Annual Assessment Report
2019-2020
University of Dubuque Theological Seminary
August 2020

This report summarizing seminary assessment for the 2019-2020 academic year is submitted to the President, Board of Trustees, Council of Advisors, and Faculty/Staff Council as a part of the ongoing assessment effort of the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary and is based on the assessment plan submitted to the Board of Commissioners of the Association of Theological Schools.

Assessment Plan

Following the 2017-2018 academic year, the seminary moved to the more streamlined plan used by the rest of the university. This plan continues to identify student learning outcomes that are related to the defined degree program goals and assigns benchmarks that are designed to measure student learning related to that outcome in order to identify strengths and weaknesses, so that academic divisions and individual instructors may assess, and if necessary, revise teaching strategies. The assessment plan also gathers other quantitative and qualitative data that is essential to assessing the performance of the program, including student questionnaires and ordination examination results. The results of this corporate reflection and changes implemented due to the assessment process are summarized in this report by the Dean or his/her designee to the President, Seminary faculty and staff, Council of Advisors, and Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees each year.

The faculty engaged in the process of gathering assessment data throughout the 2019-2020 academic year. In a change from previous years, when only the Program Development Committee reviewed the data, the Faculty as a whole and in smaller groupings began reviewing and analyzing that data in the academic year 2016-17. Recommended curricular revisions are reflected in this report.

Doctor of Ministry

The Doctor of Ministry degree (D.Min.) provides advanced-level study using peer and self-directed learning in the theological disciplines within the context of a ministry setting. The D.Min goals, student learning outcomes, and artifacts listed in the assessment plan reflect these concerns for advanced study, particularly in regard to congregational revitalization. The D.Min. student learning outcomes were developed to demonstrate and measure progress through the duration of a student’s participation in the program. For example, in the first year the students are expected to identify key issues related to congregational revitalization by integrating the assigned readings and seminar discussions. The second year learning outcome is designed to measure the effectiveness of the Congregational Resource Team and includes integration of reading and discussion in the Year Two Seminar. The third learning outcome reflects the student’s ability to integrate study, research, and ministry experience in a final ministry project or thesis, and is assessed after that work is complete.

Data for the third D.Min. student learning outcome was collected and assessed (DM 866/867). This outcome requires that students complete their doctoral project in the form of a ministry focus paper or a thesis. During the 2019-2020 academic year we had three students successfully complete this artifact and graduate from the program. After assessing the final versions of these papers, the instructors, in consultation with the Director of the D.Min. Program, determined that all of the students demonstrated mastery of this outcome.

Students participating in DM 815/816 were asked to identify key issues related to congregational revitalization by integrating the assigned readings and class discussions. All demonstrated mastery of this learning outcome. Students in their second year (DM 825/826) were required to identify needs and strategies for revitalization within their own ministry settings, by reporting on the work of their congregational resource teams. All demonstrated mastery of this learning outcome. The Director of the D.Min. Program will continue to work with the instructors to fulfill this requirement and archive the appropriate assessment data following each D.Min. residency.

Master of Divinity

The Master of Divinity degree (M.Div.) educates students in the four areas of religious heritage, cultural context, personal and spiritual formation, and capacity for ministerial and public leadership. The M.Div. goals, student learning outcomes, and benchmarks listed in the assessment plan reflect the curricular emphasis in these four areas. In addition to benchmarks from courses, global assessments including Ordination Examinations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the ATS Entering Student Questionnaire, and Graduating Student Questionnaire are used to gather information on the achievement of learning goals at various points in the program and after graduation. Alumni/ae will also be surveyed for their evaluations.

The Dean and Director of Seminary Vocation analyzed and assessed these results, reviewing strengths and weaknesses, and referred concerns to the appropriate division for discussion and revision.

Beginning with the 2014-15 academic year, the Field Education office has developed appropriate SLOs, along with a rubric to match, and has asked Field Education Supervisors to answer a series of questions that assess the students’ performance on a scale of met, met with strength, or not met. These SLOs and the rubric are compiled by field education staff.

Other qualitative data, both direct and indirect, was reviewed by the faculty as a whole, including the ATS Entering Student Questionnaire, the ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire, and results of the Presbyterian Ordination Examinations. The faculty observed the following:

**Entering Student Questionnaire:**

The majority of our residential students (63%) continue to come from churches with fewer than 250 members, though 63% of distance students now come from churches with 100-499 members and 19% from churches with 500-999 members (Table 14).

69% of distance students considered theological education after graduating from college, down from 75% in 2015-16. Most residential students continue to consider seminary during or after college (Table 15).

Students first learned about our seminary from a friend, pastor, faculty member, or alum, though more distance students this year say they first learned about UDTS from a web search or our website (34%) (Table 16).

Many students (36%) gained additional information about UDTS from our website or a request from the website, but there was an increase in students (35%) who cite the importance of direct communication with school staff, faculty, and students (Table 17)

Making a school visit continued to be important or very important to 100% of residential students, but was important to only one distance student (Table 17).

The top factor in the decision to pursue theological education was a call from God, while a desire to serve others ranked second in most categories (Table 18).

Importance of factors in making a decision to attend UDTS included faculty, denominational affiliation, and curriculum (Table 19). For distance students, the availability of distance learning received the highest rating (5.0 on a scale of 5), while for residential students the desire for a school close to home received the third-highest rating (4.0).

A majority of both residential and distance students, as well as male and female, have an expectation of seeking a full time position in ministry after graduation (Table 23a).

Information in most of these categories was similar to previous years, though there are some trends toward considering theological education at a younger age, coming from larger congregations, and relying more heavily on personal interactions for information. The faculty and Director of Admissions will continue to monitor and respond to these trends as future classes complete the ESQ.

**Graduating Student Questionnaire:**

Student debt is less of a concern than in prior years. The Young Adult Ministry Scholars program has reduced the number of residential students graduating with significant debt, and in this academic year fewer than 38% of the class graduated with more than $30,000 in student debt, down from 42% the year before (Appendix A).

Measures of personal growth and educational effectiveness as compared with ATS as a whole are reported under the relevant learning outcomes in Appendix A.

Level of Satisfaction with the School continues to receive predominantly high scores. Residential students gave the lowest rating to ease of scheduling courses (3.6). Distance students were also mainly highly satisfied, aside from two low scores for financial aid (2.8) and debt counseling (2.6) (chart 20).

Overall Experience received high ratings from both distance and residential students. Spiritual growth, stronger faith, and good friends received the highest score (4.8 of 5), and most affirmed that they would come here again (4.6) (chart 21).

Both distance and residential students expect to serve in congregational ministry following graduation, although residential students also list campus ministry as a possible option (chart 23).

The faculty will continue to monitor concerns surrounding student debt, and will watch for other changes and trends as future classes complete the GSQ.

**Alumni Questionnaires:**

UDTS last used the ATS Alumni/ae Questionnaire to survey M.Div. graduates for in the fall of 2018, and will repeat this every 2-3 years.

**Presbyterian Ordination Examinations:**

The results of Presbyterian Ordination Examinations are also reported in Appendix A under their relevant learning outcomes. Passing rates in Biblical Exegesis and Polity have been increasing relative to the PCUSA, while scores in Worship and Theology have been losing ground. The Dean and Director of Seminary Vocation discussed this drop in performance with the relevant divisions so that plans can be made.

The faculty will continue to watch the trends of exam scores and consider ways to enhance student preparation.

**Master of Arts in Mission and Discipleship**

This degree replaced the Master of Arts in Missional Christianity beginning in the academic year 2015-16. The Master of Arts in Mission and Discipleship provides instruction in the Christian heritage (Scripture, theology, church history), in understanding cultural context, and in Christian formation. The M.A.M.D. degree program, both residential and distance, matriculated its first students during the 2016-17 academic year. Enrollment was low in this first year but this may be a result of curricular changes made late in the recruitment cycle.

**Observations and Revisions**

 Several observations and concerns have become apparent as a result of the assessment review process of the 2016-17 academic year.

1. The 2013-14 report noted that continued use of the Alumni/ae Questionnaire would require a more effective system for keeping our alumni/ae contacts up to date. Although we decided not to use the Alumni/ae Questionnaire in 2016-17, our Alumni Office has made progress in updating contact information for our graduates. We will consider how to gain more complete data on our alums during the next year.
2. Student debt continues to be a concern, especially for distance students. Changes in the fee structure beginning in summer 2018 will help to lower costs, but debt counseling continues as a challenge.

We are pleased with the progress that is represented by this assessment report and find that our mission is benefitting from such focused introspection. This assessment plan continues to give us the key data needed to effectively improve our seminary degree programs and to prepare for future changes in the landscape of theological education.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Assistant Dean of the Seminary