**Faculty Staff Retreat**

**May 8, 2024**

**Sisters of the Presentation**

**9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.**

**Present:** Blue, Colyer, Dodds, Duba, Elder, Felderman, Forshey, James, Longfield, McCaw, Schlimm, Shellabarger, Slemmons, L. Ward, M. Ward (for the first part of the meeting)

9:00 a.m. Dr. Forshey opened the retreat with worship and meditation on John 21

**Words of Guidance:** **Dr. Mark Ward**

* Dr. Travis Frampton, our new President, will start on June 1, 2024.
* Dr. Vance Thomas, our new Library Director, will also start on June 1, 2024.
* HLC will be doing a re-accreditation visit this September and the seminary will be considered another department for them, so we will be under review.
* New federal compliances for the undergraduates will start July 1, 2024, which means we will have to report the following;
1. Debt/Earnings; if earnings from a degree does not cover student loans, the student will need to sign paperwork, so they are aware of the debt they will be accruing.
2. Gainful Employment; need to supply 10 years of earnings.
3. Licensure/Certificate; undergrads coming from Illinois will need to teach in Illinois.

**Incoming Class Projections:** **Rev. Samuel Felderman**

* Current enrollment numbers reported as of today;
* 7 MDiv Enrolled
* 7 MDiv in process
* 2 MAMD Enrolled
* 1 MAM Enrolled
* 2 MARTS Enrolled
* 2 MARTS in process
* Unclassified students are up from last year
* Last year we admitted 15 new students in the fall.
* The last three weeks of August is the busiest time for admissions.
* Faculty speaking engagements are very helpful for admissions.
* An Admissions Recruitment Team will be starting soon.

**Shared Governance: *(Recognize these relationships: What do we hope to offer and receive?)* Break out Groups**

* **Council of Advisors** **Beth/Jill**
* Create a new covenant for the Manuel of Operations.
* Increase the involvement of COA members to 15.
* Get their input and engagement for strategic marketing.
* Include alumni
* Help us connect to other constituencies and future goals
* Include COA members on panels and workshops
* Restore term limits- two, three year terms in a row with the seventh year off, to create new opportunities.
* **Wider University Lindsey, Mary Emily, Tim**

(1) What we offer the wider university:

* We help set the tone for being a Christian university by speaking and teaching the faith, participating in and offering worship opportunities, serving the Wendt program (speakers, mentors).

(2) What we receive (or hope to receive) from the wider university:

* Curriculum review and course proposals go through the graduate curriculum committee. This holds us accountable to standards and forces our involvement in the wider committee;
* We use the university's probation system, which also serves as accountability.
* Needs:
	+ Alumni engagement through University Relations (we also recognized that they are sorely understaffed);
	+ ASC professional staffing for our students;
	+ Professional development opportunities.
* **Board of Trustees Elmer, Susan, Chris**
* We offer the Trustees;
* Artifacts about us.
* Give examples to Dr. McCaw to share what faculty are doing.
* Broken record of who we are and what we do.
* Presentation (did last year)
* Tell our story around finances of seminary grants
* Host something when board is in town
* Board as potential ministry context (devotions at meetings)
* We need;
* A faculty Rep on the Board; relationships and communications
* Clarity of seminary finances
* Scholarships; open existing ones and create new ones.
* Few Board members to build relationships with.
* Pursue seminary donors on our behalf.
* **New Staff and Adjunct Faculty Matt, Emily, Becky**
* Who we are – where do they fit? How do they reflect us? Mission? Does that translate to the students?
* Mission=Short Sweet Distinctive;
1. Invite them to all faculty/staff events
2. Connect with all faculty and staff / August / Involved
3. No Micromanaging – academic freedom
4. Involve more faculty/staff in the hiring process
* Share expectations
* Early on- Onboarding ARTICULATE us to them.
* More about FIT / less to manage later
* Conversation early = your calling
* = goals and mission fits
* = calling fits us
* = TOGETHER with someone WATCHING over
* Faculty and staff involved in EVERY hire
* New program hires should have huge involvement= All present here
* **New President, Library Director, VPAA Brad, Samuel, Nick**

 **President:**

* Should have faculty rank. Perhaps Professor of Biblical Interpretation (given dissertation)? Maybe teach a course occasionally?
* Should be invited to faculty meetings. Perhaps at least the first and last meeting of the year.
* Should be invited to preach in chapel/baccalaureate
* Should be encouraged to attend ATS new president meeting, ATS biennial meeting, COTE, General Assembly.
* Needs to get prepped for ATS accreditation visit (copy of visit report, copy of New Day Dawning, debrief on the administrative and faculty changes for last 10 years, changes in degree programs, admissions numbers, denominational composition students and faculty, cv’s of all faculty and staff, get on ATS list serves).

 **Librarian:**

* Needs faculty rank (Professor of Theological Bibliography?) and (per ATS) should attend all faculty meetings and have a voice in all curricular decisions vis-à-vis need for library support.
* Needs to be a major player in new student orientation so students have a clear understanding of library resources and how to access them. Can tell folks about Turabian, hit plagiarism one more time, show all the resources Becky showed us that most folks knew nothing about.

 **VPAA:**

* It is not at all clear what the relationship is between the VPAA and the VP and Dean of the Seminary. To the best of our knowledge the VP and Dean of the Seminary is not mentioned in the Faculty handbook. To whom does the VP and Dean of the Seminary report? Who is in charge of the seminary curriculum/new degree programs? Who recommends faculty for appointment or promotion/dismissal? Who has budgetary authority/ determines what new positions are needed or whether old positions should be eliminated? Who is the main liaison to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board? Where is the VP and Dean of the Seminary on the university organizational chart? No doubt the new VPAA and ATS will want to know all of this.

**Exegesis of Corporate Reflections to Date *(Reviewing these corporate exercises in taking stock-What themes emerge in terms of mission and identity? What have been the keys to these?***

* **New Day Dawning; Board of Trustees Survey Chris, Beth**
* The beginning of the new presidency is a good time for recapitulation of New Day Dawning (NDD) 10 years in.
* NDD stresses centrality of campus/student body – a call to shift toward embeddedness – but not exclusively so, our mission. We have done this with most seminary faculty teaching college classes, with GA’s working in campus ministry, and with moving the Theology major into the seminary.
* NDD highlights the need to train students to be entrepreneurial – this went into curricular revision, such as the class in starting missional communities. Increasingly we also take alternative models of ministry into contextual assumptions in OTHER classes.
* Branding – we need to focus on a few key ones put them out there. Formation, “we believe this stuff,” love of the church, primarily church oriented, missionally innovative approaches. We meet people where they are (key theme lifted up by Board of Trustees survey also) – while valuing “locatedness.”
* Places are a missional context.
* Lay academy was mentioned in NDD – the 2023/2024 CLP/CEP overhaul is a significant answer to this vision.
* Partnership in NDD – has become more important. Theology Matters, Collaboration Project sub-grantee in Madison; potential for collaborating with the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary foundation as we seem to share values and vision. Partnerships – increasingly important.
* Per NDD vision – we have increased use of bi-vocational practitioners as adjuncts - teaching along with their ministry expertise. This strengthens our brand for us being practically relevant.
* We want to restructure use of our scholarships so they meet UDTS students of today.
* There is importance in finding a unique niche – best in class, be our best selves – rather than generally “best theological education out there.” We have a distinctive gift to give.
* Flipped classroom was mentioned in NDD – done. Also in Madison with innovation in modalities.
* Shift from content we want to teach to the kind of leader we want to form – increasingly we stress the latter, without neglecting content.
* NDD references preparing leaders emanating from multiple hubs. We are doing this in our partnerships (Theology Matters, CEP Synod of Rocky Mountains co-teachers), and in our localized learning communities grant program explorations.
* **2022 and 2023 Faculty/Staff Retreats Lindsey, Brad, Jill**
* Focus on four things and do them well;
1. Coherence with adjuncts; Improve Onboarding
2. Orientation for New Students; High Quality
3. CLP; Keep leaning into this program, it’s working well
4. Faculty/Staff recruiting; Sending faculty out to recruit
* **Divisional Discussions Mary Emily, Elmer, Susan**
1. Identified "training Pastors and Equipping Congregations" as a clear, key theme.
2. Identified a tension between our identity as a reformed seminary and an ecumenical seminary. What does this tension mean for our mission and identity, as well as how we communicate that identity to students? What needs to be articulated and clarified in order that we can more clearly know and live into a common mission?
* **Council of Advisors/Focus Groups Tim, Becky, Samuel**

Reflecting on the separate conversation groups we were in, all three of us made comment on just how well the format for the conversation worked and how engaged the participants were in the discussions. While many things were discussed in the different groups, there were noticeable trends across all groups. All groups highlighted:

* Our commitment to the Rural Church
* Our commitment to training pastors for congregational ministry
* Our commitment to practical ministry

One negative that was highlighted across groups however was our students lack leadership skills in difficult conversations and underscored our need to continue to be intentional about training our students in dialogue and being a calming presence in the midst of conflict.

* **ATS Daily Prompts (Wider University) Nick, Emily, Matt**
	+ Pastoral Care = Psychology
	+ Ministry and Money = Business MBA; Administration
	+ We could teach outside of UDTS; Matt=Lit; Nick=Com/Lit; Brad=History; Tim=Communications; Susan=Lit/English
	+ We survive if we teach a lot of students= #’s matter
	+ Reconsider the Theology Degree; finesse and change dynamics
	+ Master of Arts in Chaplaincy= Nursing/PA and ROTC connection
	+ ROTC= Moral Injury and The Bible
	+ Supporting other programs and how we INTERSECT with them.
	+ Could have a BLANKET MA in Theology and focus on Ministry, Biblical Studies, Mission, Chaplaincy, Business/MBA, Theology/Education

**Stewarding New Initiatives Toward Our Core Mission (*What could these look like in 2030: What key needs could they meet in the church of tomorrow? How could they strengthen and reflect our distinctive vocation? How would they contribute to seminary sustainability?***

* **Learning Communities Lindsey, Mary Emily, Chris**
* Need to capture knowledge of best practices for gathering people in other places? What’s replicable secret sauce to use in all learning communities. These are the essentials. This is how we do it.
* LCs address polarization.
* LCs offer companions for the journey (outside the bubble). This addresses burnout, isolation in ministry.
* Serving places that other seminaries are not present
* Bridging lay and masters preparation

Strengthen and reflect distinctive vocation

* Training pastors & equipping congregations (as a pair) (plentiful gifts)
* Ecumenism/ Christian conversation (is this commonly held?)(is it only in some spaces?)

How would they contribute to seminary sustainability?

* Flash in the pan? Or
* Revenue positive beyond grant period
* Importance of onboarding and tethering into our vocational identity (come in August)
* Recruitment into academic programs
* Vehicle for forming organizational partnerships (limit to those we can be good partners with)(Presbyteries and churches
* Vehicle for identifying adjunct faculty
* Proximity to church and places (as distinctive vocation)
* **MA Degrees Matt, Emily, Brad, Susan**
* People are being ordained with 2-year Master’s degrees. This is because Boomers are retiring.
* Focus on Practical Theology and Pastoral Studies
* Be willing to try new things and fail, then let go of it.
* MACL to MAM is healthy (Susan saw that UDTS needed to adapt and did it. How do we evaluate current programs to move to new idea?

The self-study will help guide us.

* Marketing; we need to get the word out and the website isn’t enough.
* Markets: 1. Forum for Theological Exploration-young adults

 2. Mainline groups- PC(USA) and UMC

 3. Specific geographic regions

* Who are we reaching? What’s feeding us? Where do we go? Who are we wanting to reach?
* **DMin Special Interest Tracks Jill, Tim, Elmer**

(1) The instructor with one of our lowest completion rates is going to tie written assignments in seminar phase more directly to the eventual final project (one chapter per semester) with a summary of findings and conclusions at the end to serve as the capstone to the program.

(2) The program will require the project proposal to constitute the primary third-year, graded seminar paper.

(3) We have recently made some hard choices in declining to admit candidates who did not seem quite ready for the program, and we will likely need to exercise this option going forward, especially where likelihood of completion seems low, all in the interest of helping prospective student be better stewards of their time and resources, and being better stewards of the same for ourselves.

(4) We will seek to enhance more institutional support, by exercising more "caringly intrusive" encouragement of students in their project phase. Whether DMin Director time and load will allow for this, especially if we decide to add separate terms for the May residency (which would add considerably to registration responsibilities), whether instructors (already stretched) can shoulder this added responsibility, or whether we need a dedicated Director of Doctoral Projects, remains to be seen. [If I can editorialize for a moment, if either of the former two options, doing more with less, seems the way to go, I hope we will bear in mind Sam's reminder, that DMin students now make up half our student body, and if we are going to shepherd them through three terms per years instead of two, then this would add substantially to administrative workload.] But, yes, we need to ride herd more closely over our students in project phase: first, making sure they emerge from seminars with an approved research proposal, and second, making sure that those who do not naturally thrive in doing independent research are receiving frequent encouragement to meet their deadlines.

(5) I would continue to raise awareness of the financial need of our students who are serving in part-time congregations or ministry contexts. Our program is very affordable, but ministry pay is notoriously low anyway, so working for half of what is already low can make even the most modest hill insurmountable for some. The Omaha PSF has been a good friend to our program, but the caps of support they offer and the geographical restriction attached to their mission does exclude some students; meanwhile, those serving in PT charges often have deep holes to climb out of, esp. if they entered such charges with unresolved seminary- or other household-debt.

(6) Susan's proposal to offer her cohort with rolling admissions would also invite project phase students to attend residencies for conversation, fellowship, as well as library-time for research. She envisions that collegial spirit as being conducive toward encouraging students to advance toward completion and even allowing more advanced student to share their experiences, discoveries, and best research practices with those in seminars.

(7) Our "all adjunct" teams—really one—has not had a great completion rate, and though I do expect another finisher there, and those who exited did so for personal reasons (in one case, health; in another, a family crisis), the orientation process for adjuncts could be stronger. These two instructors did take Jenn Pattee's course when she was here; but this cohort has functioned in a fairly hands-off, autonomous mode (as have, frankly, some of our in-house cohorts).

(8) We discussed some other structural matters regarding grading policy, converting the project phase semesters to P/F, etc., and while positive and timely reporting of grades (even P's) in seminar semesters (instead of waiting for an end of year grade to be backfilled) would certainly help build a sense of momentum—itself a worthy goal—beyond that, this part of our conversation was more focused on administrative processes than on direct intervention that would juice our completion rates.

* **Lay Education/Plentiful Gifts Becky, Nick, Samuel, Beth**
* We have a core call to help people grow their faith – discipleship across the church.
* By 2030 – half of congregations will be lay led.
* We grow people practically - but also solid theologically, in our lay programs.
* How do we find those people wanting and needing to be equipped from square one?
* How can we help churches find people in their pews?
* There is not a big difference between for credit and CE students in Madison (Nick)
* What do we make of that - identifying people to equip educationally?
* Let us not overlook -lay education can be *for credit*….
* What about opening MAM class – intro to theology and ministry -waive that as a requirement in the degree, *or* get credit for it? Samuel has worked out the math for what this requires, making it a more flexible offering for diverse lay education needs.
* Can we try to funnel our offerings into a wider option of buckets, like an MATS…. Or have MAM and MAMD meet in middle at a 36 credit offering?
* Regardless – there could be advantages to getting the MAM approved under ATS. Look into this.

At noon the meeting concluded with lunch.