3 The theological curriculum: learning, teaching, and research

A theological school is a community of faith and learning that cultivates habits of theological reflection, nurtures wise and skilled ministerial practice, and contributes to the formation of spiritual awareness and moral sensitivity. Within this context, the task of the theological curriculum is central. It includes the interrelated activities of learning, teaching, and research. The theological curriculum is the means by which learning, teaching, and research are formally ordered to educational goals.

3.1 Goals of the theological curriculum

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

3.1.2 The emphasis placed on particular goals and their configuration will vary, both from school to school (depending on the understanding of institutional purpose) and within each school (depending on the variety of educational programs offered). The ordering of teaching, learning, and research toward particular sets of goals is embodied in the degree programs of the school and in the specific curricula followed in those programs. The theological curriculum, comprehensively understood, embraces all those activities and experiences provided by the school to enable students to achieve the intended goals. More narrowly understood, the curriculum is the array of specific activities (e.g., courses, practice, supervised ministry, spiritual formation experiences, theses) explicitly required in a degree program. In both the more comprehensive and the more narrow sense, the curriculum should be seen as a set of practices with a formative aim—the development of intellectual, spiritual, moral, and vocational or professional capacities—and careful attention must be given to the coherence and mutual enhancement of its various elements.

3.2 Learning, teaching, and research

Learning and teaching occur in the classroom and through experiences outside the classroom; the responsibilities of teaching and learning rest with both students and faculty; the collaborative nature of theological scholarship requires that people teach and learn from one another in communal settings; and research is integral to the quality of both learning and teaching.

3.2.1 Learning

3.2.1.1 Learning in a theological school should reflect the goals of the total curriculum and be appropriate to post-baccalaureate education.

3.2.1.2 Learning should cultivate scholarly discourse and result in the ability to think critically and constructively, conduct research, use library resources, and engage in the practice of ministry.

3.2.1.3 Learning should foster, in addition to the acquisition of knowledge, the capacity to understand
and assess one’s tradition and identity and to integrate materials from various theological disciplines and modes of instructional engagement in ways that enhance ministry and cultivate emotional and spiritual maturity.

3.2.1.4 An institution shall demonstrate its ongoing efforts to ensure the quality of learning within the context of its purpose and as understood by the relevant scholarly and ecclesial communities.

3.2.2 Teaching

3.2.2.1 Teaching should involve faculty, librarians, and students working together in an environment of mutual learning, respect, and engagement.

3.2.2.2 Instructional methods should use the diversity of life experiences represented by the students, by faith communities, and by the larger cultural context. Instructional methods and the use of technology should be sensitive to the diversity of student populations, different learning styles of students, the importance of communities of learning, and the instructional goals. The integration of technology as a teaching tool and resource for learning shall include careful planning by faculty and administration to ensure adequate infrastructure, resources, training, and support.

3.2.2.3 Courses are a central place of interaction between teachers and learners. The way the instructor arranges the work and structures the class should encourage theological conversation. Courses and programs of study should reflect an awareness of the diversity of worldwide and local settings. In the development of new courses and the review of syllabi, faculty should interact with one another, with librarians, with their students, with the church, and with the developing fields of knowledge. Faculty should be appropriately involved in the consideration of ways in which technology might enhance or strengthen student learning. Course development and review best occur in the context of the goals of the entire curriculum.

3.2.2.4 An institution shall demonstrate its ongoing efforts to ensure the quality of teaching within the context of its purpose and as understood by the relevant scholarly and ecclesial communities.

3.2.3 Research

3.2.3.1 Research is an essential component of theological scholarship and should be evident in the work of both teachers and students. Theological research is both an individual and a communal enterprise and is properly undertaken in constructive relationship with the academy, with the church, and with the wider public.

3.2.3.2 As a function of learning, research involves the skills needed both to discover information and to integrate new information with established understandings. As a function of teaching, research assimilates sources of in-formation, constructs patterns of understanding, and uncovers new information in order to strengthen classroom experiences.

3.3 Characteristics of theological scholarship

Patterns of collaboration, freedom of inquiry, relationships with diverse publics, and a global awareness are important characteristics of theological scholarship.

3.3.1
Scholarly collaboration

3.3.1.1 The activities of theological scholarship—teaching, learning, and research—are collaborative efforts among faculty, librarians, and students, and foster a lifelong commitment to learning and reflection.

3.3.1.2 Scholarship occurs in a variety of contexts in the theological school. These include courses, independent study, the library, student and faculty interaction, congregational and field settings, and courses in universities and other graduate level institutions. In each of these settings, mutual respect among scholarly inquirers characterizes theological scholarship.

3.3.1.3 Collaboration and communication extend beyond the theological school's immediate environment to relate it to the wider community of the church, the academy, and the society. Theological scholarship is enhanced by active engagement with the diversity and global extent of those wider publics, and it requires a consciousness of racial, ethnic, gender, and global diversities. In accordance with the school's purpose and constituencies, insofar as possible, the members of the school's own community of learning should also represent diversity in race, age, ethnic origin, and gender.

3.3.2 Freedom of inquiry

Both in an institution’s internal life and in its relationship with its publics, freedom of inquiry is indispensable for good theological education. This freedom, while variously understood, has both religious roots and an established value in North American higher education. Theological schools have a responsibility to maintain their institutional purpose, which for many schools includes confessional commitments and specific responsibilities for faculty as stipulated by these commitments. Schools shall uphold the freedom of inquiry necessary for genuine and faithful scholarship, articulate their understanding of that freedom, formally adopt policies to implement that understanding and ensure procedural fairness, and carefully adhere to those policies.

3.3.3 Involvement with diverse publics

3.3.3.1 Theological scholarship requires engagement with a diverse and manifold set of publics. Although the particular purpose of a school will influence the balance and forms of this engagement, schools shall assume responsibility for relating to the church, the academic community, and the broader public.

3.3.3.2 Theological scholarship informs and enriches the reflective life of the church. The school should demonstrate awareness of the diverse manifestations of religious community encompassed by the term church: congregations, denominations, parachurch organizations, broad confessional traditions, and the church catholic. Library collections, courses, and degree programs should represent the historical breadth, cultural difference, confessional diversity, and global scope of Christian life and thought.

3.3.3.3 The theological faculty contributes to the advancement of learning within theological education and, more broadly, in the academic community, by contributions to the scholarly study of religion and its role in higher education.

3.3.3.4 Theological scholarship contributes to the articulation of religion’s role and influence in the public sphere. The faculty and administration should take responsibility for the appropriate exercise of
this public interpretive role to enrich the life of a culturally and religiously diverse society.

3.3.4 Global awareness and engagement

3.3.4.1 Theological teaching, learning, and research require patterns of institutional and educational practice that contribute to an awareness and appreciation of global interconnectedness and interdependence, particularly as they relate to the mission of the church. These patterns are intended to enhance the ways institutions participate in the ecumenical, dialogical, evangelistic, and justice efforts of the church.

3.3.4.2 Global awareness and engagement is cultivated by curricular attention to cross-cultural issues as well as the study of other major religions by opportunities for cross-cultural experiences; by the composition of the faculty, governing board, and student body; by professional development of faculty members; and by the design of community activities and worship.

3.3.4.3 Schools shall demonstrate practices of teaching, learning, and research (comprehensively understood as theological scholarship) that encourage global awareness and responsiveness.

3.3.5 Ethics of scholarship

The institution shall define and demonstrate ongoing efforts to ensure the ethical character of learning, teaching, and scholarship on the part of all members of the academic community, including appropriate guidelines for research with human participants.

NEASC Standards

Standard Four: The Academic Program
The institution’s academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the academic quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded. The institution sets a standard of student achievement appropriate to the degree awarded and develops the systematic means to understand how and what students are learning and to use the evidence obtained to improve the academic program.

4.1 The institution’s programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution offers collegiate-level programs consisting of a curriculum of studies that leads to a degree in a recognized field of study and requires at least one year to complete. The institution for which the associate’s degree is the highest awarded offers at least one program in liberal studies or another area of study widely available at the baccalaureate level of regionally accredited colleges and universities.

4.2 Through its system of academic administration and faculty participation, the institution demonstrates an effective system of academic oversight, assuring the quality of the academic program wherever and however it is offered.

4.3 Each educational program demonstrates coherence through its goals, structure, and content; policies and procedures for admission and retention; instructional methods and procedures; and
the nature, quality, and extent of student learning and achievement. The institution offering multiple academic programs ensures that all programs meet or exceed the basic quality standards of the institution and that there is a reasonable consistency in quality among them. The institution provides sufficient resources to sustain and improve its academic programs.

4.4 Institutions offering degrees at multiple levels demonstrate that expectations for student achievement, independent learning, skills in inquiry, and critical judgment are graduated by degree level and in keeping with generally accepted practice.

4.5 The institution publishes the learning goals and requirements for each program. Such goals include the knowledge, intellectual and academic skills, and methods of inquiry to be acquired. In addition, if relevant to the program, goals include creative abilities and values to be developed and specific career-preparation practices to be mastered.

4.6 Degree programs have a coherent design and are characterized by appropriate breadth, depth, continuity, sequential progression, and synthesis of learning.

4.7 The institution ensures that students use information resources and information technology as an integral part of their education. The institution provides appropriate orientation and training for use of these resources, as well as instruction and support in information literacy and information technology appropriate to the degree level and field of study. (See also 7.10)

4.8 Students completing an undergraduate or graduate degree program demonstrate collegiate-level skills in the English language.

4.9 The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its degree programs under effective institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters.

4.10 The institution undertakes academic planning and evaluation as part of its overall planning and evaluation to enhance the achievement of institutional mission and program objectives. These activities are realistic and take into account stated goals and available resources. The evaluation of existing programs includes an external perspective and assessment of their effectiveness. Additions and deletions of programs are consistent with institutional mission and capacity, faculty expertise, student needs, and the availability of sufficient resources required for the development and improvement of academic programs. The institution allocates resources on the basis of its academic planning, needs, and objectives.

4.11 Institutions undertaking the initiation of degrees at a higher or lower level, off-campus programs, programs that substantially broaden the scope of the academic offerings, distance learning programs, correspondence education programs, contractual relationships involving courses and programs, academic programs overseas, or other substantive change demonstrate their capacity to undertake and sustain such initiatives and to assure that the new academic programming meets the standards of quality of the institution and the Commission's Standards and policies. In keeping with Commission policy, institutions initiating substantive changes seek Commission approval prior to implementation. The institution recognizes and takes account of the increased demands on resources made by programs offered at a higher degree level.
When programs are eliminated or program requirements are changed, the institution makes appropriate arrangements for enrolled students so that they may complete their education with a minimum of disruption.

If the institution depends on resources outside its direct control (for example, classrooms, information resources, information technology, testing sites), provision is made for a clear, fixed understanding of that relationship that ensures the reasonable continued availability of those resources. Clear descriptions of the circumstances and procedures for the use of such resources are readily available to students who require them.

**Undergraduate Degree Programs**

Undergraduate degree programs are designed to give students a substantial and coherent introduction to the broad areas of human knowledge, their theories and methods of inquiry, plus in-depth study in at least one disciplinary or interdisciplinary area. Programs have an appropriate rationale; their clarity and order are visible in stated requirements in official publications and in student records.

Each undergraduate program includes a general education requirement and a major or concentration requirement. At the baccalaureate level, curricula include substantial requirements at the intermediate and advanced undergraduate level, with appropriate prerequisites. Wherever possible, the institution also affords undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue knowledge and understanding through unrestricted electives.

**General Education**

The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution’s definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn.

The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another.

The institution ensures that all undergraduate students complete at least the equivalent of forty semester hours in a bachelor’s degree program, or the equivalent of twenty semester hours in an associate’s degree program in general education.

Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind.
The Major or Concentration

4.20 The major or area of concentration affords the student the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills in a specific disciplinary or clearly articulated interdisciplinary area above the introductory level through properly sequenced course work. Requirements for the major or area of concentration are based upon clear and articulated learning objectives, including a mastery of the knowledge, information resources, methods, and theories pertinent to a particular area of inquiry. Through the major or area of concentration, the student develops an understanding of the complex structure of knowledge germane to an area of inquiry and its interrelatedness to other areas of inquiry. For programs designed to provide professional training, an effective relationship exists between curricular content and effective practice in the field of specialization. Graduates demonstrate an in-depth understanding of an area of knowledge or practice, its principal information resources, and its interrelatedness with other areas.

Graduate Degree Programs

- 4.21 Graduate degree programs are designed to give students a mastery of a complex field of study or professional area. Programs have an appropriate rationale; their clarity and order are visible in stated requirements, in relevant official publications, and in the demonstrated learning experiences of graduates. Learning objectives reflect a high level of complexity, specialization, and generalization.

- 4.22 Graduate programs are not offered unless resources and expectations exceed those required for an undergraduate program in a similar field. Information resources, information technology, and as appropriate physical resources should exceed those required for an undergraduate program in a similar field.

- 4.23 Institutions offering graduate degrees have an adequate staff of full-time faculty in areas appropriate to the degree offered. Faculty responsible for graduate programs are sufficient by credentials, experience, number, and time commitment for the successful accomplishment of program objectives and program improvement. The scholarly expectations of faculty exceed those expected for faculty working at the undergraduate level. Research-oriented graduate programs have a preponderance of active research scholars on their faculties. Professionally-oriented programs include faculty who are experienced professionals making scholarly contributions to the development of the field.

- 4.24 Students admitted to graduate degree programs are demonstrably qualified for advanced academic study.

- 4.25 The institution’s graduate programs have cohesive curricula and require scholarly and professional activities designed to advance the student substantially beyond the educational accomplishments of a baccalaureate degree program. The demands made by the institution’s graduate programs on students’ intellectual and creative capacities are also significantly greater than those expected at the undergraduate level; graduate programs build upon and challenge students beyond the levels of knowledge and competence acquired at the undergraduate level. The institution offering both undergraduate and graduate degree programs assesses the relationship and interdependence of the two levels and utilizes the results for their individual and collective improvement.

- 4.26 Degree requirements of the institution’s graduate programs take into account specific program
purposes. Research-oriented doctoral programs, including the Ph.D., and disciplinary master’s degree programs are designed to prepare students for scholarly careers; they emphasize the acquisition, organization, utilization, and dissemination of knowledge. Doctoral degree programs afford the student substantial mastery of the subject matter, theory, literature, and methodology of a significant field of study. They include a sequential development of research skills leading to the attainment of an independent research capacity. Students undertake original research that contributes to new knowledge in the chosen field of study. Disciplinary master’s programs have many of the same objectives but require less sophisticated levels of mastery in the chosen field of study than does the research doctorate. While they need not require students to engage in original research, they do provide an understanding of research appropriate to the discipline and the manner in which it is conducted.

4.27 Professional or practice-oriented programs at the doctoral or master’s degree levels are designed to prepare students for professional practice involving the application or transmission of existing knowledge or the development of new applications of knowledge within their field. Such programs afford the student a broad conceptual mastery of the field or professional practice through an understanding of its subject matter, literature, theory, and methods. They seek to develop the capacity to interpret, organize, and communicate knowledge, and to develop those analytical and professional skills needed to practice in and advance the profession. Instruction in relevant research methodology is provided, directed toward the appropriate application of its results as a regular part of professional practice. Programs include the sequential development of professional skills that will result in competent practitioners. Where there is a hierarchy of degrees within an area of professional study, programs differ by level as reflected in the expected sophistication, knowledge, and capacity for leadership within the profession by graduates.

4.28 Programs encompassing both research activities and professional practice define their relative emphases in program objectives that are reflected in curricular, scholarly, and program requirements.

4.29 Students who successfully complete a graduate program demonstrate that they have acquired the knowledge and developed the skills that are identified as the program’s objectives.

**Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit**

4.30 The institution’s degrees and other forms of academic recognition are appropriately named, following practices common to American institutions of higher education in terms of length, content, and level of the programs. The institution ensures that minimum degree requirements are 60 semester credits at the associate’s level, 120 semester credits at the baccalaureate level, and 30 semester credits at the master’s level.

4.31 The institution offers required and elective courses as described in publicly available print and electronic formats with sufficient availability to provide students with the opportunity to graduate within the published program length.

4.32 The institution demonstrates its clear and ongoing authority and administrative oversight for the academic elements of all courses for which it awards institutional credit or credentials. These responsibilities include course content and the delivery of the instructional program; selection, approval, professional development, and evaluation of faculty; admission, registration, and
retention of students; evaluation of prior learning; and evaluation of student progress, including the awarding and recording of credit. The institution retains, even with contractual or other arrangements, responsibility for the design, content, and delivery of courses for which academic credit or degrees are awarded. The institution awarding a joint, dual, or concurrent degree demonstrates that the program is consistent with Commission policy, and that the student learning outcomes meet the institution’s own standards and those of the Commission.

. 4.33 The evaluation of student learning or achievement and the award of credit are based upon clearly stated criteria that reflect learning objectives and are consistently and effectively applied. They are appropriate to the degree level at which they are applied.

. 4.34 Credit awards are consistent with Commission policy and the course content, appropriate to the field of study, and reflect the level and amount of student learning. The award of credit is based on policies developed and overseen by the faculty and academic administration. There is demonstrable academic content for all experiences for which credit is awarded, including study abroad, internships, independent study, and service learning. No credit toward graduation is awarded for pre-collegiate level or remedial work designed to prepare the student for collegiate study.

. 4.35 Credit for prior experiential or non-collegiate sponsored learning is awarded only at the undergraduate level with appropriate oversight by faculty and academic administration. When credit is awarded on the basis of prior experiential or non-collegiate sponsored learning alone, student learning and achievement are demonstrated to be at least comparable in breadth, depth, and quality to the results of institutionally provided learning experiences. The policies and procedures for the award of credit for prior experiential learning are clearly stated and available to affected students.

. 4.36 The institution publishes requirements for continuation in, termination from, or re-admission to its academic programs that are compatible with its educational purposes. Decisions about the continuing academic standing of enrolled students are based on clearly stated policies and applied by faculty and academic administrators.

. 4.37 Graduation requirements are clearly stated in appropriate electronic and print publications and are consistently applied in the degree certification process. The degrees awarded accurately reflect student attainments.

. 4.38 Faculty, with administrative support, ensure the academic integrity of the award of grades, where applicable, and credits for individual courses. The institution works to prevent cheating and plagiarism as well as to deal forthrightly with any instances in which they occur.

. 4.39 The institution offering programs and courses for abbreviated or concentrated time periods or via distance or correspondence learning demonstrates that students completing these programs or courses acquire levels of knowledge, understanding, and competencies equivalent to those achieved in similar programs offered in more traditional time periods and modalities. Programs and courses are designed to ensure an opportunity for reflection and for analysis of the subject matter and the identification, analysis and evaluation of information resources beyond those provided directly for the course.

. 4.40 Courses and programs offered for credit off campus, through distance or correspondence
education, or through continuing education, evening or week-end divisions are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution. Such activities are integral parts of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus. They receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs. Students have ready access to and support in using appropriate learning resources. The institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs and assures adequate resources to maintain quality. (See also 3.10)

4.41 On-campus faculty have a substantive role in the design and implementation of off-campus programs. Students enrolled in off-campus courses, distance learning courses, and/or correspondence education courses have sufficient opportunities to interact with faculty regarding course content and related academic matters.

4.42 An institution that offers distance education or correspondence education has procedures through which it establishes that the student who registers for such a course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit. In carrying out these procedures, the institution protects student privacy.

4.43 Institutions offering certificates based on courses offered for credit ensure the coherence and level of academic quality are consistent with its degree programs.

4.44 In accepting undergraduate transfer credit from other institutions, the institution applies policies and procedures that ensure that credit accepted reflects appropriate levels of academic quality and is applicable to the student’s program. The institution’s policies for considering the transfer of credit are publicly available to students and prospective students on its website and in other communications. The information includes the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education along with a list of institutions with which it has articulation agreements.

4.45 The institution does not erect barriers to the acceptance of transfer credit that are unnecessary to protect its academic quality and integrity, and it seeks to establish articulation agreements with institutions from which and to which there is a significant pattern of student transfer. Such agreements are made available to those students affected by them.

4.46 Students complete at least one fourth of their undergraduate program, including advanced work in the major or concentration, at the institution awarding the degree. In accepting transfer credit, the institution exercises the responsibility to ensure that students have met its stated learning outcomes of programs at all degree levels. The acceptance of transfer credit does not substantially diminish the proportion of intermediate and advanced coursework in a student’s academic program.

4.47 The institution accepts graduate credit in transfer on a strictly limited basis to preserve the integrity of the degree awarded.

Assessment of Student Learning

4.48 The institution implements and provides support for systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain,
achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded.

4.49 The institution’s approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students.

4.50 Expectations for student learning reflect both the mission and character of the institution and general expectations of the larger academic community for the level of degree awarded and the field of study. These expectations include statements that are consistent with the institution’s mission in preparing students for further study and employment, as appropriate. (See also 1.4 and 2.7)

4.51 The institution’s approach to understanding what and how students are learning and using the results for improvement has the support of the institution’s academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty. (See also 3.12)

4.52 The institution’s system of periodic review of academic programs includes a focus on understanding what and how students learn as a result of the program. (See also 2.6, 4.9 and 4.10)

4.53 The institution ensures that students have systematic, substantial, and sequential opportunities to learn important skills and understandings and actively engage in important problems of their discipline or profession and that they are provided with regular and constructive feedback designed to help them improve their achievement.

4.54 The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, and includes external perspectives. The institution devotes appropriate attention to ensuring that its methods of understanding student learning are trustworthy and provide information useful in the continuing improvement of programs and services for students.

Institutional Effectiveness

4.55 The institution’s principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings and student learning.

3 The Theological curriculum: learning, teaching, and research
ATS Standards 3; NEASC Standards 4

3.1 Goals of the theological curriculum
- Gordon-Conwell has always understood its mission as growing out of the two fundamental commitments:
o A calling to faithfully represent the Protestant Evangelical tradition as peculiarly manifest by the neo-evangelical renaissance of the last half of the 20th century in figures such as Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, Carl Henry, John Stott and J.I. Packer.

o A calling to prepare ministry leaders in practical and theoretical ways for the unique context of the contemporary world.

- These two commitments are held in complementary ways at times and in healthy tension at other times. Faithfulness to the past and commitment to the present create opportunities to educate students for their unique vocations that take seriously both the simplicity of the core convictions and the complexity of the world in which they live. We spell out our mandate for theological education in the six articles of our Mission Statement – each of which find a particular location in the degree goals for every one of our degree programs at the Master’s and Doctoral levels. These six articles are as follows:

1. **Biblical Competency** - To encourage students to become knowledgeable of God’s inerrant Word, competent in its interpretation, proclamation and application in the contemporary world.

2. **Academic Excellence** - To maintain academic excellence in the highest tradition of Christian scholarship in the teaching of the biblical, historical and theological disciplines.

3. **Ministry Skills** - To train and encourage students, in cooperation with the Church, to become skilled in ministry.

4. **Spiritual Maturity** - To work with the churches towards the maturing of students so that their experiential knowledge of God in Christ is evidenced in their character, outlook, conduct, relationships and involvement in society.

5. **Cultural Engagement** - To provide leadership and educational resources for shaping an effective evangelical presence in Church and society.

6. **Global Evangelistic Influence** - To develop in students a vision for God’s redemptive work throughout the world and to formulate the strategies that will lead to effective missions, evangelism and discipleship.

These six articles (goals) serve as core values for Gordon-Conwell and its educational mission. They are manifest in each set of degree goals which guide the **mission, maintenance, evaluation, and innovation** of the three interwoven academic divisions of the curriculum – Division of Biblical Studies, Division of Christian Thought and Division of Practical Theology. These three divisions also serve as the template for the core architecture of the curriculum.

**Mission** - The mission of the school is hard-wired around the six mission articles (goals) as illustrated in the divisional architecture of the faculty. Each of the articles derives from the work of a division or set of divisions. The articles serve as the institutional reminder of the purpose of each division and why they have been structured as they have.

**Maintenance** – The character of the faculty is determined in large measure by each and every search for a new full time faculty member. That search process has remained relatively constant across the years to require a super majority of existing faculty approval for any new faculty. The interview process explicitly makes use of the mission goals as the template by which the search committee examines candidates. As the guardians of the curriculum, the faculty collectively bears responsibility for the maintenance of these core values in each and every course taught. In the recent past, the seminary has added several new degrees (M.A. in Spiritual Formation at the Hamilton campus, M.A. in Christian
Ministries at the Charlotte campus) each of which bear the imprint in their degree goals as derived from the six mission articles. In addition syllabi for each course are to state clearly how the degree goals are implemented in the course and how they are to be achieved by students. Each year, our faculty jury system analyzes artifacts from a representative sample of courses using rubrics derived from the degree goals. The juries report their findings through the deans, to the faculty as a whole.

**Evaluation** – Every individual course is evaluated in part by a survey given to students in the course asking how the mission goals were reflected in the course. In addition, the seminary gathers data from surveys given to entering students, current students, graduating students and alumni to gauge the student’s perspective about how effective their program of studies effectively accomplished the degree goals. The faculty juries then are another annual layer of evaluation for our degrees oriented towards a qualitative analysis of student achievement manifest in the course artifacts. (see below for description of the Faculty Jury Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan) In addition every faculty member is peer reviewed by our senior faculty personnel committee (FPPC – Faculty Personnel and Policy Committee) on a rotating basis (no less than every five years). The evaluation examines teaching of the member under review with class visitations, and analysis of their student evaluations. A final layer of evaluation are generative discussions by the faculty at their fall and spring retreats as well as at their weekly (or monthly, depending upon campus) meetings. There are several faculty discussions in this cycle of meetings each year given over to issues arising from evaluation and assessment of student achievement. The faculty governance structures have been significantly revised in the last two years to require two full faculty retreats annually. It is now also a core commitment of the faculty to tackle at least one major student learning issue at each faculty retreat, ordinarily based upon the findings of the Assessment Survey Committee and the Faculty Juries.

- **Faculty Juries – Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan** – These are ongoing efforts to ensure the quality of learning within the context of the seminary’s purpose and the constituencies it seeks to serve
  - Every campus/program has annual faculty juries to assess learning outcomes
  - Artifacts from diverse courses representing different degree programs are collected in advance of the jury reviews
  - Rubrics developed that reflect our core mission goals (EPs)
  - Each jury is tasked with asking whether the EPs have been well reflected in the artifacts
  - Each jury is tasked with offering key topics for further reflection as a result of the analysis of the artifacts
  - The results of each jury are given to the “Dean's Council” (made up of all deans of campuses and directors of programs).
  - The Dean's Council deliberates as to how best to generate integrative discussion in the institution related to the topics which the faculty juries chose.
  - At each of the two annual faculty retreats, issues which emerged from the faculty juries are discussed. Strategies for implementation are delegated to the appropriate committees
  - The Faculty and its committees are then tasked with implementing changes that emerge from these discussions. (One notable example is the change of schedule at Hamilton campus to accommodate far more co-curricular seminars on topics of contemporary concerns.)
**Innovation** is informed by various levels of the evaluation processes. Each of the faculty divisions meets monthly during the academic year and is to respond to any new issues/topics that need to be included within the division’s existing curriculum. In this sense the division is ordinarily the first location in which new initiatives are proposed relative to the curriculum. A major revision to the core curriculum in Practical Theology came about recently because of some generative discussions in the whole faculty, but the nuts and bolts of the revised curriculum were first hammered out in the division of Practical Theology before vetting took place across the whole faculty. The revisions to the curriculum were driven by student concern for greater integration of theory and praxis across individual disciplines represented in the curriculum. That came through on student surveys, on faculty jury reports and from the generative faculty discussions. Another layer of innovation took place in a different fashion two years ago when the faculty at the Hamilton campus revised its daily academic schedule to provide a longer lunch time slot in order to facilitate more informal interaction of students and faculty, and also to allow for a more convenient and accessible time for co-curricular forums. In the wake of the schedule changes, each division is now asked to sponsor two co-curricular forums per year on topics not traditionally covered in classes (e.g. Immigration Reform, Economics and Faith, Film Criticism, Budget Management, etc). These have been proven to be very popular with students, though they have also added to the sense of “busyness” during the course of an ordinary class day. One positive innovation has led to an unforeseen problem – which is now driving a different evaluation having to do with overtaxing our students in their residential experience. Arising from a similar evaluation, our Charlotte campus piloted The Integrative Seminar nearly 10 years ago as a required co-curricular event for all students on topics of ecclesial and cultural significance for ministry. The Charlotte campus is a non-residential campus and the Integrative Seminar was an attempt to build a total campus event into the students experience that also addressed their need to see faith integrated with practice on topics of cultural significance. The Seminar has been a one day forum at the beginning of each term with invited speakers and a requirement that all students write a reflection paper on the topic as it pertained to their peculiar ministry vocation. The current student survey data from our Charlotte students has now suggested (cf. 2014 Annual Report of Assessment Survey Committee) that the campus may need to rethink the long term sustainability of this one day event experience. Another significant innovation has taken place at our Boston campus in the last year with the introduction of field based ministry projects in which students work with urban churches and other non-profits in the city on a project specifically defined by the church/non-profit. The projects are intended to address a significant need in the church or non-profit and which they otherwise might not have the resources to address/solve without the seminary student team. (Cf: Background document from Boston Mentored Ministry Program). This has taken the place of the previous Mentored Ministry experience of students in which they were “mentored” by a supervisor. The evaluation of this prior model, helped the Boston campus reach the conclusion that the mentoring was uneven, and did not effectively grasp the collaborative nature of ministry in an urban context. The newer project based mentored ministry intentionally involves teams of students working with a team from a church/non-profit in the city, and the initial results are very encouraging.

The seminary’s six articles (and related degree goals) guide the way in which each campus (Hamilton, Boston, Charlotte and Jacksonville) and program (Hispanic Ministries Program and D.Min) conceives its curricular commitments. At the institutional level, we have a long history of conflict between our campuses and this has been manifest in the respective suspicion with which each campus often views the others. Since the multi-campus model took effect in the 1970s with the creation of the second campus in Boston, the curricular independence and interdependence of has been a key issue. Our third campus was started in Charlotte in the 1990s and the fourth campus in Jacksonville was started in the 2000s. The Hispanic Ministry Program started in 2010, while not a separate campus, does function with
Degree Goals and Student Learning Outcomes:

Each set of degree goals (Cf. background document with all of the degree goals and respective degree requirements/checksheets) serve as the templates for the student learning outcomes (SLO) which are evaluated by our faculty juries on an annual basis. We arrange faculty juries on an annual basis on each campus. Each jury consists of three faculty members who read and examine 10 student artifacts from three different courses, reflecting a particular degree. The juries then evaluate the artifacts by means of a rubric designed to reflect the degree goals. The juries then discuss verbally their general findings from the evaluation of the artifacts. And then finally each jury writes a collaborative report about their findings. This report is then passed along to the Dean’s committee for dissemination to the wider faculty.

These faculty jury reports (cf. Background Documents – Jury Reports) then influence the faculty conversation and decision making pertaining to course offerings, faculty selection, co-curricular activities, and also inform the emphases in our community development. The nature of our student learning communities do vary from campus to campus and from program to program, and therefore we have sought to be sensitive to the difference of our student communities as we seek to implement any conclusions reached as a result of the jury reports. An example might illustrate the concern. A recurring conclusion reached by many faculty juries is that student artifacts struggle to make integration across the disciplines. The nature of “integration” itself has then become a topic of recurring concern in the Divisions and the faculty as a whole. The experiment in reshaping the Division of Practical Theology’s required M.Div courses is one attempt at addressing this issue. The Division of Christian Thought hosts a monthly faculty breakfast at which time many issues of integration are addressed, and thereby become part of the faculty conversation. The Division of Biblical Studies has committed itself to a Biblical Theology course in the M.Div which would seek to intentionally integrate Old Testament and New Testament materials together. However, one recurring problem that crops up in the jury report, is the lack of ability of students to integrate materials across the Divisions. As transparent as we can be, this is an issue of intense faculty interaction which nonetheless has not been resolved.

The seminary’s curriculum as a whole consists both of the classroom experience and the intentional experiences we provide our students outside of the classroom. The curricular and co-curricular are increasingly seen as two sides of the same coin. A student’s “learning memories” from their degree will as likely arise from their co-curricular involvements as from their classroom experiences. Because we know this to be true (and validated by all of our student survey data) we have sought to think together as a whole faculty about the shape of the co-curricular experiences of students as part of their actual learning in their degrees. The greatest challenge for us has been the “patchwork quilt” nature of these co-curricular experiences. On our main campus in Hamilton, the student body is large and residential. There is an abundance of co-curricular opportunities (Kern Scholar Seminars, Peirce Center Fellows...
program, Wilson Center initiatives, Endowed Lectureship Lunch Forums, Mentored Ministry Reflection Groups, Tuesday Lunches with Faculty, Residence Dorm Small Groups, Women’s Resource Network Groups, Church Planting Discussion Forums, Byington Fellows Program, Black Student Association Forums, Tuesday/Wednesday Chapels, Anglican Morning Prayers, (more co-curricular experiences to list??). There are fewer co-curricular structures in Boston, Charlotte and Jacksonville, but by the nature of the teaching modules on these campuses, there is a greater sense of cohort based coursework, which in turn leads to intense relational experiences around the shared ministry vocations. These campuses also more significantly emphasize field work for their students and intentional reflection upon life experiences. The D.Min degree is entirely built around a cohort model, and emphasizes the co-curricular dimension of the degree during the two week residencies with the goal of shared meals, shared field trips, and shared projects. Each of these co-curricular emphases have been intentional built to complement the curricular goals and to help underwrite the curriculum’s impact.

The seminary’s curriculum is undoubtedly a function of the faculty who teach the curriculum. With the seminary’s multiple locations, the common mission of the faculty is protected by very similar degree goals for the same degree on different campuses. However the institution experiences obstacles (creative tensions) to maintaining the “unity” part of the unity/diversity dimensions of the curriculum across different campuses. The central obstacle is that a different set of faculty teach the same degree on different campuses, and there are significant differences in the student communities on the different campuses. (cf. Student Section of the Self-Study Report). Much of the faculty have been at the seminary for many years and are committed to the seminary’s mission statement. This is often the primary reason faculty articulate a deep satisfaction with respect to their job. Three significant initiatives (innovations??) have sought to address this without minimizing the need for diverse contextualizations of the degrees on the different campuses.

1. We are committed to have as many faculty as possible teach on campuses other than their home campus. This has been an institutional value for a long time and continues. It has also significantly increased with regard to our Jacksonville campus, which is smaller and which regularly uses faculty from the other campuses to teach. The HMP program also uses a large percentage of faculty from the other campuses. The D.Min would be a third clear example of shared faculty across campuses.
2. We are committed to experimenting more with team taught courses, so that fewer courses are solely the product on one faculty member’s unique perspective. This is the model intrinsic to our D.Min degree, where there must be two faculty members who share the responsibility for leading the cohort.
3. The Semlink+ courses (our online course offerings) are taught in a synchronous manner with students in each course drawn from all the campuses. There were 200 “seats” in our online program this summer. Our goal is to double this number by next summer. Many of our Semlink+ courses are designed and built by regular full time faculty and then taught by an approved adjunct using the materials of the regular faculty. This serves as another form of team-teaching and has been very well received by students so far.

A special note should be added to our report at this point. In the spring of 2013, the seminary was required to make a very quick change from our older Semlink courses to the newer Semlink+ courses. The older Semlink courses were judged to be “correspondence” courses and lacked a significant interactivity component with the faculty member of record. This caused considerable institutional upheaval since the Semlink Classic courses were asynchronous and allowed students to progress according to their own timetable. However, the pedagogical values of the correspondence model have long been in question, and the seminary now finds itself in the situation of having to build many new online courses from scratch with a faculty already feeling overloaded (Cf. Faculty Self-Study Subcommittee Report).
Summary of Mission Values in the Curriculum and Co-Curricular Experiences and related Student Learning Outcome Assessments

Biblical competency
- Curriculum is heavily dependent upon original language training for coursework in Biblical Studies. The faculty have resisted the “dumbing down” of the language requirements for ministry believing that the ability to work with Greek and Hebrew will underwrite a commitment to the value of Scripture for ministry. Some faculty have noted that too much time is spent on source criticism in the student’s exegesis papers.
- Language programs – at each campus there are language directors & teaching fellows; at the Hamilton campus there are regular offerings in other Semitic language courses; the academic M.A.s in OT/NT and Biblical Languages every year produces many students who pursue doctoral studies in cognate fields. Many faculty noted both how important the ancient languages are to the curriculum and the disproportionate amount of time students spend on the languages compared to other coursework.
- Every degree at the seminary requires significant work in Biblical Studies.
- All M.Div students to take both Hebrew and Greek (total of 4 courses) and interpretation of both testaments (2 courses) before taking exegesis courses (4 courses);
- Entering students are required to prove OT & NT competency in the first year of M.Div – via by exam or by the Survey in OT & NT courses – changes made in 2012-2013 academic year.
- Some faculty juries noted that there seemed to be too little connection between the student’s exegesis papers and the application of exegesis to the current context.

Academic Excellence
- Curriculum – There is a large concentration on writing skills throughout the course requirements. In addition there is a large component of academic M.A.s which produces an ethos of academic rigor in the institution at large. Some faculty juries noted that student’s are trained to write in a manner that will not be repeated in pastoral ministry.
- M.Div requires 96 credit hours. M.A. require 60 credit hours. The MACO degree requires 72 hours.
- Academic M.A.’s all require a biblical or research language. Some faculty noted that many papers/exams were sufficiently rigorous to augur well for future Ph.D studies for students. Other faculty noted that some papers were not sufficiently rigorous to warrant a passing grade in a graduate level course.
- Encouragement for students to avail themselves of coursework in the other BTI schools. (Harvard, Boston Univ, Boston College, St. Johns, Holy Cross, Andover Newton, Episcopal Divinity).

Ministry Skills
- M.Div Curriculum is built around 7 courses in Practical Theology
- A significant revision of Mentored Ministry on the Hamilton campus took place in the fall of 2013 with the tightening up of mentor requirements and approved mentoring sites.
- Field based Mentored Ministry at the Boston Campus. Some faculty noted that different field sites are more rigorous in training than others.
- Revisioning of Practical Theology core requirements in 2014 for the M.Div in Hamilton.
- Preaching Center and a National Preaching Conference continue to influence the core ethos of the seminary’s commitment to develop expositors of Scripture for the well being of the church. Some faculty noted that exegesis papers did not easily lead to good sermons.
Character formation

- Curriculum is influenced by the Spiritual Formation course which requires students to take a personal inventory of their vocation and character. Many faculty noted that this is the most difficult mission goal to assess looking at student artifacts.
- There is a core ethical character of curriculum. Most faculty said that ethical convictions of students was clearly articulated in their exams.
- Variety of views of spiritual formation as manifest in the Peirce Center for Discipleship alongside of a variety of mentoring programs alongside a Kern Scholars Discipleship program.
- Ecclesial partnerships (Lutherans, Anglicans)
- Men’s accountability groups (Hamilton)
- Integrative seminar (Charlotte)

Leadership Formation and Cultural Engagement

- Curriculum contains a pastoral ministry course around which the issues of leadership are central.
- This is a recurring issue for co-curricular programs in Hamilton and Charlotte. Some faculty noted the difficulty of assessing leadership skills in written assignments.
- The Boston campus has initiated an awards program highlighting key urban servant-leaders overlooked by the media. This has deeply impacted the ethos of the campus and their understanding of leadership formation.
- M.Div director (Charlotte) oversees the character of leadership training for all M.Div students in Charlotte. The final evaluation of projects by the M.Div director
- Mockler Center seminars on Leadership Development
- Pastoral Ministry seminars on Leadership Development
- Some faculty noted that a solid grasp of Biblical concepts of leadership were well evidenced in student artifacts.
- Most student surveys suggest that the faculty are more significant than exams in preparing to be ministry leaders.

Global Engagement

- Curriculum has a core World Missions component central to the M.Div and all of the M.A. degrees as well.
- Hispanic Ministry Program is a core program for the seminary whose primary mission is to train leaders for the Hispanic church in North America and around the globe. Very positive feedback from HMP students regarding their interactions with Hamilton students and faculty. Very positive feedback from Hamilton faculty regarding their HMP classes.
- Wilson Center in Hamilton is a primary resource center for global networking by the seminary. The present director of the Center has helped start our China Initiative to work with Chinese pastors in furthering their theological training. This follows our long standing (20 years) commitment to the Chinese church through our Chinese Semlink program. There have been three major conferences of Chinese scholars and students held on the Hamilton campus in the last three years.
- Mission Emphasis Week is a week in the fall semester on the Hamilton campus devoted entirely to the global character of Christianity and the diverse challenges it faces in these diverse global contexts. Last year’s theme was “Ministry and Migration: The Impact of Immigration on the Global Church”.
- Global Education Courses are an important opportunity for our students to be exposed to global contexts in the midst of a for-credit course. Recent courses have followed the ancient silk road from China to Russia, and the Journey of the Christian Faith in the Middle East.
• There are several of our D.Min tracks which have one of their three residencies at an international Sites.
• We have a 25 year old summer for-credit program which takes a group of students to a global site to be involved with a variety of ministries. This program is called Overseas Missions Practicum, and normally involves 15-30 students.
• At present there are 16 faculty members born outside of North America. There are 13 faculty members whose native language is not English. With just a few exceptions, every faculty member has had significant exposure to the diverse global contexts.
• Our campus with the greatest diversity of international students is our urban campus in Boston. (Cf. Student Self-Study Subcommittee Report)
• The Center for the Study of Global Christianity is located on our Hamilton campus and is a world renowned research center for the demographic trends of religion across the globe.

3.2 Learning, teaching, and research

3.2.1 Significant Findings from our Student and Alumni Surveys
The seminary has committed itself to regular and ongoing surveys of entering students, current students, graduating students and alumni. These surveys are analyzed by a standing committee of the seminary (The Learning Surveys Committee) which meets monthly, and whose annual report is distributed to every Dean and every Center director at the seminary.

- **Core Educational Priorities (EP)** Longitudinal trends in our EP’s going back to before the 1969 merger show that the relative strengths of the seminary have remained largely unchanged – in descending order: Biblical Competency; Academic Excellence; Ministry Skills; Global Evangelistic Influence; Cultural Engagement; and Spiritual Maturity – despite many changes (Source: Alumni Survey)
- When compared with recent years (2009 and 2010), in 2011 there appears to be an overall decrease in student satisfaction in the six EP’s.
- The most significant decreases were evident in Ministry Skills and Spiritual Maturity as compared with the previous year. (Source: Graduating Student Questionnaire)

**Biblical Competency** – this value is the hallmark of the seminary, consistently reported highest in all measures – (ISS, CSS, GSS, & AS). This is the most important reason most students come to, expect, and experience at the seminary and practice it in ministry. It is not experienced in static fashion, but through many diverse evangelical traditions within the umbrella of Biblical faithfulness and is manifest in our multidenominational student body. Students value the school’s multidenominational nature and function.

**Academic Excellence** , “Your commitment to careful study” category has consistently been the highest value, which suggest that GCTS education is producing life-long learners. (Source: Alumni Survey) Alumni have consistently pointed out the importance of certain services provided by the seminary for them, which the seminary should maintain and improve – Four top ones: seminary website, Contact Magazine, continuing & alumni educational events, and Alumni portal. “Interactions with faculty” and “Relationships built during seminary years” are also two of the highest values on student surveys. This reflects the significance of community of life for most students on everyone of our campuses – both residential and commuter campuses. It is important for us to realize that the curriculum is reinforced relationally, and that we should strive to increase this relationality wherever possible.
- **Spiritual Maturity** is clearly the lowest score on our student surveys. The “Knowing God experientially” and “Developing Christ-like character” categories appear to be higher than the other two: “Maturing in spiritual practices and disciplines” and “Experiencing ongoing spiritual accountability” (Source: Alumni Survey), but slight improvement in the ongoing spiritual accountability in the past three years (Source: GSS).

- **A Recurring Curricular Problem**: There appears to be a perception among students that there are curricular silos, and that spiritual formation and spiritual maturity are not the province of Biblical Studies nor the Christian Thought faculty. This creates the impression that much of the curriculum is not devoted to spiritual maturity but rather to academic progress. The area (EP’s) with the widest gap among the campuses was Spiritual Maturity, showing significantly higher student satisfaction in Boston and Charlotte than Hamilton. (Source: Graduating Student Survey)
  
  o However, some hints for closing it may be found by reviewing the focus group reports from 2011 through 2013. In the 2011 focus group, students were asked to identify contributors to their spiritual maturity and the element that most participants mentioned was professors’ “Christlike humility”.
  
  o In the 2012 focus group, we investigated contributors to the development of students’ practical ministry skills and found that students perceive a connection between spiritual formation/maturity and growth in practical ministry skills. The 2013 focus group on student expectations concerning faculty involvement reinforced the key role that faculty can play in this area.

- **On Job Placement**
  
  • Since the year 2000, 58% and 83% of our Master’s graduates were hired for their first professional position/ministry by the time of graduation and within one year after graduation, respectively. These findings represent a slight increase over recent decades. (Source: Alumni Survey)
  
  • Most helpful in finding work to be denominations or ministries that the students were part of. (Source: Alumni Survey) – continue encouraging denominational ties and networking with various ministries while at the seminary; offering denominational polity courses; inviting denominational/ministry leaders to come on the campus to network and recruit
  
  • Even though we have a good placement rate, graduates continue to express dissatisfaction with the placement services available. It would be wonderful to have a fully functioning placement office that offers a variety of services, including mentoring and counseling, since many of our students explore new career paths while they are at seminary and/or do not belong to a denomination. This idea was reinforced by some of the finding of this year’s annual focus group.

- **On Educational Experience – faculty interactions, & advising**
  
  • The majority of students identify the most significant influences on their educational experience at GCTS as the curriculum (all courses offered) and the faculty (their credentials, availability, and example as role models). Since the curriculum is a product of the faculty, it is safe to conclude that the faculty (in all the various ways in which they impact the students) are the number one influence on a student’s educational experience at GCTS. (Source: Graduating Student Questionnaire)
• However, when asked about the learning environment within their degree programs (including faculty, advising, co-curricular elements, and collegiality with peers) students in 2011 showed increased dissatisfaction compared with 2010. (Source: Graduating Student Questionnaire)

• Across all campuses, advising received the lowest satisfaction of all the learning environment areas surveyed.¹ In examining the individual campuses, it was evident that Charlotte performed slightly better in this area than the other campuses, but it is still clearly an area where students from all campuses desire significant improvement. (Source: Current Student Survey)

• The 2012 annual focus group this year was conducted on the topic of “student expectations concerning faculty advising and faculty involvement outside of the classroom.”

• The most important criterion for evaluating faculty advising and involvement outside the classroom involves participants’ desire for organic, informal, and life-changing mentoring relationships with faculty which includes spiritual support where faculty intentionally take the initiative to be pastoral with them.

• One possible area to look at: Over the five academic years (2009-2014), total of nine annually contracted faculty members in a given academic year taught more than 9 courses (1.3 FTE); 12 more than 10 courses (1.4 FTE); and 9 more than 15 courses (2.1 FTE) with 19.9 courses (2.9 FTE) being the highest.² (Faculty FTE 2009-2014)

### 3.2.2 Teaching

**Classroom Experience**

• When asked what type of classroom experience was most appealing³ across every campus the overwhelmingly dominant response among entering students was “lecture-discussion.” This was surprising considering the recent criticism by some in higher education of the lecture-style classroom experience. (Source: Entering Student Survey)

• Most lasting influences have to do with *relationships.* First with faculty and then other students. Should the seminary be more intentional in exploring and practicing more interactive and group teaching-learning methods (virtually or in person)? (Source: Alumni Survey)

• Professional MAs showed noticeably higher satisfaction in every mission area when compared to other degrees. Should the seminary be exploring more praxis approach to teaching-learning? (consistent results over the past two years)(Source: GSS)

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¹ Learning environment areas surveyed were: accessibility to library resources, advising, availability of course offerings, campus community, chapel, class size, co-curriculum, collegiality with peers, curriculum, diversity of student body, faculty as role models, faculty availability, faculty credentials, helpfulness of library staff, mentorship, ministry-internship opportunities, mentorship ministry services, Pierce Center activities, and Semlink.

² Full-time faculty are contracted to teach 6 classroom courses with the 7ᵗʰ course being various responsibilities. Semlink+ and Hybrid courses function like classroom courses and so have been added to load in the same manner above (i.e., each three-credit course = 1 toward load). For all other instruction types (directed studies, Classic Semlinks, mentored ministry, counseling internships and professional seminars, etc.), the enrollment is divided by the average class size for that academic year. For example, if the average class size for one year was 20 students and a professor taught 15 students in directed studies, then these would collectively count as 0.75 toward his load for that year.

³ Surveyed categories were: lecture only, lecture-discussion, seminar, independent research, and practicum.
- **Course Offerings**
  - Availability of course offering has been repeatedly pointed out by graduating seniors as an influential area that should be considered as a priority area that needs work. (Source: GSS) There tend to be multiple sections and options of M.Div required courses being offered in a given semester. With a few exceptions, these classes tend to be small in size.
  - Many required courses for M.Div and other degree programs with a relatively fewer elective options. Heavy on required courses for most degree programs: M.Div (Hamilton: 6/4 – if place out of OT & NT survey; Jacksonville: 2; Charlotte: no free elective; & Boston: 1)

- **Ministry Skills** - While alumni ratings of Ministry Skills preparation continue to lag behind Biblical Competency and Academic Excellence, we want to affirm the overall strength of the alumni response in this area in contrast to the anecdotal comments often heard. (Source: Alumni Survey) – in response, Division of Practical Theology (DPT) curriculum review and revision has been in progress – carefully analyzing and envisioning the scope and sequence of the DPT MDiv curriculum, which would have some positive ripple effect on other degreed programs primarily housed in DPT – Hamilton whereas a similar process has taken place already at CUME under the leadership of the new CUME dean; there has been addition of new faculty thus bringing new energy and ideas and synergy; use of Dean’s forum to address salient & timely ministry issues while curriculum review/revision in progress; Charlotte – M.Div integration effort has been intentional from the inception of the school, but constantly improving it according to the needs of the students and of the churches in the region in cooperation with them.

- **Under Ministry Skills, “Meaningful mentored and/or supervised experience(s)” continues to be the lowest of the four categories.** Yet, it has been steadily increasing among the more recent alumni. (Source: Alumni Survey) – This has been an area where new leadership has breathed in fresh vision and insight. Also with the introduction of Ministry Profile and other personal inventories, more intentional interactions and training events for ministry mentors, MM grades as part of the student’s GPA calculation, additional mentoring groups with DPT faculty members on campus, the school has worked hard to improve this vital area of ministry formation.

- **Cultural Engagement** as the second lowest EP’s category, our alumni have consistently evaluated their experience higher in two sub-categories that are more theoretical and/or theological than the other two, which tend to more life based and public and/or cultural engagement. (Source: Alumni Survey) – To remedy this, recent hires in Division of Christian Thought (DCT), two praxis-informed ethicists – one in the field of workplace ethics and another in medical ethics. DPT revising curriculum to be more coherent and to focus on understanding and engaging the protean world, especially through a brand new course in the theory and practice of theology. Dean’s Forum – bringing in passionate and reflective practitioners in salient ministries and in other public arenas to stimulate students’ thinking, facilitate their exposure, and making connections for further praxis.

- **Online education** is the last in the list of the most lasting influence among our student surveys. This must be seen as something not to eliminate but re-designed in light of two of the top lasting

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4 The four categories under the Ministry Skills are: 1. Development of competence in ministry skills associated with your field of study; 2. Confidence in preparedness for ministry; 3. Competence to thoughtfully integrate biblical truth with the practice of ministry; and 4. Meaningful mentored and/or supervised experience(s).
5 Using a Christian worldview to reflect critically on cultural events and themes; and To gain experience in expressing biblical truth effectively in a cultural context.
6 To gain understanding of, appreciation for and sensitivity to the cultural and social contexts of people; and To learn to engage cultural forces as they are at work both outside and inside the life of the church.
influences, namely related to the formation of community. Our new online courses now are far more interactive between students and faculty and also intentionally community-based among the students. This is the transition from Semlink Classic to Semlink Plus.

3.2.3 Research
- **Describe the core research in which faculty are engaged**
  - Heavy emphasis upon written publications of our faculty (Faculty Book Shelf in President’s Dining Room is evidence of this)
  - Increasing emphasis upon multi-cultural research projects of faculty
  - Recent Faculty Development grants ($5,000) awarded to 10 faculty each year – outlining a project relating to modern day faith and the nature of vocation and work. This arises from an ongoing grant from the Kern Foundation.
  - Rewriting of Faculty Handbook criteria of promotion related to research and writing to more clearly emphasize scholarly production – though not solely of tradition print publication variety.
  - Recent Faculty retreat discussion on the value of writing for the guild and also writing for the church. These are two very different “publics”.
  - Encouragement to our faculty to attend their annual guild meetings (e.g. - ETS/AAR/SBL)
  - Book Bytes – A lunch time forum for public interviews of faculty on their recent book publications
  - Significant intellectual voices brought to campus (See Appendix for listing)
  - Public Faculty Dialogues/Debates on significant topics (Hamilton)

3.3 Characteristics of theological scholarship
- Entering students in 2012 continue to identify the top three factors in their decision to attend GCTS as 1) the school’s academic reputation, 2) the quality of the faculty, and 3) the spiritual atmosphere. These three factors showed noticeably greater significance to our 2011 entering class than prior years. Similarly, while our entering students have always perceived that GCTS compares favorably to other theological educational opportunities in these three areas, the 2011 entering students showed an increase.

3.3.1 Scholarly collaboration – Campus faculties meet either weekly (Boston, Charlotte and Jacksonville) or monthly (Hamilton). These meetings regularly address topics of curricular concern and generative discussions of common theological concern. There are several co-curricular initiatives to encourage collegiality as the foundation for collaboration among faculty. There are a limited number of team-taught courses and a new initiative to encourage more team teaching. This is an area of increasing significance to us, but also one that is financially complex to support as an institution. The last two years have seen small research grants (10 per year of $5000) given to faculty members to pursue projects related to the connection of faith/vocation/wealth/poverty. Faculty are active in their individual scholarly guilds with colleagues from other institutions.

3.3.2 Freedom of inquiry – We affirm as an institution that each faculty member is accountable to their individual ecclesial body. As a faculty member at an ecumenical evangelical theological school, we encourage faculty to represent the essential “unity and diversity”
of many ecclesial traditions across the entire evangelical spectrum. Our faculty handbook reads:

“Within the limits of the doctrinal and mission statements of the seminary and their regularity, faculty members are free to pursue teaching, research, and community service with freedom to discover and declare truth. The seminary accepts the statement on academic freedom which has been adopted by the Association of Theological Schools as published in ATS Bulletin 4, Part 5, 1996, pp. 2-3.”

3.3.3 Involvement with diverse publics – We affirm that our central “public” is the organized church represented by denominations, by local congregations, by networks of churches, by ecumenical collections of church leaders, etc. We also affirm that the church lives in the world, and therefore the seminary is to be connected to a wide variety of publics in the world. These publics include the following:

- Local communities in/around Boston, in/around Charlotte, in/around Jacksonville.
- Ethnic specific communities (HMP, China Initiative, Pastors for Africa Program)
- Academic religious guilds (AAR/SBL/ETS/IBR/ASCH/etc.,)
- Regulatory governing bodies (Dept. of Education, State Education Boards)
- Donors – individuals, foundations, communities

3.3.4 Global awareness and engagement (See above EP #6). We affirm the significance of reflecting the diversity of the global church wherever and however possible. This takes institutional shape for us with our Hispanic Ministry Program, our China Initiative, the Pastors for Africa scholarships, our M.Div in Urban Church Leadership, our Overseas Mission Practicum, our world renowned Center for the Study of Global Christianity, our Global Education department, our Wilson House for visiting global scholars and our Wilson Center for student oriented global interactions. It is also reflected in a student body from many nationalities and faculty who are fluent in more than a dozen languages. Individual courses are offered in English, Mandarin, Spanish, Portuguese and Korean.

3.3.5 Ethics of scholarship – Included on every syllabus is the reminder that plagiarism is prohibited and will be appropriately punished when discovered. Scholarship must distinguish between the intentional collaboration of multiple authors and the dependence of research upon prior quoted research. This is a commitment that the faculty also required to make.

Summary Description/Evaluation of Degree Programs:

The M.Div Degree

The M.Div is our “core” degree on all our campuses. It is that around which the six mission articles (and degree goals) have special focus. One significant reason for this is that the church is our primary “public” as an institution. It is the vocational location in which a plurality of our students will land. This is the driving force in our evaluation of the curriculum in the context of our degree goals.
The foundation questions throughout the M.Div is: What is the mission of the church and how should leaders for the church be prepared. The curricular goals of Gordon-Conwell reflect our conviction that the church ought to be led by people who “think theologically, engage globally and live biblically” (to quote our Vision Statement). The M.Div purposively has a strong emphasis on the integration of biblical exegesis and theological reflection with practical skills relevant to pastoral ministry. This degree aims to give students a broad understanding of biblical exegesis, theology, church history and ethics in the ecumenical evangelical tradition (the ATS “religious heritage” standard). These comprise well over half of the M.Div curriculum. The M.Div also has an assortment of other goals focused on developing professional ministerial competence. These include expounding the biblical message of redemption, developing skills in church leadership, cultivating a commitment to evangelism, and fostering an appreciation for global mission (the ATS standards of cultural context and capacity for ministerial leadership). Like most of the other degree programs, the MDiv also has the goal of fostering a love for God and his Word and cultivating the practices of spiritual maturity, Christ-like character, and ethical responsibility in church and society. (ATS spiritual formation content standard)

We recognize that the M.Div on each campus must wrestle with its own primary context (and student body) and how it conceives the contextualization of the curriculum. The least conflict on the contextualization of the curriculum across our campuses inevitably occurs at the co-curricular level. This is a vital part of the M.Div student’s experience and often communicates the micro-brand of the individual campus very effectively. At the curricular level we have agreed institutionally that all revisions to the core requirements of the M.Div degree on any campus requires a majority vote of the whole faculty across all our campuses. But we have also permitted campuses to have different curricular requirements in their campus specific M.Div. So for example the M.Div in Hamilton requires three theology core courses, whereas the Boston, Charlotte and Jacksonville M.Div’s require two theology core courses and one elective course in Christian Thought. Though this may appear small, it has been a way of communicating that Boston, Charlotte and Jacksonville have a (slightly) different way to frame the project of contextualization with one elective in this area. Another example is a recent decision by the Charlotte campus faculty to require both Old Testament and New Testament Survey for their M.Div students. That decision arose because of feedback that their students were not entering seminary with sufficient Bible background knowledge to carry on significant original language exegesis later in their M.Div studies. This was a decision the Charlotte campus reached independent of the other campuses. It has grown out of the perception by the Charlotte faculty that the first two degree goals of the M.Div (#1. Competency with the biblical languages and exegetical and hermeneutical skills using the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek text of the New Testament. #2. Understanding of the basic content and themes of the Old and New Testaments in their historical and cultural settings, as well as the historical and theological dimensions of the Christian faith) were not being successfully achieved.

To summarize the M.Div curricular challenge of a multi-campus institution: there is one macro-brand present in all campus/programs/degrees and several distinct micro-brands on each campus and program and degree. The relationship of faculty to teaching and learning is oriented in these two directions: towards a “common mission” which is variously and diversely contextualized on each campus or program. At our Charlotte campus, faculty wanted to see students integrate history and theology more in the biblical studies work. In Hamilton, faculty noted the lack of integration especially in the area of preaching, with one faculty member wondering “whether we are really doing a good job in producing the kind of student-pastors who are able to integrate all that they learned in classroom and beyond”

An additional area of concern is that of spiritual and pastoral formation. Faculty generally noted in their jury reviews of student artifacts a love for God and Scripture evidenced by their students, though some faculty admitted this was not always easy to objectively gauge from the samples studied. Current and graduating students thought that there was at times an over-emphasis on intellectual
performance to the neglect of spiritual formation. While students consistently ranked the spiritual nature of Gordon-Conwell’s atmosphere as a reason for choosing to attend the seminary, graduating student and alumni satisfaction was lowest in the area of spiritual formation compared to academic rigor or formation of skills for ministry.

Other Degree Programs  (Cf. Background Documents for Degree Checksheets for all degrees)

M.A. Professional Degrees: MACC, MACL, MACM (Charlotte) MAEM, MACO, MAR, MAR-WTEL, MASF, MAME (Hamilton) MAUM (Boston)

Each of our Professional M.A. degrees are significantly focused degrees around differing disciplines: counseling (MACC, MACO) mission (MAME) spiritual formation (MASF) or urban studies (MAUM). Broadly speaking they each attempt to:

1. To integrate a practical discipline’s theory with biblical truth so that the knowledge and skills learned in studies and practice will be realized in professional application.
2. To gain experience in an understanding of cultural backgrounds toward effective expression of biblical truth, with the goal of ministering to Christians and to those who are not Christian believers.
3. To demonstrate an awareness of national, racial, ethnic and cultural factors that impinge upon the teaching and modeling of biblical truth, and to develop the capacity for a critical evaluation of important cultural changes within the discipline under consideration.

Emerging Issues: The faculty jury reviews expressed ongoing concern about the integration of the specialized practical disciplines with rigorous Biblical exegesis. The faculty juries also noted how passionate students were about their individual vocations in these degree programs.


Each of our Academic M.A. degrees are significantly focused degrees around differing religious academic disciplines. They are intended as degrees that provide an intermediate working knowledge of the disciplines in preparation for further graduate studies. Each of the Academic M.A.s have a common core of courses that give a broader introduction to the fuller theological curriculum as well as a more specialized number of courses in the particular field of study. These degrees relate to the integral mission of the school in so far as they are aimed at fostering a love for God and his Word and therefore cultivating the practices of spiritual maturity and Christ-like character, and to understand the Christian’s ethical responsibility in church and society. It is also the intention of the degrees to increase awareness of cultural contexts, and greater understanding of the ethical and missiological dimensions of the Christian faith.

Advanced Degrees: Th.M (with emphases in Biblical Studies, Christian Thought, Preaching) Th.D (Joint Program in Missiology with Boston University School of Theology) and D.Min.

Gordon-Conwell remain primarily a professional religious school rather than a research school of theology. We have chosen consciously not to offer any free-standing Ph.D’s and the only research doctorate offered is a joint Th.D with Boston University which is highly dependent upon Boston Universities research resources. Many of our students do go for further graduate study and the academic rigor of our master’s level degrees continues to draw students to our school. Our other advanced degrees beyond the M.Div emphasize either a further preparation for doctoral studies (Th.M) or to enhance the practice of ministry (D.Min).
The Th. D program in Missiology was jointly started by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Boston University School of Theology (BUST) in 2007. In January 2014 the program was converted to PhD. The change is largely one of nomenclature. The program is aimed to train students for academic study of missionary practices and scholarly career in academic institutions. Through its course requirements and dissertation research process, this program provides students ample opportunities to obtain knowledge and research skills in mission theology, mission history, anthropological and sociological studies of missions, and mission’s interaction with other religions. The close working relationship between the two schools benefits students who study at Gordon-Conwell, as they can utilize the academic resources of both institutions. Although the program is administered though the Boston University School of Theology and offer a Boston University degree at its completion, students in the joint Ph.D program in missiology have doctoral advisors from either institution. Library and classroom resources are also shared. Currently five faculty members from Gordon-Conwell and three from BUST are listed as core faculty for the program. Their research areas include mission theology, mission history, theology of dialogue, religious demography, world Christianity, and so on. They bring world class scholarship and well proved teaching and advising competency to the program, and provide the students in the program with a wide range of research subjects.

D.Min - The overarching purpose of Gordon-Conwell’s Doctor of Ministry Program is to nurture passionate, reflective practitioners through the process of informing spiritual passions by forming mentored-learning communities, thereby transforming ministers and ministries for a lifetime. In 2007 out of a desire to preserve and enhance the integrity of the DMin Program, the faculty approved four core values: (1) the centrality of GCTS faculty, (2) the value of partnering with scholars and exceptional practitioners outside of the faculty, (3) cohorts are key to transforming influence, (4) since “doctor” means “teacher” DMin pedagogy should be highly interactive and encourage students to teach what they are learning to one another and in their ministry contexts. Building upon similar biblical and theological commitments as reflected in the degree goals for the masters programs, the DMin degree goals give a particular emphasis upon integration and application of theological education into the current practice of ministry, specifically through a cohort model of offering specialized tracks. These degree goals are in keeping with ATS content standards, particularly in GCTS’s intentionally multidenominational context that bring together diverse publics and the growing international student representation in the DMin program that further facilitates global awareness and engagement. DMin faculty have been brought into the loop at an annual Mentor Forum for the past eight years, which has also been a venue for exploring best practices together in areas related to DMin instruction as requested by the faculty (e.g. maintaining contact with and among a cohort between residencies, supervising thesis-projects and conducting oral defenses, creating opportunities for worship and spiritual formation). New DMin tracks in areas such as Emerging Generations, Bible Translation, Church Planting, Global Christianity, Pentecostalism have been developed in response to perceived critical ministry needs not already addressed by existing tracks in keeping with the passions and expertise of faculty, especially newer faculty. The Pastoral Skills track has been extended to additional languages (Haitian Creole and Korean), and a new Chinese track has been developed because of new faculty and co-mentors who are fluent in these languages. New faculty have also revised existing tracks such as Workplace and Advancing the Church.

List of Recommendations from Academic Programs Subcommittee:
1. **Integration**: a greater emphasis on inter-disciplinary curriculum integration needs to happen. This could take various forms. At the individual course level, course design could more intentionally incorporate learning activities for integration, perhaps in greater use of real-world assessment, and team teaching. At the programmatic level, the mentored ministry credits might be buttressed by a corresponding coursework component, which would provide opportunities for student reflection and instructor feedback on field experiences and the development of a theology of ministry in light of real-world concerns.

2. **Spiritual formation**: aside from integration, this remains the weakest component of the MDiv program. A potential difficulty is the seminary’s inter-denominational character, which makes defining “spiritual formation” difficult. Perhaps the seminary could attempt to draft a guiding definition of spiritual formation for use in the program. Additional extra-curricular activities may also be needed.

3. **Advising**: clearer structures and a more formal process for faculty advising need to be established.

4. **Writing**: it may be necessary for the Hamilton campus to develop a required “research and writing” introductory course along the lines of those at the other campuses to address issues of poor student writing. Greater efforts at establishing clear standards for academic writing need to be made at all campuses.

5. **Grading**: A suggestion came from three faculty to consider the possibility of several faculty grading student papers/exams together, rather than grading all by oneself.

6. **MACC**: Hiring an adequate amount of faculty and administrative staff is most crucial. The MACC is responsible for approximately 150 students at any one time. One full-time faculty is simply insufficient, especially given the professional nature of the degree and all of the bureaucratic needs that arise from students pursuing licensure.

7. **Counseling Accreditation** - If CACREP accreditation (National Counseling Accreditation) is pursued, then various changes will have to be made. For example, we currently require that students attend faculty group supervision once per month. CACREP standards require that students come to faculty supervision weekly.

8. **MACL**: More opportunities for students to specialize in an area of leadership would enhance the quality of the program and students’ experiences. According to Dr. Cooper, the MACL is broad, which is good, but opportunities for specialization would also be helpful.

9. **Th.M**: Factors contributing to the decrease in enrollment of the international students in the Th.M. program must be studied, especially at the Hamilton Campus. Such study is important not only in terms of the enrollment numbers, but more importantly for the sake of the contribution that GCTS would be making in training the leaders of the churches around the world, at the Th.M. level. Do the Th.M. concentrations at GCTS currently meet the dire needs of the churches, both domestically and internationally?

10. **Athanasius Program** - The pedagogical genius of mentoring students of color for further graduate work of the Athanasius Program can be adapted and applied beyond the Christian Thought concentrations of the Boston Campus.

11. **D.Min** - Review of DMin staffing to replace student workers with full and/or part time staff consistent with the number of students and faculty involved. Revise Research Methodology training and develop similar required online DMin Writing training to expand the more limited opportunities afforded by the optional in-person DMin Writing Workshop in response to feedback from both mentors and students.