisis: The Absence of Assessment FOR Learning, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83 (2002): 758-765, and "Where Is Our Assessment Future, and How Can We Get There From Here?" in *Assessment in Educational Reform: Both Means and Ends*, ed. Robert Lissitz and William Schafer (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002), 18-49.
68. Grant Wiggins, *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 190.
69. Huba and Freed, 233-268.
70. Danielson, 38-50.
71. Stiggins, *Student-Involved Classroom Assessment*, 467-489.
72. Outside the educational setting, market forces in some ministry contexts (e.g., health care chaplaincy) are prompting the creation of frameworks similar to Danielson's for assessing ministerial effectiveness and efficiency. Such frameworks express expectations for ministers as specific activities (e.g., providing comfort and support, intervening in crises, leading worship) understandable to persons in other disciplines and organizational roles. Ministerial effectiveness is assessed via performance indicators that define the activities and rate their impact on individuals and groups within the culture and setting. Ministerial efficiency (productivity) is assessed in terms of the complexity of the activities (i.e., number of competences simultaneously engaged) and the time required to carry them out. These efforts have received mixed reviews, even by those participating in their development. See for example: *Measures of Chaplain Performance and Productivity: Task Force Report* (Denver: Catholic Health Initiatives, 2002).
73. Eisner, 185-186.
74. Elizabeth Liebert, *Changing Life Patterns* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 21. Liebert utilizes the developmental theories of Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, Abraham Maslow, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Jane Loevinger and the works of Robert Kegan and James Fowler on the relationship between human development and culture.



*What is the Literature Saying about  
Learning and Assessment in Higher Education?*

75. Ibid., 41.
76. John Harris and Dennis Sansom, *Discerning is More Than Counting* (Washington: American Academy for Liberal Education, 2001).
77. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 196.
78. Elizabeth Liebert, "The Role of Practice in the Study of Christian Spirituality," *Spiritus*, 2 (2002), 37, 30.
79. Ibid., 39.
80. Howard Gardner, *The Disciplined Mind* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).
81. Eisner, 189.
82. Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 60.
83. Donald Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987), 13. An example of the application of Schon's approach in another field can be found in *Reflective Practice in Nursing: The Growth of the Professional Practitioner*, ed. Anthony Palmer, Sara Burns, and Chris Bulman (Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1994).
84. Mary Taylor Huber, "Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Reflections on the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," in Huber and Morreale, 27. The Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning was established "to foster scholarship of teaching that aims to improve the quality of students' learning and to raise the level of conversation about teaching in colleges and universities of all kinds" (26). Huber claims that in most higher education, this conversation is impoverished by several realities: faculty see themselves primarily as disciplinary scholars, and secondarily as teachers; faculty have had no training as teachers; teaching does not count for much in the reward systems of higher education (especially on research university campuses); and the culture of higher education does not encourage making teaching "public" to one's colleagues.
85. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage To Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 141.
86. Ibid., 104
87. Ibid., 95
88. Ibid., 144.

# Exploring the Process of Assessment: Report on the ATS Workshop on Assessing Theological Learning

*Eleanor A. Daniel*  
*Emmanuel School of Religion*

*ABSTRACT: In November 2002, representatives from thirty-nine ATS schools met in Pittsburgh at a workshop developed by the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation Task Force. This workshop, the first of its kind for ATS, was designed to explore the process of assessment in theological education. It allowed theological educators whose schools are preparing for self-study for continued accreditation within the next four years to think through the assessment process and be introduced to models and resources to assist them.*

## Introduction

**Assessment** *n.* 1. The act of assessing. 2. An amount assessed.

**Assess** *tr. V.* 1. To estimate the value (of property) for taxation. 2. To set or determine the amount (of a tax, fine, or other payment). 3. To charge (a person or property) with a tax, fine, or other special payment. 4. To evaluate, appraise.<sup>1</sup> It seems straightforward enough. At least, it does until you begin to try to determine *how* to evaluate or appraise.

The assessment movement in education emerged, in part, from an industrial model that insists on efficiency and productivity. The last third of the twentieth century witnessed the erosion of confidence in schools—and the accompanying demand that schools should produce educated people (however that is defined).

As a student in an educational psychology program at a major university in the early 1970s, I was intrigued with the work of Bob Stake and his associates who honestly believed that we should—we must—evaluate and appraise what happens to students as a result of educational programs in which they are engaged. I resonated with the work of Norman Gronlund, my advisor at the University of Illinois, who believed that we could—and should—clearly specify learning outcomes toward which we would teach and then measure in some way. I even chose to do my doctoral research in the specification and measurement of specific educational outcomes in Christian education in the local church.

I wasn't far into my work with Gronlund when I discovered that at least two views of specifying and measuring outcomes prevailed. Whereas one

*Exploring the Process of Assessment:  
Report on the ATS Workshop on Assessing Theological Learning*

model believed that every outcome should be specified in behavioral terms with a time and amount as part of the indicator, Gronlund had what seemed to me to be a more realistic approach. The teacher or curriculum designer would specify the general areas of outcomes, identify sample behaviors that would indicate achievement of the more global outcome such as understanding or evaluating or synthesizing, then work to find appropriate ways to measure the outcome. Those measurements certainly could be by testing, but anecdotal records, observations, and other kinds of assessment could likewise be acceptable. The first model was very much linked to an industrial setting; Gronlund, on the other hand, acknowledged and accounted for far more complex learning. Likewise, Bob Stake, in his evaluation classes, made it clear that some things can be measured by counting, but not all can or should.

Though I have, at times, lamented the reduction of evaluation to a set of numbers as the idea of evaluation came to be called assessment and the accrediting agencies moved toward outcomes assessment as critical in determining institutional effectiveness, I still believe that teachers and institutions should know what they are seeking to achieve—and then measure that. However, in the case of Stake and Gronlund, as well as those using another paradigm for evaluation, teachers and curriculum designers must have a clear idea of proposed outcomes, and then find a way to determine if this had been achieved.<sup>2</sup>

That basic conviction made the decision easy for me when I was invited to be a part of the ATS Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation Task Force. Though I am well aware of the elusiveness of specifying and measuring every possible outcome in theological learning and the trap of reductionism in this process, I have a bedrock belief that education should make a difference in the lives of students. This difference is far better described by outputs than it is by inputs (number of books in the library, number of hours in the curriculum, number of faculty in the school, amount of classroom space, etc.). I wanted to be part of this group.

### **The initial work of the task force**

The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation project has four goals, which had been outlined in the proposal to Lilly Endowment to fund the project. Believing that theological education could learn from the broad assessment arena, but also contribute to it, these four goals have guided the committee.

1. Increased understanding of the character of theological learning.
2. Increased skill in assessing the attainment of learning for religious vocation.

3. Preliminary information about the relationship between the goals of learning for religious vocation and selected characteristics of theological students.
4. Resources for extending the learning of this project to other schools.

From the outset, the task force for the project has been a working committee. From the first meeting in January 2001 to the present, participation has been high. The committee is composed of people from a wide spectrum of theological backgrounds and individual teaching areas. The group has debated the issues openly and honestly, in large part, due to the outstanding leadership of David Hogue from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary who chairs the task force.

The first task was to determine the status of assessment in the ongoing life of ATS institutions. Charles Wood and Gordon Smith did stellar work in developing a simple, yet profoundly challenging questionnaire, and then collating and interpreting the results. Their final conclusions are included in this journal in the article "Learning Goals and Assessment of Learning in Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey."

The task force pressed on by reviewing literature related to the field, conducting interviews in selected seminaries, and examining assessment procedures in parallel professions. The work of these groups, though not finished, is providing additional help in determining the character of theological learning and pointing to ways to assess it.

From the beginning, the task force intended to develop a workshop in which forty schools seeking reaffirmation of accreditation between 2004 and 2006 would gather to examine the assessment issue and to receive resources for these schools as they seek to address assessment as described in the ATS Standards of Accreditation. Specifically, the purposes would be to (1) report on findings of the task force to this date, (2) engage a select group of schools in examining assessment issues more thoroughly, and (3) provide resources to help the schools at the workshop address their assessment concerns and needs. The November 2002 workshop brought together the findings thus far as they were heard, interacted with, and responded to by participants from approximately forty institutions that are engaged in continuing accreditation activities—self-studies and visits to determine ongoing accreditation—between 2004 and 2006.

### **The Pittsburgh workshop: the activities**

An air of anticipation seemed to permeate the gathering of folks in Pittsburgh on November 1. Certainly, those gathered had been chosen because of their involvement in their institution's coming self-study or their role as those working with assessment in their institution, and that fact alone may account for the anticipation. However, I heard none of the arguments once

*Exploring the Process of Assessment:  
Report on the ATS Workshop on Assessing Theological Learning*

often heard, "You can't define and assess theological education. It is too complex to reduce to stated outcomes and measurements." Those with whom I worked recognized the complexity of describing outcomes for theological education and the sometimes seeming impossibility of measuring those outcomes. Yet they recognized the reality of the need for assessment, if for no other reason than to satisfy the accrediting bodies, though the motivation seemed to be far more profound than mere compliance with accrediting standards.

The workshop was intended to be—and for the most part, took on the character of—a working session. Participants were not merely listeners; they were called to interact with the material they heard. This was, I think surprisingly, more the case in plenary sessions than it was in breakout groups. From the opening session at which table groups were asked to interact, it took on the character of a highly participatory working session.

Daniel Aleshire set the tone for the serious consideration of assessment with his opening plenary address, "The Character and Assessment of Theological Learning for Religious Vocation: M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites," the text of which is included in this volume. He did what we have come to expect him to do: he thoughtfully outlined the issues, raised questions, and provided direction for us. He discussed the rise of the assessment movement, raised the problems theological education presents to the movement, and described the efforts of ATS to address the issue. He did not attempt to answer all the questions of assessment, but he left his hearers with plenty to ponder as they awaited the next day.

Saturday morning was again a working session. Charles Wood and Gordon Smith presented the findings of their research among ATS schools to determine the current practice of evaluation. Then those attending were asked to gather at pre-assigned table groups where a task force member facilitated a discussion based on the report from Wood and Smith. The other presentations were reports of work in progress. Vic Klimoski had done significant preliminary work on determining how assessment is done in parallel professions, and he shared his findings to this point. Carolyn Jurkowski had also done similar preliminary work in reviewing literature relevant to the assessment task, and she provided a helpful written summary of the emphasis of several important works. Their reports piqued interest, provided helpful resources, and promised hope for more help to come. Reports of their research are also included in this issue of *Theological Education*.

At least in the group where I was facilitator, the discussion for forty-five minutes was free flowing, animated, reflective, and helpful to all those involved. Groups had been arranged to provide for a degree of heterogeneity, facilitating the kind of interchange that actually occurred. My group, for example, had two representatives from a Catholic institution, two from a mainline Protestant seminary, two from a seminary many times larger than the others in the group, and two from an urban evangelical seminary. Regardless

of the differences in theological persuasion and size of institution, virtually all confronted the same issues and needs, making this a time of helpful and mutual exchange of ideas.

Saturday afternoon was filled with workshop sessions devoted to various aspects of assessment, how it has been done in some seminaries, and how it has affected curriculum and institutional practice. In my mind, this had the most promise for practical help for schools preparing to undertake the self-study process. I have very often gone to such workshops at the regional accreditation meetings only to come away disappointed because the discussion focused only on undergraduate programs. When asked about what they do in graduate education, presenters have often admitted that they do little and don't really have an idea of what to do. It was in anticipation, then, that I attended two of the four workshops.

Unfortunately, at the ATS gathering I came away disappointed again. It is true that the workshops focused on graduate education—that was a positive feature—but neither workshop I attended scored a bull's eye. One did an admirable job of showing how evaluation became a part of the ethos of the community but gave little practical guidance on how well their data-gathering worked for them. Frequent reference was made to the data, and that they had a means of doing it, but few handouts demonstrated what they actually did. The second workshop did little in illustrating how the outcomes were identified and got bogged down in traditional, complex measurement devices—probably suitable for the specific program, but not appropriate or practical for most, if any, M.Div. programs. I can speak only to the two workshops I attended, but in many ways, this was the least beneficial part of the program for me and the least participative for those attending. One of my colleagues in my own institution attended the two workshops I was unable to attend. He reported that one workshop was outstanding, the other disappointing. He agreed that these workshops were, in fact, the least productive part of the weekend.

The program concluded Sunday morning. The day began with a time of worship together—a rich and rewarding experience—followed by a brief presentation by Katarina Schuth, “The Pilot Project on Assessment Five Years Out: Hints for Ongoing Implementation.” The meeting concluded with a response by Daniel Aleshire.

### *Observations*

The Pittsburgh workshop was a hopeful beginning. It demonstrated many strengths, few weaknesses, and provided a forum for theological educators to think seriously about assessment practices. I came away with a few key observations.

1. The amount of assessment in ATS member schools was gratifyingly high. Having often heard the arguments that theological learning defies assessment,

*Exploring the Process of Assessment:  
Report on the ATS Workshop on Assessing Theological Learning*

I did not expect the amount of assessment activity that is clearly happening among ATS schools. The Wood and Smith study reported a wide variety of assessment activity—that was encouraging.

2. Although the amount of assessment activity is impressive, the uses of the substantial data collected are still unclear to this observer. It would appear that sometimes schools collect data primarily to collect data more than they do to make informed institutional decisions about faculty, curriculum, and student activities. In part, this seems to be the outcome of a lack of a strong theoretical foundation reflected in a carefully designed assessment system. All of us have been forced into “doing assessment,” ready or not. Though all of us seem to be thinking through the process, some of our activity seems superfluous—and we are probably missing some key areas.

3. Assessment, for the most part, relies on counting in some areas—usually the easiest areas to assess—and carefully avoiding other areas that are more complex and require creative thinking and hard work to formulate a plan. This too seems to be an outgrowth of little strong theoretical foundation for good practices in assessment.

4. Theological educators are vitally interested in assessment. The growing moral crisis among some clergy has surely contributed to this interest. Seminaries serving a specific denominational constituency face the ever-present question of whether students are really able to serve the church. This perhaps is a greater concern among those in seminaries who, for the most part, serve churches that do not have a judicatory to determine the fitness of individuals for ministry, but it is a concern for everyone. The social climate demands that institutions, educational or otherwise, demonstrate the achievement of their stated missions. In other words, the time is right for schools to consider assessment seriously.

5. Assessment of graduate education, not just theological education, is a hit-and-miss activity in higher education. Theological educators, as well as those in other graduate institutions, need practical help in designing assessment practices and procedures. People want to do effective assessment, but they need resources. The workshop provided that kind of initial help—more must be provided.

6. Although schools are involved in assessment, it is not as clear that assessment shapes many of the decisions about curriculum and faculty. This is the result, in part, of a lack of strong theoretical foundation for assessment, cited in number 2 above, and the lack of clear assessment of graduate education overall, cited in number 5.

7. The workshop accomplished its goals. It did bring together people interested in the assessment process. It presented helpful resources. It spurred people to think and ask questions. It acknowledged that assessment can and must be done. It provided the impetus for a new emphasis among theological schools.



### What is next?

The question now must be posed: what is next?

Thirty-nine schools are prepared to engage in self-study and an accreditation visit between 2004 and 2006. Each of them will continue to have access to materials and resources provided by the project. Ten schools, however, will receive additional attention, resources, and guidance to develop their self-studies from the new paradigm of outcomes. These ten schools will meet in Pittsburgh again next year for another workshop. They will arrive, ready for additional resources and assistance. Their motivation is high; their need is guidance.

Though that workshop is not yet planned, I would encourage a very practical, hands-on format. What would it look like for the ten schools to work on pre-specified questions and concerns, and then go to Pittsburgh for specific guidance? I could envision a workshop with several plenary sessions on the research projects, but most of it with each school with a consultant who guides it through the process of creating outcome statements, brainstorming possible assessment techniques (including techniques in the qualitative realm of evaluation), and developing a plan to go back home and work at implementing it with their colleagues in the home institution.

### Conclusion

The Pittsburgh 2002 workshop was a helpful, promising beginning. The assessment issue will not go away in the foreseeable future. Educators must always be concerned about the outcomes of their educational efforts. Especially in times of financial stress—as many schools are now experiencing—good data is required to make good decisions, but even in better economic times, the demand is no less. Effective stewardship of resources requires good data to make good decisions and to demonstrate the value of an education at that particular seminary. Consequently, the project on the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation is crucial to the future of effective theological education.

It is with anticipation that I await the next step—more reflecting, more planning, more resources—and better M.Div. preparation!

*Eleanor A. Daniel is dean of Emmanuel School of Religion in Johnson City, Tennessee, and a member of the task force for the project on The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation.*

*Exploring the Process of Assessment:  
Report on the ATS Workshop on Assessing Theological Learning*

ENDNOTES

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982).
2. See Norman Gronlund, *How to Use and Write Instructional Objectives*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1991) for a description of his approach to stating and measuring objectives. See LeRoy Ford, *A Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education* (Nashville: Broadman, 1991) for an extensive demonstration of how to use Gronlund's approach for theological education.

# Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards

*Loyde H. Hartley*  
*Lancaster Theological Seminary*

*ABSTRACT: The author speculates how visiting accreditation committee members might evaluate a school's implementation of ATS's outcomes assessment standards, based on his experience as a member of such committees. The paper presents an argument that favors theological schools moving quickly toward implementing outcomes assessment procedures, but cautions against rash over-compliance. Specific suggestions for evaluating outcomes assessment programs are offered, along with a series of fifty-two sample statements visiting committees might consider adapting for inclusion in their reports.*

Accountability of theological schools to public stakeholders has lagged behind that of elementary, secondary, undergraduate, and even other graduate professional schools. This slowness is traceable in part to the fact that theological schools receive few funds from the government—the big promoter of outcomes assessment—as well as to the close relationships many schools maintain with their supporting constituencies, thereby reducing the number of loud, distrustful stakeholders. Conscientious public accountability is often exceedingly costly, especially for small schools, and when no one is clamoring for it, providing such introspective musings promises no added financial support. Consequently, theological schools have had little appetite for outcomes assessment, regardless of the growing evidence about its value for institutional well-being. There is, as those who are suspicious of outcomes assessment point out, a wide divergence of opinion about what the desirable outcomes of theological education might be, still less agreement about how to standardize those outcomes, and even whether or not qualitative outcomes should ever be quantified at all. Theological schools are a different breed, the argument continues, and they cannot submit to the same standards for demonstrating public trustworthiness that the other educational institutions do.

Heightened curiosity and genuine appreciation, however, are now beginning to erode former suspicions and inattention.<sup>1</sup> Commitment to outcomes assessment began to arise during the 1990s in a few theological schools, stimulated initially more by regional accrediting agency standards than by grumbling taxpayers' demands, although the general public might welcome greater accountability from theological schools. Consenting to increased government pressure, all accrediting agencies, including ATS, now stipulate

*Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View  
of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards*

outcome-oriented standards. The role of ATS in the outcomes assessment movement, as emphasized at a recent ATS-sponsored workshop,<sup>2</sup> is to encourage member schools to become increasingly explicit about and evaluative of their educational goals and results. The aim is to advocate judicious use of outcomes assessment as a valuable tool that leads to institutional soundness. ATS hopes also to mitigate in behalf of its membership against the more objectionable aspects of the assessment juggernaut—particularly narrow standards of learning, one-size-fits-all assessment measurements, expensive assessment infrastructures, and “bean-counting” over-compliance.

Accordingly, the 1996 ATS standards describe member schools’ responsibilities for assessing both student learning and the suitability of that learning for students’ anticipated careers. These standards (which, although they began to be applied during comprehensive visits in 1998, still have not been used for those schools that had their last decennial visit prior to that date) expressly do not prescribe what member schools’ outcomes should be, except in the broadest of terms—theological understanding, spiritual awareness, moral sensibilities, grounding in a faith tradition, and abilities requisite for ministry. The schools themselves must sharpen the vision for their various degree programs, stipulate expected outcomes, and devise procedures for self-criticism, all of which presumably leads toward improved goals and demonstrable results.<sup>3</sup>

ATS standards have traditionally focused, as have regional association standards, on the inputs, resources, or assets a school has at its disposal: conducive facilities, sufficient library holdings, appropriately trained teachers, qualified students, favorable student/faculty ratios, balanced curricula, sufficient endowments, and wise and informed trustees, among others. If the component parts of a school were worthy, the accreditation teams inferred that the resulting educational program and the graduates would be similarly worthy. When a school demonstrated that it had at least the threshold levels of the essential ingredients, it would be eligible for continued accreditation without punitive notations or required follow-up visits. If the school exceeded the thresholds, it received commendations.

The 1996 ATS standards stress outcomes or results of educational programs rather than inputs, although not exclusively so. Relying entirely on the assessment of outcomes would spawn the inference that, if the outcomes are demonstrably excellent, then the component parts of the school are also excellent. However, most thoughtful educators would dispute this deduction because, if for no other reason, a poor library is a poor library, regardless of how well the graduates are doing. The standards continue, therefore, to require input resources. The attention of visiting accreditation teams will be increasingly guided by the idea that the character of theological education is significantly shaped by its desired ends or purposes.<sup>4</sup> Visitors can reasonably expect a school to show, therefore, that its particular desired ends are well chosen and somehow approximated; that the constituencies associated with the school’s educational programs—its students, graduates and the people with whom the

graduates carry out their ministries—actually do (or do not) benefit. This shift from evaluating only inputs to also assessing outputs as the gauges of whether or not a school meets accreditation standards will, in relatively short order, overhaul the procedures schools use for preparing self-studies and recalibrate the work of visiting teams. More consequentially, the schools themselves will change as outcomes assessment provides a new basis for institutional planning and evaluation.

The workshop sought generally to promote outcomes assessment in theological education and to interpret the new ATS standards to delegates from the 39 schools in attendance, all anticipating accreditation visits sometime during the next four years. The workshop's aims interested me both as the representative of a school that is currently preparing a self-study and as a frequent member of ATS accreditation visiting teams. Throughout the workshop, I found myself speculating about the indicators visitors might discover in a school's self-study that would signal robust or thin compliance with the outcome-oriented standards. Whom might a visitor consult, once on site, about a school's outcomes assessment efforts? Even more importantly, what might visiting teams write in their reports that would result in some encouragement or corrective action by the Commission on Accrediting? Other workshop participants were similarly curious. Discussions about how schools might be held accountable for outcome-oriented standards and what visiting teams might identify as satisfactory implementation (or lack thereof) aroused rapt attention and generated animated debate.

Visiting teams clearly need to go beyond mere mention in their reports of how well or poorly they think a school is doing in its efforts to identify and assess outcomes. The schools will expect the teams to recognize their accomplishments and to offer enlightened recommendations. Teams will be asked to distinguish among conceptual, motivational, and implementational difficulties a school might be facing, and to locate these difficulties within the schools' systems of accountability. The suitability of the outcome indicators that a school uses will need to be determined, as will the efficacy of the assessment results for institutional planning. Finally, teams must draft recommended actions for the Commission on Accrediting. "Would regular faculty attendance at chapel," one workshop participant queried, "reliably indicate a school's spiritual well-being?" One might wonder, too, about the converse of this proposition.

During the workshop, I began jotting some notes about indicators for compliance to outcome-oriented standards that visiting teams might use. Some of these were implied in the formal presentations, while others arose during group discussions. After the workshop, I continued tinkering with the list and comparing it with indicators identified by regional accreditation agencies.<sup>5</sup> The result is offered below in its obviously nascent and flawed state in the hope that it contributes to the ongoing exploration of one important issue raised by the

*Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View  
of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards*

workshop, namely—how schools will be held accountable for the outcome-oriented standards.

Before unfurling this compilation, however, I wish to register a disclaimer and two caveats, and then propose a friendly prediction about theological schools that derives mainly from my experience as an accreditation visitor. The disclaimer, offered in behalf of ATS, is that none of the indicators I propose has any official status with the Association. Indeed, they may not even remotely reflect what visiting teams will actually take into account during a visit. They are only my own embryonic notions—not officially sanctioned directions or even suggestions to visitors—yet (this is the first caveat), seasoned accreditation visitors do develop pet indicators for compliance to standards as well as for general institutional health.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps they even exhibit minor eccentricities in what they report to the Commission on Accrediting. As the committee members work together during a visit, always under the moderating tutelage of ATS staff representatives, a consensus emerges about which indicators are apt and helpful for a particular school. Because outcomes assessment represents a new approach to evaluating schools, however, visitors over the next few years probably will not have honed their sensibilities about what indicates what, so far as evaluating outcomes assessment is concerned. At least there will be room for divergent opinions and disagreements.

The second caveat derives from the first. The fact that outcomes assessment is new for ATS provides no excuse for member schools to give it a low priority, even if visiting teams are uneven in their applications of the outcome-oriented standards. Some schools might be tempted, when they encounter such start-up glitches, to dismiss outcomes assessment altogether as a passing fad borrowed from efficiency-conscious industries—a rogue sprung from the 1980s tax revolts—and a largely extraneous development so far as theological education is concerned. Such notions, if they do arise, are mistaken.

However, I predict that ATS member schools will welcome this new approach to accreditation. Furthermore, I predict that laxity about outcomes will not become a persistent concern identified by visiting teams, especially after the schools have worked out their own manageable, affordable assessment procedures. Of the schools I have visited over the past 30 years, I cannot think of any that do not care greatly about what students learn and about how that learning applies to graduates' careers. We want students to succeed in their ordination examinations and their ministries. Moreover, we who teach seem to universally hold the opinion that what we do in the classroom somehow makes a difference for the church and, even further, that our entire curriculum matters. As a result, we naturally tend to worry more about standards at the end of a student's course than at the beginning of it. This worry spurs us to critically examine whatever it is that our work accomplishes. Outcomes assessment will flourish in theological schools as it becomes firmly rooted in our concern for students as well as in the conviction that we ought to do well whatever we do for the church.

We, therefore, do examine our accomplishments, even the laziest and most outcome-shy among us, at least selectively and (deo volente) with forgivable biases. The conclusions we draw about our accomplishments (or their lack or extent of their appropriateness) have regularly led us to make major institutional revisions and reforms. All that the new accreditation standards change is that we now hold one another accountable for undertaking rigorous outcomes assessment.

### **How a visiting committee might assess a school's assessment program**

The following list of indicators takes the form of statements that visiting teams might write in their reports, followed by suggestions about where they can expect to find the warrant and supporting evidence for making such claims. All of the statements suggest that some kind of problem exists with the school's outcomes assessment efforts, although they could easily be reworded as commendations if the school excels on that particular matter. In addition, the phraseology could be tilted slightly in one direction or the other, depending on whether the committee concludes that the school will benefit from friendly consultative advice or that the Commission on Accrediting needs to require follow-up action. The statements assume that the school desires to comply with the outcome-oriented standards and is making a good-faith attempt to implement assessments. Anyone who is familiar with theological education will readily think of additional indicators and can invent better wording for those I have listed. The statements are arranged into four categories of potential problems: incongruous values, irresolute commitment, faulty implementation, and diminished effectiveness.

#### ***Values***

The first set of indicators point to a lack of full engagement with outcomes assessment on the part of the school. If committee members were to include such statements in their reports, they would be saying that the school has not yet fully grasped the vision of what outcomes assessment can do. Goals remain unclear, theological foundations have not been laid, or it may be that the school does not quite "get it" so far as outcomes assessment is concerned. Misconceptions about the importance of assessment, or even internal arguments, may have toppled the school's resolve. Ultimately, these indicators speak to the question of institutional integrity, ATS Standard 2.

1. *"This school lacks a reasonably coherent, normative vision of the vocation of ministerial leadership toward which its basic ministerial degree program is oriented."*<sup>7</sup> The same indicator can be modified to apply to the school's nonministerial degree programs as well. The teams will need to assess the level of coherency utilizing, in addition to their own perceptions, primarily the opinions of discerning outside observers who know the school well. Do the



*Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View  
of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards*

church leaders associated with this seminary, for example, understand the school's vision and support it? If the vision makes no sense to reasonable outsiders of the same faith tradition as the school (say, to lay people where graduates work), then it is likely incoherent in either descriptive or normative terms, or both.

2. *The mission statement does not state or imply goals for student learning.* Teams can support this claim by citing the school's published purpose statements. What goals does the school have, for example, regarding "theological wisdom" and "moral sensibility"? The committee may find that some stakeholders are uncertain about the school's outcome goals, or that the school is unable to defend them. The lack of explicit goals for student learning may indicate that the school offers one or more degree programs simply to boost enrollment or to increase tuition income, as visiting teams sometimes concluded about the burgeoning D.Min. programs of the 1970s.

3. *Expected outcomes are not clearly defined and/or lack theological grounding.* Student handbooks are a source for supporting data. Interviews with students will indicate how well they understand the expectations and the extent to which they consider them important for their studies. Do the faculty members teaching theology, as a matter of satisfying the team's curiosity, defend the outcomes statements? The lack of consensus about goals may signal unsettling conflicts over values, ideologies, or attainment criteria. Such conflicts may, of course, be educationally valuable reflections of ecclesial and cultural realities. When that is the case, however, the school's goal statements should reflect the importance of these conflicts.

4. *Some goals are not addressed by the curriculum and/or course designs.* Students, faculty, and administration ought to be able to link opportunities for instruction to educational goals, and to identify any lacunae. Are student field placements mainly in suburban churches with many professional members, for example, while graduates serve primarily rural or inner city churches with a majority of nonprofessional members? If a committee finds this to be the case, then questions about the suitability of the curriculum might be raised, assuming the school aims to prepare students pragmatically for their future ministries. In even more distressing instances, schools may not be able to identify any goal-producing aspects of their educational programs.

5. *This school does not distinguish clearly between its own responsibilities for ministerial formation and those directed (supervised, controlled) by other agencies of the church.* Making this distinction will be more difficult for schools with students from multiple faith traditions than for schools that serve only one denomination. Visiting teams might inquire about how a school handles ministerial formation for students who represent denominational minorities within the student population.

6. *The faculty expresses doubts about students' abilities to function well in their chosen ministries.* Faculty should not shudder as graduates walk across the stage at commencement time, as ATS Executive Director Daniel Aleshire

has often commented. If they do, the assessment program is likely defective. Teams should be attentive during the visit to idle comments the faculty makes about graduates and, when possible, trace these remarks to their roots in the school's educational programs or recruitment practices.

7. *The culture of assessment in this school promotes excessive uniformity and stifles the more creative students.* This, of course, is one of the often-expressed fears about outcomes assessment programs. Retention rates in degree programs and evidence from exit interviews of dropout students might be used to substantiate this criticism.

8. *Expected outcomes are not critiqued and revised periodically.* The half-life of published expectations, I would guess, might be in the order of three to five years. The committee can inquire when the last revision was made and when the next is scheduled. The absence of a schedule for revisions may indicate that the formal goal statements have not kept pace with the educational program.

9. *This school assesses outcomes for some of its educational programs, but not for others.* Teams will, of course, make this observation more frequently for schools that are in the beginning stages of implementation. Similarly, faculty members at the outset of implementation might stress educational outcomes for their own courses, but not for the curriculum as a whole.

10. *This school sets goals for outcomes over which it has no authority or influence.* Does, for example, the school preempt responsibilities for outcomes that students themselves ought to assume? Do graduates blame the school for failures that are their own and not the school's? There are, of course, many personal attributes that foster or undermine worthy outcomes, e.g., intelligence levels, singular characterological quirks, or family environments. These variables need to be taken into account when a candidate's suitability for ministry is being assessed, but a school cannot produce them or make them go away through educational programs.

### ***Commitment, participation, collaboration***

Outcomes assessment requires institution-wide participation and clear delineation of responsibilities. ATS standards specify faculty and governing board roles in assessment, and imply important responsibilities for administrators and students. In most schools, an even wider circle will be drawn into assessment endeavors, including student peers, field supervisors, and other church leaders.

11. *Commitment to and understanding of outcomes assessment is limited to only a few stakeholders.* Interviews during the visit will readily identify who is on board and who is not. Teams might ask faculty members, "Specifically, how has the outcomes assessment program affected your work?"

12. *The board does not require the president to certify that this school undertakes outcomes assessment and that the results inform policy development.* A review of the president's reports to the trustees will provide documentation of compliance with ATS Statement 8.3.1.5.

*Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View  
of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards*

13. ***Faculty contracts do not spell out responsibility for assessment.*** This and the next indicator refer to ATS Statement 6.3.1. ATS does not specify exactly what the faculty role in assessment is to be, but the standards do require faculty involvement. Teams can discover how a school has complied by checking the contracts of relatively new faculty members. If the school does not assign specific responsibilities, then likely no one assumes the burden of making assessments.

14. ***Annual and/or tenure reviews of faculty members do not include the results of outcomes assessment.*** Teams will want to examine some of the reviews, sample copies of which (with informed consent and names deleted) might be provided in the team's work area. Are the assessments cited? Are any faculty members commended for excellence in implementing outcomes assessment?

15. ***The outcomes assessment program does not take into account judicatory expectations and guidelines for ordinands.*** Interviews with students will reveal how well they understand what their future ordaining body expects of them and whether or not the curriculum is addressing these expectations. If the school promises ministerial preparation for students from a variety of faith traditions, then a working knowledge of the expectations of each tradition is necessary.

16. ***Internal disagreements about appropriate outcomes have inhibited progress toward implementing outcomes assessment.*** Interviews with individual faculty members will indicate whether or not this is a problem, as will the lack of precise statements about desirable outcomes (see items 2 and 3 above). The problem is, of course, not that a school has disagreements, but that the school's handling of disagreements has derailed implementation. Conflict, common and often beneficial in theological schools, should not ambush assessments. Similarly, assessment programs should not thwart free discourse.

17. ***Assessment strategies are insufficiently collaborative. Opinions of important evaluators are not included in the assessment.*** Student peers, faculty members, judicatory officials, field education supervisors, members at field education churches, and even trustees as well as any other persons who have insight should be involved in reviewing a student's overall progress toward and suitability for ministry. Are assessments collected only from the faculty or limited to classroom performance? Does the school have a shared vocabulary associated with assessment? If the committee finds that the student peers understand and value their role in outcomes assessment, then others likely will too.

18. ***Key persons in the assessment process have insufficient orientation to their work and/or training for it.*** Teams might inquire especially about orientation provided to field education supervisors, spiritual mentors, and key church members at field sites.

### ***Implementation***

Many of the pitfalls schools encounter as they move toward outcomes assessment will be in the area of implementation. Over-compliance, selective compliance, or under-compliance can impede realization of outcomes assessment benefits. Visiting teams will need to appraise the appropriateness of the financial resources allocated to outcomes assessment, the qualifications and preparation of the evaluators, and the amount of time given to assessment. Teams cannot reasonably assume in the absence of convincing evidence, for example, that schools with elaborate assessment infrastructures necessarily produce excellent graduates. Over-compliance with outcomes-oriented standards may divert resources from instructional budgets or library acquisitions. Discouraging over-compliance may, in the long-run, be ATS's most important contribution to the larger assessment movement.

### ***Structural implementation***

19. ***The assessment program lacks sufficient oversight and/or clearly defined responsibilities.*** Teams will need to examine the organizational chart and verify its accuracy. Normally, the chief academic officer (CAO) is in charge of assessment. If the CAO is not in charge, does the responsible person have sufficient clout? Has the school clearly defined and differentiated roles for administrations and evaluators? In larger schools, conflict between evaluators and the administration or faculty may become a problem, as might high turnover among evaluators.

20. ***This school fails to take into account the additional load that assessment procedures place on the faculty.*** Faculty members will be forthright about this, voicing the most common among complaints to visiting teams. The root problem may be over-compliance, under-resourcing, or simply the pandemic extra-instructional duties typically assumed by theological school faculty. There is, as yet, no clear indicator of how much time faculty should allocate to the assessment task.

21. ***Insufficient financial resources are devoted to outcomes assessment.*** The proportion of school budgets allocated to assessment will vary greatly from school to school. It is probably too early in the history of outcomes assessment to develop generalizations about how much funding is necessary. Nevertheless, because the budget reflects a school's priorities, the cost of assessment should appear.

22. ***Assessment does not occur on a regular schedule.*** Teams ought to ask for the schedule if it is not included in the self-study.

23. ***Privacy protection for students and others being evaluated is insufficient.*** Teams should inquire about the school's formal privacy and confidentiality provisions to determine if they are clear and adequately published.

24. ***This school does not maintain its outcomes assessment data carefully.*** Where, a committee might inquire, are the data collected during the last survey

*Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View  
of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards*

of graduates located? How many years does the school consider these data to have saliency for institutional planning?

25. *This school has difficulty drawing helpful generalizations from the assessment data it collects.* Teams might ask, for example, how the school has formulated summations based on course evaluations. What policy changes have resulted?

26. *The outcomes assessment procedures are unduly disruptive to the educational mission.* This is yet another widespread fear about the consequences of outcomes assessment, namely, that so much time and resource is allocated to assessment that the educational program as a whole suffers. Or, furthermore, that the faculty is narrowly preoccupied with obtaining high ratings for its courses.

*Measurement strategies and procedures*

27. *Implementation of the assessment program is uneven.* Perhaps the school evaluates course work, but not overall ministerial skills, spiritual formation, or other valued characteristics for graduates that are less amenable to measurements and precise judgments. Assessment implementations at extension sites may lag behind those at the main campus.

28. *The materials developed for assessment are inconsistent with the school's mission statement.* Schools will need to include, as addenda to their self-studies, copies of assessment materials, which teams can compare with the published mission and purpose statements. Ill-considered measurements may be signs of hasty over-compliance or bewilderment about how to identify indicators for complicated expectations.

29. *This school infrequently uses outside consultants in the assessment process.* If a school appreciates the importance of disinterested perspectives in its assessment procedures, it bodes well for its efforts. Insiders are often less likely to question the status quo, are less able to be critical of other insiders, and have less time to commit to evaluation. Schools can provide lists of consultants and their responsibilities.

30. *Measurements of outcomes lack validity and/or reliability.* At the initial stages of implementation, schools may be tempted to use ill-suited benchmarks, such as relying too heavily on non-theological indicators or co-opting descriptive measurements for normative purposes—The Myers-Briggs, 16PF, and Enneagram come to mind. The desired outcomes should determine the measurements rather than the other way around. The more comprehensive outcomes resist reduction into specific behaviors or into empirical measures. Hyper-measurement indicates over-compliance and incites stakeholder revolt.

31. *This school does not effectively use readily available indicators about outcomes.* The opposite of hyper-measurement may also be a problem. If exit interviews, field education evaluations, course evaluations, grades, employ-

ment records of graduates, and other similar sources of evaluative information do not inform assessment processes, then the school fails to collect obvious, easily available indicators. People with important assessment information include graduates, trustees, field education supervisors, spiritual mentors, church members, laity in field education churches, and judicatory leaders (episcopoi, district superintendents, placement officers, et al.). In the past, accreditation visitors rarely interviewed these people at any depth and, even when they did, the topic of outcomes assessment rarely surfaced. In the future, these people will provide teams with some of the better insights into the school's successes and failures at outcomes assessment.

32. *The information collected is not helpful in making institutional decisions.* Perhaps the people who select the measures the school uses understand too little about the desired outcomes. Perhaps decision-makers cannot fathom the data afforded by the assessment procedures.

33. *This school does not solicit evaluative information from its graduates or their places of employment.* The standards for individual degree programs require schools to maintain minimal measures, "such as the percentage of students who complete the program and the percentage of graduates who find placement appropriate to their vocational intentions (Statement E.5.2)." Ordinarily, the registrar will have these data available for inspection. Record-keeping changes as well as modifications in the curriculum can obstruct efforts to obtain overtime comparisons, thereby reducing the significance of dated alumni/ae evaluations.

34. *Evaluations of outcomes focus on surface indicators rather than the overarching goals of theological understanding, aptitude for theological reflection, and wisdom pertaining to responsible life in faith.* (See ATS Statement 4.1.1.) The measurements a school uses may distinguish insufficiently between proximate and eventual goals. Some learnings may be catalyzed only after several years of experience.

### *Efficacy*

Outcomes assessment is a waste of time and energy if it does not result in institutional changes and does not benefit students. Although many schools will likely be more willing to use outcome assessment for reviews of student progress than for program evaluation and modification, both uses are crucial.<sup>8</sup> While these are the two main applications of the assessments, still others are equally possible, such as fulfilling symbolic or ritual goals (as in moving students toward ordination), reducing complacency among faculty and students, calming anxieties, or placating disgruntled constituencies.

### *For students*

35. *Students are unaware of how the school assesses their learning.* Visitors will need only to ask them about the feedback they receive. Students need to



*Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View  
of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards*

perceive that the assessment feedback they receive is informative, timely, beneficial, effectual, and comprehensive.

36. *Grade inflation has rendered academic evaluations useless for outcomes assessment.* The school's registrar can provide the evidence.

37. *The results of outcomes assessment do not take into account the needs of exceptional students.* Committee interviews with faith tradition minorities (and any other minorities within the school), physically challenged students, and extraordinarily able students will indicate if assessment effectiveness is constrained to students who conform to central tendencies. Narrow outcomes specifications, for example, can hamstring the prophetic functions of ministry.

38. *Decision-makers in this school are reluctant to make judgments about students' suitability for their intended professions based on results of the outcomes assessment program.* The committee can ask the chief academic officer how many students have been counseled out of degree programs based on outcomes assessment and what the rationale for the counseling was. Schools that regularly make such judgments likely published their appeal and due process provisions in student handbooks. Furthermore, the results of outcomes assessment ought to inform the schools' admissions decisions (those presumed unable to succeed will be refused admission).

*For institutional planning*

39. *The outcomes assessment program is not sustainable.* Top-heavy programs with overly elaborate administrative structures may spring up in the early years of implementation, only to fade away prematurely. Faculty interviews will likely yield evidence about the proportionality of the assessment program. The program can falter because of unintended costs, lack of feasibility, or lack of acceptability to important stakeholders.

40. *The assessment procedures miss or omit obvious outcomes of educational programs.* The committee might uncover an unnoticed weakness or an unacknowledged strength the school has not included in its assessments.

41. *Learner outcomes are inconsistent with institutional goals.* Unanticipated learner outcomes are difficult to identify because a school is not normally looking for them. Outside consultants can more unflinchingly examine the full range of outcomes. Their reports can help visiting teams greatly.

42. *The faculty and/or administration make important policy decisions without the benefit of outcomes assessment results.* Schools should be able to demonstrate where assessments have informed their strategic plans. If they cannot, it may be because the problems identified by the assessments are multifaceted while the school's educational policies are single-minded.

43. *Outcomes assessment data do not help identify alternative ways to accomplish goals that are not currently being met.* The data collected may be open to too many interpretations.



44. *Turbulence in educational programs has limited the usefulness of outcomes assessment.* Outcomes assessment will likely not resolve internal conflicts or allay environmental disruptions. In some instances, the school may need to resolve such matters before proceeding with outcomes assessment. Teams will need to describe the nature of the disruption and the extent of its effects, then craft fitting recommendations.

45. *This school fails to keep an accurate record of improvements in educational policy that have resulted from outcomes assessment.* A list of such improvements should appear in the self-study.

46. *This school does not make its outcomes assessment sufficiently public.* If a school does assessment well and makes appropriate changes, its constituencies should know about it. The committee can review relevant publications and frame interview questions to obtain evidence. If stakeholders do not know the results, they cannot consider them when regarding the school. Those who provide feedback for the assessment process especially need the reward of knowing their contribution makes a difference to the school.

47. *Influential stakeholders undermine the effectiveness of outcomes assessment.* Unfounded negative comments or criticisms and misinterpretations of results subvert the effective appropriation of the results. Do faculty members, for example, routinely discount comments that students receive from field supervisors? Do trustees meddle in the administration of outcomes assessment?

48. *The assessment program appears to address only external demands or accrediting requirements.* In such cases, the main values of outcomes assessment are overlooked. Benefit to the school is small in comparison to the investment. When a school holds to the letter but not the spirit of outcomes assessment, the benefit is small in comparison to its investment.

49. *This school's board does not consider outcomes assessment when formulating institutional policy.* Trustee minutes and interviews can provide necessary documentation.

50. *Board members do not fulfill their role in communicating outcomes assessment and the related improvements to important constituents.* Trustees can describe how much they accomplish in this regard.

51. *This school does not sufficiently celebrate its excellent accomplishments in outcomes assessment.*

52. *This school has not yet found ways to share with other theological schools insights gained from its superior outcomes assessment program.*

### **What makes a visiting committee's review of a school's outcomes assessment helpful?**

Clearly, a visiting committee will not make fifty-two comments about a school's compliance with outcomes-oriented standards, even if the school is

*Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View  
of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards*

very far from the mark. Three, perhaps four, comments with supporting evidence will suffice. How, then, can a committee craft its comments—drawing from the full range of possibilities—so that a school benefits from these insights and the Commission on Accrediting takes appropriate, if any, action? The team's difficulties in formulating its recommendations, ironically, parallel those the school has in setting up its assessment program in the first place. There are so many parameters to choose from that it is virtually impossible to make a compelling, comprehensive case for or against satisfactory compliance. Many specific findings will resist generalization. Some ambient factors will not be measurable or even open to thoughtful subjective evaluation. The assessment program itself may shift directions from the time the self-study was prepared to the time of the visit. Changes made since previous assessments were completed may not yet be producing observable results. The committee must then always cope with the perennial problems of evaluation research: the lack of suitable controls, the inability to establish causality between the outcomes and educational programs, and the unreliability of indicators from school to school.

However, some provisional qualities of commendable committee recommendations can be identified. Assuming that the wording a committee settles on is clear and accurately describes the school's circumstances, four additional qualities are important for the recommendations: specificity, timeliness, attainability, and collegiality.

Schools respond best when visiting committee reports target specific points of commendation or concern. Cookbook approaches, such as what might result if the fifty-two indicators listed above were formally adopted as limits to what a committee could say, are less effective than a team's own customized conclusions. Although uniformity from school to school is lost when teams formulate their own comments, there is less confusion about exactly what the committee had in mind, about what steps the schools might take next, and about who is in a position to take them. Adroit diagnoses and specific recommendations empower schools to make changes.

The suggestions teams make also need to be timely, in the sense that they need to take into account the schools' planning schedule. Schools will not move abruptly from no outcomes assessment, for example, to full implementation. Reasonable "next steps" will be more effective as suggestions than dire warnings about the lack of full compliance. If a school cannot, within the bounds of its resources, carry out the team's recommendations, the resulting frustration—both for the school and for the Commission on Accrediting—will not advance the cause of outcomes assessment. Recommendations need to be fitted to the appropriate scale for a school and to be usable in the school's particular environment.

Finally, teams need to remember they are colleagues of the theological educators in the school they are visiting and frame their conclusions accord-

ingly. The collegiality that occurs during an accreditation visit is an indispensable element in the peer evaluation of educational institutions. One way a committee respects this collegiality is by being attentive to the power implications of its recommendations. If, for example, the people who most vigorously applaud the team's recommendations are not the people who can make or influence decisions for change at the school, then appropriate responses may not result.

However outcomes assessment unfolds in ATS member schools, the movement toward greater compliance with the new standards will require visiting teams to retool. Visitors need to devise new questions and discern uncustomary indicators. Different assumptions about accreditability will emerge. Stakeholders who have traditionally been on the fringes of visits will now provide crucial evidence for the team's report. The form and content of committee recommendations will shift. As the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation Project unfolds over the next three years, all of these matters will demand attention.

*Loyde H. Hartley is professor of religion and society at the Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a position he has held since 1971. A former dean of LTS, he is a frequent ATS visiting committee member and has served as consultant to the departments of education in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. Lee C. Barrett, Donald Freeman, Charles Willard, Riess Potterveld, Elizabeth Patterson, and Eleanor Daniel provided many important, useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. The author's assumption that their criticisms would not achieve consensus was sustained.*

#### ENDNOTES

1. Gordon T. Smith and Charles M. Wood, "Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey," *Theological Education* 39:1 (2003).
2. Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation Project Initial Gathering and Workshop, held in Pittsburgh, November 1-3, 2002, an event sponsored by The Association of Theological Schools and supported by a Lilly Endowment grant.
3. Outcomes assessment is the central theme in ATS Standard 4, "The Theological Curriculum," and in the standards for individual degrees, but it also appears throughout the others standards, for example:  
8.3.1.5 "The governing board shall require ... evaluation of outcomes ...."  
6.3.1 "Faculty shall be involved in evaluation of 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."  
1.2.2 "Evaluation ... a critical element in support of integrity ... includes the identification of desired goals or outcomes for an educational program..."
4. See "The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation: M.Div. Education and Numbering the Levites" by Daniel O. Aleshire in this issue.

*Assessing Assessment: An Accreditation Visitor's View  
of ATS Outcome-Oriented Standards*

5. See, for example, The North Central Association, The Higher Education Commission, "Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Levels of Implementation," (Updated March, 2002).
6. Among my personal input-oriented favorites are: (1) If a school does not allow full credit at its main campus for courses completed at extension sites, then the extension sites probably do not meet standards. (ATS now has a standard to ensure the quality of distance education, although it was not so in the 1970s). (2) If a school holds insufficient fiscal reserves to continue operating until the most recent entering class has graduated, then it likely does not meet the standards for financial resources. (3) If students have no access to the library stacks, then the school will have difficulty demonstrating that its collection is well used and meeting student needs. At one school I visited, a city building inspector had condemned the library stacks and, for fear of collapse, only the librarian entered to retrieve books. The committee was allowed unfettered access, however.
7. Gordon T. Smith and Charles M. Wood, "Learning Goals and the Assessment of Learning in Theological Schools: A Preliminary Survey," *Theological Education* 39:1 (2003).
8. Ibid.

# Worship and Theological Education

*E. Byron Anderson*

*Christian Theological Seminary*

*ABSTRACT: Seminary-sponsored worship has become problematic around two related issues—the content of worship and the place of worship in a theological curriculum. Responses to the problem of content often have resulted in segregation by liturgical, ethnic, and musical traditions. Responses to the place of worship often have isolated it from the theological curriculum as an extra-curricular product students consume. To maintain its place in the curriculum, seminary-sponsored worship must balance the tensions between expression and formation, diversity and unity, and congregation and seminary.*

The “worship wars” are still with us. Communities of worship debate, fight, and fragment over questions about musical style (praise, gospel, folk, classical); instrumental accompaniment (no accompaniment, praise bands, organ); language (how and if to address the Triune God and how to express our concerns for gender, race, physical or intellectual ability); ritualized and printed texts versus free prayer; and the appropriate balance between Word and Sacrament. Yet, despite the amount of attention paid to the “worship wars” within the Protestant mainline churches, little has been written about worship in Protestant mainline seminaries even though worship in these seminaries has been and remains problematic.<sup>1</sup> The problems with seminary-sponsored worship tend to focus on two related issues—the content of worship and the place of worship in a theological curriculum. This is especially true in those seminaries with significant ecumenical representation among their student bodies and in those seminaries whose denominational identity (or lack thereof) does not provide a determinative role in the shape and practice of worship. What may surprise church people outside of the seminaries is that worship wars in Protestant seminaries are neither recent nor likely to be resolved any time soon.

Local churches that have received recent seminary graduates over the past twenty-five years may have encountered this war as it is reflected in or initiated by their pastors. Even so, the lines of battle shift away from the seminary as pastors move into the local church and assume responsibility for worship leadership within a single denominational tradition. While the place of worship in a church’s life is rarely questioned, the content and style of worship in the local church is much debated. When the debate in the local church becomes a battle, the war often remains an “in-house” skirmish, softened by local and denominational traditions, and addressed in the context of a relatively stable and homogeneous community. When the battle breaks out of these denominational and communal containers, denominations, congregations, and indi-

viduals sometimes separate. The perceived winners and losers go their separate ways.

In contrast to the local church, Protestant mainline seminaries often do not have these communal containers. The frequently changing student body, the increasing diversity of that body, and the softening of denominational traditions out of respect for that diversity work against easy resolution of such conflict. Consequently, in most of our seminaries, students who absent themselves from the worship life of the seminary do not see this as an obstacle to enrollment in coursework.

The “skirmish” between “traditional” and “contemporary” worship we encounter in Protestant churches today is only the most recent of the conflicts many seminaries have encountered. These conflicts have tended to emerge as a form of “single issue” politics, a pattern that seems to parallel much current American political life. Students and faculties have engaged one another over questions of inclusive language (an issue surprisingly muted in the current battles), feminist emancipatory worship practices, and “high” church versus “low” church traditions. Weaving through all these issues are questions of race and culture as these influence the shape and practice of worship.<sup>2</sup> Somewhere in the midst of these battles—not so much the instigator as both lightning rod and mediator—is a person or persons responsible for the worship leadership of the seminary community.

At the core of many of these conflicts for students, and often for faculty, is the expectation that worship is primarily a means for the expression of faith and belief. In a day in which the individual reigns supreme, this often means the expression of “my” faith and belief.<sup>3</sup> Those seven dreadful words pastors hate to hear—“We’ve never done it that way before”—are enacted by seminarians as “That’s not the way my tradition does it.” In some schools, this produces a programmatic response that emphasizes and gives priority to a variety of experiences and expressions. Students are invited to be “exposed to,” to “sample,” or to experiment with corporate worship. Students and faculty members are presented with a “smorgasbord” of liturgical experiences—a little of something for everyone. This, in itself, is not a bad thing. Such variation permits the seminary chapel to be a place of instruction, comparable perhaps to an introductory survey course in Christian theology, or a place of artistic experimentation—comparable perhaps to an artist’s workshop or an open performance venue. Chapel life in these forms “survey” the varieties of piety and worship traditions represented in the student body, offer the opportunity to explore liturgical possibilities outside of such traditions, and invite considerable attention to the place of the arts in Christian worship.

For example, one ecumenical Protestant seminary provides a rich and varied liturgical life that, in many cases, provides a case study in creative liturgical experimentation.<sup>4</sup> This seminary’s commitment to worship is reflected in what, for many Protestant seminaries, is a significant commitment of

personnel and financial resources. Several full-time faculty and staff work with the chapel, including two space coordinators who attend to the arrangement of the worship space every day. Seldom is there the same physical setup two days in a row. This seminary's worship schedule gives central place to four noonday services (Monday through Thursday), each approximately thirty minutes in length. One of the services Monday through Wednesday is normally a preaching service and Eucharist is celebrated each Thursday. Artists-in-residence usually lead one service each semester, as do various classes and student groups. Worship planners are encouraged to use the common lectionary, to be inclusive, to involve the congregation in as many ways as possible, and to include time for silence and prayer. The seminary has recently begun a series of monthly evening services, led by African American students. An Episcopal group offers daily morning prayer in a smaller chapel; a women's and men's *schola* sing evening prayer one day a week. A faculty member leads a meditation group every day at 6:45 am. Overall, the worship life of this seminary reflects the diversity of its student body, draws on the many artistic resources of the community around it, and provides a creative, prophetic liturgical voice in the community.

There is much to affirm, even to envy, in such a setting. Nevertheless, this rich and diverse programmatic response can lead to three potential, if unintentional, consequences that seminaries must address. First, such a response potentially fractures and segregates the learning and worshipping community. On the one hand, the seminary community benefits by having the liturgical practices reflected in prayerbook, sacrament, preaching, African, Asian, and Latin American, white, charismatic, formal, traditional, or contemporary traditions, all finding a place in the schedule. On the other hand, students are free to pick and choose among the options, often preferring that tradition most like themselves and that from which they believe they will most likely "get" something. Again, this is in itself not a bad thing. Such self-selection functions as a form of self-care for those who, even in the first years of seminary, are already providing regular worship leadership in the local church. Nothing, however, challenges this rupture of community and the individualism represented by it. There is little understanding that choosing to worship together, even when it is not from one's own tradition, invites an encounter with the otherness of one's neighbors as well as the Transcendent Other. Nor is there an understanding that choosing not to worship together is itself a reflection of the lack of community about which students and faculty so often complain.<sup>5</sup> As some describing the work of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey suggest about their own experience, the diversity of many seminary communities permits, at certain levels, little in common except the *experience* of worship, thus making worship an essential element in a program of spiritual and communal formation.<sup>6</sup> It is such a concern for formation, in contrast to *information*, that brings L. Gregory Jones to argue that the process of forming students for ministerial



leadership requires more attention “to the character and quality of seminary-sponsored worship.”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps our seminaries require a voice such as that found in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (II.59), in which the bishop is urged to charge church members to not absent themselves from the liturgy lest they deprive the body of Christ of one of its members. Would our students today understand that their absence results in a body at worship minus fingers, hands, or limbs?

A second consequence of this response is that the worship life of the seminary community is placed among those extra-curricular, and therefore optional, activities provided as a service to the student as a consumer. Catechized by consumerism, we allow ourselves and our students to be defined by what we produce, purchase, and consume rather than by the practices through which we seek, love, and glorify God.<sup>8</sup> As a consumer, the seminarian acts no differently than those she or he is called to serve. The seminarian/pastor—like many people in the local church—seeks a liturgical experience that best fits his or her personal spirituality, psychological history, and experience. If the liturgical experience is perceived as not matching one’s personal spirituality, the experience is avoided. The implicit soteriology expressed by a consumer-driven approach to worship—acknowledging that worship is not our salvation—is that we are able to produce, purchase, and consume our own salvation. The Christian gospel, in contrast, argues that the salvation we seek is produced and purchased for us and that what we consume is provided as a gift.

A third consequence, corollary to the extra-curricular location of seminary worship life, is that as a “program” corporate worship is no longer a part of the formational curriculum of the seminary. J. Robert Nelson asked in 1964 if we have “simply cherished an inappropriate ideal of worship.” He responded by arguing that “the chapel should surely inform the academy with the viewpoint, attitude, and appreciation of what is valid and valuable in the curriculum.” “The foremost element of seminary education,” he argues, “is the discovery of the full dimensions of Christian worship...both Word and Sacrament, both liturgy and life, both confession of sin and confession of faith, both doxology and self-sacrifice, both the heart and the head.”<sup>9</sup> Robert Duke, addressing the same question a year after Nelson, argued “It is possible to think theologically with attention paid to theology’s central affirmation expressed in worship. It is not possible, however, to live theologically unless that reflecting, unfolding, and developing faith is rooted in thanksgiving, confession, and forgiveness.”<sup>10</sup> Sallie McFague, writing in 1976, argued that the formational task of theological education sets it “within the context of church and the faith. The *sine qua non* of such formation is a worshipping community.... The context for our intellectual work must be that of worship, or we deny our basic loyalty.”<sup>11</sup> Marjorie Procter-Smith, writing in 1985, asks “If ministers-in-training do not learn the disciplines of prayer and worship as they learn their Bible and systematic theology, when will they learn it?”<sup>12</sup> We might add to Procter-Smith’s question a question

about the formation of what seems to be a growing number of seminarians in ecumenical seminaries who arrive with little experience of church, much less of the spiritual and liturgical practices of the church. When and where will these students receive what can only be called “remedial” catechesis and formation in the Christian faith?

In these brief reflections, spanning three decades and often reflecting very different theological perspectives, each writer agrees that worship in the seminary is part of the formational and curricular program of theological education. Procter-Smith’s comment suggests a connection with the discussion of the worship smorgasbord earlier: No theological curriculum is adequate to the task of theological formation if it does no more than survey a topic and never works in depth with an issue. In Bible and systematic theology we begin with surveys and introductions in order to lead students into a certain depth of study. So, too, should a program of worship as a component in the theological and spiritual curriculum of a seminary lead students into a depth of prayer, Word, and Sacrament. As religious educators such as John Westerhoff have argued, while instruction and formation are related enterprises in the catechetical life of the church, they are neither the same nor do they have the same ends.

How, then, are we to understand communal worship as part of the theological curriculum and, therefore, of the formative work, even catechesis, undertaken in and by the seminary? Let me begin to answer this question by exploring three tensions that, at best, must be managed but cannot be resolved: the tensions between self-expression and formation, between unity and diversity, and between the seminary and the local church as communities of practice. These tensions offer opportunities for constructive and creative growth even as they provide the possibility for the rupturing of a community.

The first tension I named at the beginning of this essay—the tension between the expressive character of Christian worship and the formative role of worship in the context of theological education.<sup>13</sup> As we can say of the Christian life as a whole, self-expression in praise of God is a sign of the grace-filled life, but we also know that self-expression requires formation in the way of discipleship, in the way of Christ Jesus. Corporate worship, like personal devotion, intellectual inquiry, and ethical action, is part of the Christian *askesis*—the disciplined training of persons for the Christian life.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, worship in the seminary must enable both expression and formation. Nevertheless, while enabling self-expression, most seminaries would agree that the work of theological education—and therefore of communal worship in the context of theological education—is first and foremost about formation for leadership in the church. The disciplines of corporate worship and theological study are companion formative practices of the seminary. Worship provides a context in which we absorb—and perhaps model—a tradition “so that the language of the tradition becomes one’s own, so that one can speak it, and not only in traditional terms.”<sup>15</sup> At the heart of the liturgical movement since its

beginning, and continuing today, have been the beliefs that corporate worship shapes the lives and beliefs of Christian people and that worship in common forges relationships that will prove irresistible.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the ecumenical work that led to the 1982 document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the model “Lima liturgy” that grew from it offered the churches a liturgical celebration recognizable to all, but “which nonetheless calls us beyond our own experience to wider unity.”<sup>17</sup>

Another way to approach the formative power of corporate worship is to claim the seminary chapel and the seminary’s corporate worship as the place and occasion for “mystagogical” formation—formation in the practiced liturgical life of a community. Such formation does not occur primarily by talking about worship but by engaging in common liturgical action embodied and enacted in liturgical prayer, song, preaching, and sacrament.<sup>18</sup> The assumption here is that a pastoral leader is not equipped to lead Christian worship unless he or she has been formed in the patterns and practices of Christian worship.

Another ecumenical Protestant seminary may serve as an example here. In this school, as in others, a fixed weekly cycle of worship services establishes a liturgical rhythm in the school’s life while attending to a range of liturgical styles and patterns. This second school has sustained a weekly (five-day) pattern for some time: services of the Word/preaching on Monday and Thursday, sung morning prayer on Tuesday (including settings composed by students in this seminary’s church music program), “experimental” or thematic worship experiences on Wednesday, and Word and Table on Friday. Students and faculty are involved in worship leadership under the guidance of a faculty member, who serves as dean of the chapel, and a team of student assistants. The Friday Eucharist is celebrated in a pattern consistent with the ecumenical consensus, but varied in ways that reflect the diverse Eucharistic traditions of the seminary community. As this rhythm depends in a significant way on a core of students who are in residence at the school or who are on campus on a daily basis, the growing number of commuter students at this seminary, as others, problematizes the expectation that students will participate in the whole of this rhythm on any regular basis. Alongside the services in seminary chapel, an Episcopal seminary that shares the campus and faculty maintains its own chapel and rhythm of daily offices and Eucharist. The clear expectation at these schools is not only that students are engaged in the rhythm and practice of common worship but also that such practice has a central place in the life of the seminary community.

A second tension experienced in Protestant theological education focuses on the claim for the normativity of diversity. While diversity is *normal*, and has been throughout Christian history, diversity is not theologically *normative*. I am not making a claim here for *uniformity*. I am claiming that the unity of the body of Christ, a “diversity-in-unity” rather than fragmentation, is normative for the church and its related institutions. We find scriptural articulations of

this theological norm in Paul's arguments for unity across economic or class lines in 1 Corinthians and across ethnic lines in Galatians. Within this tension between diversity and unity, the community has equally the possibility for experiences of cohesion and integration or of fragmentation. To accept fragmentation and separation across the boundaries of race, gender, or class as normative is to deny the fundamental unity of the church present in Jesus Christ. It is to deny, or at least lose sight of, the fundamental unity of the individual with the community through Christ enacted by and in Christian baptism.

Such fragmentation reveals that an institution committed to ecumenism is living something less than the truth. Susan Wood writes, "What distinguishes liturgical prayer from other prayers of the church, is that it is a corporate gesture of praise of God neither originating from nor directed toward any one individual or group in the church. It is the church as church glorifying God."<sup>19</sup> When we demythologize all ethnocentric expressions of the Christian faith, as Albert Pero argues we must do, we "may discover that the essence of the Christian faith not only ultimately transcends the ethnocentric culture of white people, but that of blacks as well."<sup>20</sup> We do not gather to worship for our own sake. "The seminary community gathers together in God's name for the sake of the world to which it ministers."<sup>21</sup> If we gather to worship in black or in white, we perpetuate the segregation present in our churches as well as in our civic communities. If, or when, we find ways to gather in corporate worship that move beyond such divisions, we provide a witness to and for the Church and our various churches. Such may be the particular task of mainline ecumenical seminaries today.

A third seminary—in this case, a denominational seminary—illustrates the way in which many seminaries have responded to this tension. This seminary offers three services a week, Tuesday through Thursday, in the seminary's main chapel, plus a Wednesday morning Eucharist in a smaller chapel throughout the academic year when school is in session. Student teams, working with specific guidelines supported by the dean of the chapel and assisted by student chaplains, design all the services in the main chapel. The Tuesday service is a service of "Word and Table," which follows the patterns of the denomination's official worship resources. This is a more formal "traditional" service, lectionary-based (usually the sermon is based on the Gospel reading) in the context of the liturgical year. On Wednesday evenings, there is an informal Gospel service, influenced by but not restricted to the African American tradition. The Lord's Supper is celebrated on the first Wednesday of each month at this evening service. Preaching at this service is not lectionary-based. Both the Tuesday and Wednesday services follow relatively set patterns. On Thursdays, they have a "blended service" with a praise ensemble leading the singing, but also an organ prelude and postlude. Like the Tuesday "traditional" service, this service is lectionary-based in the context of the

liturgical year. Although the chapel staff encourages creativity in this service, it sometimes looks much like the Tuesday service. The celebration of Eucharist is an option at this service, although it is specifically included for such services as All Saints, Transfiguration, and Ascension. Like the second seminary described above, this seminary normalizes a rhythm of diversity that, if students are in worship on a daily basis, provides a range and depth of experiences over time. Yet, it does so primarily by segregating ethnic and musical liturgical traditions.

All of this is not to deny the sense of particularity, difference, or otherness we experience and our need to give expression to that difference. David Cunningham's recent work on the Trinity provides suggestive possibilities here. Cunningham argues that God's triune character is not "merely a compromise between the one and the many." It is rather a "pluralizing" (not a pluralism) that holds together oneness and difference. Pluralizing worship, he argues, does not mean dividing a community into discrete groups worshiping in different languages, styles, times, or locations. We must learn to worship together, "regardless of whether we use the same words at the same time." The result is a polyphonic rather than unison voice.<sup>22</sup>

Polyphony, Cunningham argues, requires a mutually understood language and process of interpretation. Our ability to participate in a polyphonic worshipping community, as in any community, "is dependent upon our sharing common practices with others in the community."<sup>23</sup> One of the difficulties here is to recognize that worship is itself a primary practice, which Rebecca Chopp defines as "socially shared forms of behavior that mediate between what are often called subjective and objective dimensions,"<sup>24</sup> through which we develop common languages and processes of interpretation. This is to say that in worship, persons and communities are formed intentionally and unintentionally in particular understandings of self, Church, and God. In worship, we learn the Christian "grammar" through which we interpret our relationships to God and neighbor. We may be explicitly aware of how we express our faith in worship, but we are generally not aware of worship's formative power. What we do in and as we worship—what and how we sing, the language of our prayer, how we participate in prayer, who and what we pray for, the roles played by the community and by leaders in worship, the ways in which Scripture is read and interpreted—is teaching us a way of being together as community. When our language is exclusive, when the congregation is made to be passive observers and listeners, when children are neither seen nor heard, when prayer never extends beyond the immediate concerns of the congregation, worship is forming an exclusive, passive, isolated adult community. When our language is inclusive of human difference, when the congregation's voice is heard in prayer and song, when persons of all ages and abilities are welcomed in worship leadership, when prayer extends to the suffering of the world, worship is becoming a polyphonic expression of life in God and a means for our participation in the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.

So why can't we create a single liturgy that makes everyone happy? Of course, such a question betrays certain assumptions about what seminary-sponsored worship intends as part of a theological curriculum. This question also ignores the fact that, even in such intentionally ecumenical contexts such as that in Bossey, Switzerland, it is difficult, if not impossible, to shape a perfect ecumenical liturgy, especially if we mean by that an experience that makes everyone happy. Bossey has the advantage of students and faculty living in a short-term intensive community that exists alongside a "resident" community that sustains Bossey's work. This experience of intensive community joined to a resident community is reflected in the rhythm of Bossey's liturgical life. Morning prayer each day is designed by ecumenical teams of students in residence for the semester. These services change from day to day and semester to semester as the student body changes. Midday prayer, which focuses on intercessory prayer, and evening prayer, reflecting the tradition of the daily offices, are developed by resident members of the community and vary little in format from day to day or semester to semester.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, the example of Bossey leaves several questions unanswered: What happens when the primary resident community of a seminary is not its students, but its faculty or staff? What ecumenical commitments and whose denominational traditions shape worship in such communities? What happens when an increasing number of students in ecumenical seminaries arrive in seminary requiring basic catechesis in the Christian faith and formation in specific liturgical, spiritual, and ethical practices of the Church? Whose patterns, practices, and traditions predominate?

These questions point to a third tension for worship in theological education, which develops in the relationships between a seminary and its constituent ecclesial communities and denominations. In seminaries closely aligned with sponsoring denominations or in clearly confessional traditions, such as the seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran or the Episcopal churches, it seems appropriate for seminary-sponsored worship to replicate or to model idealized denominational patterns. In inter-denominational or widely ecumenical schools, this is less easily done. Bossey, as described above, provides one model—some balance between practices that explore and express the diversity of its "temporary" community and practices that reflect the continuing traditions of both the resident community and the ecumenical church. Another response has been to attempt, in some way, to honor every tradition with a service of its own, as we saw in the third school example above. A third response, partly illustrated by the first example, is to minimize concern for any tradition.

Another potential response, however, would invite seminaries to seriously consider what ecumenism requires of us and develop a liturgical response to it. It might be helpful, for example, to consider an ecumenical seminary—even though it is not a church yet part of the Church—as itself a particular ecumenical ecclesial community. As such, the seminary has the opportunity to explore



and develop the liturgical traditions, practices, and goals that grow out of the ecumenical convergence of the past twenty-five years. Thus William Leshar, former president of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), expressed the hope that worship at LSTC “be firmly grounded in the western tradition of Christian worship,” what *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* calls “‘the great tradition’ that embodies the essential elements or, as some would say, the Catholic substance of Christian worship.” Leshar hopes that “these essential elements of Christian worship become fixed in the life and piety of students during the time they spend in these unique, set apart communities called seminaries.”<sup>26</sup>

With this understanding in place, it may become possible for us to understand the worship life of the seminary as part of an interactive process between the seminary chapel and the worship practices of diverse local communities (between weekday and Sunday, as it were). That is, as a gathering of diverse communities, students and faculty move back and forth between the particularity of their own denominational traditions and the oneness of the Church manifest in the seminary. Seminary worship provides a context in which worship can be shaped by the wider ecumenical norms of the Church. When such is the case, it becomes possible for the seminary, through the use of liturgical materials from its various constituencies, to work at a form of ecumenical liturgical formation that provides a liturgical experience of an emerging shared liturgical tradition. For example, the liturgical reforms of the past forty years that have provided common patterns and practices for daily prayer and celebrations of the Eucharist also provide new opportunities for the inculturation of these patterns in each seminary community. Rather than provide a specific liturgical model to be replicated in the local church, the development and practice of a shared liturgical tradition offers the possibility that new pastors will be “better, sounder, and more creative presiding-celebrants of the Church’s liturgy.”<sup>27</sup> In doing so, the seminary also models a new way of being church for and to the Church, providing a context for the practice of interrelatedness and mutuality of persons and traditions. Ecumenical seminaries, even as they avoid “one size fits all” solutions, must also argue against “least common denominator” forms of ecumenism in which the primary agenda seems to be that everyone “get along.” In worship as in theological study, we must attend to and embody, however imperfectly, the possibilities of the eschatological hope of unity that, for the moment, seems to have receded on the horizon of theological education.

I have suggested that the tensions between self-expression and formation, unity and diversity, the seminary and the local church cannot be resolved. Rather, we must manage these tensions in each seminary, doing so in different ways in light of the particular character of the seminary. To enter a seminary, as new seminary faculty members and students discover, is to enter a community of particular theological, social, and political practices and conversations.



Because worship in the seminary, as in the local church, is often the most public of a community's activities, it will reflect the ways in which these practices and conversations are being worked out. Well managed, these tensions become opportunities for growth in the life of a community. Poorly managed or ignored, they lead to what often feels like tribal warfare as a community fragments. If seminary-sponsored worship is to be part of the formational theological curriculum, as I have argued it must be, the shape and practice of such worship must be part of any discussions of the theological curriculum. That is, the shape and practice of worship must be part of and managed by the theological faculty in honest conversation with the norms and theological traditions of the seminary, its sponsoring institutions, and the ecumenical Church as these norms and traditions are brought to bear in the mission and purpose of the school.

Finally, if the shape and practice of worship is part of the theological curriculum, should it then also be part of conversations with accrediting agencies such as The Association of Theological Schools (ATS)? Although I am disinclined to suggest that ATS—in its concern for the integration of academic, spiritual, and pastoral formation—develop criteria with which to assess the character and quality of worship in accredited seminaries, ATS or other accrediting bodies may have a role to play. That is, if worship is the most public of a seminary's activities (and it well may not be), reflection on a seminary's liturgical life as part of a school's self-study could be a place in which a school explores the character and coherence of its curriculum and life together. Being able to have such a conversation, itself, will say something about a community's life. Similarly, participation in and reflection on a seminary's liturgical life by an accreditation visiting committee not only provides a starting point for an exploration of the ways in which a particular school understands its relationship to particular denominational liturgical and theological traditions, but such participation and reflection also provides a means to explore how a school handles the tension between unity and diversity, addresses the depth of the Christian spiritual life, and attends to the complexities of theological discourse. Even so, one week in the life of a community may not be a representative sample of its life. It is in silence, song, prayer, gesture, vestment, art, preaching, and sacrament as these are practiced over time that the depth of a community's life is revealed.

*E. Byron Anderson is assistant professor of worship at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana; he was director of worship for the seminary for five years. In July 2003, he will join the faculty of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary as associate professor of worship and music ministry.*

ENDNOTES

1. For example, the question of seminary worship life is not addressed in any of the past twenty-five years' issues of *Theological Education*, with the exception of James White's intriguing discussion of the formative power of the seminary chapel building, "The Seminary Chapel Building as Spiritual Formation," *Theological Education* 38.1 (2001): 101-110. The most complete exploration of corporate worship in a Protestant seminary context continues to be Dietrich Bonhoeffer's chapter "The Day Together" in his book *Life Together* [Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 48-80.]
2. As Albert Pero notes in his discussion of worship in the Black context, each of the "single issue" emphases, especially those related to ethnicity and gender, provides the means by which particular groups can distance themselves from dominant cultural traditions in order to recover a sense of personal or group identity. Albert Pero, "Worship and Theology in the Black Context" in Albert Pero and Ambrose Mayo, ed., *Theology and the Black Experience* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 231-232.
3. Nathan Mitchell notes that the various relationships students negotiate in seminary occur "in a 'tribal village' atmosphere where competition and scrutiny are intensified. The tribal village quickly becomes guerilla theatre, with everyone participating as both actor and critic." In such a context, Mitchell writes, "Worship is judged successful when it 'contributes to my personal growth' or when it 'offers me insight into myself.'" Nathan Mitchell, "Teaching Worship in Seminaries: A Response," *Worship* 55 (July, 1981): 323. Although Mitchell wrote these words in 1981, they continue to resonate in the life of the church. In a discussion that focuses primarily on the place of and conflicts that develop around music in worship, Thomas Troeger and Carol Doran encourage the church to find ways to worship that draw "on the best of what each tribe has to offer without reinforcing the fragmentation and the struggle for domination that characterizes our culture." *Trouble at the Table: Gathering the Tribes for Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 16.
4. This description and those that follow are based on correspondence with faculty members responsible for worship in an admittedly small group of seminaries. It is not my intent to set them up as "straw" examples to be overcome by a single normative vision. Rather, I am trying to use them descriptively as a means to further problematize the place of worship as a place of spiritual and theological formation for pastoral leadership within the theological curriculum. Therefore, to facilitate their use as representative types in this discussion, I have not identified the schools by name.
5. J. Robert Nelson suggested the "daily rhythm of chapel worship, godly learning, and communal living" is a "beatific public vision" that is "not only inaccurate, but pathetic and ludicrous." He continued, "Who of us has not heard *ad nauseum* the continual complaint about the lack of Christian community among students and faculty alike." What may surprise some is that this was not written recently; Nelson provided these comments in the first issue of *Theological Education* [Vol.1.1 (Autumn, 1964): 53].
6. John H. Erickson and Eileen W. Linder, "Worship and Prayer in Ecumenical Formation," *Theological Education* 34 Supplement (Autumn 1997): 24.
7. L. Gregory Jones, "Beliefs, Desires, Practices, and the Ends of Theological Education" in ed., Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 2002), 203.
8. Paul Waddell, "Teaching as a Ministry of Hope" in ed., L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, *The Shape of our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 2002), 121.

9. Nelson, 57, 59.
10. Robert Duke, "Seminary Worship," *Theological Education* 2.1 (Autumn 1965): 42.
11. Sallie McFague TeSelle, "Between Athens and Jerusalem: The Seminary in Tension," *Christian Century* 93 (February 4-11, 1976): 89. James White concludes his 1980 review of the teaching of worship in North American seminaries with similar words: "Worship is a basic art of the whole personal being of all in Christian ministry, both ordained and lay. The classroom has to be balanced by the chapel. A strong worship life in the seminary is as basic as a good library in equipping men and women for ministry." James White, "The Teaching of Worship in Seminaries in Canada and the United States," *Worship* 55 (July 1981): 318. Unfortunately, White's research did not include attention to the specific liturgical structures and practices of these seminaries.
12. "Daily Worship: An Instituted Means of Grace," *Christian Century* 102 (February 6-13, 1985): 125.
13. I have explored this particular tension in several articles. See "Making Claims about Worship," *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* (2001): 75-93; "Liturgical Catechesis: Congregational Practice as Formation," *Religious Education* 92.3 (Summer 1997): 349-362; and "Form and Freedom: The Discipline of Worship," *Encounter* 60.3 (Summer 1999): 271-282.
14. Albert Pero challenges notions that free church worship traditions, especially those within the Black community, are unrationalized. He argues that in many contexts, spontaneity is ritualized, making it possible to predict "who will be spontaneous, when, and how...as with all gifts of the Spirit, there is an implicit order." Pero, 243.
15. McFague, 90.
16. Unfortunately, this hope, expressed by Lutheran ecumenical leader Eugene Brand in 1984 and reiterated in 1999, has become not only resistible but also more problematic. See Eugene Brand, "Worship and the Ecumenical Movement," *Ecumenical Review* 51 (April 1999): 189.
17. Robert Gribben, "Celebrations of the Eucharist in Ecumenical Contexts: A Proposal from a Group Meeting at Bossey," *One-in-Christ* 31.4 (1995): 373. This work continues; it is reported in the papers of the Ditchingham consultations of the World Council of Churches. See Thomas Best and Dagmar Heller, ed., *Eucharistic Worship in Ecumenical Contexts* (Geneva: WCC, 1998) and *So we believe, So we pray* (Geneva: WCC, 1995). The Best and Heller volumes provide helpful examples of this ecumenical consensus as embodied in non-North American or European ecclesial traditions.
18. See, for example, the Roman Catholic Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries: Instruction no. 2: "All genuine liturgical formation involves not only doctrine but also practice. This practice, as a 'mystagogical' formation, is obtained first and mainly through the very liturgical life of the students into which they are daily most deeply initiated through liturgical actions celebrated in common." (Washington: USCC Publication, 1979.)
19. Susan Wood, "Participatory Knowledge of God in the Liturgy," *Studia Liturgica* 29.1 (1999): 32.
20. Pero, 230.
21. Duke, 44.
22. See *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998): 270-284, and E. Byron Anderson, "Concentered All in Jesus' Name," *Doxology* 18 (2001): 49-70.

*Worship and Theological Education*

23. Cunningham, 134. This paragraph draws directly from my "Concentered All in Jesus' Name," 66-67.
24. Rebecca Chopp, *Saving Work* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 15.
25. Erickson and Linder, 24.
26. William Leshner, "On Worship," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 22 (October 1995): 401. Eugene Peterson, reflecting on spiritual formation in seminaries, offers a similar hope. Peterson suggests that, rather than ask what we can do "to make the seminary a better place for spiritual formation," we should ask "How can we enter into and embrace the unique condition that constitutes the seminary in such a way that we grow up into the maturity of Christ Jesus?" Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 56-57.
27. Thomas A. Krosnicki and John A. Gurrieri, "Seminary Liturgy Revisited," *Worship* 54 (March 1980): 169.

# Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum with Education about Disability: Addressing the Human Experience of Disability in the Theological Context

*Robert C. Anderson*

*Center for Religion and Disability*

*ABSTRACT: The absence of education about the human experience of disability represents a “missing note” in the education of future clergy. The need exists to critically evaluate graduate theological education toward this end and offer suggestions for transforming the educational experiences of religious leaders. The impact of this phenomenon extends to the wide body of religious adherents in society, since like the general public, most people will be touched by the human experience of disability if only through the aging process.*

## **Introduction**

Graduate schools of theology equip thousands of future clergy every year. However, a 2001 survey of 244 ATS member schools in the United States and Canada demonstrated that there is little representation in the graduate theological curriculum to equip future clergy with knowledge about the human experience of disability.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, clergy are called upon more frequently than most professionals to work with people who have disabilities.

## **Elements for exploration**

Given that graduate theological education bears a formative mark on the careers of religious leaders, this article also explores how various ideologies and practices constitute “access” to the graduate theological curriculum for people with disabilities. Methodologies for transformational education will be offered, along with a review of current literature.

## **What constitutes “access” to theological education for people with disabilities?**

“Access,” where disability is concerned, has both literal and symbolic significance. One might speculate that an increased presence of people with

## *Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum with Education about Disability*

disabilities on seminary campuses would have an impact on one or more levels (whether the *explicit*, *implicit*, or *null* aspects) of the curriculum. No institution can be fully accessible to all types of disabilities. However, studies show that most graduate schools of theology have limited experience with both the study of human disability and people with disabilities in particular.<sup>2</sup>

Access to a *field of study* requires a body of knowledge about that subject. Identifying “disability” as a coherent and studied concept within the history of theological inquiry is difficult. An archeology of the theological community’s experience with the subject of disability reveals a mixed bag of ideologies and perceptions. From Levitical prohibitions to associations with sin and evil, the study of disability may be characterized within theological inquiry more by its absence than as a voice for better understanding of human life and our relationship to God.

More puzzling is the lack of attention devoted to an experience so common and essentially human. The World Health Organization cites over 500 million people with disabilities worldwide. Within the United States, people with disabilities number forty-six million—eighteen percent of the population.<sup>3</sup>

The dearth of scholarly research, writings about, and experience with human disability reveal the challenge ahead within theological education. Few faculty within theological education profess sufficient experience with the subject matter of human disability. How does this element of “access” impact theological curriculum?

### ***Practical access***

*Disability* is an abstract concept; *people with disabilities* are living human documents. Since the learning environment is contextual, constructing a context for interacting with both people and concepts enhances the educational experience for all participants in the theological setting.

For example, a ramp provides physical access to a building, but also creates the context where people who use wheelchairs enter and form relationships with other students. Over time, this contextual environment bears positive influence on the school’s curriculum—whether through content or practical access.

I employ the phrase “practical access” to clarify how subtle realities shape a school’s responsiveness or capacity to include people with disabilities. Often, efforts to include people with disabilities are characterized by frustrations—both logistical and financial. These systemic realities find the majority of seminaries generally unprepared to admit students and hire faculty with a variety of disabilities. Unless these realities are named, they cannot be addressed and progress goes no farther than silent awareness.

Lilly Endowment’s 1992 occasional report, “Theological Education: The Road Less Traveled,” identifies aging facilities as a critical problem among seminaries.<sup>4</sup> National funders receive requests from seminaries for access

renovation funding on an increasing basis. Philanthropists of theological education understand the need to renovate buildings, but are discovering that progress also lies in transforming attitudes about what happens inside those buildings. It is easier to make a case for modernizing a facility than it is to illustrate why ministerial students should know more about working with (and including) people who have disabilities.

In comparison to other institutions of higher education, students, faculty, and staff with disabilities are underrepresented on theological campuses. Recent surveys reveal the status quo, both in quantitative and anecdotal terms, from information provided by seminary administrators:

“Our institution has no expertise with this area of study.”

“Disabilities may be touched on in a hit-or-miss way by instructors of our pastoral theology courses, but there is no overall plan for its inclusion in our curricula.”

“We are not sufficiently equipped to educate people with disabilities. We once had a person apply who was legally blind and could not accept him on that account.”<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, theological leaders identify benefits to their educational environments—and more notably, their curricula—when their schools actively promote inclusion of people with disabilities:

“We have two students entering the seminary this year who have disabilities. This has caused us to incorporate new areas of consideration into our teaching.”

“Students with disabilities have opened our eyes to our own blindness in this area.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Religion, disability, and the ethical/moral fabric of theological education**

The discipline of theology offers humanity a powerful pathway toward discovering the mysteries and wonder of life. The terrain of theology offers inquiry that draws from the wells of our moral, ethical, and value-oriented qualities as human beings. Theological discourse is intrinsically relationship driven (the nature of community: God, humanity, and one another). Religious practice urges us into moral responsibility toward one another.

These value-laden qualities of theological education compel us to ask the questions: “Why is theology relatively silent about the human experience of disability? Should theology have a response to this dimension of life?”



*Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum  
with Education about Disability*

This article submits the need for both response and responsibility. Social theorist Gayatri Spivak<sup>7</sup> bestows “responsibility” with qualities similar to Mikhail Bakhtin’s understanding of “moral answerability.”<sup>8</sup> Responsibility signals not only the speaker-listener transaction, but also the ethical imperative to make room for people cast as different. Where disability is concerned, religious inquiry is compelled to plumb the depths of human experience for what the occurrence of disability tells us about ourselves, God, and life together in community with others. We need the *voice* of people with disabilities to realize a richer revelation of God and ourselves.

Theology’s silence toward the human experience of disability limits the opportunity for both reflection and presence. This silence poses barriers for people with disabilities in terms of achieving admission, participation, and voice within theological education.

Engaging meaningfully and profoundly with people who have disabilities requires that theological educators initiate dialogue within the theological setting. This dialogue must include people with disabilities, and not simply be about “them.”

Deborah Creamer, a graduate of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, suggests that the embodied experiences of people with disabilities enrich the context of theological education. Creamer identifies this contextual relationship in her master’s thesis:

The church has failed to honestly engage with people who have disabilities, to seek out and listen to their stories, and instead only speaks to or about them or does things for them. It is the same with theology. Theology has rarely engaged in conversation with, or been done by, people with disabilities . . . by refusing to consider the perspectives of people with disabilities, the church limits its own possibilities for growth and wholeness.<sup>9</sup>

A small, but growing, number of scholars add voice to the need for an informed perspective of human disability within theology. Most recently, authors such as Nancy Eiesland, Kathy Black, Brett Webb-Mitchell, and Stewart Govig identify this absence as a serious omission from the spectrum of theological inquiry and curricula.

### **A serious call for the inclusion of people with disabilities**

The time has come, then, for a transformative call with regard to the human experience of disability. The words of one theological educator affirms this need:

Here we are, then, the people who lead theological education, who can open doors, or keep them closed. I urge that as an

association of theological schools, we commit ourselves individually and for the schools we represent to a practicable openness to those members of this emerging one-tenth of our population—the handicapped [sic]—who wish to enter our doors for professional theological education.<sup>10</sup>

This prophetic call comes to us not in the year 2002, not even 1990. This need was voiced in 1978 with clear-eyed vision by Harold Wilke, born without arms and widely considered as the first modern theologian to directly address the matter of theology and disability. Wilke's words ushered an informed and relatively unanswered call to the academy. Interestingly, Wilke's critique was the first and only article about the human experience of disability that has appeared in this journal.

Wilke's assessment bears critique on one point: since 1978, more precise estimates of people with disabilities are placed at eighteen percent of the population, rather than one-tenth. An even greater number of families are touched by the human experience of disability. Stuart Govig terms people with disabilities as "the world's largest (multicultural) minority."<sup>11</sup>

### *Relevance*

Disability crosses all lines of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, and religious preference. As such, there is no more common story to be told than the one shared by people with disabilities.

One of the strengths of theological wisdom is its generative power to share and interpret the human story. In terms of personal story, people with disabilities have much to share with the community of faith since they embody the story of their differences (the disabilities themselves). Educational leadership theorist Bill Johnston relates the power of personal story as belonging to all members of the community.<sup>12</sup> When these stories are told in a theological learning environment, such as the seminary, the opportunities to chart undiscovered country within theology are enormous. The benefits of this story to the community of faith are just beginning to be realized.

Kathy Black cites the healing power of stories about disability, as shared with one another in a context of faith.<sup>13</sup> Her book, *A Healing Homiletic*, offers insight for introducing stories about disability through the most popular storytelling venue in congregations: the sermon. As a homiletics professor, Black notes her discomfort with the inadequate and incomplete treatments given to the topics of healing and disability by numerous (theologically trained) ministers. Clergy often lack sufficient awareness of the human experience of disability such that they sometimes unwittingly do more harm than good articulating the subject of disability.

For example, parents of children with disabilities recount being told, "God must think you are special, to entrust you with such a special child." Parents who hear this phrase often think (and sometimes say), "If that's what it means

*Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum  
with Education about Disability*

to be special to God, then I don't want to be special. I want to be average. I want my child to be average."

Including the stories of people with disabilities within theological curricula provides future clergy with a foundational understanding of disability as they begin their careers. Sharing the human story of disability also enables people to not only understand one another better through the eyes of faith, but also demonstrates how members within congregations may find deeper ways to care about one another.

### **Disability as subject in religious interpretation: historical snapshots**

#### ***Holiness = "unblemished"***

Christian scholars are often quick to cite ancient Jewish Levitical requirements for purity among its priests. Jewish laws, however, require the community to include and care about people with disabilities. Yet limitations were described in relation to certain priestly functions. Access to the inner Temple was restricted to the "unblemished Levite," who, in addition to moral purity, was also beholden to manifest no physical defects. Among the people, leprosy and other physical conditions were regarded as "unclean" and sometimes associated as punishment for one's sins. Other passages reveal that the "blemished" should not be excluded from the religious life of the Hebrews, although there is always the undertone of difference associated with people who had disabilities.<sup>14</sup>

By New Testament times, the stigma of difference was still associated with disabilities. John 9:1-7 tells the story of a man blind from his birth. The Pharisees asked Jesus, "who sinned—the man, or his parents?" The scriptures exhibit a rush to emphasize the healing of people with disabilities (perhaps to illustrate Christ's divinity), even though Jesus himself seems to regard disability as "natural" within human experience. Indeed, the number of scriptures where Jesus engages people with disabilities speaks of the need for deeper examination of the human experience of disability within theological study.

#### ***Disability = "abnormal"***

Disability defines "normal" by presenting its opposite. Difference or otherness thus fixes disability as a social category, whereby cultural stereotypes and stigmas are perpetuated.

People with disabilities are silently marginalized within the academy of religion not so much intentionally, but rather because the frame of reference for educational structures is an able-bodied perspective. Educational theorists Penny P. Gosetti and Edith A. Rusch describe this phenomenon as "an active process of disregard." They also assert that broadening the cultural horizon affords benefits to educational leaders:

Despite what educational, religious, and other social institutions teach, we do not have to view our world solely through the lens of the dominant

culture. The lenses provided by other perspectives help bring into focus the gaps and invisibilities embedded into traditional ways of seeing, thinking, and knowing.<sup>15</sup>

Institutions often cannot “see” the barriers that people with disabilities experience. Addressing inclusion requires that we be proactive and intentional, willing to learn from people with disabilities.

***Misconceptions of disability: a glimpse at religion’s historical role in the social construction of disability***

The difficulties of reconciling disability within the religious community shed light on its historical lack of development within theology. Could it be that throughout history, Euro-Western religions have “placed” disability into the hands of faith healers and the medical community in order to avoid the difficult theological questions suggested by disabled human bodies? Disability certainly “incarnates” the reminder of human imperfection, otherness, and difference, offering insight into why the matter of human disability is subconsciously silenced in the holy setting. This lack of historical treatment accounts for the diminished voice that people with disabilities experience within the religious community.

Offered below are examples of how even the greatest of Christendom’s theological minds have struggled to understand the human experience of disability.

Brenda Brueggemann cites the difficulties that exist in early religious statements about people with disabilities. From St. Augustine forward, interpretations about the human experience of deafness are offered in light of scripture. Brueggemann notes the deaf community’s debate over the Augustinian interpretation of the Apostle Paul’s statement that “faith comes by hearing” (Romans 10:17):

For how might a deaf person come to be taught what was good if he could not hear the wisdom of the ages? This is a concern carried forward from St. Augustine . . . “those who are born deaf are incapable of ever exercising the Christian faith, for they cannot hear the Word, and they Cannot [sic] read the Word.”<sup>16</sup>

Brueggemann’s spotlight on this debate illustrates the role language plays in the social construction of disability. The deaf community has variously regarded Augustine’s comments from incomplete to “damnable.” While this debate is relatively unknown among the theological community, it is often referenced within deaf culture (as in the work by sociolinguist James Woodward, *How You Gonna Get to Heaven if You Can’t Talk to Jesus? On Depathologizing Deafness*)<sup>17</sup> as a point of exclusion from religious community. Most people within the deaf community have thus tended to gather into “congregations for the deaf” rather than among places of worship for the “hearing.”

*Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum  
with Education about Disability*

In his "Answer to Julian," St. Augustine places the occurrence of disability as punishment for the human condition within the context of original sin:

Tell me, then, because of what wrong are such innocents sometimes born blind and others times deaf? This defect is even a hindrance to faith itself, as the apostle bears witness, when he says, Faith comes from hearing . . . (Rom. 10:17) Or are any of you so feeble-minded that you do not regard feeble-mindedness as an evil . . . Is there anyone who does not know that those whom the common people call morons are born so mentally feeble that one can hardly credit certain of them with the mental capacity of animals? And yet you refuse to admit that from its beginning when it [humanity] abandoned God, the human race contracted from its condemned origin a sinfulness fully deserving all these punishments, except when the inscrutable wisdom of the creator spares it by reason of his hidden plan.<sup>18</sup>

It remains unclear what Augustine intended to convey about the place of people with disabilities within the community of faith. Surely, he must not have meant that persons who are deaf or "feeble-minded" cannot find faith in God. It is more likely that Augustine regarded the deaf and mentally impaired as less capable of "exercising" certain religious roles, such as worship, leadership, and presentations of the liturgy. Even so, his words create an uneasy glimpse of early theological (mis)understandings about disability that cannot be dismissed.

Attempts to interpret the human experience of disability also surface within the works of German reformer Martin Luther. His discourse reflects, in large part, the conceptions and placement of disability within the medieval mind. In Luther's day, religious interpretation of the human experience of disability was contextualized with rampant disease and illness. Disability was considered by many as punishment from God, and often associated with demon possession. The church inadvertently fostered a climate of hysteria that alleged witches brought about great mischief among the population: casting spells that caused physical and mental disfigurement, and breeding grotesque human forms. Martin Luther spoke against the practice of witchcraft in his time, and saw the Christian life as a battle against Satan.<sup>19</sup> At other times, Luther interprets various forms of mental instability as demon possession, as in this account from Luther's *Table Talks*:

In Dessau, there was a twelve-year-old boy like this: he gorged himself, defecated, and drooled. Luther suggested that he be suffocated, or taken to the Moldau River and drowned. Somebody asked, 'For what reason?' He [Luther] replied, "Because I think he's simply a mass of flesh [*massa carnis*] without a soul . . . the devil himself is in his soul."<sup>20</sup>

M. Miles regards Luther's attempts to deal with the milieu of his day as widely misunderstood, for many within the modern disability community express wonderment at Luther's references to disability in his writings.<sup>21</sup>

L. Kanner, in his *History of the Care and Study of the Mentally Retarded*, notes that John Calvin, at times, refers to persons with certain mental imbalances as possessed or created by Satan.<sup>22</sup> Like his fellow reformer Martin Luther, Calvin's conceptions of disability reflect the social coloring of his day. However, Calvin took the education of God's people seriously and doubtlessly would commend efforts to deepen understanding among God's people about an experience so basic to life as disability. At the heart of Calvin's teachings is his steadfast belief that "God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into [maturity] solely under the education of the church."<sup>23</sup>

Because religious practice manifests itself through story and relationship, these theological expressions of disability serve as vivid examples of how we are prone to mistake our cultural conditioning for "divine truth." In this sense, theological interpretations may reinforce the "disablement" of people by placing them in categories. For example, the amazing determination of people with disabilities is lionized as "heroic"; pitied ("the shut-ins"); or demonized (viz., the AIDS epidemic). All of these labels create difference and distance when people with disabilities hope only for a word of welcome into the community of faith.

### *From —ism to human experience*

Theological education has had experience over the past few decades with a variety of popular movements seeking both justice and community. These movements have brought new knowledge (both cognitive and affective) into theological education. In practice, the academy has become somewhat more guarded when called to embrace new forms of thought that appear likely as the next *-ism*. Women's rights, civil rights, gay rights, liberation theology—what's a seminary to do? Can all these interest groups be accommodated as disciplines within theological education, each with its own agenda and self-proclaimed place within the academy? The fact remains that disability is an equally valid expression of human experience. An interdisciplinary approach in studying theology and the human experience of disability is needed.

### **Disability as shared experience in theological reflection**

One of the values of religious community is the privilege to connect with others and grow spiritually through shared experiences. Common experiences knit people together, not just through language or ethnic identity, but through the shared aspects of human life. Disability offers this level of strength through

*Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum  
with Education about Disability*

connection with others. The experience of disability informs our shared understanding of what it means to be fully human.

Because people with disabilities permeate all social groups and geographies, the human experience of disability might be regarded as a particularly valuable lens for theological interpretation. Yet the stigma of difference remains as excluding among the community of faith as with society at large. Govig examines the expression of stigma within religious communities, and offers that people with disabilities become “teachers” to the able-bodied.<sup>24</sup> Govig emphasizes that as people interact with one another, differences may not go away, but they become less limiting.

### **Disability as multicultural expression in theological education**

Exposure to disability inquiry and “culture” broadens a theological school’s capacity to become more inclusive. In effect, theological students have opportunities for more informed contextual learning experiences—about the world, people with disabilities, and themselves.

Accommodating students with a variety of cultural backgrounds—among them, students with disabilities—is a practice that will continue to rise. Administrators at theological schools report their attempts to include students with disabilities in various ways. The statements below, also from the 2001 survey referenced above, provide insight into the “learning curve” still being experienced at schools of theology relative to including people with disabilities. Some degree of difference construction (“us, them”) is observable in the language:

“We deal with them on a case-by-case basis as students come to us for accommodations.”

“We have handicapped accessibility and scooters for them.”

“Our main building is inaccessible—though other areas such as chapel, social commons, and certain offices are accessible once inside.”

“Our student handbook includes a statement to contact the dean’s office for assistance if needed.”<sup>25</sup>

The survey reveals that institutions are not always attuned to connecting the dots between access (whether physical or programmatic) and the underrepresentation of students with disabilities enrolled in theological studies. One school reported most of its grounds as being below average in physical access in one section of the survey, while in a section inquiring about the school’s history of admitting students with disabilities, the respondent replied,



“We have had very few students with disabilities to apply during the past ten years.”

These responses come decades after seminaries began in earnest to deal with issues of silence, inequality, oppression, and missing viewpoints in relation to key movements (such as feminism, civil rights, and other cultural studies) that have traversed the plain of social discourse. Gosetti and Rusch identify this landscape as critical mass for educational leaders struggling to integrate new perspectives into the fabric of their institutions.<sup>26</sup>

### ***The global and local impact of multiculturalism***

Theological institutions are called upon with exponential force to produce ministers capable of addressing the complexities of modern life. Frequent questions emerge: “How shall we best teach our students to minister to the world?” and “What does our curriculum require in order to equip clergy to embrace all God’s creation?”

This trend is addressed at length by Alice Frazier Evans, Robert A. Evans, and David A. Roozen in their collection of essays, *The Globalization of Theological Education*.<sup>27</sup> Their work references the essential changes with which theological pedagogy must grapple in the increasingly multicultural world. The influence of global living bears a formative impact on graduate schools of theology.

In the book’s foreword, noted theologian Walter Brueggemann locates the impetus for change within theological education as inescapably linked to real life:

As is often the case, the defining pressures of theological education are not initiated by theological schools or generated by the church. They are rather emergents in the life of culture where the church and its theological schools find their rightful habitat . . . . This redefinition of social relationships, which touches every phase of public reality and which therefore intrudes into our most intimate sense of self, will inevitably be viewed as a mix of promise and threat.<sup>28</sup>

Brueggemann’s eloquent two-page foreword bears common language and observations with those on the “front” of religion and disability. The transformative possibilities of infusing education about human disability into the theological curricula bring the academy—and the faithful—into contextual relationships requiring committed dialogue and active engagement. This dialogue will also more deeply reveal the interrelationship of all people who are welcome to the table together.

### **Re-constructing disability as “normal” within theological**

## **interpretation**

DeShae Lott credits her disability with generating a channel for dialogue and positive change in classroom norms.<sup>29</sup> Lott draws out the critical element for transforming change within educational spaces: the relationships which occur among human beings. When people with disabilities interact with others in educational settings, a transformation of environment, culture, and curriculum will necessarily occur.

Able-bodied people often shun relationships with those who have disabilities because they exhibit traits considered undesirable or grotesque. For example, people with disabilities sometimes drool, talk with slurred speech, or even soil themselves. How may these relationships be negotiated when they are so difficult to talk about, let alone accept as normal?

Robert Bogdan and Steven J. Taylor describe these relationships as central in overcoming stigma and exclusion.<sup>30</sup> They suggest a view of “humanness” rather than disability. This interesting turn of phrase places disability as a natural part of human experience, rather than existing on its periphery. The “problem” surrounding people with disabilities is not the disability, but how we who are able-bodied see the people. The humanity of people with disabilities is just a little more obvious than with others. Until we arrive at a place in our relationship spaces that regards people with disabilities as valued and loved human beings, our theology and our ministry will be incomplete.

### ***Disability as human experience: capturing theological imagination The witness of Henri Nouwen***

Disability, then, is an ordinary part of the human experience. In theological terms, we often discover more about the “holy” through examining the ordinary, as demonstrated in the writings of noted Catholic theologian Father Henri Nouwen, who lived for many years in the L’Arche Daybreak disability community of Canada. This discovery is one of the gifts disability offers to theological inquiry. Its naturalness within life is almost universal, to the point that if one lives long enough, the experience of disability is ushered through the aging process alone.

Nouwen evidences what happens when the human experience of disability captures one’s imagination. He left the fame and influence he had acquired in academic life at some of America’s most prestigious universities to serve as pastor and caregiver in a L’Arche home for the profoundly mentally disabled in Toronto.

Nouwen’s autobiography, *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey*, describes his personal reflections during the one-year period leading up to his decision to join the L’Arche community.<sup>31</sup> L’Arche (meaning “the Ark” in French) is a community where people with developmental disabilities, such as Down’s Syndrome, live together and help one another. Many of the people who live in the 103 L’Arche communities worldwide have come out of institutions

after years of neglect. Nouwen was captivated by the love that was so evident among the residents, often describing how they ministered to him.

For Nouwen, the change came after meeting Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche. Vanier convinced Nouwen to stay for nine months in 1984 at the L'Arche community in Trosly, France. In 1985, Nouwen first began to identify his *home* as L'Arche. Belonging to L'Arche resolved a dilemma for Nouwen. He had long struggled with his desire to be around those who were successful academically. However, at some level, he feared that success would take away what he desired most: the intimacy of a loving community outside the spotlight. At L'Arche, Nouwen found the love he sought in the community of people who were treated as undesirable company by society.

Given the power of human story, the absence of disability within the corpus of theological disciplines is all the more striking. People with disabilities have certainly been present throughout the history of time. Why then has the theological method been historically silent about the subject of disability?

Perhaps it is that disability reminds us too vividly of our humanity. In theological perspective, humanity's creaturely position in relation to the divine has always represented a chasm of difference, where God, as pure Other, stands in contrast to human insufficiency. In Christian faith tradition, the humanity of Christ is evidenced throughout his life and ministry. Christ's essential humanity is nowhere more evident than at the moment of his physical brokenness on the cross. Ironically, it was at that point when the disciples turned away from such a candid presentation of difference and disablement.

Both Jewish and Christian traditions share the belief that "God created humankind in his image: male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).<sup>32</sup> The creation account does not deal directly with the human experience of disability, but it does effectively encompass the same terrain: humanity's creatureliness. In Genesis 3, we encounter not the lush state of Eden, but rather banishment from paradise. This new vista is an important first revelation of humanity's essential state of fragility, weakness, and severe limitations in the same world of our creation. This state of being is the common ground of life where the human body can now be broken, deteriorate, and return to the dust. The reality of human disability is thus introduced in the very fabric of our creation.

Walter Brueggemann notes that while God's human creatures broke his commandments, He allows them to live, even though physical limitations and death become a normal part of life on earth.<sup>33</sup> Thus our early religious texts—spotlighting the moment of human creation—provide the groundwork for theological reflection on the human experience of disability.

*Re-imagining people with disabilities in religious life: toward a*

*Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum  
with Education about Disability*

*cooperative image of “life together”<sup>34</sup>*

Edward Farley chronicles the struggles theological education has encountered in the face of modern history.<sup>35</sup> Historically, theology held the role as an agency of divine wisdom. Through such wisdom, nurtured through mystical and monastic treatments, theology offered the knower a means to become more personally inclined toward God. Farley asserts that theology has migrated toward the position of an academic discipline within the framework of higher education that imposes standards of rationality and empiricism.<sup>36</sup> The character of theology has become more “academic” and less personalized. One might deduce that treatments of human life, such as the experience of disability, might be of lesser interest within such a framework.

Craig Dykstra draws our attention to how such abstractions create gaps between the academy and people within congregations. We too easily regard seminaries as the repository of academia where clergy are trained to be the arbiters of theological knowledge. Dykstra calls for the re-imagining of theological practice. Rather than viewing theology as theoretical exercise, or acts done by an individual (the pastor, rabbi, or other clergy), Dykstra observes the need for cooperative theological practice:

. . . Practice is inherently cooperative, so the lens broadens to include numbers of people. And these people are not doing things to one another so much as they are doing things with one another. Though each may be engaged in different specific actions, they are not doing different things. Individual actions interrelate in such a way that they constitute engagement in a common practice.<sup>37</sup>

Dykstra employs a language used passionately among persons involved in the field of religion and disability. Harold Wilke often employs the cooperative image of ministry not just *to* but *with* people with disabilities.<sup>38</sup> This distinction personalizes theological practice as a cooperative, interrelated activity of the people of God. Infusing theological curriculum with education about the human experience of disability adds an important *qualitative* dimension that many often cite as missing or incomplete.

In this cooperative perspective, people with disabilities fill a needed and valuable role within the community of faith—they have a place at the table. Indeed, people with disabilities embody in human form a revelation of God that the able-bodied need to discover.

### **Body theology**

Human bodies are fragile. People with disabilities show us that sometimes our bodies can be messy. What business does theology have with the messiness of human life?

In his book *At the Will of the Body*, Arthur Frank notes how our bodies

become sources of revelation.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, human experience is nothing without the interpretive web of meanings we attach to bodily life. A growing number of scholars interpret what is meant by “body theology” (Deborah Creamer, 1995; Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendell, 1995; Mary Timothy Prokes, 1996; Lisa Isherwood, and Elizabeth Stuart, 1998). James B. Nelson says that it begins with experience:

Body theology begins with the concrete. It does not begin with certain doctrinal formulations, nor with certain portions of a creed, nor with a “problem” in the tradition (though all of these sources may well contribute insight later). Rather, body theology starts with the fleshly experience of life—with our hungers and our passions, our bodily aliveness and deadness, with the smell of coffee, with the homeless and hungry we see on our streets, with the warm touch of a friend, with bodies violated and torn apart in war, with the scent of honeysuckle or the soft sting of autumn air on the cheek, with bodies tortured and raped, with the bodyself making love with the beloved and lovemaking with the earth . . . .The task of body theology is critical reflection on our bodily experience as a fundamental realm of the experience of God.<sup>40</sup>

Elsewhere, Nelson notes:

I do not just have a body. I am a body. My whole sense of self is rooted in my body. It is the way I express myself with others in the world.<sup>41</sup>

Theologian Deborah Creamer, a person with a disability, nails down the issue:

There is no me, at least in this world, without my body. We can claim that our physical selves so not affect our thoughts or actions or reflections, but in truth, without our bodies we are nothing. We cannot speak or write. We cannot function. We do not exist.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Faith and embodiment***

The belief that human beings are created in the image of God inclines our imagination further. The wonder of our creation as *imago dei* encompasses the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental fabric of our creation. We are whole beings—imperfect, yes; broken, perhaps, but not fragmented. For Christians,

Christian faith is embodied faith, deriving from the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, and the Revelation that he lived out bodily . . . .The significance of embodiment is crucial to all theological inquiry . . . .Christian theology must grapple with the depth of

*Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum  
with Education about Disability*

meaning of human embodiment.<sup>43</sup>

The body is also employed within Christian tradition to interpret theological aspects of faith. Christ speaks at the Last Supper, foretelling the disablement of his own body: “Take, eat: this is my body that was broken for you.” The body becomes sacrament. Paul speaks of the Church, and it becomes the body of Christ: “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another” (Romans 12:5). This interconnected, interdependent statement is at once profoundly theological and intimately human.

People with disabilities offer unique theological perspectives, perhaps because they have to grapple theologically with their own bodies. Interestingly, female theologians offer some of the best perspectives about body theology—and disability. Creamer describes how her body has been “colonized” by theological misrepresentation:

Those of us with disabilities are often seen as physically broken, a concept that is easily connected to intellectual or spiritual brokenness. Able-bodied people often assume that people with disabilities are less intelligent, and religious institutions often forget that we are full members of God’s community. The language of brokenness needs to be reclaimed in such a way that it no longer oppresses us . . . . I consider my disability to be a central part of who I am; I cannot be whole without it.<sup>44</sup>

*Stigma* is a word often used to describe the perceptions that society associates with people who have disabilities. The Greek word *stigmata* connotes marks or cuts made into the flesh, and truly they were in New Testament times. Slaves and criminals were often branded to permanently display who (and whose) they were. Worthy of note, however, is the phenomenon associated with the spontaneous wounding of saints—stigmata—regarded as signs of holiness. Little wonder that theological treatments of the body deserve further attention.

## **Methodologies for infusing disability education into the theological curriculum**

### *Creating voice*

It is with the power of voice that we “reach out” and “call” others into relationship with us. This means of relating is inherent to the language of theological understanding.

Penny P. Gosetti and Edith A. Rusch clarify that in order for marginalized people to have a voice, educational institutions must rethink what they say and do.<sup>45</sup> This self-critique must start with an examination of ways to infuse the discourse throughout the institution’s lifeline: the curriculum.

Calls for curriculum enhancement conjure mixed reactions on the part of educational administrators. Within graduate schools of theology, the curriculum is already tight: the master's level divinity degree requires an average completion time of three years of full-time study. With approximately ninety hours of credit requirements, the theological curriculum is one of the most rigorous and full within academe.

### *Curriculum infusion*

This article does not propose an "add-on" approach as the solution for including disability education in theological studies, although opportunities to add meaningful coursework are invaluable. The academy has certainly covered all options with other specialty interest groups that call for curriculum revision on behalf of their causes. The baseline proposed here is curriculum *infusion*: interweaving knowledge about the human experience of disability throughout the existing curriculum.

The first order of benefit is through people with disabilities themselves, whose presence will usher generative discourse within the community. The second order is committing to a process that educates the faculty about how to interweave the subject of human disability into any course they might teach. Thirdly, the intentional infusion of educational content about disability throughout a school's curriculum has an equally generative impact. By employing a multifaceted approach for the infusion of knowledge about disability, the door opens for critical dialogue.

A professor of New Testament theology, for example, might address the meaning of why the friends of a paralyzed man (Luke 5: 17-19) loved him so much that failing to gain access to a building, ripped off the roof so they could lower the man inside to worship alongside them. In the course on pastoral ministry, one might speak about how people with disabilities can also minister to others rather than simply being the objects of care.

Infusing disability education should include some level of elaboration about its theological and practical value within the curriculum. Beginning points for discovery might include:

The school clearly articulates to faculty, trustees, and others within the community why the human experience of disability is needed within the educational process.

The community understands that committing to the process of infusing knowledge about disability involves time, dialogue, and reflection.

The parallel aspects of a school's explicit curriculum are beginning to receive greater attention in theological education. The "implicit curriculum" encompasses the tacit, nonverbal, unspoken aspects of the seminary curricu-



*Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum  
with Education about Disability*

lum. Perhaps more compelling is the “null curriculum,” which refers to neglected subjects such as disability studies. From the null curriculum—the topics we do not teach about—students gain the impression that these untaught elements are not important to their educational experiences nor to our society. What a school fails to consider a part of its distinctive *ethos* (its curriculum) often bears equal influence as to what it intentionally includes.<sup>46</sup>

***Curriculum examination***

Curriculum design functions to produce desired learning outcomes. Infusing disability education into the curriculum is a process that creates content learning with contextual applications. In the theological setting, the desired goal is to expose persons who are called by God to an affective awareness of human experience beyond content.

For example, a course might include content about various kinds of disabilities. Exposure to information about the human experience of deafness, for example, opens a first door to awareness. The lecture(s) are further informed when a guest minister, who is deaf, attends the class and shares his personal experiences with the students.

During the week, that minister leads the campus chapel service and speaks on “Growing Up Deaf and Hearing the Story of Faith.”<sup>47</sup> The sign language interpreter “reverse interprets” (speaks) the message so that the “hearing” persons in the audience can understand the sermon. That weekend, the students attend the minister’s congregation (most of whose members are deaf) and experience a new kind of worship environment. During class Monday, the students synthesize all they have learned in the process. Their learning is thus contextualized, shaping a clearer and more informed theological understanding of the human experience of disability.

Leroy Ford describes this dimension as “affective” learning and highly recommends it for theological education. In his book, *A Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education*, he cites affective educational goals for learners as “one of the most neglected parts of curriculum design in theological education.”<sup>48</sup> Ford insightfully notes that cognitive goals are specific and focal in nature, whereas affective goals permeate all the curricula:

When designers specify goals related to attitudes and values, they discover that many apply equally well to multiple facets of an institution’s curriculum plan.<sup>49</sup>

Institutions tend to prefer cognitive goals because they are more concrete and easier to measure and employ within learning structures. Affective goals require greater tolerance of ambiguity and a willingness to see these goals take effect over longer periods of time.

### ***Teaching methodologies***

Teaching methodologies that employ discursive elements are drawing increased attention. (Here, “discursive” refers to examining not only the content of what is taught, but also the language elements that convey them.) For example, the phrases *stroke victim* and *person who has had a stroke* contain roughly the same content. However, the meanings and images assigned to the two are strikingly different. Likewise, the scripture phrase, “Hear now the word of the Lord” would be interpreted by a deaf person with theological nuances unavailable to those who hear.

Institutions committed to the process of curriculum infusion want more than knowledge content. They will grapple with the human experience of disability: theologically, practically, and “affectively.”

*Collaborative symposia and workshops* provide seminary faculty, administrators, and people with disabilities the opportunity to “flesh out” the issues. Cognitive concepts become richer in the context of dialogue and relationships. The participants are able to teach themselves and one another, and synthesize discrete elements into refined understandings with solid theological foundations.

*Courses for students* about the human experience of disability offer both faculty and students venues for discursive learning.

*Research scholarships and graduate assistantships* centered around the human experience of disability signal the school’s intent to enhance the field of theological inquiry.

*Continuing and distance education:* An increasing number of seminaries provide educational opportunities for clergy already in the field. Since most clergy have never been exposed to educational content about the human experience of disability, its addition to continuing education is particularly valuable. As society continues to age and people with disabilities become more active in religious communities, this educational venue will become increasingly relevant to alumni.

### ***Evaluation of new curriculum elements employed***

Graduate theological schools will benefit from critically evaluating how the elements of disability education inform the curriculum. The institution should have a plan for its evaluation, and employ it both empirically and discursively. Anecdotal feedback (from faculty, students, staff, and others) should be weighed alongside more standardized evaluations.

*Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum  
with Education about Disability*

***The need for critical research and dialogue***

I have granted this section the “last word.” Advancing theological understanding of the human experience of disability requires dedication to a great many elements in the educational milieu. Since Michael Oliver’s seminal work, *The Politics of Disablement*, was released in 1990, disability research has been in a welcomed state of transformation. Since then, disability researchers (both those with disabilities and their non-disabled peers) have launched a crusade to radically alter how disability research is produced.<sup>50</sup>

Most of the contributions, to our knowledge, about human disability have come from the “secular” fields of study: sociology, anthropology, and the physical sciences. As a minister and theologian, this author remains baffled, on the one hand, and energized on the other. The dimensions of faith and theology may join in discovery of what, for a large number of human beings, is a natural part of life. Theological inquiry about the human experience will add to the symphony of voices already attuned to this task.

The academy realizes that what is taught in our schools manifests itself in the congregation. Teaching future ministers about the human experience of disability presupposes that the content is in our curricula—not just in scant measure, but in well thought and sustained portions. Education about the human experience of disability deserves to be welcomed into the theological curriculum. Clergy students may then transfer that knowledge and welcome people with disabilities (and their families) to their congregations, creating a place for all people around the table of faith.

**Conclusion**

People with disabilities desire to celebrate the rights and obligations of their faith just like everyone else. The connection is just being made that the absence of education about disability at the seminary level has a limiting effect on the participation of people with disabilities in congregations.

Infusing disability education into the graduate theological curriculum is a great new awareness in our thinking, faith, and knowledge of God. Perhaps the most beautiful (and largely undiscovered) country is the emerging landscape where people with disabilities offer theological education new revelation about what it means to be the people of God.

The kingdom of God is like a man who prepares a great banquet, and when the usual list of guests cannot attend, the summons is issued: go find those who are made to reside outside the gate: the blind, the lame, those with disabilities . . . so that the kingdom of God may be made manifest.<sup>51</sup>

Robert C. Anderson is president of the Center for Religion and Disability in Birmingham, Alabama. Anderson's career spans fourteen years in the field of religion and disability. He has served as an educator, researcher, practitioner, conference speaker, and consultant for a wide variety of religious and community organizations. His experience includes work with more than 300 congregations locally, regionally, and nationally. He has served as an associate editor of the national quarterly, the *Journal of Religion in Disability and Rehabilitation*. His most recent book is the edited volume, *Graduate Theological Education and the Human Experience of Disability* (Haworth Press), for release in winter 2003. Anderson's research focuses on empowering the religious community to include people with disabilities.

#### ENDNOTES

1. *Survey of Theological Education and People with Disabilities*, Robert C. Anderson and W. Daniel Blair, principal researchers (Birmingham: Center for Religion and Disability, Inc., 2001). Beeson Divinity School (Samford University) also provided logistical and other support of this survey.
2. In addition to the *Survey of Theological Education and People with Disabilities* (2001), note the published survey of fourteen United Church of Christ-affiliated seminaries by Laura-Jean Gilbert, "Acceptance and Accommodation of Students with Disabilities in Graduate Schools of Theological Education: A Study of the Seminaries Directly Affiliated with or Historically Related to the United Church of Christ," *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health*, Volume 5, Number 4 (2001): 61-91.
3. Disability statistics are taken from the following two sources: Worldwide statistics: "World Health Report 1999" (Geneva: World Health Organization). U.S. disability statistics: Various estimates place the number of people with disabilities between 35 and 50 million. Cf. Mitchell P. LaPlante, "How Many Americans Have a Disability?" *Disability Statistics Abstract* Number 5, June 1992 (U.S. Department of Education and National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research).
4. "Theological Education: The Road Less Traveled," *Progressions: A Lilly Endowment Occasional Report*, ed. Susan O. O'Conner, Volume 4, Issue 2, April 1992.
5. *Survey of Theological Education and People with Disabilities*, *op cit*.
6. *Ibid*.
7. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Spivak Reader*, eds. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLain (New York: Routledge Press, 1996).
8. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press).
9. Deborah Creamer, "Finding God in Our Bodies: Theology from the Perspective of People with Disabilities, Part I," *Journal of Religion in Disability and Rehabilitation*, Volume 2, Number 1, 1995: 28-29.
10. Harold H. Wilke, "Access to Professional Education," *Theological Education*, Volume 15, Autumn 1978: 31.
11. Stewart D. Govig, *In the Shadow of Our Steeples: Pastoral Presence for Families Coping with Mental Illness* (New York: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 1999).
12. Bill J. Johnston, "Educational Administration in the Postmodern Age" in *Postmodern School Leadership: Meeting the Crisis in Educational Administration*, ed. S.J. Maxcy (Connecticut: Praeger Press, 1993), 115-131.

*Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum  
with Education about Disability*

13. Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).
14. Brett Webb-Mitchell provides a concise history of theology and the place of people with disabilities in his book *Unexpected Guests: Welcoming People with Disabilities into the Church* (New York: Crossroad Publishers, 1994).
15. Penny P. Gosetti and Edith A. Rusch, "Diversity and Equity in Educational Leadership: Missing in Theory and in Action," 4. Paper presented at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. ERIC Document 374-574.
16. For a broader discussion of how the deaf community has struggled with St. Augustine's words on the deaf and faith, see Brenda Jo Brueggemann, "Deafness, Literacy, Rhetoric: Legacies of Language and Communication" in *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture*, eds. J.C. Wilson and C. Lewiecki-Wilson., 115-134. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001). See also Margaret Winzer, *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration* (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 22.
17. *How You Gonna Get to Heaven if You Can't Talk to Jesus? On Depathologizing Deafness*, ed. James Woodward (Silver Spring: Terrance J. Publishers, 1982).
18. "Answer to the Pelagians, II: Answer to Julian: III, 4, 10," 344. *Part I Books, Volume 24 in The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, *American Heritage Institute Series* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1998).
19. For an example of how Luther's thought reflected a belief in the existence of witchcraft, see the following citation: *Luther's Works, Volume 54: Table Talk*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, trans. Theodore Tappert, Page 298, Number 3953 (Dated August 8, 1538). (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).
20. *Ibid.*, 396-397, Number 5207 (dated between September 2 and 17, 1540).
21. M. Miles, "Martin Luther and Childhood Disability in 16th Century Germany: What Did He Write? What Did He Say?" *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health*. Volume 5, Number 4, 2001: 5-36.
22. L. Kanner, *A History of the Care and Study of the Mentally Retarded* (Springfield: Thomas Publishing, 1964).
23. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.5.
24. Stewart D. Govig, *Strong at the Broken Places: Persons with Disabilities and the Church* (Louisville: John Knox/Westminster Press, 1989).
25. *Survey of Theological Education and People with Disabilities*, op cit.
26. Gosetti and Rusch, 1-3.
27. *The Globalization of Theological Education*, eds. Alice Frazier Evans, Robert A. Evans, and David A. Roozen (New York: Orbis Books, 1993).
28. *Ibid.*, xi.
29. DeShae Lott, "Going to Class with (Going to Clash with?) the Disabled Person: Educators, Students, and Their Spoken and Unspoken Negotiations" in *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture*, eds. J.C. Wilson and C. Lewiecki-Wilson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 135-153.
30. Robert Bogdan and Steven J. Taylor, "Relationships with Severely Disabled People: The Social Construction of Humanness" in *Perspectives on Disability*, ed. Mark Nagler, Second Edition (Palo Alto: Health Markets Research, 1993), 97-108.

31. Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Road To Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey* (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1990).
32. In Jewish and Christian traditions, the first story of creation is told in Genesis 1:1-2:4. This passage references the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
33. Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation Commentary: Genesis* (Louisville: John Knox/Westminster Press, 1982), 30-31.
34. The theological imagination of "life together" was first and best referenced by noted German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together*, whose treatise calls for a new way of being the people of faith.
35. Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).
36. Edward Farley, *Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).
37. Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice" in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, eds. Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley (Louisville: John Knox/Westminster Press, 1991), 35-66.
38. Harold H. Wilke, *Creating the Caring Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980).
39. Arthur Frank, *At the Will of the Body* (New York: Mariner Press, 1992).
40. James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 42-43.
41. *Ibid.*, 128.
42. Creamer, 71.
43. Mary Timothy Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Press, 1996), 25.
44. Creamer, 83.
45. Gosetti and Rusch, 10.
46. E.W. Eisner, "Creative Education in American Schools Today," *Educational Horizons*, 63 (Special Issue, 1985): 10-15.
47. This story of "Growing Up Deaf and Hearing the Gospel" is credited to Angela and Daniel Blair, who have on many occasions offered their testimony of faith to congregations and seminary faculty.
48. Leroy Ford, *A Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education: A Learning Outcomes Focus* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991).
49. *Ibid.*, 108.
50. Michael Oliver, "Changing the Social Relations of Research Production?" in *Disability, Handicap, and Society*, Volume 7, Number 2, 1992: 101-114.
51. Luke 14: 16-24, paraphrased. The meaning and implications of this parable of the Great Banquet is examined at length in Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Unexpected Guests*, op cit.



# Judicatory-Based Theological Education

*Lance R. Barker and B. Edmon Martin*

*ABSTRACT: Reporting on a research project funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., the article outlines an eighteen-month study of locally or regionally based theological education programs that prepare persons for various forms of authorized ministry. While these programs have been a part of the history of theological education in North America, they reflect a resurgence of interest and innovation in models of study and formation proximate and responsive to particular ecclesial contexts. Based on their research, the authors argue for the inclusion of these programs in a more comprehensive understanding of theological education and, consequently, for continued reflective discussion about their structure and role.*

## Background

In the history of North American theological education, the theological school has become the primary location for churches in the Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran, and Methodist traditions to prepare persons for various forms of legitimated or authorized ministry. As denominations became more organizationally structured during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, denominational actions tended to shape standards for ministerial preparation and practice. By the mid-twentieth century, standards were firmly linked to concerns for a learned ministry and, by extension, to the completion of a degree in theology. Concurrent with this development, accrediting bodies, such as The Association of Theological Schools, established criteria for professional theological education, thus assuring the central role of the graduate theological school in the preparation and authorization for ministry among the mainline denominations.

Throughout the history of theological education, however, a wider range of educational options for theological study has continued to prepare ecclesial leadership. Most recently, these programs have manifested themselves in a variety of institutional forms: theological education by extension, study centers, mentored study, seminary campus extension programs, and special focus institutes. Some are of recent innovation while others reflect options for ministry preparation, functioning long before the modern seminary and particular professional academic degrees. One education model with a long history in American theological education that attracts a resurgence of interest is the denominational study program primarily initiated, designed, and carried out within the bounds of a local or regional judicatory or at an approved location. Such programs provide curricular resources that allow one to complete courses of study that lead to some form of authorized ministry: certified, commissioned, licensed, or ordained.



This article contains findings of eighteen months of exploratory research into models of education for ministry—alternative to professional degree programs of theological schools—that prepare persons for various forms of commissioned, licensed, ordained, or otherwise legitimated ministry. The alternative programs at the core of the research were in the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, the United Church of Canada, and the United Methodist Church. However, a wider range of programs exists in several denominations and in the contexts of various institutes and study centers. Our research focus centers on the above denominations because of (1) their shared histories in developing theological schools and their inclusion of the M.Div. (or B.D.) degree in authorizing processes to certify persons for ordination and (2) their more recent recovery of alternative routes to authorized ministries through the development and support of special study programs and projects.

The goals of the study were: (1) to catalogue a significant number of those programs; (2) to seek information about them from their leaders and constituencies through a variety of research means; (3) to develop profiles of how some of the programs function; (4) to assess outcomes and (5) to consult with key parties involved in various forms of theological education to consider implications of the project's findings.

Currently, we see a resurgence of interest in the role(s) of these programs not only as a stopgap measure for staffing church ministries, but also as an effort to enrich the fabric of formal theological education and ministerial practice. Our assessment is that the existence and activities of these programs will continue to be a resource for people who see themselves called into ministry—often out of life experiences that do not lend themselves to M.Div. study at a theological school. These denominational judicatory-based theological study programs will continue to be a part of continuing conversations of how pastoral leadership is to be provided for a variety of settings where full-time, seminary-trained leadership is not feasible. Those settings will most likely be small, sometimes financially stressed, often geographically isolated congregations, or congregations developed by new ethnic communities.

### **Research stages and resources**

The research procedure entailed six stages. A project advisory committee met at the midpoint and end of the research stages. Composed of program directors, students, and graduates of the judicatory programs; seminary personnel; and representatives of the denominations, the advisory group provided valuable advice on the focus and methods of the research and on preliminary interpretations of the findings of the project.

The first stage aimed to identify as many of these programs as possible and to solicit basic information about them. A survey instrument was distributed

to every Evangelical Lutheran Church in America synod, United Methodist conference, Presbyterian (USA) presbytery, United Church of Christ conference, and Episcopal diocese. Additional survey questionnaires were sent to Disciples of Christ regional offices and to officials in the United Church of Canada where we were aware of that denomination's programs, particularly, for native or aboriginal peoples. The questionnaire asked for self-definition of the programs and key information about governance, program design, current students, graduates, and general history.

Stage two included structured telephone interviews with fifty-two persons who constituted a pool of program directors, students, graduates, founders, instructors, and members of governing boards selected from thirteen representative programs. The seven program sites were selected using five criteria: (1) length of existence (at least five years); (2) number of graduates or students having completed most of their program of study; (3) denomination; (4) geography; and (5) ethnic or minority programs.

Stage three involved three-day visits to seven program sites to attend an educational event. This gave us opportunity to encounter program pedagogical styles and content and to converse with students, faculty, and other key people.

Stage four included three-day visits to congregations where persons involved in the denominationally based theological education programs were serving. The intent of this stage was less a formal congregational study and more an effort to assess the ways the judicatory-based education program and the pastoral leadership produced are perceived. This stage offered perspective on a particular church's ministry, the role of its pastoral leader, and the congregation's presence within its wider social, cultural, and geographic milieu.

In stage five, 195 questionnaires were sent to graduates or people with substantial study completed in the seven sites as well as to the other six locations interviewed by telephone in stage one. Our survey, with a response rate of thirty-five percent, solicited information on such matters as motivation, relationship to home church, prior education, satisfaction with program, authorization outcome, placement and service, relation to other clergy, continuing education needs, and interest in seminary.

Stage six featured public discussion of the project's initial findings. Two major consultations were held for program directors, faculty or teachers, students or graduates, denominational officials, and interested parties from theological schools. The goals of these consultations were not only to present findings but to gain clarity on what was being reported and interpreted.

### **Program sites**

While we do not base the findings of our research solely on the site visits, the stories generated from these sites are the sources of the central themes that

shape discussion of the significance of judicatory-based theological education programs. Unfortunately, because of limited space, the following descriptions cannot tell the full story of the people and congregations involved in each of the following sites.

***Commissioned Lay Pastor Program: Holston Presbytery***

Holston (Tennessee) Presbytery established its initial Lay Preacher Program in 1986. This was modeled after a program operative in neighboring Abingdon (Virginia) Presbytery that had been in operation since the 1960s. The two presbyteries now cooperate in a shared program structure. The impetus for the founding of the Holston Presbytery program included three factors: (1) Nearly half of the presbytery's congregations numbered less than 100 members. Attempts to form yoked or cooperative parishes were limited by the geographic remoteness of congregations, the inability to develop practical size clusters that would work, and the financial viability of congregational resources even in cooperative contexts. (2) A history of elders (ordained lay leaders in the Presbyterian polity) preaching and providing other services led to some problems of individuals becoming *de facto* pastors in congregations and choosing to effectively function outside the bounds of Presbyterian polity and doctrine. Difficulties also emerged for congregations and the presbytery through non-Presbyterian pastors, often untrained and unfamiliar with Presbyterian order, providing pastoral and theological leadership. (3) In 1985, a new presbytery executive arrived who sensed the need to provide more training and a more formalized education process to enhance the roles and practices for elders as lay leaders in the presbytery. In 1991, a new associate executive was given a portfolio that included support and further development of a commissioned lay pastor program.

During this period of time, the Presbyterian Church (USA) was developing new and more clearly identified guidelines for the preparation of Commissioned Lay Pastors (CLP), including courses in Bible, the denomination's theology and understanding of the sacraments, polity, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, and Christian education. In the case of Holston Presbytery, the program consists of several levels of preparation. The first level includes four courses of six to eight weeks in length, meeting weekly for two to three-hour periods. Another level includes two years experience in filling pulpits in the presbytery. The final level requires attending continuing education events that include presbytery-sponsored retreats; a series of courses dealing with such topics as pre-baptismal and pre-marriage counseling, Christian education, evangelism, session moderating skills, and the like; and an event on sexual misconduct. Yearly attendance at a continuing education event of no less than ten contact hours is required for yearly recertification as a CLP.

Faculty for the program is drawn from area colleges and from the roster of clergy in the presbytery. The regional Presbyterian seminaries have not been a major source of faculty support.

Administration of the CLP program is under the guidance of the Commissioned Lay Pastor Subcommittee of the presbytery's Committee on Ministry. This subcommittee admits persons to the program of study, examines them, and finally, recommends action to the Committee on Ministry for referral to Presbytery.

At the present time, Holston Presbytery has twenty-five Commissioned Lay Pastors. A majority of these serve as either Sunday preachers or temporary supplies. These individuals not only provide qualified pulpit services, but they also constitute a body of theologically trained leaders for the presbytery.

***Course of Study: Perkins School of Theology,  
The United Methodist Church***

The Course of Study (COS) is a denomination-wide program administered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. COS is the oldest form of formal theological education in the United Methodist Church. Historically, it has been a correspondence and mentored study program that prepared candidates for the orders of that denomination before attending seminaries became a norm. It now is a more structured and institutionally based program. Currently, there are about 2,500 students in course of study programs. In July 1999, Perkins had about 200 students enrolled. All serve as local pastors.

Course of Study is carried out through seven of the seminaries of the United Methodist Church. In addition, there are ten extension centers related to particular seminaries. Each COS operates with a curriculum prescribed by the Board of Higher Education and Ministry. The current COS represents a particular ministerial strategy of the United Methodist Church. Persons eligible for COS are individuals already licensed to be local pastors who have attended a "local pastor's school." The denominational judicatory does all admissions screening. A college degree is not required for COS enrollment, though one must have completed licensing school. The basic COS curriculum includes twenty courses of twenty contact hours, each to be taken over a five-year period. Completion of this work qualifies one for a continuing position as a local pastor. In addition with a college degree—or in some cases, sixty hours of college credit—there are options to participate in a later advanced course of study that leads to full conference membership and ordination to elder's orders.

Each seminary hosting COS allows for additional M.Div. course work, when combined with COS study, to be counted toward the M.Div. degree. The Board of Higher Education prescribes a uniform set of contents, contact hours, and expected educational outcomes for each course. Each COS site, however, designs a program model and residency period to meet the denominational requirements.

Perkins School of Theology provides an illustration of this denomination-wide judicatory-based theological education program. The Perkins program is

### *Judicatory-Based Theological Education*

a four week on-campus program at Southern Methodist University. Students take four courses, each preceded by extensive reading and preparation of papers assigned a year in advance. Students work on the assignments during the year and send their written work in advance to the teacher who evaluates it prior to their arrival at the campus. This allows for the professor to gear on-campus work to assessed needs of students. The Perkins program is particularly sensitive to ethnic theological education. Along with two other schools, Perkins has developed a Spanish language faculty to serve a growing Hispanic constituency. In addition, the Perkins program has special skills tracks for special groups such as Native Americans.

The Perkins COS selects and develops its own faculty. Indeed, guidelines established by the UMC Board of Higher Education suggest that instructors should include active pastors within a conference rather than relying totally on teachers from colleges and seminaries. Those faculty members include pastors (some with advanced degrees), a number of individuals from area colleges, and a few Perkins faculty.

#### ***Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Center***

Located in Beausejour, Manitoba, Canada, the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Center was founded in the mid-1980s in response to the educational needs of aboriginal peoples. Prior to the founding of the Center, which was named after a beloved and visionary educator, most aboriginal people seeking ordination in the United Church of Canada attended the Cook School in Arizona. Some church leaders were critical of this program, noting that when aboriginal students engaged in a program of study removed from their home contexts, they seemed to be less able to relate to their own communities. The Dr. Jesse Saulteaux Resource Center (DJSRC) was established to provide an alternative model of education for ministry, one that would allow for specialized study, but at the same time, affirm the place of students as continuing members of their home communities. The United Church of Canada now recognizes the DJSRC as a location for ministerial authorization. In several ways, DJSRC is representative of other contextually based ministry education programs emerging in the United Church of Canada, namely, the *In Community Program for Ordination* (ICPO) based in Winnipeg. Currently, there are seventeen students enrolled in the DJSRC program.

The basic theological education model of the DJSRC includes a series of forty-five residential week-long units held at the Center. The program is carried out over a period of five years, though a student may extend that period. Each unit entails at least twenty hours of structured learning that consists of the following components: biblical study, theological reflection (including aboriginal teachings), practice of ministry, history, education, and community development. The DJSRC offers a certificate, though a student who completes additional work at the University of Winnipeg School of Theology is eligible to be awarded a bachelor of theology degree.

Students are accepted for the program and supported in their study in ways particular to aboriginal practice. If people have been recognized and affirmed in their aboriginal communities, then they can be admitted to study. The staff of DJSRC does further assessment of students whose educational levels range from grade five reading capacity to persons possessing college degrees. Each student has a vision keeper who provides support at home. During periods at home and while attending the residencies at DJSRC, students keep journals that become the subject matter of regular meetings with DJSRC staff.

During each residency course week, the leadership team includes an aboriginal elder whose role is to honor aboriginal teachings. In addition, there is another faculty member selected because of expertise in subject matters as well as sensitivity to aboriginal ways. The basic pedagogical style is the learning circle with the aboriginal elder and the other faculty member guiding discussion, making presentations, and attending to a variety of personal issues members bring to the circle.

***Lay Ministry Program: New York conference,  
United Church of Christ—Northeast Region, Disciples of Christ***

The Lay Ministry Program (LMP) is a four-year program of study under the guidance of a mentor that includes participation in two weekend retreats each of the four years; attendance at a selected number of related workshops of a student's own choosing; and completion, under the guidance of the mentor, of four levels of readings (for an equivalent of twenty-eight books read). The program allows the student to focus on areas of specialty, such as worship and preaching, licensed ministry, interim ministry, Christian education, pastoral care, campus ministry, lay leadership, arts in the church, ministry in the workplace, and other areas of service as they may arise.

Because of the diverse educational foci, course and workshop options in multiple venues, requirements for developing self-directed study, and student interests, the LMP requires a complex monitoring of student admissions, completion of requirements, and final placement or recognition in some form of ministry. Because of this, the mentor is the key figure in guiding a student through the intricacies of the course of study. The twice-yearly retreats are significant gathering points and moments for participants in the lay ministry program. These retreats each feature a particular topic approached through lectures, discussions, and workshops. Topics range from issues in biblical study, to approaches to preaching, to topics in pastoral counseling. Interspersed throughout the experience of the retreat are opportunities for sharing stories, comparing approaches to meet the program curricular requirements, and worshipping.

A person enters the program upon the recommendation of a local church governing board to the Committee on Ministry of the U.C.C. association or comparable Disciples regional body. No academic credentials are required,



though a majority of students have substantial college study background. Following acceptance by the Committee on Ministry, the person is enrolled in the program of study as a lay minister. Upon completing the program, one may become a recognized lay minister by the U.C.C. Conference or the appropriate Disciples of Christ body. During the period of study, a person may preach and lead worship, and, in some cases, serve as lay pastor of a church.

At the time our research was initiated with the LMP, there were thirty current students and fifteen graduates serving in one form or another of recognized ministry. In addition, five of the graduates had enrolled in a graduate theological school.

***Mutual Baptismal Ministry Program,  
Diocese of Northern Michigan, the Episcopal Church***

The program has a history that reaches back to the 1970s when officials in the Diocese of Northern Michigan began to identify that the “small church” was becoming the strategic issue for the future of the diocese. Two issues seemed primary—one was the basic situation of small size and economy of resources for a significant number of diocesan congregations that limited their mission and ability to support full- or part-time priests, and the second was the actual functioning (or over-functioning) of priests in contexts where dependency on their leadership diminished the role of the laity. The diocese was not alone in its concerns. In other dioceses, the concepts and practices of “total” or “mutual” ministry were shaping new approaches to develop local church ministry.

Among the several manifestations of total or mutual ministry there are some commonalities. It is highly indigenous. It recognizes the radical locality of a congregation’s ministry. Its leadership is carried out within an apostolic vision of diocesan support and communion, and with the commitment that congregations should be empowered to have a full sacramental ministry. Thus, an education or empowerment model was necessary to fulfill the theological conviction and the practical demands of ministry leadership in a congregation. A full sacramental theology would involve regular celebration of the Eucharist and a recognition that the ministry of the baptized is at the heart of any congregation’s life and structure.

Structural changes were made in policies and polity of the Diocese of Northern Michigan to facilitate this process. First, the bishop or diocesan representatives meet with a congregation’s vestry to help the congregation refocus its ministry and ministerial practices. The refocusing is directed to the development of a local ministry of the baptized who would assume a shared ministry on behalf of the congregation. Such ministry would include local priests, deacons, stewardship coordinators, education coordinators, ecumenical coordinators, preachers, etc.

If the vestry so chooses, the matter is taken to the whole congregation. Upon agreement, a consultant or missionary employed by the diocese, begins



taking the congregation through a discovery process with the vestry and other leaders. A series of meetings is held to discern who would be invited to the positions of presbyter (priest), deacon, stewardship coordinator, Christian educator, and so on. At least two persons are invited for each position so that no one person would be looked upon as “the priest” or “the deacon.” These individuals become a covenant group that meets twice a month for three to four-hour sessions for eighteen to twenty-four months. They follow a formation curriculum and engage in diocesan-wide workshops. The diocesan missionary facilitates the curriculum, which consists of eleven units ranging from two to four three-hour sessions per unit. The missionary is a seminary-trained, but not necessarily ordained, person. The session topics range from studies of diaconal, priestly, and apostolic ministries to an examination of the history, liturgy and program of the Episcopal Church. Other studies include biblical and theological subjects, focusing on the origins of the Scriptures and the story of Jesus, and practical topics such as ways to increase effectiveness in groups.

Upon completing the curriculum, the covenant group is examined as a team by the diocese’s Commission of Ministry. The whole team, then, if approved, is commissioned as a ministry support team at a service that affirms the ministry of the whole congregation. Members of the team are duly ordained or licensed, as their ministry requires. The term “ministry support team” is significant. The goal of the team is not to replace a priest in charge, but to support the baptismal ministry of the whole congregation. Periodically, the discernment process repeats itself and new covenant groups are formed and ministry support teams developed.

***Partners in Ministry, Nebraska Synod,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America***

Originated in 1993, the Partners in Ministry Program was developed to meet ministry staffing needs within the rural geography of Nebraska. The geography is expansive and contains numerous small congregations—some of which lack accessibility to pastoral services for a number of demographic, economic, and geographic reasons. A key issue for the synod is attracting clergy to serve in what are perceived to be isolated settings.

The lack of available clergy deeply influenced an original vision of the program to prepare and support persons to augment the ministry of the local congregation. The role and practice of the program, however, has grown to exceed the original vision. As one of our informants noted, there are two distinct needs being met: one is to augment the ministry of the pastor or local congregation; the other is to provide interim ministry and, in some cases, to provide full-time pastoral support for a congregation. In the terminology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “the program serves to authorize and legitimate synodically authorized ministries.”

## *Judicatory-Based Theological Education*

The entry into the Parish Ministry Associate (PMA) study is by petition of an applicant who is endorsed by a local church council and pastor. The key factor in discerning a person's readiness for study is that the person demonstrates spiritual maturity and leadership skills. Upon approval, the applicant begins a three-year course of study that involves six required core courses and three pre-approved electives. The courses generally are carried out in regional cell groups. The student works with a supervisor who is assigned by the bishop to oversee a student's or graduate's course of study and ministry. Secondly, there is a facilitator of the cell group who organizes group sessions and helps the student process course materials such as the *SELECT* video courses and lectures prepared by the Division for Ministry, ELCA. Periodic retreats provide opportunities for faculty from Lutheran seminaries to support the course process. Finally, a student selects a mentoring minister who serves as a sounding board and support person for the student. Upon completing the course of study and being appropriately interviewed by synod officials, the bishop certifies the individual to engage in ministry with the requirement that twelve contact hours per year of continuing education be completed to retain certification.

Upon completion of certification, the person is eligible to be assigned by the bishop to a ministry, which may include service in part- or full-time roles. PMAs serve in ministries that range from "side-by-side" service with a pastor to social justice ministry to serving as a pastor or several pastors in a team, and to other innovations the program seems to have spawned.

### ***SCOPE: Southern Conference, United Church of Christ***

The Southern Conference Ordination Preparation Education (SCOPE) program was started in 1989. By intent, the program is not oriented toward preparing lay ministers. The purpose of the program is to provide a formal educational supplement to the theological education preparation for persons seeking ordination in the United Church of Christ. At its founding, the program was envisioned to be temporary. Documents outlining the program claim that it is not a degree program, that there will be a diminishing need for the program, and that the preferred route to ordination will continue to be the M.Div. degree.

To be eligible for the program, an applicant must be a member of a U.C.C. church and serving in a pastoral role within it, have a high school diploma or its equivalent, be at least thirty years of age, and be approved by the Church and Ministry Commission of the Conference. The curriculum for the program involves these components: an individualized learning contract, the utilization of academic courses taken independently at a college or university, and a required bibliography to be read. The independently designed course of study for each student is structured in four units, each requiring 125 contact hours in course work and 100 hours in supervised ministry practice. Unit 1 addresses the practice of ministry in the UCC; Unit 2 focuses on communication skills in

the practice of ministry; Unit 3 is advanced study in the Holy Scriptures; and Unit 4 is advanced study in history and theology of the church. The student has a maximum of seven years to complete the course of study.

In the original formation of SCOPE, courses could be taken in a cohort group at Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Certain impracticalities of that arrangement led to other institutional options. Shaw University has become the academic site where most students complete their academic courses. Shaw has an associate arts degree in theology and cooperates with SCOPE in providing coursework in U.C.C. history and polity. Moreover, most students at Shaw are bi-vocational as are the SCOPE students.

### **Program dimensions**

The variety of denominational judicatory theological study programs may be differentiated in a number of ways: their number, their diversity, their founding motivation, and their relationship to graduate theological education. In the following descriptive sections, we trust that brevity, which is necessary, will not detract from what we believe are some common themes that articulate essential characteristics of the programs.

#### ***Number of programs***

While our most intensive study of judicatory-based theological education programs was of the seven sites, the most significant and surprising discovery for us has been the ubiquity of these programs. Within the denominations that we surveyed, there are programs across the country aimed at meeting the leadership needs of small churches—rural and urban. Our initial mailing identified 158 different programs in the six denominations serving as the focus for this study. From our query of these, we received 104 completed responses, some of which noted more than one program entity. While some of those programs have existed for a long time, most of them have come into existence in the past fifteen years. Sixty-one of the programs responding to the initial survey were founded after 1990. We continue to add to the list through referrals gained at the consultations and through correspondence.

#### ***Diversity of programs***

We find that theological education among these denominations is much broader and more diverse than is usually assumed in current conversations about its nature and forms. Theological education takes institutional form in multiple ways within these denominations and leads to multiple legitimated leadership roles. Even those who have responsibility for these programs, for the most part, do not realize the extent of the phenomenon. Because these alternatives in theological education tend to be developed and sponsored by local or regional judicatories, wider awareness of the scope and variety of approaches is limited not only among denominations, but within denomina-

tions. This limitation—the exclusion from wider theological discussion—and a general resistance on the part of some clergy to recognize the legitimacy of the programs, generate a general sense of programs being alone and somewhat marginalized in their mission. Raising awareness of one another among a few of these companion programs has been one outcome of our research.

### ***Motivation for program founding***

A number of factors influence the formation of judicatory-based theological study programs. First, such programs emerge from the need for ecclesially relevant and legitimated leadership within the churches. As such, they have a distinct denominational identity based on the ways in which leadership is raised and defined within particular contexts. At the same time, innovative thinking in ecclesiology, theology, and the practice of ministry inform the shape a program takes. Secondly, judicatory-based programs appear to be directed to the empowerment of laity. In some cases, the empowerment is that of identifying and developing a cadre of lay leaders within denominational bodies: conferences, presbyteries, synods, and dioceses. In other cases, the leadership is already in place and the desire to provide training to empower such leadership becomes the motivating rationale. A preponderance of the respondents we interviewed confirmed how the programs were an innovation in education and formation that empowered both individual persons and congregations.

A third factor includes a range of contextual factors such as small congregation size, financial viability, sparse population, geographic location, and historical or cultural identity. The need to provide leadership where employing or calling seminary-trained personnel is impractical becomes the overriding motivation behind most of these programs. On the other hand, there are congregations that have been small in number for years, have had a history of lay pastors, and desire to continue that pastoral model. These contextual variables do influence the style of educating and deploying leadership in a congregation.

Finally, theological study for ministry that is located near or in proximity to the communities of faith to be served is perceived as being of value in and of itself. Whether the issue is with aboriginal peoples or with individuals who choose to remain tied to their home communities or regions, a common thread of discourse among respondents was the close connection between the person preparing for a ministry and the communities calling that person to service.

### ***Governance and funding***

Judicatories govern a majority of the programs through committees or subcommittees or boards of directors accountable to that judicatory. Often the composition of the governing boards reflects a diversity of constituents with a stake in the program, but there are exceptions. In the case of the United

Methodist Course of Study, the accountability is a partnership between the Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the national church and the seminary or center that conducts the program. Yet within most programs, efforts are made to increase advisory input by students, denominational representatives, and other interested parties.

Various funding models are employed to support the programs. The most usual approach is to operate a program from limited judicatory funds with added support from student fees. Other models include designated endowment funds, shared funding between a judicatory and a congregation, or, in the case of Course of Study, national denominational support. These budgets provide limited resources for program innovation, faculty support and development, and appropriate assistance to students.

### *Relationship to seminaries*

The relationship between the judicatory-based programs and theological schools varies. Only in limited cases are there formal links between seminaries and such programs, as is the case with the Course of Study programs. We did find a few seminary-resourced programs such as the Alternative Theological Education Project in Los Angeles and the Indian Ministries Program of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.

Most programs, at one time or another, utilize seminary faculty either in courses or in the leadership of retreats. Such is the case with the Lutheran Partners in Ministry Program. Our respondents were clear on this point: There is no intent for these programs to be considered a graduate theological school. In every program site the researchers visited, people affirmed the need for graduate-level theological education. The denominational judicatory theological study programs function within some fairly clear boundaries of being centers for ministry support and preparation. In almost every program we visited, note was made of those students who had decided to attend a seminary and, in most cases, complete M.Div. studies.

### **Curricula and pedagogies**

As educational projects, the denominational study programs require intentional curricular designs, strategies to provide faculty and other educational resources, and procedures to admit and evaluate students. Our research indicates the powerful role the contextual factors behind a program's founding influence the ways curricula are constituted and resources utilized.

### *Curricula origins*

With regard to curricula and resources for theological education, these programs tend to innovate in accordance with local situations and need. Four primary factors influence the shape that programs and curricula take. As noted

above, the initial motivation most often comes from particular stress points on local congregations and their communities. Demographic, geographic, and economic issues head the list of these stress factors. Once a program begins to take form, three other influences help shape the program. First, denominational ethos and polity contribute both form and constraints based on factors related to church order and theology. Secondly, denominational guidelines and/or requirements outline the parameters within which to design a curriculum. A final influence is the pervading sense that, in whatever forms it takes, theological education in these denominational judicatory programs must be responsive to the encyclopedia of areas of study normally included in the curriculum of the theological school. In most instances, the traditional topics of seminary education (Scripture and historical studies, and systematic and practical theology) undergird, in one way or another, the study content of the programs.

Programs will be inclined toward a model or method consistent with their own theological or ecclesiological rationale, but most will also pick and choose according to what instruments best serve the needs within their particular context. Given these caveats, our research reveals at least four general curricular models: (1) a defined set of courses, often taken with a cohort of participants; (2) a facilitated process that utilizes retreats, workshops, or small group processes and requires supervised or mentored independent study following specific guidelines; (3) a process of study using a set of requirements that allows participants to function independently, selecting courses at colleges, seminaries, and graduate schools; and (4) a study and formation process based in a local congregation involving a cohort of members called by that congregation to its ministries. Grounding all approaches is the assumption that the educational outcome connects with some process instituted by a denomination that leads to recognition, certification, commissioning, or ordination.

### ***Faculty resources***

Programs select their own faculty except in those cases where students take courses at an academic institution. Our respondents note that programs depend on accessible faculty—local pastors, some with Ph.Ds, area college religion department professors, and individuals from a variety of educational and resource programs. Course delivery is inclined to be traditional, using lectures, readings, video resources, workshops, and small group discussions. These formats, however, seem to be more closely related to ecclesial practice than is the case in a typical graduate school classroom. We believe this is an outcome of the fact that program designs, students, and most faculty remain contextually proximate to their faith communities.

From what we have seen, there is minimal use of distance learning technologies. This is not because of a lack of interest, but because of a lack of availability, accessibility, and relevant resources. There is some difference of opinion about what sort of distance learning resources would be helpful. Some

say that any kind of Internet-generated content in the typical areas of theological inquiry would be helpful. Others say they are not interested in relying alone on “canned” content that does not take into account the context of their ministry concerns. They would welcome resources that allowed for and encouraged more inductive use of the material.

### *Admissions and standards*

Standards for admission to programs are as diverse as are the curricula. Students are admitted on the basis of call to ministry, prior service and commitment to the church, and gifts for ministry rather than on academic credentials. A majority of respondents to the surveys had come into a judicatory-based program through some form of particularized or communal learning or formation event in their congregation that pressed them into what they perceived to be a need for deeper, more formal study.

Typically, there are no commonly held standards among the programs that would define any shared characteristics. Implicit standards may exist in the expectations of clergy who are trained in seminaries accredited by The Association of Theological Schools. In effect, criteria for study and for the programs that shape the study curricula tend to be more outcomes-based, with review and renewal of authorization for ministry leadership being closely linked to performance and ecclesial need.

### **Relation to church structures and clergy**

Denominational study programs exist in the context of the institutional bounds and bonds of ongoing ecclesial, leadership, and educational systems. Our research examined the interaction within those systems of multiple approaches for preparing and legitimating various forms of ministry.

### *Church structures*

How these judicatory study programs are perceived within the structures of the denominations depends to a large extent on their visibility and the roles they are fulfilling in supporting the ministries of the churches. As one former program director noted, the judicatory theological education program had to “make its claim on the conference program.” This involved important discussions of budget and connections with that denomination’s committee on ministry. In the case of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, the rules for voting in the diocesan convention were changed to expand the voting options of congregations served by ministry support teams.

Finally, the judicatory programs influence employment patterns that are denominationally specific—there are some commonalties. First, most programs lead to some form of license, commission, or ordination. These ministries serve or provide support for traditional venues for ministry, namely, the local congregation. Many graduates of programs serve on ministry teams or



## *Judicatory-Based Theological Education*

engage in part-time supply preaching. Compensation packages for these new ministries vary from completely voluntary, nonstipendiary models to employment packages that include salaries and various forms (or lack) of benefits.

### *Clergy*

Several of our informants told of clergy suspicion of study completed in the judicatory programs. Some clergy expressed misgivings about the type and depth of study offered in the judicatory programs. Others were somewhat apprehensive regarding graduates of the programs taking jobs normally held by seminary graduates.

On the other hand, we found indicators of support given to the programs and their graduates. Seminary educated clergy appeared to be less resistant when they were involved and their gifts were used in the judicatory program. One informant noted that as a small church rural pastor he already felt on the margins. He found support in having lay colleagues in ministry working as a team. Also, in most cases, when a bishop or denominational official provided leadership, other clergy joined in support.

### **Program participants**

#### *Students*

A profile of students offers a not surprising picture of study program participants. In many ways, they reflect the demographics of the communities from which they come, yet there are some patterns that emerge. While people of all adult ages are represented in these programs, the majority of students are older (40s-70s), with most falling in the 55-65 year range. Several of our interviewees claimed that some programs are attracting younger people, but by and large in our site visits, we found most students to be older, some retired from other careers.

With a few exceptions, men and women make up the student population of the programs in about equal numbers. Some respondents suggested that the numbers of women are increasing and that the attrition rate for men is higher. This latter observation may explain the significantly higher number of women in our survey of advanced students and graduates. One surprising finding was the relatively few people in the programs we surveyed who were of other than Euro-American descent. There were certainly exceptions; namely in the SCOPE and Dr. Jesse Saulteaux Resource Center programs.

Students come from a great variety of vocational and occupational backgrounds. As one respondent observes, "they run the whole gamut:" farmers, housewives, lawyers, engineers, industrial workers, teachers, business people, salespeople, federal employees, doctors, nurses, administrators, police officers, and dentists. While many are retired, some are fully employed while going to school. Most who are not retired will continue to work in their "regular" jobs after completing their programs of study and being authorized for particular

ministries in the church. With such varied backgrounds, program students hold one thing in common: they are recognized leaders in their local churches and will most likely remain as ministry leaders in their local churches and/or judicatories.

Many students come to a judicatory-based theological education program through some form of particularized or communal learning or formation event in their congregation or local community. Several respondents mentioned “Walk to Emmaus,” for example, as the stimulus for their involvement. Another came through a religious conversion experienced at a Marriage Encounter event. These prior formational events thus become feeders for judicatory study programs.

Prior education seems to be an area where there is little commonality across the spectrum of participant backgrounds. It is somewhat amazing that these programs work so well across such a range of academic backgrounds. Nowhere did we hear program leadership lamenting poor quality students. It is our guess that proven leadership ability, a universal desire to learn, and deep commitment to the ministries of servanthood account for the ability of these programs to hold together such divergent populations.

### ***Congregations***

While information about students provides us with some sense of why and how these programs exist and who their audience is, it is in the life and faith of congregations that one begins to understand what is at stake. We visited several congregations served by graduates or students in six of the judicatory-based education programs. Certainly, if space allowed, our profiles of congregations would sketch a larger picture of the impact of the study programs. Space limits recounting incidents or patterns of ministry from the lives of these congregations shaped by leaders who attend or have completed judicatory-based study. What seems important to us is that theologically informed leaders are available to these congregations that otherwise would be under-served or without pastoral leadership at all.

### **Impact of programs**

Our study of judicatory-based theological study programs suggests that denominations must attend to the varieties of options that may be available to prepare persons for authorized ministries. These programs engage people in the midst of their home and life situations and return them to ministry in those locations. They tend to democratize access to the resources of theological education.

Our site visits to congregations indicate that preparation for ministry in one of the denominational judicatory programs does not lead to a decline in the competence of ministry leadership, given the contextual situations and needs being served. At the same time, we found a longing in some settings for a

seminary-trained clergy person. In all cases, however, this was not predicated on the inadequacy of the lay pastor or commissioned leader trained in the judicatory program. In more than one situation, ministry leadership had been redefined and reconfigured, adding both breadth and depth to the ministries of the congregations involved.

### **Issues and challenges**

While each program is context specific, we believe there are some common issues that call for further discussion and action among those responsible for denominational judicatory programs, those in national denomination offices charged with theological education, and those who represent the graduate theological schools.

First, while our research confirms for us that local or regionally developed theological education programs are workable options that support the mission of congregations often considered to be unique—whether by size, financial resources, ethnicity, or geographic location—we suggest that more research is needed to assess denominational judicatory program outcomes in terms of graduates' readiness for ministry and their roles within a specific denomination's mission.

Secondly, church leadership should move beyond developing such programs merely to meet a crisis or problem. Consideration needs to be given to their theological rationale, including ecclesiologies and theologies of ministry. How does the particularity of ministries served by graduates of these programs fit into a mission strategy for the ministry of the whole church, including the deployment of people trained for service in a variety of venues? How do these programs reveal gifts within the church that are not being used effectively and what does that say about the way we are a church?

Thirdly, the programs require resources for educational design and curricular content. These programs are required to direct their courses of study to students of quite diverse educational backgrounds. At the same time, student constituencies may be less plural—culturally and theologically—than membership in their wider denominations and student bodies of theological schools. Key figures in these programs need opportunities to communicate with some regularity and to have available resources to assess the inputs and outcomes of their educational practices and the quality of mentoring required to guide students through programs that have limited on-campus involvement. Without exception, there is a need for curricular materials that are learner-oriented, designed for alternative time schedules or periodic events, structured for collegial learning environments, and fully representative of higher theological education. At issue is how, in the long run, these programs will offer the depth and breadth of ministry preparation sufficient to meet the demands that called forth the alternative model of education in the first place.

Fourthly, it is important that conversations be initiated between these programs and the theological schools and national denominational theological education offices. At issue are the topics that allow for an informed discussion of what constitutes the depth and breadth of education necessary for ministry preparation. Within these discussions there needs to be a serious consideration of the relationship of theological education models and the ecclesial communities for whom leadership is prepared. Our research has uncovered a vibrant discussion, already in process, of what constitutes authorized ministry leadership and the forms that leadership takes. Continued efforts need to define within and among denominations, the ways innovation for the sake of renewal may occur in the delivery systems of theological education.

We believe that denominational judicatory-based programs and regional graduate theological schools, together, present the possibility for a broader, richer fabric of education for ministry leadership and, consequently, a fuller recognition and use of the gifts of the baptized. Thus, wider theological education is faced with this question relative to appropriate roles and interconnections among its institutional parts: How is it possible to weave a fabric of collaboration that has the potential for the enrichment of theological education, for the renewal of the church, and for fuller recognition and inclusion of the ministries of all the baptized?

*Professors Emeriti Lance R. Barker and B. Edmon Martin served for thirty and twenty years, respectively, on the faculty of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in New Brighton, Minnesota. Barker was Schilling Professor of Church and Economic Life and, for a time, directed the D.Min. program of the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools. Martin was professor of historical and contextual studies and served a term as acting dean of the seminary. In their careers, they have had the opportunity to explore and practice a variety of models of theological education in North America. The full report of the study of judicatory-based theological education can be found at <[www.unitedseminary-mn.org/resources/ate.htm](http://www.unitedseminary-mn.org/resources/ate.htm)>.*



## ***Theological Education Submission Guidelines***

The Association of Theological Schools is a membership organization of schools in the United States and Canada that conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and advanced study of the theological disciplines. The Association's mission is to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.

*Theological Education*, the journal of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, is devoted to the distinctive concerns of graduate theological education in North America. The journal supports the mission of the Association by providing those concerned with theological education—including administrators, faculty, and independent researchers—with scholarly discourse and reports on issues and trends, research findings and resources, and models of critical analysis and effective practices in graduate theological education.

Unsolicited submissions are reviewed by members of the journal's Editorial Board, who then make recommendations regarding their publication. The Editorial Board will not consider articles that are being submitted simultaneously to other publications.

### **Article Formatting Requirements**

1. Articles should be approximately 6,000-8,000 words in length.
2. Follow *Chicago Manual of Style*, using endnotes.
3. Convert footnotes to endnotes, if necessary, using author's given name and then the surname with no intervening comma.
4. The *American Heritage Dictionary* and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* are the references for preferred spellings.
5. Provide a paragraph abstract at the beginning of the article in approximately 80 words.
6. Add a short (2-3 sentence) paragraph at the end of the article identifying the author(s), institution or relationship to the project/topic, position held, and/or other information relevant to the experience of the writer(s).
7. Articles should be e-mailed to the managing editor <merrill@ats.edu> in Rich Text Format (RTF) followed by a hard copy sent by conventional mail to: Nancy Merrill, Managing Editor, *Theological Education*, The Association of Theological Schools, 10 Summit Park Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1103.

