

**REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT**

**TO**

**University of Dubuque Theological Seminary  
Dubuque, Iowa**

Monday, November 17, 2014 to Thursday, November 20, 2014

for

The Board of Commissioners of  
The Commission on Accrediting of the  
Association of Theological Schools

**EVALUATION COMMITTEE**

*THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE COMMISSION ON ACCREDITING OF THE ATS*

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## I. Introduction

1. The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary (UDTS) was founded in 1852 as “Van Vliet Seminary” to prepare ministers for the growing German immigrant population in the region. It is one of ten theological institutions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the only embedded theological school in the broader context of a university, the University of Dubuque. The seminary is historically associated with the Reformed theological tradition but it engages a wider spectrum of theological traditions in its student body and faculty. The seminary cooperates with nearby Wartburg Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and is an approved theological seminary for Methodist students by the United Methodist Church. UDTS offer three approved degree programs: the Master of Divinity (MDiv) in both residential and distance learning formats, the Master of Arts in Missional Christianity (MAMC), and the Doctor of Ministry (DMin). The seminary has 131 students (FTE 117) in its degree programs and 115 non-degree students for a total of 246 students. The seminary has 11 faculty.
2. Accreditation History: In June, 2008, ATS reaffirmed accreditation of UDTS for a period of 7 years (until spring, 2015). Several ATS actions occurred since 2008: preliminary approval of the distance learning MDiv was granted in 2008; in 2010, preliminary approval was granted for the new Master of Arts in Missional Christianity (MAMC) and in 2011, approval was granted to deploy half of this degree program in an online format; in 2012, the distance learning MDiv was given full approval. In addition, reports were submitted by UDTS to the Board of Commissioners: in 2009, a report was submitted regarding adequate financial support; also in 2009, a report was submitted regarding a clarification of the Master of Arts in Religion (this degree program was phased out from 2010-2012); in 2010 and again in 2011, reports were submitted regarding student learning assessment; in 2011, a report was submitted regarding the library’s collection and staffing.
3. The evaluation committee was welcomed by all persons at the seminary and received full cooperation in the process of the site visit. The self-study report was complete in most respects. The evaluation committee asked for additional documentation while on site to amplify a number of issues from the self-study report but the team considers this a normal and expected part of the process. The documents room contained both printed documents and access to online documents. The team found some delay and some confusion in the ability to access online documents. The appropriate staff from UDTS responded immediately with help when the team encountered a problem but this was an issue that persisted throughout the visit.

## II. General Institutional Standards

### Standard 1 Purpose, Planning and Evaluation

The mission of the seminary was frequently referenced in the interviews held by the visiting committee. It is a relatively new mission statement, adopted by the Board of Trustees of UD in May, 2013. The new mission statement is in strong continuity with the previous statement. The mission statement identifies the purpose of the school as: “A Community after God’s Heart: Shaped by Faith in the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, We seek to follow Jesus, Walk in the Spirit, Join God’s Mission.” The seminary board, the university president, the faculty, and the staff, although they perhaps could not all recite the mission statement, are all united in working together for the mission of the school. The seminary is well aware of the considerable challenges that face the school. With a trend of declining enrollment and with recent events in the PC(USA) that may be impacting the school, there is a shared commitment to re-envision the task of theological education in this time. Because this is such a critical task for UDTS, the committee is recommending: **To require a report by April 1, 2016, regarding progress in the school’s current efforts to “revision the seminary” in light of the school’s own sense that it now stands not at a crisis,**

**but at a strategically opportune time to re-envision itself. The school's long-term health may depend on its ability to discern in the near future what theological vision will guide it going forward, particularly in terms of how that vision will be implemented in such areas as educational programs, academic and support personnel, delivery methods, and constituent markets. The report should articulate how it understands and implements its "guiding vision," in light of this statement from the Commission standards (emphasis added): "Theological schools are communities of faith and learning guided by a theological vision." (Standard 1)**

## **Standard 2** Institutional Integrity

[NOTE: This section of the report was to be written by the ministry practitioner, who failed to submit any material despite repeated requests. The following was written by the Commission staff liaison based on interviews conducted and materials reviewed by the entire evaluation committee. This section has been approved by the evaluation committee.]

The seminary complies with all relevant city, county, state, and federal regulations. The self-study report (p. 11) notes that several offices on campus are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the university "is in compliance at all times." That report further clarifies that financial regulations are maintained by the vice president of finances and auxiliary services with oversight by the Finance Committee and the Board of Trustees. Hiring and employment regulations are enforced by the director of human resources with oversight from the vice president of finances and auxiliary services and the president's cabinet. Student privacy and academic integrity policies are regulated through the registrar and the seminary dean's office. The dean of student financial planning aid/scholarships ensures that all financial aid distributions follow federal regulations and ensures compliance with state regulations regarding distance education. The environmental health and safety director is charged with maintaining a safe campus environment and ensuring all facilities and equipment meet relevant regulations.

The evaluation committee reviewed all relevant documents regarding integrity, including federally mandated items in the Targeted Issues Checklist (appended), and found no concerns. As will be noted under Standard 5, diversity remains an ongoing challenge. The fall 2014 enrollment report indicates that less than 10% of the student body and less than 10% of faculty identifies as non-Caucasian (one faculty member is a registered Alaska Native Descendant.) Gender diversity in both groups is commendable. The school is encouraged to pursue new strategies to increase its diversity during the next period of accreditation.

## **Standard 3** Theological Curriculum: Learning, Teaching and Research

### *Goals, Learning, Teaching, and Research*

Interviews with students, alumni, and faculty provided the evaluation committee with evidence that the UDTS faculty excel in their integration of theological understanding, spiritual formation, and preparation for ministry. One example reported by faculty members is the involvement of faculty from multiple divisions in teaching spiritual formation courses. This evidences the seminary-wide commitment to the integration of theology and faith. The faculty reported sharing a common commitment to the church and to preparing students for ministry. Degree program goals, as listed in the Academic Catalog and the self-study report, clearly articulate a focus on intellectual, spiritual, moral, vocational and professional outcomes. In addition, the *Foundations of Preaching* course is mentioned in the self-study report as another example of a comprehensive learning opportunity, teaching students to articulate their faith tradition with the practice of ministry.

The team saw evidence that instructional methods and the use of technology are sensitive to the diversity of the student population. Students were enthusiastic about the support provided by faculty members, both within and outside the classroom, including supportive instruction for distance education courses. The Academic Success Center was also cited by international students, as an excellent resource supporting research and writing. The librarian and library staff were praised by students for their provision of ongoing instruction and resources to distance education and residential students, to ensure students have the support needed to utilize online research tools.

The evaluation committee saw evidence of collaboration among the faculty and the librarian, in designing new courses. Faculty members reported a process involving completion of a proposal, which is first reviewed by the division, and then the Program Development Committee (PDC), providing opportunities for dialogue between divisions in the design process. The university librarian also serves on the PDC and meets with faculty individually, providing a thorough process of collaboration. Faculty members assess courses through the use of course evaluations and a faculty course assessment form. Proposals for revision are brought by the faculty member to the division for approval, which ensures consistency in teaching. One example of collaboration cited in interviews with faculty was the reduction of credits in the MDiv program. This process required cooperative planning among the faculty members to ensure that proper courses were offered to fulfill the learning goals of the program, while also improving the remaining courses to cover any deficiencies in instruction.

The evaluation committee saw evidence that faculty research and teaching skills are fostered through sabbaticals, and are rewarded through promotions, faculty forums, and library celebrations featuring faculty research. The faculty reported sharing research results among the community, as well as receiving encouragement to integrate research into course content. Faculty also reported sharing pedagogical methods, including distance educational methods, in order to support each other in teaching and learning. The team saw evidence of an expectation that faculty should not only be scholars but teachers and should strive to improve pedagogy.

The evaluation committee noted excellent efforts to foster students' information literacy. The university librarian teaches a course in theological and biblical research methods, required of all distance education students. The librarian has also developed an information literacy assessment plan utilizing assessment of assignments embedded in required courses. The librarian works closely with faculty members to ensure course instruction is strengthened in areas where deficiencies in information literacy are identified.

#### *Characteristics of Theological Scholarship*

UDTS demonstrates scholarly collaboration between faculty, students, and librarians. Small class size allows faculty and students to have frequent contact and for faculty to provide informal mentoring. Technology is also used to enhance collaboration and interaction between faculty, librarians, and students. As mentioned, the library provides strong support for student and faculty scholarship. In addition, Supervised Practice of Ministry (SPM) or field education provides collaboration in teaching and learning with the church through the work of field supervisors. Students and alumni cited the value of SPM and the required series of spiritual formation courses, in equipping them for ministry. Collaboration is also demonstrated through the involvement of ministers from the PC(USA) and the United Methodist Church, the two denominations most represented in the student body.

The team noted evidence fostering diversity of perspective through various means. Examples include invitations to pastors from various denominations to preach in chapel or hold luncheons with students. A faculty member also noted providing leadership for a series of monthly discussions called "Children of Abraham", which brings together practitioners from other religions. Collaboration also takes place through colloquia with other institutions in the Dubuque area, as well as endowed lectureships for church leader and scholars.

Involvement with diverse publics is cultivated in several ways. The seminary has a Council of Advisors consisting of clergy and laity from various denominations. Faculty members and leaders are also actively involved in local ministry. The seminary ties to the United Methodist Church foster involvement with diverse publics. Courses also support diverse theological scholarship through required cross-cultural experiences and through field experience, in addition to courses in missions and other religions. Funds for faculty travel have occasionally been used to facilitate international research and scholarship.

The evaluation committee noted that while racial diversity continues to be a challenge, faculty and students were aware of efforts to promote global awareness and engagement. One example given is an official relationship with a church in Ghana through their seminary. The members of UDTs and the seminary and church in Ghana have reciprocated visits to each location. Faculty and students also reported that the relationship to University of Dubuque also enhances the diversity of the campus and the opportunities for global engagement due to significant diversity in the university faculty and student. In addition, members of UDTs participate in the university Global and Cultural Learning Committee, which promotes cross-cultural learning and relationships. The team suggests that the seminary continue to build on the resources and connections of the University as one strategy to increase diversity.

The seminary has a policy to support academic freedom, published in its Seminary Faculty/Staff Handbook. Ethics of scholarship by faculty and students is also maintained through published policies on ethical research and plagiarism.

#### **Standard 4** Library and Information Resources

##### *Collections*

The Charles C. Myers Library serves the entire university and is considered the heart of the campus. The university has made significant strides in strengthening the resources for theological research since the last ATS self-study review. While total collection growth has remained relatively flat due to the removal of periodicals now accessed through the JSTOR I – IX, the book collection in the subjects most used by the seminary have grown by 12% in the last nine years. The library has also given high priority to strengthening resources for distance students, as evidenced by the acquisition of Ebsco eBook's *Religious Collection* and *Academic Collection*. The university has made a significant investment in electronic periodicals and databases to support both the seminary and the university, providing more than 100 databases. In addition, the multimedia collection has grown from 4,000 to 6,500 in the last five years.

The university librarian created a separate seminary Collection Development Plan to address the unique research needs of the institution. Faculty and students from denominations other than the PC(USA) provide input regarding the collection development, in order to serve their heritage and support assignments. Special grants and agreements with other area libraries also add to the breadth of the resources. One particularly beneficial partnership is with the Reu Memorial Library at Wartburg Theological Seminary, which shares a catalog with the library and involves daily shuttles of materials.

##### *Support for Learning, Teaching, and Research*

The university librarian, in consultation with the faculty, has developed an information literacy plan tied to key course assignments. In select courses, the faculty determines whether or not each student has met the information literacy goals, and reports strengths and weaknesses to the librarian. In addition, as mentioned under Standard 3, the librarian also teaches a course required of all distance education students, *Theological and Biblical Research*. Students also submit course assignments assessing their own information literacy skills, the results of which are reviewed by the librarian to guide her in improving programs and services. Students and alumni praised the support provided by the library staff, citing the service provided as one of the highlights of the seminary's academic services.

The librarian and staff also support faculty research by hosting celebrations featuring faculty publication, by training faculty and promoting new resources, and by consulting with division chairs on collection development. Faculty report receiving excellent assistance in the use of library electronic resources and in finding resources for research.

The library facilities are well equipped. The building was renovated most recently in 2003 and has adequate space and room for growth. The building provides a variety of research areas to serve the needs of students, including the media and technology needed for research.

#### *Leadership and Staffing*

The librarian is a voting faculty member of the university and participates in seminary committees, including the Program Development Committee (PDC). The PDC supports the library's collaboration with seminary faculty in educational and financial planning and assessment. The librarian's prior role, as the seminary's reference and instruction librarian, also strengthens her ability to plan and assess the library, in light of the needs of the seminary. The library is adequately staffed with five librarians and 5.25 paraprofessionals. The university librarian participates in ongoing professional development, including providing presentations at the American Theological Library Association annual conference.

#### *Resources*

The librarian has developed a strategic plan for the library, detailing goals tied to the university's strategic plan, and to the mission of the institution. The librarian reported that the plan has greatly improved the library over the last ten years. The strength of the librarian's planning and leadership ensures that the library staff members focus on the mission and goals in their work and make wise use of the library's resources.

The team saw evidence of the library's ongoing process to evaluate the collection, the patterns of use, the services provided, and the personnel. One example of this evaluation process includes the statistics provided by the librarian regarding the downward trend in circulation of the print collection. This trend is explained by the increase in distance education students resulting in an increase in the use of electronic resources, as well as the implementation of e-reserves.

The library has experienced a decrease in expenditures since 2008-2009. This is explained by a number of factors, including the building of the Wendt Character Initiative Collection prior to the 2009-2010 year, as well as the discontinuation of outside funding and additional funding that was received in prior years. While overall expenditures have decreased, the seminary has increased spending for electronic databases in support of distance education. The library has benefited from special gifts over several years, which have assisted in the growth of these electronic resources. The ongoing cost of databases, and the need for additional outstanding resources, is a concern in light of the finite nature of the gifts. The seminary should continue to assess the needs of the library, especially in light of the distance education program. The evaluation committee encourages the seminary to designate greater resources to overall technology upgrades in a time of rapid changes in both library science and distance education. (See below, Standard 8 and ES.4.)

#### **Standard 5** Faculty

In its consideration of the faculty at UDTS, the evaluation committee reviewed all relevant documents and engaged in multiple interviews with the faculty. This combined evidence provided the committee a good understanding of the quality, character, and circumstances of the UDTS faculty.

The faculty of UDTS bring the dual strengths of academic quality and ministry experience, with only two of the full-time faculty not yet holding a terminal degree in their field; both of those are ABD. Faculty

have received terminal degrees at a variety of excellent institutions. One faculty member is an alumnus of the seminary. Two thirds of the faculty are ordained, having served congregations or other ministries. While the predominant denominational membership is PC (USA), reflecting the seminary's denominational affiliation, other faculty are United Methodist. Additional viewpoints of ecclesial heritage are also represented among the faculty. The faculty is well represented by both senior and junior members: The average term of service is just over ten years; the longest-serving member of the faculty has served over thirty years; new faculty have just recently been appointed.

While the seminary has done well in achieving gender diversity among the faculty, racial/ethnic diversity is not yet present. The committee recognizes that UDTS has stated its intention to promote racial/ethnic diversity among its faculty, and has reportedly offered appointments to minority candidates, but the contextual demographics both denominationally and regionally have made the recruiting of such minority faculty difficult. The evaluation committee makes the following recommendation: **“Diversity appears highly prized but not well implemented, at least in terms of racial and ethnic diversity among the faculty and, to some extent, among the students. The fall enrollment report indicates that less than 10% of the student body identifies as non-Caucasian, and none of the seminary faculty does, though gender diversity in both groups is commendable. To be sure, the lack of diversity is not for the lack of trying. The school notes that its small-town Midwest location, modest resources, and mostly Caucasian church constituency have historically limited its ability to attract minority faculty—and students. Yet, the school’s self-study report (p. 12) also recognizes and promises that ‘increasing diversity is a priority.’ Toward that end, the school is encouraged to pursue new strategies to increase its diversity (Standard 5, section 5.1.3).”**

UDTS provides a clear and well-supported opportunity for research in its sabbatical opportunities. The faculty is well published, both in scholarly books and journals and in popular level writings to benefit the local congregation. Faculty publishing benefits classroom teaching and learning by including current scholarly conversation in courses taught. Students report that in addition to being competent scholars, the faculty are also engaging teachers and caring mentors and shepherds. Several students interviewed talked about a particular course that had been a life-changing experience for them. This blending of regular, competent, institutionally supported scholarship with capable pedagogy and genuine concern for students makes for a faculty that serves UDTS and its mission well.

The evaluation committee noted that professional development funds are available to each professor each year, however, the amount that can be awarded is not sufficient for major conferences. The evaluation committee encourages the university to support this vital opportunity for faculty development.

The Faculty Handbook of UDTS clearly defines and describes the school's policies and procedures governing the faculty's relationship to the seminary and university in which it is embedded. The faculty expressed no concerns over matters of academic freedom, tenure, rank, promotion, hiring, or separation. Through their monthly meetings and the work of the Program Development Committee, the faculty exercise appropriate control over curricular content and development. The faculty did acknowledge that compensation at UDTS is lower than other PC (USA) seminaries. The evaluation committee urges the university administration to monitor carefully the salary and benefits packages of faculty.

The faculty relationship to the seminary is clearly understood and documented. The relationship of the seminary and the university appears to be less clear. Seminary faculty sometimes spoke of the university as an entity distinct from the seminary, not as the overarching institution in which the seminary is embedded. Faculty members expressed some insecurity about whether the university would continue to support the seminary. They also questioned whether the current administrative and budgetary structure of the university supported the technological and pedagogical needs of the seminary. It must be stated that the trustees and administration of the university consistently spoke of the university as a whole, with the

seminary and the undergraduate college being its two constituent and necessary parts. This suggests the seminary faculty, in terms of their morale, may benefit from additional clear communication from the board and administration as to the value of and ongoing role of the seminary.

Workload for full-time faculty of UDTS is specified as teaching 17 credit hours a year, but the committee noted that tenured faculty members teach additional hours, while tenure track and term faculty members teach slightly less. All faculty members interviewed reported teaching courses with significant online components. The seminary may want to review the time commitments of teaching a predominantly online course. The literature of online teaching and learning reveals that course development for a new online course requires significantly more faculty time than planning a new residential course. The committee noted that faculty make significant personal investment in developing and teaching in the online environment. Faculty advising and committee service workloads seem reasonable.

The seminary makes use of adjunct faculty in a number of ways: as substitutes for unfilled faculty positions, to partner with full-time faculty in leading Doctor of Ministry cohorts, to teach courses related to field education, and, in rare circumstances, to lead student spiritual formation groups. Such adjunct faculty members are appropriately credentialed and qualified, and enhance the work of full time faculty. In an interview with a portion of the evaluation committee, a group of adjunct faculty expressed a desire for technology support in the form of better orientation to the learning management system and access to the academic information system, a desire to better understand the place in the overall curriculum of the course being taught, a desire for more feedback on assessment of courses, and the need for a quick reference or FAQ site for administrative issues.

#### **Standard 6** Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, and Placement

[NOTE: This section of the report was to be written by the ministry practitioner, who failed to submit any material despite repeated requests. The following was written by the Commission staff liaison based on interviews conducted and materials reviewed by the entire evaluation committee. This section has been approved by the committee.]

Regarding recruitment and admissions, the seminary adheres to all applicable Commission standards. As the self-study report notes (p. 46), the seminary “recognizes that the call to ministry, and to seminary, begins with God and is discerned both inwardly and externally in the life of individuals and congregations... Throughout the recruitment and application process, UDTS prospective students are encouraged to explore their call to service and examine their own spiritual gifts to determine the best program to meet their vocational goal. As a seminary affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA), UDTS actively recruits from Presbyterian congregations and colleges. Its ecumenical commitment, however, has for decades drawn students from other denominations as well, particularly the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches; so many of the UDTS activities are targeted to faith communities beyond the PC(USA).” This denominational diversity was evident to the evaluation committee and strengthens the seminary community in commendable ways.

Student services are facilitated primarily by a Pastor to Students, a faculty position that focuses especially on pastoral and spiritual needs. Students who were interviewed spoke quite highly of the faculty’s concern for their well-being and spiritual/personal/pastoral formation. As noted in the Committee Recommendations section of this report, one of this school’s distinctive strengths is “an intentionally relational culture among the faculty that balances very well their roles as scholars, teachers, mentors, and colleagues; students often used the word “formation” to illustrate how the faculty build strong relationships with seminarians in order to shape their hearts and minds for pastoral, relational ministry.”



Student borrowing does not seem to be a problem at the school, with a default rate of 8.6 percent that is well below the national average for private institutions. The financial aid office requires students who borrow to avail themselves of financial counseling, and that office has recently begun expanding that role through informal lunches with seminarians. All issues related to Title IV programs were reviewed as part of the Targeted Issues Checklist and found to be in complete compliance with federal regulations. Placement rates are also within peer ranges for their professional ministry degree programs.

### **Standard 7** Authority and Governance

UDTS operates as an embedded institution within the University of Dubuque. Seminary and university are governed by a single Board of Trustees and led by a single president. The president is the chief executive officer under the authority of the Board. The Articles of Incorporation of the University of Dubuque are kept current according to the standards established by the Association of Governing Boards (AGB). UDTS is accredited by both the ATS and the NCA/HLC.

The committee was impressed with the high level of appropriate involvement and commitment to the seminary by its Board of Trustees. The committee affirms the following strength: “A governing board for the university that demonstrates exemplary trustee leadership, strong support of the embedded seminary, and an openness to re-imagining how to do theological education through a collegial process that values shared governance and broad input.” The committee also noted the clear and compelling leadership of the president. The revitalization of the University of Dubuque since 1998 is nothing short of astounding. The seminary, too, enjoys the strong leadership of both the president and the dean of the seminary. In spite of a time of challenge and re-visioning, clearly the top administrators of university and seminary are boldly leading the seminary into new models and paradigms of fulfilling their mission. The benefits of the seminary embedded in the university seem clear: an infrastructure of functions that supports the seminary, a strong and capable Board, a visionary president. There may be some potential hindrances as well. Because the seminary is a small entity in the larger university, the seminary faculty may find themselves as a disadvantage in terms of communicating their concerns to the larger system.

The seminary and the broader university are well governed by clear and consistent policies. The seminary has a seminary handbook and is also governed by the university handbook. These policies do not seem to conflict and the appropriate steps are taken to keep all policies up to date.

A critically important phase is occurring at UDTS in this academic year. Because strong currents of change are sweeping through theological education, the president and the Board of Trustees initiated a re-visioning process of study and creative planning. A strategic planning consulting firm from Minneapolis, MN, was contracted to assist in this process. At the writing of this report, the seminary had just received the consulting team’s report and will be processing it in the coming months. The evaluation committee wishes to commend the seminary for the courage and foresight to think “outside the box” on the mission of the school. This report has already indicated the recommendation of a report (see Standard 1, above, and the Committee Recommendations page, below) on this re-visioning challenge.

### **Standard 8** Institutional Resources

#### Physical Resources:

Severance Hall is home to the seminary on the university campus. All seminary faculty offices are located in this building and many seminary classes are taught there. The evaluation committee from the last re-accreditation visit in 2008 indicated in their report that the building appeared “a bit tired.” No significant renovations have occurred since 2008; one can only assume the building is even more tired at this point. The evaluation committee of 2014 urges the university to provide educational spaces more conducive to the bold re-visioning plans currently underway. Although it is difficult to measure, it may be the case that

efforts to attract students to the seminary are hindered by the state of Severance Hall. The university campus itself is very attractive, with several large and impressive buildings recently opened for all students on campus.

#### Human Resources:

The seminary relies on significant infrastructure resources of the university. These resources include budgeting, advancement, hiring and reviewing employees, communicating and deploying benefits, and implementing appropriate policies. Some personnel infrastructure is unique to the seminary, including the dean, the faculty, and administrative support staff. In conversations with the support staff, the evaluation committee noted with gratitude their genuine commitment to the mission of the seminary, a strong spirit of collegiality and community, and genuine hope and eagerness for the future of the seminary.

#### Financial Resources:

The self-study and supporting documents demonstrate that UDTS has adequate financial resources in order to fulfill its mission. The dramatic improvement of the university's endowment and annual giving over the past ten years is remarkable evidence of this. The self-study reports that the past ten or twelve years have seen an increase in net assets at the university from just under 15 million dollars to just under 79 million dollars. In addition, the rate of draw on the endowment is now 4%, a significant achievement for overall fiscal viability. All accounting, auditing, and budgeting protocols are in place.

The seminary does not have its own budget process; budget requests and needs are handled at the university level. This unified budgetary approach is a strong benefit to the seminary; it may also mute the requests of the seminary for needed budget allocation. The evaluation committee is concerned particularly about technology infrastructure, physical plant improvements, and faculty development funds and encourages the university budget planning process to attend to these seminary needs.

#### Technology Resources:

The university and the seminary share information technology resources. The evaluation committee was impressed with the dedication and energy of the personnel who support information technology. The team also notes that the infrastructure of information technology, particularly as it undergirds the distance learning program, is somewhat dated. The learning management system might be described as "minimalist" rather than capable of the robust functions of a best practices program. The team encourages the school to evaluate the quality of distance learning technology and make appropriate upgrades.

### **III. Educational and Degree Program Standards**

[The evaluation team notes that UDTS does not have any approved extension sites and that all issues covered in this section of the Standards meet the expectation of the Commission, including such things as admissions, transfer of credit, advanced standing, and other expectations of degree program administration. UDTS has a significant non-degree instructional program for commissioned ruling elders in the PC(USA).]

#### **ES.4 Distance education**

UDTS was an early entrant into the field of distance education and is still the only PC (USA) seminary to offer comprehensive distance education. The MDiv and the MAMC are both have online as well as traditional residential components. The ATS requirement that one-third of an approved MDiv degree program be deployed in a residential format is met through two-week intensives in January and August. One function of the intensives is spiritual formation and community building. Distance courses vary from residential courses in specific pedagogical methodologies but not in content, purpose, or quality. These courses are reviewed by the same assessment and evaluative processes as residential courses.

The evaluation committee noted a high degree of support for the distance learning programs in three areas. The library provides not only a growing number of eBooks and full-text journals, but fulfills student requests for resources not available in the library's electronic holdings by either mailing materials to students or scanning and emailing requested resources. Other than the reciprocal agreement with Wartburg Seminary, services for distance students are not provided at remote libraries. The seminary employs a distance education coordinator to assist the associate dean in administrating the program and serving as a clearinghouse and point of initial contact for student or faculty questions about the distance program or the LMS. The seminary also employs its own director of technology to assist students and faculty with technical issues involving the use of the LMS, access to the seminary's online learning environment, and to assist faculty with the video recording of lectures. While in a cooperative relationship with the broader university technology department, the director of seminary technology reports to the associate dean not the university director of technology. In terms of the functioning of this last area of support, both the university and seminary directors of technology report an LMS uptime ratio in excess of 95%, and the seminary tries to respond to any request for technological assistance within 24 hours. Responsibilities for training the faculty in the use of the learning management system and in appropriate and innovative online instructional pedagogy are shared by the associate dean of the seminary, the distance education coordinator, and the director of seminary technology. New student orientation contains training for students to use the LMS, and an online course supplements training for students.

Full-time faculty teach distance education courses as part of their regular load, so that distance students are provided the same quality of instruction as residential students. Full-time faculty also advise distance students. This regular interaction by full-time faculty insures deep familiarity with the distance program, and any issues or opportunities it presents.

Currently, the undergraduate college and the seminary use different versions of Moodle. Interviews with faculty and administrators indicated that in the future seminary faculty may be assigned to teach online courses in the undergraduate college. If this occurs, seminary faculty could find themselves working with two different LMS platforms. The evaluation committee encourages the seminary to advocate for a standardized LMS. This would benefit the faculty and would fit into the goals of the re-visioning plan. Technology in support of distance education has been a pioneering part of this school for more than a decade. Yet, the infrastructure supporting that distance education technology appears in need of renewed attention. An increased workload for faculty and a decreased support staff in technology have combined to "dull" somewhat the "cutting edge" of the school's pioneering efforts in this area. This concern is amplified by the critical role that technology plays in how the school accomplishes its educational mission now and in its future. The school is encouraged to focus renewed efforts on additional staff support, improved faculty training and support, and increased attention to best practices in online pedagogy.

## **ES.6 Assessment of Student Learning**

UDTS implemented a systematic, ongoing student learning process in the 2010-2011 academic year, in answer to the June 2008 Board of Commissioner's request for a report regarding assessment, as a result of the last self-study review. The ATS reader panel voted to accept this report, submitted November 2011, at their January 2012 meeting. Since this time, UDTS has continued to evaluate each degree program every year, as confirmed by review of the self-study report and assessment reports, and through interviews with the administration, faculty, and staff.

UDTS has developed learning goals for each degree program. Goals are clearly linked to the mission of the seminary and to the ATS goals for each degree, and are stated in measurable terms. The evaluation committee was concerned with the number of learning goals for the MDiv degree, currently listed as

twelve goals. The faculty, with the assistance of the director of institutional research, assessment, and planning, should consider combining related goals or including some goals as sub-points on the assessment rubrics.

UDTS has developed assessment plans for each degree program. These plans detail the use of direct measures, which include rubrics assessing student learning in courses with assignments mapped to a degree program learning goal. Direct measures also include field education supervisor and lay committee evaluations of student learning in the MDiv and MAMC, as well as Presbytery ordination exams. Indirect measures include the use of the ATS Entering, Graduating, and Alumni surveys.

Data from assignment rubrics is archived in LiveText, an online assessment tool. Faculty and administration reported that in most cases, more than one measure is used to assess each learning goal. Examples include multiple rubrics for the same course, due to multiple sections of a course. The evaluation team suggests the faculty, with the assistance of the director for institutional research, assessment, and planning create a map detailing the correlation between metrics and learning goals, to ensure there is more than one metric being used to assess each goal. The faculty and administration also reported that evaluations for field education are being formatted in a rubric form in LiveText, to make better use of this metric. The evaluation committee encourages the completion of this project in order to more effectively use field education evaluations for assessment of student learning.

The evaluation committee saw evidence of various quantitative measures of student learning, as mentioned previously in the use of data from LiveText, the results of Presbytery ordination exams, and ATS surveys. The evaluation committee encourages the faculty, with the assistance of the director of research, assessment and planning, to develop and implement qualitative metrics of student learning, such as exit interviews, or open-ended responses to field education evaluations, to further enhance the metrics used in assessment.

Faculty members teaching the courses used in assessment, academic divisions, and the Program Development Committee (PDC), routinely review the results of assessment. The faculty uses a benchmark of 80% of students meeting a goal, when reviewing assessment results. Themes of concern are noted by the PDC, and are referred to the proper division for a response. The faculty noted ongoing conversations regarding assessment results and stated they are now much more aware of what is being taught in each course. The dean then summarizes in a report, the assessment results, the PDC's concerns, and the division recommendations to improve student learning. This report is distributed to the president, the faculty and staff, the Council of Advisors, and the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board.

The faculty provided the evaluation committee with some examples of the way in which assessment results have also been used to improve the curriculum. Below average results from MDiv students on one Presbyterian ordination exam resulted in enhanced instruction to prepare students for the theology portion of the ordination exam. Recent ordination results show improvement in the area of deficiency. Faculty also improved course content as a result of the recent decrease in the number of credits in the MDiv program.

The evaluation committee did not receive clear examples of improvements in student learning for the MAMC and DMin programs. The seminary should ensure the assessment process is producing adequate results to inform the assessment of learning and that results lead to improvements in learning. The evaluation committee, in its Committee Recommendations, encourages the seminary to continue to attend to assessment: "Assessment is becoming part of the school's culture, though still new enough to be an ongoing work in progress; the school is encouraged during the next period of accreditation to continue faculty conversations about how assessment data can improve student learning in significant and

substantive ways, especially in light of the school’s core value of ‘excelling in theological education...’ (Educational Standard, sections ES.6.1 (4) and ES.6.4.1).”

It is evident that the seminary has a process in place to assess the assessment plan. The assessment reports, and interviews with the faculty and administration, provide many examples of the way in which the process has been improved. For example, the seminary revised the assessment artifacts chosen due to the discontinuation of specific classes. Rubrics are also periodically revised to better align with the degree program goals. The administration has been working with the alumni office to improve alumni placement information through improved alumni contact information. The faculty reported their view that the process is sustainable.

The seminary has strong advocates for assessment in the dean and associate dean. Both play a role in ensuring faculty actively participate in the process and that the PDC and divisions respond to assessment results. The director of institutional research, assessment, and planning, also provides a support role for LiveText, but is more active in participation of university assessment. The evaluation committee suggests that the seminary leaders should make use of all available personnel resources to envision ways to move assessment forward. The faculty reported their value for the assessment process and the dean and associate dean echoed the involvement and buy-in of the faculty, for the process.

Resources have been adequately allocated to support the assessment process. The seminary invested in LiveText, which supports faculty review of assessment artifacts. The university also hired a director of institutional research, assessment, and planning, to support the assessment process university and seminary-wide. Additional funds are also budget to support other expenses.

The assessment process protects student anonymity since the data pulled from LiveText is anonymous. Student surveys results are also reported in aggregate, without any identifying information.

The seminary makes public the results of the student learning assessment process. The Academic Affairs Committee of the Board and the president are provided with the annual assessment report. Members of the Board noted receiving the assessment results and being informed of the process. They stated that the seminary makes information available in a way that is easy for them to digest. A Statement of Educational Effectiveness is also available on the seminary’s website and includes placement and completion rate data.

#### **Degree Program Standard A Master of Divinity (MDiv)**

[NOTE: This section of the report was to be written by the ministry practitioner, who failed to submit any material despite repeated requests. The following was written by the Commission staff liaison based on interviews conducted and materials reviewed by the entire evaluation committee. This section has been approved by the committee.]

As noted in the self-study report (p. 86), the “purpose of the Master of Divinity degree is to serve the one God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and prepare women and men for faithful, compassionate, and effective ministry. It is the first professional degree for those seeking ordination.” It is an 84-credit program that adheres appropriately to the requirements for Degree Program Standard A. The evaluation committee reviewed assessment data and reports for the last three years for the MDiv and found the program to be meeting its goals and Commission expectations. The committee does suggest, however, that the faculty may want to review the large number of student learning outcomes for this degree with a view to reducing them in order to simplify the assessment process for this program. The self-study report presented a very thorough analysis of the MDiv.

Resources are ample for this degree program, which has the largest enrollment of the three offered. The online option is the most popular track, with a decreasing enrollment for the on-campus option. That is a concern to the faculty that it continues to address. The online option still requires at least a third of the degree to be completed on campus through semiannual intensive courses. The school has been offering this online option for 7 years, pioneering this delivery method among ATS member schools. The evaluation committee encourages the seminary to note the concerns expressed under the Educational Standard (section ES.4) regarding how it might strengthen its distance education program. The school also offers a 3 + 3 program for university undergraduates who want to use the first year of seminary as their last undergraduate year. This program is a long-standing one at the school, but it is not proving currently to be as popular an option as it once was. Enrollment is limited to a handful of students.

### **Degree Program Standard B Master of Arts in Missional Christianity (MAMC)**

The MAMC program at UDTS is a professional Masters degree designed for non-ordination seeking students. ATS approved the degree in 2010. The degree targets students seeking training for parachurch or mission work, church planting, or a specialized staff role in a congregation. The lay pastor is also a potential student for this degree program. The MAMC program requires 48 semester hours for completion and is the equivalent of two years of full-time academic work.

The MAMC shares several courses with the MDiv degree and shares both courses and students with Wartburg Seminary. This arrangement offers several benefits for the relatively new program. It allows courses to populate with both MAMC and MDiv students and builds community between the two degree programs as well as the two seminaries.

The MAMC degree curriculum addresses all necessary components. Three courses focus on missional Christianity. Students can choose from a number of courses to complete five more in history and theology. Three courses, two early in the program and one near the end, address the student's spiritual formation. A number of electives and a robust supervised ministry component build on a basic course in cultural context. A capstone project completes the curriculum. When a student uses the MAMC to lead to licensure or certification, electives are selected to meet the standards in that area of specialization.

The field education component of the MAMC necessitates a number of qualified field supervisors over a broad geographic area. UDTS has a comprehensive process, under the direction of a director of field education and placement, to screen, select, train and oversee these field supervisors as well as monitor student progress. Since the student in this degree program can select from a broad range of kinds of ministry to in which develop missional Christianity, the field supervisor is selected based on the individual student's goals and the nature of the capstone project.

As previously noted, UDTS has a strong relationship with Wartburg Seminary, its neighbor. The involvement of field education supervisors from the seminary's constituent denominations and from appropriate mission and social agencies gives students in the MAMC program many opportunities for vocational guidance and support as well as placement.

While the MAMC seems to be a well-designed and resourced program, admissions have been weak. In the four years since the program was approved, thirteen students have been admitted. In the current year the program only enrolls five students. Therefore, the evaluation committee recommends to the Board of Commissioner: **To require a report by November 1, 2015, describing how “the number of students enrolled in [its MAMC] degree program [is] sufficient to ensure a viable community of learning,” given that it currently enrolls only five students, down from nine students the previous fall. (Educational Standard, section ES.1.1.2)**

## **Degree Program Standard E** Doctor of Ministry (DMin)

The DMin degree program is focused on the pastor as a leader of church renewal through integrated theological study. The cohort-based program teams a resident full-time faculty member of the seminary with an academically qualified practitioner to lead seven to ten students who are ordained and have at least three years of ministry experience. The DMin is designed as a four-year program of study. Each cohort takes on a focus of the specialty of the full-time faculty member leading the cohort, so one year may be church renewal through pastoral counseling while a subsequent year may be church renewal through biblical studies or preaching. The learning of each student is also supported by a Congregational Resource Team within the student's ministry context.

Four primary goals for the DMin program are: the ability to define and show evidence of congregational renewal, the ability to think theologically by integrating learning from classical disciplines into the life of the local congregation, the ability to identify significant theological and social issues in the ministry context, and the ability to develop lay congregational leaders. These goals are clearly stated in the seminary catalog. The accomplishment of each of these goals is measured by the seminary's assessment plan with specific artifacts demonstrating student learning outcomes for each of the primary goals. Of the fifty-four students who entered the program in the six years from 2005-2010, twenty-eight have graduated and 5 more are expected to graduate.

The forty hours of the DMin program consists of three main components: three two-week intensive seminars, pre-and post-seminar self-directed learning (combined for a total of ten credit hours each year), and a project or thesis in ministry (ten credit hours). While focusing on the same program goals, the curriculum for each cohort is different, shaped by the theological discipline of the faculty leaders and to a lesser degree the ministry focus of the students. While most students will do a context-focused project, the program does allow students to do a DMin thesis, based on original research. Following approval of the DMin project, students make an oral presentation of their projects in a colloquia.

The cohort model fosters several types of learning, including peer learning and evaluation (from the cohort seminars), integrative and interdisciplinary learning (enhanced by the combination of a traditional faculty member and a practitioner to lead each cohort and the uniqueness of disciplinary focus in each cohort), self-directed learning (from the pre-and post- seminar phases each year and the project), and the use of the student's ministry context (from the congregational resource team and the project). Cohorts are designed to become spiritual support groups for personal and spiritual growth, and each cohort curriculum includes activities designed to foster spiritual growth. Cohort leaders are tasked with exploring ministry at both the global and congregational level, and encourage students to consider resources outside their usual denomination and theological perspectives. Global awareness has also been strengthened by the presence of students from several countries outside the U.S.

All full-time resident faculty have teaching responsibility in the DMin program. Faculty are given specific training in the nature of DMin education and an orientation regarding resources and goals for this program. The pairing of a seasoned practitioner with a full-time faculty member enhances the work of each.

DMin students have the same access to library services as other students, both during their residential seminars and while at a distance during the pre-/post- seminar phases of each seminar and the project. Other seminary support services are available to DMin students.

Although not a part of the evaluation of this degree program standard, the visiting committee noted that the Doctor of Ministry program is not subject to any Institutional Research Board for its human subject research. Since at least some of the program's students will likely do research with human subjects, the

seminary is encouraged to investigate the need, specified in USDE and DHHS regulations, for such research oversight. The visiting committee notes that the University of Dubuque, in which UDTS is embedded, has a functioning IRB for human subject research, and this board should be of help to the seminary in determining its status and compliance for such research.

#### **IV. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Evaluation Committee recommends to the Board of Commissioners the following actions:

1. To reaffirm the accreditation of the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary for a period of ten years (fall 2024). [NOTE: The term listed in parentheses is the date of the next anticipated comprehensive visit, one term before the period of accreditation expires.]
2. To approve the following degree program(s):
  - Master of Divinity*
  - Master of Arts in Missional Christianity* (Professional MA)
  - Doctor of Ministry*
3. To approve the following extension site(s): None
4. To grant approval to offer comprehensive distance education: Yes
5. To encourage that attention be given to maintaining and enhancing these distinctive strengths:
  - a. Being an embedded school in a growing private Christian university, which provides significant resources that many stand-alone seminaries of its size do not enjoy; the challenge may be to move from a mentality of “being” an embedded school to more fully “functioning” that way, by seizing the present opportunity to revision the seminary within the university to better lead and serve internal and external constituencies.
  - b. An intentionally relational culture among the faculty that balances very well their roles as scholars, teachers, mentors, and colleagues; students often used the word “formation” to illustrate how the faculty build strong relationships with seminarians in order to shape their hearts and minds for pastoral, relational ministry.
  - c. The school’s early entry and extensive experience in the field of distance education, prompted by the needs of its primarily rural constituency, providing the only distance education program by a PC (USA) seminary.
  - d. A governing board for the university that demonstrates exemplary trustee leadership, strong support of the embedded seminary, and an openness to re-imagining how to do theological education through a collegial process that values shared governance and broad input.
6. To encourage that attention be given to the following areas of needed growth during the next period of accreditation:
  - a. Assessment is becoming part of the school’s culture, though still new enough to be an ongoing work in progress; the school is encouraged during the next period of accreditation to continue faculty conversations about how assessment data can improve student learning in significant and substantive ways, especially in light of the school’s core value of “excelling in theological education...” (Educational Standard, sections ES.6.1 (4) and ES.6.4.1)



- b. Diversity appears highly prized but not well implemented, at least in terms of racial and ethnic diversity among the faculty and, to some extent, among the students. The fall enrollment report indicates that less than 10% of the student body and less than 10% of faculty identifies as non-Caucasian (one faculty member is a registered Alaska Native Descendant.) Gender diversity in both groups is commendable. The school is encouraged to pursue new strategies to increase its diversity during the next period of accreditation. (Standard 5, section 5.1.3)
  - c. Technology in support of distance education has been a pioneering part of this school for more than a decade, noted above as a distinctive strength. Yet, the infrastructure supporting that distance education technology appears in need of renewed attention. An increased workload for faculty and a decreased support staff in technology have combined to “dull” somewhat the “cutting edge” of the school’s pioneering efforts in this area. This concern is amplified by the critical role that technology plays in how the school accomplishes its educational mission now and in its future. The school is encouraged to focus renewed efforts on additional staff support, improved faculty training and support, and increased attention to best practices in online pedagogy. (Standard 8, section 8.8.2, and Educational Standard, sections ES.4.2.10-12).
7. To take actions regarding the following areas of needed improvement:
- a. To require a report by November 1, 2015, describing how “the number of students enrolled in [its MAMC] degree program [is] sufficient to ensure a viable community of learning,” given that it currently enrolls only five students, down from nine students the previous fall. (Educational Standard, section ES.1.1.2)
  - b. To require a report by April 1, 2016, regarding progress in the school’s current efforts to “revision the seminary” in light of the school’s own sense that it now stands not at a crisis, but at a strategically opportune time to re-envision itself. The school’s long-term health may depend on its ability to discern in the near future what theological vision will guide it going forward, particularly in terms of how that vision will be implemented in such areas as educational programs, academic and support personnel, delivery methods, and constituent markets. The report should articulate how it understands and implements its “guiding vision,” in light of this statement from the Commission standards (emphasis added): “Theological schools are communities of faith and learning *guided by a theological vision.*” (Standard 1)