

A RESOURCE FOR SEMINARIES AND INSTRUCTORS USING ONLINE
EDUCATION SETTINGS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

A PROJECT REPORT
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Years ago, I made the decision to complete my undergraduate degree by distance education. At the time, this consisted of cassette tapes that arrived by mail and contained recorded lectures. Assignments were completed and returned by mail. Contact with instructors was limited to the occasional telephone call and written feedback on assignments. It was, to say the least, a rather sterile process, devoid of community, focused primarily on knowledge acquisition, and required significant personal discipline from the student in order to be completed. It did allow me to remain at home, raise two daughters, and work part-time throughout the process. It also began a lifelong curiosity about learning and effective distance education.

Fast forward to my early years as an adjunct instructor in which I watched colleagues struggle with teaching in the online milieu and wondered again if there might be methods that are more effective. I also began to work in assessment, recognizing that online education had great potential but also opened a Pandora's Box of issues and concerns. I met students who wanted to study but could not relocate because of spousal commitments, or could not study full-time because of financial obligations. I listened to instructors who wanted to reach as many students as possible for the sake of the Kingdom but did not know how to begin. This project was born out of my curiosity and the recognition that online theological education could provide an effective response to these concerns if it were engaged by wise practitioners.

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ABSTRACT

One might argue that change is the only constant in all higher education settings. The history of theological education reflects this pattern of changing methods and models for education. The movement from early church models of mentored teaching, through the monastic movements, cathedral schools, American primitive schools, to the academic settings of university and seminary, reflects this ongoing change. In the midst of this change the constants of knowledge acquisition, personal formation, and practical skills acquisition remain.

This project, focused on online theological education seeks to evaluate the ability of online education to provide for the necessities of theological education, knowledge acquisition, personal formation, and practical skills, through the formation of a virtual community of learners.

The research approach adopted in this dissertation included both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Surveys were deployed using online survey tools and the responses of seventy-one theological school graduates and forty-two theological educators were compiled. Additionally, surveys were conducted with several theological school graduates and several theological educators in order to provide qualitative content. Results were coded to develop central themes related to online theological education.

The findings of this research demonstrate that online theological education is both viable and desirable provided certain best practices are observed. Recommendations include a summary of these best practices and a hybrid Master of Divinity model, which

provides the best of online and face-to-face theological education as suggested by this research.

A brief manual is provided which is intended to guide the theological education institution considering the adoption of online theological education and to provide best practices for institutions already engaged, or planning to engage in online theological education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Context of the Problem

David¹ is a full-time seminary student. He is working towards a Master of Divinity degree and seeking ordination in his denomination. The majority of his classes take place online, through a regionally accredited seminary. Before beginning his seminary studies David worked part-time in a local church as the youth pastor, and part-time at a local retail store. His undergraduate degree in computer technology services was helpful in finding the local retail job but it does not provide much applicable experience as David works towards his master's degree. He has recently accepted a full-time position as the associate pastor, with an emphasis on youth and congregational care, in a small town congregation. He is now both a full-time student and a full-time pastor.

A typical day finds David out in the community, visiting the local high school at lunch hour, making pastoral care calls at the local hospital, in the church office, planning for a weekly youth group gathering, making follow up telephone calls and updating the church's Facebook page with upcoming events.

¹ David is a composite of several individuals and their experiences receiving a theological education degree through an online education program.

Evenings are often filled with committee meetings, youth gatherings, community events where his presence as youth pastor is encouraged and a once a week shift at the local youth drop-in center.

David completes most of his course work in the early morning and late evening hours. He is thankful that the seminary's delivery system allows him to post comments on the discussion board at any hour of the day or night and notices that he is not the only one making late night and early morning use of the Blackboard modules. He finds it difficult to complete the necessary course reading, often dozing off in the middle of a long paragraph, but he is used to being tired. It is simply another element of his normal schedule now.

He finds the online test taking system very frustrating. Tests are largely multiple choice and the tests are timed. If David is unable to complete a test in the assigned time, the test "closes" and he cannot review or complete his answers. Recently he received a poor grade on a theology exam. He is concerned that the grade will lower his GPA and raise concern regarding his academic success with the committee reviewing his application for ordination. There is already pressure from the committee to transfer to a nationally accredited school but that would mean relocating and giving up his new call.

David enjoys the reading that he is required to do for his courses but is sometimes confused by the content and does not have contact with his professor except by e-mail. The professor is an adjunct who has limited office hours. Often he feels as if he is working in a vacuum, without the support of fellow students and a focused instructor. He notices that some online programs offer one-week intensives but his program is entirely online.

David wonders if all of this work is really worth the effort. He is chronically tired, constantly rushing to meet deadlines at both church and school. His family life is virtually non-existent and he cannot remember the last time that he made prayer and meditation on God's word a priority. Sometimes it seems to David that he is gaining his seminary education at the expense of his relationship with God and others.

David is not unique. He is representative of many students engaged in theological education. He is also very different than the average seminary student of generations past.

A generation ago, the average seminary student had just completed an undergraduate degree, most often in a field that related to a seminary education, and as a part of the seminary journey became a residential student at the denominational seminary of choice. The course of study of the seminary took place five days a week over the course of a semester and included times of classroom study as well as an expectation of chapel participation. Students had regular contact with professors both in the classroom setting and during other times of shared fellowship. Regular use of the seminary facilities, particularly the library, was essential to the student's ability to achieve academic goals. In addition to contact with professors, students were in regular contact with each other, creating a community of support and establishing collegial friendships that had lasting significance throughout the remainder of the seminarian's career. The seminary campus became, for the duration of the student's educational journey, the world in which the student lived the total of his or her life. Support came in the form of peers and readily accessible faculty who maintained regular office hours. Families were close by in seminary housing and were integrated into the life of the seminary.

Today's seminary student may come directly from an undergraduate degree program but many seminary students come to seminary having already complete a master's level degree program.² The programs in which they have completed degrees, whether bachelor's or master's level, are diverse including behavioral studies, technical studies, or humanities.³ Rather than living in a residential setting, 49.2% of students commute between one-half and one hour to the seminary.⁴ Courses may take place in the evenings only or students may be on campus for a single day or several days of the week but rarely are students attending classes five days per week. Additionally, today's students are often working, in either a ministry setting or a secular workplace. Full-time MDiv students intend to work an average of twenty or more hours per week in addition to their seminary studies.⁵ Students may complete all or part of their course work using online education platforms such as Blackboard or Moodle. Contact with professors is increasingly by e-mail rather than face-to-face or by telephone. Students do not necessarily move through courses with a cohort but find an ever-changing roster of other students. The world of the seminary student is very different from a generation ago. These significant differences in theological education, particularly those related to increased distance--both physically and logistically--result in decreased opportunities for community and for ministry formation in the traditional forms.

² The Association of Theological Schools, "Entering Student Questionnaire: 2010-2011 Profile of Participants," <http://www.ats.edu/Resources/Student/Documents/Questionnaire/ESQ/2010-2011ESQ.pdf> [accessed Jan 8, 2011].

³ The Association of Theological Schools, "Entering Student Questionnaire: 2010-2011 Profile of Participants."

⁴ The Association of Theological Schools, "Entering Student Questionnaire: 2010-2011 Profile of Participants."

⁵ The Association of Theological Schools, "Entering Student Questionnaire: 2010-2011 Profile of Participants."

Statement of the Problem

Theological education in the twenty-first century continues to evolve and develop at a rapid pace that reflects the progress of education as a whole in North America. Advancements in technology in the twentieth century have allowed the emergence of online education based programs in which students earn a degree from the convenient setting of their own home or office. Education programs based online allow a student to attend class at any distance from the school and often allow the student to engage learning materials at the time of their choosing as well. The variety of available offerings in online-based programs have expanded dramatically as have the delivery platforms used to provide information to the student and to allow interaction with instructors. Sarah Horton, writing in *Web Teaching Guide: A Practical Approach to Creating Course Websites*, notes, “Until recently, most software written to facilitate the task of education has been discipline-specific...with the advent of the Web and the increasing interest in online learning, education systems, or courseware, have emerged.”⁶ A recent article in *Christianity Today* notes, “Online education has been growing at a compound annual rate of 19 percent.”⁷

Changes in technology have resulted in changes in theological education. The increased availability of technology to support online education as well as the changing face of seminary students has increased pressure on seminaries to provide online course offerings.

⁶ Sarah Horton, *Web Teaching Guide: A Practical Approach to Creating Course Websites* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 3.

⁷ John W. Kennedy, *Christianity Today*, “The iSeminary Cometh,” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/april/30.48.html> [accessed January 8, 2011].

Anna is a part-time professor at a small seminary with 40 students enrolled in a Masters of Divinity program.⁸ She has been assigned to teach a directed study for one student in Christian ethics which, because of the student's schedule and distance from the seminary, will take place online using BlackBoard as the delivery system. Anna has rudimentary skills and basic knowledge of BlackBoard but she accepts the assignment with the reasoning that an online course cannot be all that different from a classroom course.

Very soon, she is overwhelmed by the time involved in setting up the course environment for the student. The process of posting written lectures and locating appropriate multi-media such as videos and podcasts is time consuming. She wonders if there is an easier way to cover the assigned material. Each week, she posts discussion questions for the student and then waits eagerly for his responses. She is increasingly frustrated with the brevity and lack of depth in his posts. The same question that generates lively classroom discussion seems to generate the virtual equivalent of a shrug.

Anna becomes concerned that the student is not engaging the course material and yet his performance on the multiple-choice quizzes is excellent. The quizzes take place online as well, in an un-proctored format. Anna does not know if the student is taking the quizzes without study helps or if these have become unofficial "open book" tests. Anna is not certain that the student is actually learning the material. In the classroom setting the ethics course provides many opportunities for discussion and one-on-one interaction with students. Anna is able to gauge the impact of the course on a student's ministry formation and can encourage new ideas while identifying areas of weakness. Without the

⁸ Like David, Anna is a composite of several seminary professors.

interaction of the classroom, Anna has not been able to gauge the impact, if any, on the student's ministry formation. She assigns a practical exercise intended to help the student apply the knowledge gained from the course but cannot directly observe the student's activity and is uncertain of the validity of the assignment. Anna is a competent classroom instructor but the online teaching process leaves her feeling incompetent and disconnected from her student.

Typically, today's student enrolled in an online learning class is engaging the course content through a web-based courseware system such as Blackboard, Convene, or LearningSpace. These formats allow for both asynchronous and synchronous engagement with the course materials but the realities of time management, and sometimes the skill-sets of the student, dictate that the majority of online learning is asynchronous. This means that the student is online at a time and place, which meets the boundaries of his or her personal schedule and not necessarily at the same time as other students or the instructor. The student will often read a lecture posted by the professor, or perhaps listen to a podcast lecture or watch a video lecture. The student will respond to a discussion question posted in a threaded discussion board. This allows the student to respond to an initial question, read the responses of other students, and comment on other students' responses. Generally, the instructor will require a certain number of posts and responses of the student per discussion topic. The instructor responds to some or all students posts. Some course delivery systems allow the instructor to automatically assign a grade to the student for completing an assignment such as listening to a podcast, or taking a test, while other systems require the instructor to manually enter a grade.⁹

⁹ UF Online, "An Instructor's Guide to Blackboard," Chapter 5, http://tltc.findlay.edu/onlinesupport/Bb_Manual_web/chp5/chp5.8.html [accessed October 10, 2011].

The course may be set up so that a student must complete certain assignments within a predetermined period after which the assignment is made unavailable.¹⁰ Equally, it is possible to create a course through which a student may move at a self-determined pace.

It should be noted that seminary students often select online learning because of the scheduling flexibility it provides and as a result are generally resistant to any course that requires significant synchronous engagement or maintains a rigid schedule of due dates without accommodation for late submission.¹¹

The instructor may determine that the course will benefit from synchronous engagement. This typically will take the format of a “chat” or virtual office hours. A “chat” consists of a screen allowing multiple students and the instructor to type and to see each other’s responses in real time. The instructor may ask a specific question to begin the conversation or may allow students to ask questions to which others may respond. The session lasts an agreed upon length of time and is generally attended by all students enrolled in the course. This allows for some peer engagement and for the instructor to observe online interactions between students. Virtual office hours generally involve an open chat that any student may attend or may be set up to accommodate a specific student. The instructor and the student or students type and respond to each other within a “chat” set up specifically for the occasion. It is also possible to use video conferencing tools such as Skype to create a “face-to-face” online chat or virtual office hours. The

¹⁰ UF CTE’s Library, “Creating Assignments in Blackboard,” <http://www.screencast.com/t/NGUzNTg2Yz> [accessed October 12, 2011].

¹¹ Faculty Focus, “Using Synchronous Tools to Build Community in the Asynchronous Online Classroom,” <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/asynchronous-learning-and-trends/using-synchronous-tools-to-build-community-in-the-asynchronous-online-classroom/> [accessed October 10, 2011].

effectiveness of this method is limited by the availability of the software and hardware required and the comfort level of students and instructor with the necessary technology.

Testing of the student may also take place within the online course management system. Quizzes can be created that allow a student multiple choice, true/false or even essay responses. These can be either graded by the computer in the case of multiple choice and true/false, or graded by the instructor. Best practices in online pedagogy would include having a system for proctoring an online quiz or would use an open book format.¹²

This brief description on online education is by no means exhaustive or intended to convey the breadth of course opportunities available to the student and instructor in an online setting. Rather it seeks to describe in general terms what may be an unfamiliar educational setting for the reader of this paper.

This writer's own experiences in distance education have provided an appreciation of the online education milieu but have also raised questions concerning online education as it applies specifically to a theological education. While online education appears to meet the academic needs of theological students, questions remain regarding practical application for the topics covered academically. In some seminary settings where online education is the norm, these concerns are met by providing mentored learning obligations for the student that take place in their local setting.¹³ In addition to the online coursework there are assignments designed to evaluate the

¹² Faculty Focus Special Report, *Promoting Academic Integrity in Online Education* (Madison: Magna Publications Inc. May 2010), 14.

¹³ Winebrenner Theological Seminary Catalog, "Master of Arts in Church Development," <http://winebrenner.edu/ProspectiveStudents/Academics/MasterofArtsinChurchDevelopment.aspx> [accessed October 12, 2011].

student's ability to apply coursework. These educational issues necessitate a network of mentors available to supervise and evaluate the student's engagement with the practical assignment. Adding to the degree of complexity are courses such as professional MA's in Christian Counseling, Family Ministry, Youth Ministry, and the academically directed MA in Theological Studies. Each requires a distinctive kind of practical education, mentors, or supervisors with skills in the area of study who are geographically proximate to the student in question, and a format for evaluating the student's activity. The wide variation of these elements of the equation creates logistical complexity in the online program.

Of great significance for theological education is concern regarding the ability of online theological education to address the issues of ministry formation. Central to this issue is the question of community. Residential- and commuter-based seminaries provide opportunities for students to encounter peers, faculty, and staff in a variety of communal settings ranging from the formal classroom setting to the informal and casual encounters engendered by shared location such as coffee shops and hallways, shared meals, and times of communal worship. There is a relational quality to traditional theological learning that the theological education community as a whole has valued. Mary E. Hess, writing in *Engaging Technology in Theological Education*, responds to this concern regarding community within the online teaching model:

This argument has two pieces to it that I would like to reflect upon. The first is the assertion that theological learning is uniquely and integrally relational, and the second is the assertion that online distance learning is by definition disembodied learning. If both of these are accurate, then the conclusion is inescapable: theological education cannot be done in an online, distributed way. On the other hand, if either or both of these are not wholly descriptive, then perhaps there is

room for emerging technologies—even understood in this narrow sense—within our theological classrooms.¹⁴

This becomes a key issue regarding theological education in the online setting. Can the formation of community take place within the confines of the virtual learning setting and will the community formed there be sufficient to provide ministry formation that is equivalent to the formation afforded by classroom based theological education?

Current models of online theological education are not holistic. They tend to focus on delivery systems with content that is knowledge-based and does not adequately address all facets of knowing, being, and doing. They do not provide sufficient practical application for newly acquired ministry skills and they do not address the formation of community that allows ministry formation to take place. The lack of a holistic approach in online theological education may result in students who attain diminished levels of ministry formation in comparison to students in traditional classroom-based models.

Purpose of the Study

Changes in theological education are due in part to advances in technology which suggest that distance education may be increasingly effective and attractive both from the perspective of the student and the institution. From the perspective of the student, distance education allows the individual to remain in their current setting, to continue current employment and does not necessitate physically relocating to the seminary area. Often online education programs are less expensive per credit hour than land-based classes. From the perspective of the institution, online education broadens the geographic area from which students can be recruited, reduces the need for physical classroom space

¹⁴ Mary E. Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 64.

and residential services for students such as housing, and provides a consistent income stream. The fastest growing seminary in the United States, Liberty University, offers a regionally accredited MDiv degree. “The school began offering distance education programs in 1985, and now is the largest non-profit online educational institution. The school has over 50,000 students all across the United States.”¹⁵ The rapid growth of this program is indicative of the demand for theological education delivered in distance format. The question remains, do these advances in technology compromise the ability of seminaries to train leaders for ministry?

This study will seek to evaluate the impact of increased use of online education in theological settings and to determine if online education can meet the holistic educational needs of students. The Association of Theological Schools standards note the purpose of theological education, “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.”¹⁶ In other words, the task of theological education encompasses much more than simply the academic pursuit of knowledge. Students are also encouraged to engage in learning activities that develop practical ministry skills and nurture the ability to engage these practical tasks in a manner that reflects the knowledge they have acquired. Finally, students are not simply acquiring skills in the areas of knowing and doing but are also

¹⁵ Liberty University, “Study Online at Liberty University,” <http://www.accredited-online-college-degrees.com/libertyuniversityonline.html> [accessed July 7, 2011].

¹⁶ The Association of Theological Schools, “ATS General Institutional Standards Section 3.0,” <http://www.ats.edu/Accrediting/Documents/10GeneralInstitutionalStandards.pdf> [accessed February 21, 2011].

involved in their own spiritual formation, seeking to acquire patterns of being that will be of service in their chosen ministry setting.

The concept of theological education encompassing the areas of knowing, being, and doing is not unique to the Association of Theological Schools' guidelines but rather has been understood as an essential paradigm for centuries. "Saint Augustine believed that the chief goals of Christian theology, like those of rhetoric, should be 'to teach, to delight, and to move.'"¹⁷ A program of theological study that meets the needs of students and provides for engagement in theological reflection, practical skill building, and spiritual formation can best be described as a holistic program.

Winebrenner Theological Seminary's Graduate Catalog notes:

Theological education is holistic. Beyond mere competence as measured by the completion of a program of studies and activities, it fosters persons of deep spiritual commitments and maturity in all dimensions of life. Theological education prepares servants of the Lord Jesus Christ to lead the Church in communal, individual, and cultural transformation. Such preparation involves thorough and integrative study and reflection respecting the various theological disciplines. It forms and informs the process of developing Christian wisdom and wholeness.¹⁸

This holistic education is the goal of theological education for ministry preparedness.

This study will seek to evaluate how online education models can facilitate "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

¹⁷ David S. Cunningham, ed., *To Teach, To Delight, and To Move: Theological Education in a Post-Christian World* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 3.

¹⁸ Winebrenner Theological Seminary, "Graduate Catalog," http://winebrenner.edu/Portals/47/Documents/Fall%202010%20WTS%20Catalog_Draft_9-30-10a.pdf [accessed July 7, 2011].

awareness and moral sensitivity.”¹⁹ These skills and characteristics are essential to the formation of individuals who will become servant leaders in ministry. Determining how these skills and the formational elements can be addressed in theological education in online settings will benefit the broader church as it assists in identifying best practices for online theological education.

The study will include a manual designed to assist theological educators and institutions in the design of online courses that meet holistic theological education goals. Here the study will serve the broader church by providing guidance in an area of pedagogy where there is currently much debate and a variety of approaches to the question of online theological education.

Additionally, the study will provide guidelines to be used by students and denominations in assessing the nature of an online program that will meet holistic theological education goals. Potential students, current students, and denominations should have tools to measure the character of a particular online theological education program so that both the individual student and the broader church receive the desired outcomes from a theological education.

Research Methodology to Study the Problem

Quantitative methods used to study the problem will include use of statistical data available through ATS reflecting Graduating Student Survey²⁰ results, and an

¹⁹ The Association of Theological Schools, “ATS General Institutional Standards Section 3.0,” <http://www.ats.edu/Accrediting/Documents/10GeneralInstitutionalStandards.pdf> [accessed February 21, 2011].

²⁰ The Association of Theological Schools, “ATS Graduating School Questionnaire,” <http://www.ats.edu/Resources/Student/Documents/Questionnaire/GSQ/2010-2011GSQ.pdf> [accessed September 2, 2011].

additional survey of students graduating from a variety of seminary settings evaluating the percentage of courses completed online, the overall academic success of the student, and the student's perception of the formational elements of the coursework. This survey will be conducted using e-mail and social media.

Qualitative methods will include interview and case study. Interviews with a selected number of students will provide qualitative data regarding a student's satisfaction with their course of study from both an academic and a formational perspective. Interviews with professors and seminary staff will seek to determine their satisfaction with the formational, practical, and theological capacity of online education as it relates to their specific institution. These interviews will be drawn from students and faculty representative of institutions with fully online degrees, partially online degrees, and those with limited online courses as a part of the degree program. Additionally, interviews with denominational officials and individuals involved in para-church settings who are the "end users" of students receiving theological education will be interviewed. The interview process will generate case studies, which will be used to identify differences between students engaged in online courses of study and those engaged in a hybrid of online, and classroom study. The interview process will also collect anecdotal material, which will describe student and faculty experience of community in online program settings.

Research Questions to Guide the Research Project

1. What, if any, are the differences between ministry formation and the sense of community as experienced by students in online theological programs and students in classroom-based programs?

2. What are the essential ministry formation needs of theology students and can these be addressed in online theological education programs. How should this impact the design of online theological programs?
3. What pedagogic methods can be used to best address the need for ministry formation in online education programs?

Significance of the Research Project for the Broader Church

The creation of ministry leaders remains a key concern for the church and for the theological education community. While online education programs are becoming increasingly common fixtures in seminaries, the percentage of courses that are online, as well as the pedagogic method of the online curriculum, will be critical to the long-term success of the ministry leader. Currently ATS standards require that an MDiv program include 30 classroom credit hours for accredited programs. However, non-accredited programs are not limited by ATS standards and the competition with these programs may result in changes in the ATS standards.²¹

Churches and denominations continue to hold the MDiv as the “gold standard” in theological education because the graduate of an MDiv program is considered to have gained the necessary skills and knowledge and will have undergone a process of spiritual formation that will adequately prepare the graduate for pastoral ministry. However, many denominations are considering alternative “paths” to ordination or authorized ministry, which may include acceptance of degrees other than the MDiv or acceptance of degrees from schools not accredited with ATS. These changes may result in increased diversity in

²¹ Recently proposed changes in ATS standards regarding residential hours in MA programs are an example of these phenomena.

the educational backgrounds of individuals entering pastoral and other ministry settings but should not result in a “watering down” of the requirements for effective ministry. A holistic model of theological education, regardless of the setting in which it is acquired, should provide the necessary skills, knowledge, and spiritual formation for effective ministry. The study will seek to provide necessary information to denominations and to individuals seeking to determine what constitutes a holistic model of theological education.

Seminaries continue to compete for fewer overall students. A recent *Christian Century* article indicates that the decline "has slowed to a rate of .8 percent between 2009 and 2010," according to Eliza Smith Brown, director of communications and external relations at ATS. This represents some stabilization over the 3.6 percent decline registered in the fall of 2008.²²

The need to be financially competitive and to appeal to the desire of students for delivery systems that are more flexible will result in increased dependence on online education programs that are both cost effective and flexible in delivery. While seminaries may respond to the demands of the market, they must not allow the market to drive the boundaries of effective pedagogic methodology. This study will assist seminaries and instructors in gauging the borders of those boundaries. It will also address best practices with regard to online theological education from the perspective of both learners and instructors.

This project will provide a model for seminaries seeking to create online programs that address all areas of ministry formation and will provide guidance for

²² Christian Century, “*Seminary Enrollment Showing Upturn*,” <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-04/seminary-enrollments-showing-upturn> [accessed October 12, 2011].

denominations and individual students seeking to determine the characteristics of an online program that is holistic in its educational approach.

Assumptions/Limitations in the Research Project

A. Assumptions

1. The increased use of online education in theological settings has an impact on the resulting academic success and formational wholeness of the student.
2. The rapid changes in technology in the culture as a whole have resulted in significant changes to the culture of seminary education and to the manner in which relationships are formed.
3. Continued changes in technology will continue to impact theological education at an exponentially increasing rate.
4. Seminaries will need to embrace online models of education in order to be financially viable and in order to continue to attract students.
5. Denominations will need to consider alternatives to the MDiv degree earned in a three-year residential setting.

B. Limitations

1. The variety of delivery platforms and variety program designs for online education in theological settings will inevitably result in some un-evenness in the data collected.
2. Evaluating the ministry formation of seminarians and graduates is largely a qualitative evaluation.

3. The bias of the author and of seminary educators may be difficult to eliminate from the resulting document. Implementation of recommendations may be limited by the willingness of administrators to adopt a delivery system that requires initial investment.

Definition of Terms

“Theological Education” is defined as undergraduate or graduate education focusing on the acquisition of theological knowledge and skills for ministry.

“Online Education” refers to a formal course of study in which the content for the course is communicated using the internet and may involve any of a variety of web-based programs.

“Distance Education” refers to a course of study in which the student lives at too great a distance from the educational institution to make regular attendance in classes possible. Education takes place in the student’s home environment.

“Holistic” refers to an attempt in Christian ministry to engage the whole person, body, mind, and spirit.

“Holistic Education” refers to a course of study in which the intent is to involve all elements of the person, body, mind, and spirit, by balancing dimensions of knowing, being, and doing.

“Spiritual Formation” refers to the ongoing development of an individual’s spiritual self in the context of a community.

“Seminary” is defined as a school, especially a theological school for the training of priests, ministers, or rabbis.

“Seminarian” refers to a student attending a seminary.

“Residential” refers to a theological education in which a student lives in the setting in which the education is taking place.

“MDiv” is the abbreviation of Master of Divinity which is a degree generally conferred by theological schools and often understood as the preparatory degree for ministry leadership.

“BlackBoard” is a widely used online education platform from Blackboard Inc., Washington, D.C., www.blackboard.com.

“Moodle” is an abbreviation of Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment that is an open source, online education platform that was developed by Martin Dougiamas at Curtin University in Australia, www.moodle.org.

“Cohort” for the purpose of this research, refers to a group of students moving through an education process at the same rate and taking the same courses.

“ATS” is an abbreviation of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada. It is an association of graduate and theological schools that accredits theological schools and accredits the programs they offer.

“Regionally Accredited Seminary” is a term used to denote a seminary that is not accredited by ATS as the national body but is accredited by a regional body that sets educational standards. In the United States, regional accreditation is the primary process for assuring and improving the quality of higher education institutions.

“Intensive” is a term used in theological education to denote a course taught over a brief period of time with significant daily engagement, such as a week-long intensive requiring eight contact hours daily.

“Convene” is a distance learning company that provides Microsoft Windows-based asynchronous learning sites.

“LearningSpace” is a distance learning education platform.

“Asynchronous” refers to students’ engagement with course materials that are not limited by temporal factors and do not require time limited involvement with the materials.

“Synchronous” refers to learning that takes place within specific time limitations and locations.

“Podcast” refers to a series of digital files that are created episodically and can be downloaded to an external storage location such as a desktop, iPod, or other mp3-equipped device.

“Skype” is an internet service that offers free calling between computers and other mobile devices. In addition to standard telephone calls, Skype enables file texting, file transfer, video chat, and videoconferencing.

“Threaded Discussion Board” is a sequence of responses to an initial message posting. This format allows the individual to follow or join an ongoing discussion. The thread generally shows the initial thread and subsequent responses.

“Posts” are individual responses within a discussion board.

“Chat” refers to participation with others, through the internet, in a real time conversation. This involves each participant typing their responses to others and reading the typed responses of others.

“Virtual Office Hours” refers to opportunities for students to enter a chat at a previously determined time and to engage with the professor who is present at that time.

There is often also allowance for file transfer. This is generally understood to take the place of “real world” office hours.

“Session” refers to a specific scheduled time in which students are expected to engage a particular discussion board or chat within an online learning platform.

“Open Chat” refers to a chat in which participation is not limited to specific students but is also available to others in the broader learning community.

“Video Conferencing” uses web camera technology to allow two or more individuals to both see and hear each other in a real time conversation.

“Professional MA” designates a Master of Arts degree in a practical field of application such as counseling or youth ministry.

“MA in Theological Studies” designates a Master of Arts degree generally understood as a stepping-stone towards a PhD program or other terminal degree program.

“Residential Seminary” refers to a seminary in which students live on campus and are engaged in classroom settings on a daily basis. This model generally also includes chapel and other communal activities.

“Commuter Seminary” refers to a seminary in which the majority of students travel from an hour or more to attend class. Classes may take place on several weekdays or on a daily basis but students are only present on campus for scheduled classes or activities. Commuter seminaries may still require chapel or other communal activity but this becomes more difficult to coordinate since students and faculty have varied schedules.

“Association of Theological Schools Standards” refers to the expectations and requirements used to assess and accredit ATS member schools.

Outline of the Research Project Chapters

Chapter One serves as an introduction to the scope of the project and will define the problem. Background to the problem will be provided as well as the rationale and motivation for the research to be undertaken. A description will be provided of the research methodology and the potential impact of the research on the broader church will be explored. The assumptions and limitations of the intended research will be considered and definition provided for terminology specific to the discipline.

Chapter Two will seek to provide a theological understanding of the importance of seminary education and of ministry formation within the broader context. Some attention will be paid to the historic development of seminary education and its various forms in the current culture. A description of the distinctives of a holistic theological education will be provided with specific reference to the pedagogic outcomes of knowing, being, and doing. Additionally, a warrant will be sought within the theological understanding for changes in the form of seminary education.

Chapter Three will include a broad review of literature related to online education in both secular and theological settings with a focus on the question of building community in online settings and a more general discussion of ministry formation in online settings for integration with the study.

Chapter Four will further define the research process and will provide a variety of data to describe the research collected from the various interview and survey sources.

Chapter Five will report and analyze the data from the research process using graphs, charts, and other presentation methods. The data will be analyzed to provide insight into the problem.

Chapter Six will provide the summary, conclusions, findings, and will provide recommendations for theological education as well as considering areas where further research is indicated.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Chapter Two will seek to provide a theological understanding of the importance of seminary education and of ministry formation. Some attention will be paid to the historic development of seminary education and its various forms in the current culture. A description of the distinctives of a holistic theological education will be provided with specific reference to the pedagogic outcomes of knowing, being, and doing. Additionally, a warrant will be sought within the biblical and theological understanding for changes in the form of seminary education and for the application of new technology such as online platforms to existing paradigms of theological education.

The Theological and Biblical Basis for Theological Education

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Arguably, the first encouragement toward theological education can be found in God's instructions to the Israelites after the giving of the Law. In referring to the Ten Commandments, God instructs the Israelites to share these teachings, specifically with their children, and to make the recalling and study of the commandments a central part of life.²³ The Hebrew word used in this instance, "*shah-nan*" indicates "sharpening skills"

²³ Deut. 6:6-9 [NIV].

with a further meaning of “gaining a deep understanding.”²⁴ Similarly, the word “*lamath*”, also used in the Book of Deuteronomy, suggests the meaning of “assimilating” or “becoming experienced.”²⁵ The theological learning encouraged in these passages is not a simple apprehension of fact but rather is deep knowing which becomes integrated in the individual and shapes patterns of living.

Matthew 28:16-20

The pattern of Jesus’ ministry suggests that education, initially in the form of discipleship, but also in a more expanded and intentional form is not simply a decision the early church made but rather it is a direct command given by Jesus to his disciples.

Jesus initially selects individuals who have the necessary character and provides them with a three-year training program. This is followed by a direct instruction regarding the ongoing process of educating leaders for the church.

In the discourse in Matthew 28, after his resurrection, Jesus instructs his disciples that they should make disciples and should baptize them. They are not only to be disciples themselves but also to instruct new disciples. The instruction does not end with the entry of the new disciple into salvation, rather it continues with the words “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”²⁶ The Greek word used here, “*matheteuo*” suggests “a follower who is a learner.”²⁷

²⁴ Ronald Chadwick, *Teaching and Learning: An Integrated Approach to Christian Education*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1982), 32-33.

²⁵ Chadwick, 32-33.

²⁶ Matt. 28:20 [NIV].

²⁷ Chadwick, 32-33.

2 Timothy 1:5

The Great Commission is to educate those who come to faith, and it is this commission that the early church understands as an essential part of the role of the church. This is demonstrated in the lives of the apostles, and perhaps most clearly evidenced in the actions of the apostle Paul with regards to his protégé Timothy.

In the relationship between Paul and Timothy the early development of a system of education that mirrors the Pharisaic tradition in which Paul has been raised is evident.²⁸ The epistles written to Timothy by the apostle Paul include words of instruction and encouragement to the young pastor.²⁹ It is important to note that Paul provides both practical instructions to Timothy and also encourages his ministerial formation. Paul gives Timothy the practical instruction that he should not be influenced by “godless myths and old wives’ tales.”³⁰ He continues his instruction, providing the reason for his instruction, and reminding Timothy that he should not put his trust in these influences but rather in the “hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially those who believe.”³¹ This dual pattern of practical theology and spiritual instruction is typical of Paul’s interactions with Timothy as recorded in the epistles. Timothy is to gain skills, to learn through “doing” but also through “being.”

However, Paul is not the only teacher that Timothy has. Paul references the names of two individuals who have had a profound influence on Timothy, his

²⁸ Acts 23:6 [NIV].

²⁹ Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application New Testament Commentary: Timothy* (Carol Stream, IL: Livingston Corporation, 2001), 931.

³⁰ 1 Tim. 4:7 [NIV].

³¹ 1 Tim. 4:10 [NIV].

grandmother Lois and mother Eunice.³² Harold H. Rowdon suggests, “There is a long and persistent tradition that inherent in Christian leadership lies the duty to make provision for the future . . . Paul places fairly and squarely upon the shoulders of Timothy the task of ensuring this continuity.”³³ Continuity between the Christian leadership of the church and theological education is important because the end product of theological education is the next generation of leadership for the church. There must be a relationship between the body that educates and the body for which the individual is educated.

Timothy serves as the example of this tradition of continuity. Timothy is a convert to the faith whom Paul describes as “my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord.”³⁴ This clear discipleship relationship between Paul and Timothy begins the transfer of essential theological concepts from one believer to another. Paul selects Timothy, teaches him via pastoral letters and through relationship. Paul commends Timothy to the Corinthian church noting, “He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”³⁵ It is Timothy’s mandate to take the benefit of a direct theological education by Paul and to share this education with other believers. This pattern of direct, disciple-to-disciple theological education becomes the pattern for the early church and remains a consistent theme in the historic development of theological education.

³² 2 Tim. 1:5 [NIV].

³³ Harold H. Rowdon, “Theological Education in Historical Perspective,” *Vox Evangelica* 7 (1971): 87.

³⁴ 1 Cor. 4:17 [NIV].

³⁵ 1 Cor. 4:17 [NIV].

Ephesians 4:20-24, 6:4

In addition to his comments to Timothy, Paul also instructs others through the Pastoral Epistles with regards to theological education. Writing to the church at Ephesus Paul indicates that believers are to be actively taught the faith. This transmission of understanding might be understood as “knowing.” There is essential truth that believers should receive. This knowledge results in a re-shaping of the believer, who becomes changes by this knowledge and whose “being” becomes formed and transformed. It is this transformation that Paul addresses in his writing to the Ephesians, using the Greek word “*paideuo*,” which suggested a process of “guiding by instruction and discipline” which results in the formation of the individual.³⁶

Conclusion

In considering themes regarding theological education through the Scriptures, a pattern exists suggesting more to education than simply the transmission of information, although this is one element. From the Old Testament instructions to the Israelites, through the teachings of Jesus and the encouragements of the Apostle Paul it is clear that theological education requires the transmission of information, followed by the assimilation of that information in a fashion that results in the transformation of the individual and in new patterns of living. Ronald Chadwick notes, “Let us never forget that the ultimate test of Christian education is not just academic excellence, but rather character change and Christlikeness. In Christian education, true teaching-learning is always for the purpose of living more like Christ.”³⁷

³⁶ Chadwick, 32-33.

³⁷ Chadwick, 36.

The Historic Development of Theological Education

Apostolic Era

The descriptions of the early church in the Book of Acts and in the Pastoral Epistles suggest that a formal structure of theological education did not exist at the time of the birth of the church, nor during its early decades. The teaching ministry of the church is focused largely on the creation of converts as evidenced by the preaching of Peter³⁸ and Stephen³⁹ and on the right order of the church, as evidenced by the Pauline epistles. However, it should be noted that the rabbinic model of apprenticeship under a Rabbi is embedded in the Jewish culture of the time.⁴⁰ The Rabbis serve as teachers of the Law of Moses, which can be understood as a precursor to Christian theological education.

The first century church began to develop a system in which an individual who showed gifts and skills appropriate to leadership in the church was given practical training and as skills developed might be elevated to a position of more authority. “Selection was governed usually by evidences of spirituality during the catechumenate.”⁴¹ This organic growth represents the earliest impulse of the early church towards a formalized theological education. Howard Rowdon notes, “The earliest equipment for Christian leadership—over and above the basic religious experience and

³⁸ Acts 2:14-41 [NIV].

³⁹ Acts 6:8-8:1 [NIV].

⁴⁰ Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg, *Sitting At The Feet of Rabbi Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 61.

⁴¹ E. Glenn Hinson, *Spiritual Preparation for Christian Leadership* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1999), 15.

knowledge common to all—was to be found in charismatic gift, practical experience at lower levels of responsibility and the personal guidance and instruction of men of God who were either themselves in the front line of Christian service—as Bishops—or who were specially set apart for the task of giving instruction and leadership.”⁴²

While it may not be accurate to term this theological education, in this early period in the church a deliberate pattern of study emerges, which focuses on “the interpretation of the received text from Scripture or council.”⁴³ The task of the early theological educator is the accurate interpretation of these texts and the transmission of them to believers to ensure the integrity of the Christian faith.

Monastic Era

As the structure of the early church begins to emerge during the late first and second century and as bishops are raised up and understood to have advanced authority and training, the beginnings of a movement to formally train leaders for the church is evident. These early schools, known as catechetical schools because of their connection to the catecheses, or instruction of converts to the faith, are described by Harold H.

Rowdon:

...[T]he teaching function of the bishop to be in part delegated to one or more instructors who would be able to specialize in the tasks not only of preparing and teaching a Christian apologetic to enquirers and new believers but also of giving potential Christian leaders a thorough grounding in learning, both non-Christian and Christian.⁴⁴

⁴² Rowdon, 77.

⁴³ Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 34.

⁴⁴ Rowdon, 77.

Modeled on the early catechetical schools, these more formal structures become increasingly widespread throughout the world of the second through fourth century church. Origen taught initially in the catechetical school in Alexandria and then later founded a similar school in Caesarea, which typified the theological education of this era. “The old classical education in the liberal arts was maintained without any interruption, and since this education was inseparable from the study of the classical authors, the old classical literature continued to be studied. But alongside of—and above—all this, there was not a specifically Christian learning which was biblical and theological and which produced its own prolific literature.”⁴⁵ This dual emphasis, on both the Greek philosophical tradition along with biblical and theological studies created a distinctive style of theological education, which continues to influence modern theological education.

Another facet of the catechetical schools, which has provided a lasting legacy to modern theological education, is the development of mentor relationships between teachers and students. The relationship between Justin and Tatian is typical of this mentored relationship. Tatian who already possess “a quality in-depth Greek-style education” converted to Christianity in about AD 160 and became “a pupil and admirer of Justin Martyr.”⁴⁶ Tatian’s writings exhibit the clear influence of his mentor but develop in an intellectually divergent direction, which resulted in Tatian renouncing the

⁴⁵ Christopher Dawson, *Crisis of Western Education* (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 1989), 7-8.

⁴⁶ Roland H. Worth Jr., *Shapers of Early Christianity: 52 Biographies, A.D. 100-400* (Jefferson, MO: McFarland, 2007), 75.

Greek philosophical influence, which undergirded Justin Matryr's own study.⁴⁷ This mentor relationship, which enriched the learning of both parties while allowing for freedom of thought and opinion, is still evidenced in the value, placed in modern theological education, on the academic freedom of both instructors and students.

The catechetical schools were in turn followed by the cathedral schools that derived their name from the 'cathedra' or chair of office of the bishop of a province or other region who was charged with responsibility for educating clergy to serve in his region. "This was especially the case under Charlemagne, by whose express orders cathedral schools were erected in each diocese, where those youth set apart for the service of Christ, received a learned and pious education."⁴⁸ That theological education remained a concern is made clear by the dictate of the Council of Aix-la-Chapelle in 789. Harold Rowdon comments on this council's instruction, "Charlemagne's aim was not to attempt the impossible task of providing universal education, but to ensure that priests and monks should be trained 'capable of understanding the Scripture, of reading the office correctly, of performing liturgical functions exactly and intelligently.'"⁴⁹

While these schools provided basic instruction in reading and writing the emphasis here is on the performance of the sacraments and ability to correctly perform worship functions in addition to the understanding of Scripture. The goal is a priesthood who understand the significance of their actions and do not simply practice by imitation

⁴⁷ Wayne Campbell Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition: Evidence of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Texts of the Canonical Gospels* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 45.

⁴⁸ George Howe, *Discourse on Theological Education* (New York: Leavitt, Trow and Company, and M.W. Dodd, 1844), 84.

⁴⁹ Rowdon, 79.

or repetition. The majority of the population in the Early Middle Ages remains semi-literate and; therefore, priests must have sufficient education to maintain the authority of the church and to correctly teach the content of Scripture since individuals cannot verify the accuracy of their teaching by their own resources. There are certain parallels to our current culture in which biblical illiteracy is on the rise and parish pastors and priest may need to function in a similar role.

It should also be noted that in the same time period as the cathedral schools were developing monastic orders were established where the emphasis was on the teaching profession as the vocation of the monk. The Benedictine order serves as an example. St. Benedict held as a cardinal principle the belief that “Idleness is the enemy of the soul”; therefore, determined that his monks “should occupy themselves both in the labor of their hands and in holy reading.”⁵⁰ Benedictine monks, and others in similar monastic orders, became among the better-educated members of medieval society and often served as instructors in the cathedral schools. The monasteries also sometimes served as a “veritable academy” in which boys were placed for education by noble families since the setting offered both education and protection from seizure during periods of unrest.⁵¹

By the end of the fifth century, the world of the church was quite literally under siege as the Roman Empire collapsed and various non-Roman groups filled in the voids left by the absence of Roman rule. The church, which in many senses has become enmeshed with Roman culture, struggles to both convert and educate these pagans while still seeking to fill the need for clergy with some formal education. “In such

⁵⁰ Paul Monroe, *A Cyclopedia of Education*, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1919), 359.

⁵¹ Monroe, 359.

circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Christian instruction and training found refuge in the seclusion and relative safety of the monasteries.”⁵² Priests trained in these monastic settings received both theological and practical education as necessary for their roles in the church. These theologically trained monastics became in turn the next generation of instructors in monastic settings.

The success of the monastic settings depended in part on the stability of the surrounding culture, leading to centers of learning in locations such as Ireland, where the impact of Rome’s deterioration were less profoundly experienced than in the Mediterranean regions. The invasion of Britain by the Saxons in the fifth century further solidified the need for monastic centers in remote regions where the influence of non-Christian culture was lessened by distance.⁵³

The establishment of the monastery on the island of Iona by Columba is typical of this time period. Monastic centers become the normative location for theological education to take place. “The island was covered with cloisters and churches and inhabited by a numerous body of students and clergy-men ... the convent of Iona was an extensive theological seminary and missionary school. The grand design and effort of Columba and his assistants was to train up men for the holy ministry.”⁵⁴

It is of note that in this time period theological education changes its format and methodology in response to the surrounding culture and in order to ensure the survival of theological education in a hostile environment.

⁵² Rowdon, 78.

⁵³ Rowdon, 78.

⁵⁴ Howe, 86-87.

Medieval Era

The later Middle Ages saw the Christianization of Europe and the authority of both Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor more clearly defined. This centralization of power in both the secular and sacred arenas saw an increased structure for theological education. “The outstanding development of the twelfth century was the emergence of the university. In a sense, the university grew out of the bishop’s responsibility to provide clerical training. The 4th Lateran Council of 1215 still exhorted every metropolitan bishop to ensure that theology was taught in the context of his cathedral church, but in fact this duty was being taken up by the universities.”⁵⁵ These universities often included a chair in theology, which was considered a standard course of study not only for future clergy but also for all well-educated individuals. “These universities bear date from the ninth to the sixteenth century. Of them all, the University of Paris was most famous as a theological school....”⁵⁶

The universities taught not only theology but also a broader curriculum considered essential to an educated clergy. It is also during this time period that universities become residential in nature, with students lodged in halls administered by the master responsible for their area of education. It is also during this era that the concept of post-graduate studies emerges. “The course of studies for bachelors was the already stereotyped programme (sic) of the seven liberal arts, comprising the Trivium (Grammar, Rhetoric and Dialectic) and the Quadrivium (Arithmetic, Astronomy, Music and Geometry). More specialised (sic) studies, such as Medicine, Canon Law

⁵⁵ Rowdon, 80.

⁵⁶ Howe, 92.

(increasingly important with the growing centralised (sic) bureaucracy of the medieval Roman Church) and Theology were post-graduate.”⁵⁷

These universities begin to resemble the modern seminary experience to some extent. A significant difference was the duration of the course of study: “The whole course might extend for anything up to 17 years, including not only disputation but also lecturing.” A familiar tendency within these universities, which is reflected in some modern theological education settings, emerged towards scholasticism in which the course of study “... became less and less related to the work of the ministry and more and more the route to a life of academic scholarship.”⁵⁸

Reformation Era

The Protestant Reformation had as a partial impetus the perceived lack of practical training in the priesthood, priests who were functionally illiterate in the parish, and the increased scholasticism of the universities that became removed from the parish setting. The resulting system focused attention on canonical law and not on the Scriptures. The educated products of the university system were not considered suitable candidates for the parish setting; instead, in the parish setting the priest was little better educated than those he served.

In contrast, the educational settings, which provided training to many of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation were a part of the “Northern Renaissance,” which

... applied the principle of ‘Back to the sources’ to the ministerial task... Melancthon at Wittenberg, as well as Calvin at Geneva and the numerous centres[sic] of training set up in the Netherlands, Scotland, and later North

⁵⁷ Howe, 92.

⁵⁸ Rowdon, 80.

America, under the direct or indirect inspiration of Geneva, gave ministerial training a firm basis in exegesis of the Scriptures in the original languages. In Geneva at least, this high academic training was balanced against practical experience.⁵⁹

This emphasis on returning to “the sources” and an awareness of the need for practical experience coupled with academic formation begins to suggest the modern approach to theological education. Desiderius Erasmus, priest and theologian, is typical of this affinity for classical sources including Aristotelian and scholastic philosophy since he understood these sources as essential to the ability to construct an orderly systematic and thoroughly doctrinal theology. “He also emphasized, quite strongly, the relationships between study of the materials of theology and the development of personal piety. Prayerful study should transform life and ultimately issue forth in public morality and piety.”⁶⁰

It should be noted that in this time period theological education changes in response to the pressures of the surrounding culture and the needs of the church. The Protestant reformers perceive deficits in the training of Catholic priests that they seek to rectify in the design of training for Protestant ministers. A strong emphasis on the Scriptures is deemed more suitable for the individual who will serve in the local parish setting as opposed to the canonical law being taught in the Catholic system. Theological education evolves in relationship and in service to the surrounding culture.

The Roman Catholic Church responded as well to the need for parish priests. The Council of Trent, reacting in part to the criticism of the Protestant Reformers, required

⁵⁹ Rowdon, 81.

⁶⁰ D. G. Hart and R. Albert Mohler Jr., eds., *Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 104.

“... all cathedral and greater churches ‘to maintain, to educate religiously, and to train in ecclesiastical discipline, a certain number of youths of their city and diocese’ or to provide for this to be done ‘in a college to be chosen by the bishop for this purpose’.”⁶¹

This increased emphasis on an educated clergy in local settings improved the likelihood that the parish priest might be educated in theological constructs and might, depending on the bishop, have experienced a curriculum that included some practical training.

Seminary Era

This decree by the Council of Trent resulted in the establishment of the seminary, initially in Italy and Germany with later development of Catholic seminaries throughout Europe. These early seminaries recognized the need to form students, “not only theologically...but also pastorally and spiritually.”⁶² These areas of concern have contributed to the design of modern theological education in Roman Catholicism. This same emphasis is apparent in John Paul II’s 1992 *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, which “calls for a highly integrated approach to priestly formation, integrating human formation with spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual formation.”⁶³

However, these changes in theological education did not take place overnight. To understand the gradual shifts in theological education attention should be paid to England

⁶¹ Rowdon, 82.

⁶² Stephen Bevens, “*Theological Education in World Christianity Since 1910*,” in *Handbook Of Theological Education in World Christianity*, ed. Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsson Kang, and Joshva Raja (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), 4.

⁶³ Bevens, 9.

in the Post-Reformation Period and to the development of seminary education in the Protestant Church.

In England during the Post-Reformation Period, theological education and training for the ministry of the church became the role of the university. While this seemed to be a transformation designed to increase the effectiveness of educating clergy the reality is not so clear-cut.

The universities did not have clear standards for providing theological education and tended to be “more social than education(al)” with education and study “almost an optional extra and where examinations were conspicuous chiefly by their absence.”⁶⁴ Finally, in the late 1800’s schools of theology were established and a more rigorous course of study defined. However, this also resulted in theological education becoming “more academic and theoretical.”⁶⁵ Perhaps as a result of the increased academic nature of the schools of theology, the bishops who had traditionally involved themselves in practical training became less directly involved in the work of preparing clergy. Instead, a tendency to emphasize “learning on the job” became more typical. Older clergy were expected to provide practical instruction to younger colleagues.⁶⁶

This increased distance between clergy in the parish and the university forms the fertile ground in which later generations, in particular the emerging evangelical churches, begin to distrust the seminary as overly academic and instead depend on a model of training that is parish based. This is exemplified by the training of lay preachers designed

⁶⁴ Rowdon, 83.

⁶⁵ Rowdon, 82.

⁶⁶ Rowdon, 83.

by John Wesley whose men were “trained on the job.”⁶⁷ Wesley advocated a system in which individuals who demonstrated natural leadership skills were given leadership of small groups. Those who excelled were promoted to increased responsibility. If the necessary spiritual development and practical skills were present, these individuals could in turn be promoted to roles as itinerant preachers.

The arrival of theological education on the North American continent tends to reflect the methods of theological education “to which they had been accustomed in the mother country.”⁶⁸ This resulted in the founding of colleges and universities such as Harvard, Dartmouth, and Yale founded by the Congregationalists, and Princeton founded by the Presbyterians. While there was significant difference in the underlying theology of these institutions, the method of educations were remarkably similar.

These universities had in common a stated intent to educate “men for the ministry.”⁶⁹ The emphasis was on a classic education, including Hebrew and Greek language courses and the study of the Scriptures in the original languages. This rigorous education was intended to provide the necessary intellectual foundation for ministry.⁷⁰

The expansion of the new colonies into areas occupied by native tribes resulted in a perceived need for training of missionaries to evangelize these indigenous peoples as well as for “the purpose of supplying the church with learned and able preachers of the word.”⁷¹ Such schools developed a biblical rather than a literary education. “It seems to

⁶⁷ Rowdon, 85.

⁶⁸ Howe, 100.

⁶⁹ Howe, 101.

⁷⁰ Howe, 101.

⁷¹ Howe, 101.

have been the case in this country in earliest times that the whole education of a young man preparing for the ministry was obtained at college.”⁷²

However, the need for clergy began to outpace the available facilities for education. This resulted in the emergence of synodical schools and academies, which lacked the educational rigor of the universities but instead provided a more practical education and often resulted in a shorter educational term followed by oversight under a more senior colleague.⁷³

This counter movement can also be seen in the “log college” founded by William Tennet Sr. This school located “on the banks of the Neshaminy, in Pennsylvania”, sought to prepare men for ministry who did not have access to “a college or university education, no institution of that kind being within their reach.”⁷⁴

A similar system was designed by D.L. Moody who sought “to combine the training of leaders with the evangelizing of down-town areas by student.”⁷⁵ In this system, academic training was unimportant. The focus was on the practical skills necessary to successfully evangelize and convert individuals. Sufficient knowledge of Scripture to meet these goals did not include any need for more esoteric studies such as the classical languages, Greek philosophy, or even theology. These programs addressed the urgent need for ministry leadership but it could be argued that the quality of those prepared for ministry suffered as a result.

⁷² Howe, 104.

⁷³ Howe, 107-108.

⁷⁴ Howe, 105.

⁷⁵ Rowdon, 85.

Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century

The current variety of opportunities for theological education is broader in the twenty-first century than at any other time during history. Some theological education settings have continued to follow the models of the early university and have a strongly academic delivery system and values. Some have been more focused on the practical skills necessary for parish ministries. Others have sought to provide a balanced approach to theological education, which reflects both a desire for academic rigor and transmitting the necessary practical skills.

In order to understand the increasingly complex world of theological education, it is essential to understand that theological education in the twenty-first century begins to have an overtly denominational pattern. Each denominational group desired pastors who had been educated in a theological education setting that supported the theological tradition of the denomination. This is increasingly true as the number of Protestant denominations continued to expand. Seminaries are directly identified with the founding denomination. It is also important to note that evangelical seminaries develop distinctively from mainline Protestant denominational seminaries such as Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian, and so forth.

North American Protestants saw theological education as an extension of the work of the university, a model received from “the great universities of western Europe where theological faculties, under the direction and patronage of the state, trained clergy for ministry in the national church.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ D. G. Hart and R. Albert Mohler Jr., eds. “Introduction,” in *Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 15.

The absence of what we can term a “national church” in North America resulted in the desire of each Protestant denomination to develop its own theological education setting. This impetus resulted in the establishment of denominationally specific seminaries for the mainline Protestant denominations.

The Evangelical Movement, as it developed into the twenty-first century, resulted in the need for a different form of theological education than that of the mainline denominations. “Evangelicalism has generally been distrustful of formal learning and academic institutions”⁷⁷ and yet evangelicals have come to recognize the need for formalized systems of theological education. Initially this took the form of “reading divinity”⁷⁸ in which college graduates who sought to enter into ministry were essentially apprenticed to more experienced clergy. “The disciples of Jonathan Edwards, for instance, used this system to perpetuate a particular theology and form of ministry along the Connecticut River valley.”⁷⁹ This system gradually gave way to the establishment of evangelical seminaries, which took on a distinctive shape due to the emphasis in evangelicalism, which is best understood using Bebbington’s quadrilateral. “Evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed, activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; Biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be call crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Hart and Mohler, 9.

⁷⁸ Hart and Mohler, 15.

⁷⁹ Hart and Mohler, 15.

⁸⁰ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 3.

Adding to the complexity of modern theological education was the varying landscape of settings, which were profoundly denominational while others had no denominational affiliation. Theological education in the twenty-first century also faces the challenge of providing education in a wider variety of countries and languages.

The World Missionary Conference that met in Edinburgh in 1910 identified “the lack of theological training and provision for ministerial formation as an urgent problem found in nearly every part of the world.”⁸¹ Between 1910 and the early 1950’s seminaries were gradually developed in non-Western settings to address this deficiency. However, “In every region ... there was a growing desire to be independent of the West, for indigenous theologians to serve as faculty in theological seminaries, and for course of study to focus on local needs and realities.”⁸² The establishment of the Theological Education Fund of the International Missionary Council was intended to address these issues.

The advent of new technology, in the form of recording equipment and the invention and mass production of the cassette tape, resulted in the next significant change in global theological education. The ability to record, duplicate, and distribute educational content paved the way for the creation of distance education and extension programs. It is in these groundbreaking programs that current online theological education programs have their roots. In this instance, theological education is responding

⁸¹ David Esterline, “*From Western Church to World Christianity: Developments in Theological Education in the Ecumenical Movement*,” in *Handbook Of Theological Education in World Christianity*, ed. Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsson Kang, and Joshva Raja (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), 13.

⁸² Esterline, 16.

to changing culture, the advance of technology, and the changing needs of the church for theological education.

Extension Programs

“Theological education by extension (TEE) began in Latin America in the 1960s and spread through Asia and Africa in the 1970s ... TEE has put the local church at the centre of theological training, demonstrating that such training can be conducted in the atmosphere of continuing work in the world.”⁸³ Initially TEE focused on textbooks designed to be “self teaching” but gradually resources were developed that included workbooks and audiovisual materials including video and audio recordings.

It is interesting to note that theological education by extension tended to thrive “when more radical political changes make the continuing of residential training impossible.”⁸⁴ In settings where residential training was possible there was significant resistance from theological educators to models that used extension programs. This would seem to directly parallel current resistance to online education by some theological educators. The underlying ethos is a preference for a face-to-face form of education as providing a better education.

A significant limitation of TEE theological education programs was the requirement of a “... high degree of motivation by the students”⁸⁵ with the resulting consequence of many students not completing their anticipated courses of study. This is

⁸³Bruce Nicholls, “Evangelical Theological Education in the Changing World of the 1980s” in *Evangelical Theological Education Today: An International Perspective*, ed. Paul Bowers (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1982), 18.

⁸⁴ Nicholls, 18.

⁸⁵ Nicholls, 18.

also demonstrated in classroom settings although in the classroom base education setting the instructor has more direct ability to provide encouragement. A significant benefit of the TEE programs was its flexibility, which allowed for "... a variety of education levels and with a variable time span."⁸⁶ The TEE model allowed for individual plans of study, which could be modified based on the educational background of the student by adjusting the number of credit hours attempted at a time or by varying the length of the course itself. These extension and distance education programs are the forerunners of the online education programs of the twenty-first century.

Online Education Programs

In considering the origins of theological education, as it was practiced in earlier centuries the rapid changes in the last century and in particular, within the last several decades appear to occur in response to the needs of the church and in response to changing patterns of education and culture. Perhaps the most significant of these changes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the gradual migration of theological education programs into online platforms.

Online education began in the mid 1990's and in general, these early programs grew out of educational settings where correspondence programs were already in place. By the year 2002, 1.6 million postsecondary students were enrolled in online courses. In 2008, this number had grown exponentially to roughly twenty-five percent of all higher

⁸⁶ Nicholls, 18.

education students. This reflects a growth rate of seventeen percent annually compared with growth in higher education as a whole of slightly more than one percent.⁸⁷

These technological advances have created something of a pitched battle within the arenas of theological education. Some view the increased availability of online education as a great boon to theological education while others consider this new technology as the single greatest threat to theological education in this century.

The polarization of opinion raises a broader question in the discussion of theological education. Fundamentally, the question becomes a part of a more complex conversation regarding technology, and in particular, Internet based technology. The very nature of technology is at issue. Can technology be a force of good or is it essentially flawed and perhaps even sinful? Does the use of technology in theological education potentially taint the education received or can it ameliorate the educational experience?

The question is explored by Nicholas Carr in *The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing To Our Brains*. He notes,

Media aren't just channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought. And what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. Whether I'm online or not, my mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles.⁸⁸

Carr's contention is that the Internet, and by extension any educational program that depends on the Internet for its delivery platform, is not neutral but rather will have a detrimental effect on the thought process of the user.

⁸⁷ Edward H. Perry and Michelle L. Pilati, "Online Learning," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* no. 128 (2011): 95.

⁸⁸ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing To Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), 6-7.

The opposing point of view is held by Jesse Rice, author of *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community*. Rice suggests that any form of media can potentially benefit the user. Even the much-maligned social networking site can become a vehicle for connection, evangelism, and fellowship. He comments “...it is appropriate to ask, ‘How can we take our co-creative tools modeled by Jesus—intentionality, humility, and authenticity—and use them to make something good like Facebook even better?’”⁸⁹ Rice views technology, and in particular, online social networking, as a benefit for humankind and for the church.

Carr and Rice represent two opposing viewpoints, which highlight a fundamental question that must be addressed in our study of online theological education. In some sense it is the question asked by Tertullian in the second century, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”⁹⁰ Tertullian was reflecting on the intersection of the Greek philosophical tradition with the communication of the gospel and raising a concern that the Greek philosophical tradition might cause more harm to the communication of the gospel than potential good. The question regarding online theological education is essentially the same. If the media of the Internet creates negative outcomes, as some writers and researchers suggest, should it even be considered as a vehicle for theological education? Conversely, if the media “shape(s) the process of thought”⁹¹ can it be used to benefit the seminary student’s ability to gain the necessary skills for servant leadership?

⁸⁹ Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook: How The Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 211.

⁹⁰ Tertullian, “De Praescriptione Haereticorum,” http://www.tertullian.org/works/de_praescriptione_haereticorum.htm [accessed January 8, 2012].

⁹¹ Carr, 6-7.

The fundamental argument is not simply about theological education in an online setting but rather about the biblical and theological warrant for the use of technology in furthering the communication of the gospel. What indeed does the Internet have to do with the church?

Genesis Revisited

There is some essential biblical truth to be gleaned from the first accounts of humankind's use of technology, which can be found in the book of Genesis, specifically in the creation account. John Dyer suggests that humankind's first use of technology is the act of Adam naming the animals that God brought for his consideration. "There in the garden, as he created words and names that didn't exist before, Adam started reflecting the image of God. These words would serve as the lens through which Eve and their children would see those creatures. Now we don't ordinarily think of language as a technology, but language is very much a tool."⁹² As Adam gives names, he engages in the use of a kind of tool that transforms God's creation for practical purposes. Once they are named Adam can differentiate between the animals and can begin to understand their unique natures. The simplest biblical understanding of technology suggests that it is "the human activity of using tools to transform God's creation for practical purposes."⁹³ This use of technology is a result of God's command to tend the garden.

This understanding of technology, as a natural outcome of God's creation, is an essential one as when considering the effective use of online education in theological

⁹² John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Books, 2001), 51.

⁹³ Dyer, 65.

education since a fundamental bias often encountered is the suggestion that in some manner technology is purely a human creation and is in some fashion tainted by human sin. Equally, it is clear human sin can result in technology, which causes more harm than good. In the biblical story of the fall of Adam and Eve, we encounter humankind, newly tainted by the first sin, using technology in an attempt to overcome their fallen nature and as an outward expression of that fallenness. Adam and Eve make for themselves clothes from the leaves in the garden. “The clothing was their way of transforming their circumstances such that they would no longer rely on God for anything.”⁹⁴

Is it possible that it is not the technology in and of itself that is positive or negative but rather the human intent behind the use of that technology which must be considered? If this is the case then the technology necessary for online theological education is in and of itself neither good nor bad but rather a medium in which the message of theological education can be communicated. This neutral understanding of technology provides a biblical warrant for the use of technology where it furthers God’s mission in the world.

If in fact, technology can be understood as neutral, are there examples in past centuries of instances in which a technological advancement enabled better training of seminary students or served as a medium to further the gospel? Consider the impact of the printing press, and the resulting increased literacy on the church of the Reformation. Prior to a widespread ability to read the Bible, the gospel remained bound within the confines of the Catholic Church. One might argue that this protected the Scriptures from heretical interpretation and misapplication. Equally the absence of wide spread literacy

⁹⁴ Dyer, 71.

and the availability of Scripture in translations accessible to non-Latin readers led to corruption and abuse of power within the structures of the church. “The ability to see directly for themselves what Scripture said is what gave traction and support to Martin Luther’s cause.”⁹⁵

The advent of the printing press and translation of the Scriptures from Latin into the language of the people in a given time and place gave new impetus to the spread of the gospel, however, the technology of the printing press is in and of itself neutral. Despite the neutrality of the printing press, the medium inevitably influenced the message that it carried.

Marshall McLuhan, the voice of caution concerning technology and media, notes, “Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the ‘content’ of a medium is like a juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind.”⁹⁶

Given that technology is not in and of itself either good or evil but it does impact the content or the message that is carried by the technology; it would seem that any use of online education technology in theological education must come from this informed posture. An intentionality regarding the effect of the medium on the message communicated is required. An important touchstone is the question how does the use of online technology in theological education act on the message communicated and are these changes beneficial or at the least not harmful?

⁹⁵ Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 19.

⁹⁶ Eric McLuhan, *The Essential McLuhan*, ed. Frank Zingrone and Marshal McLuhan (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 158-159.

The role of technology in theological education cannot simply be ignored. “Christianity is fundamentally a communication event. The religion is predicated on God revealing himself to humanity . . . Any serious study of God is a study of communication, and any effort to understand God is shaped by our understanding—or misunderstanding—of the media and technology we use to communicate.”⁹⁷ Neither demonizing technology, nor elevating it as the only hope for theological education, serves the church well. Instead, consideration must be given to how to best evaluate the outcome of theological education performed in an online setting. Online-based theological education must be carefully designed and executed.

The ability to assess the education provided, whether online or in the classroom must be based in a clear model that reflects the desired content of a theological education and the desired end product, to wit, the seminary graduate who is equipped academically and practically to shepherd and minister to the people of God within the Body of Christ.

A Holistic Theological Education

When considering the essential shape of a theological education a vital position reflects the standards adopted by the Association of Theological Schools that note:

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.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Hipps, 12.

⁹⁸ The Association of Theological Schools, “ATS General Institutional Standards, Section 3.0,” <http://www.ats.edu/Accrediting/Documents/10GeneralInstitutionalStandards.pdf> [accessed January 14, 2012].

Three areas emerge from this definition: habits of theological reflection, wise and skilled ministerial practice, and formation of spiritual awareness and moral sensitivity. In many theological settings, these areas have come to be identified with the less cumbersome terminology of knowing, doing, and being, respectively.⁹⁹ It should be noted that these are not new areas of concern in theological education but rather a reflection of the history of theological education with its emphasis on academic knowledge, the practical application of the academic knowledge and spiritual formation gained in a theological education.

These areas of emphasis can be understood to define a holistic theological education. When all areas are addressed in an even and balanced fashion the resulting program will result in a ministry professional who is well versed in areas of knowledge, capable in areas of practical ministry, and demonstrates a degree of spiritual and emotional maturity appropriate to the role and commensurate with their status as newly minted practitioners.

David Kelsey, writing in *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate*, suggests that theological education has developed a bipolar nature, torn between two models, the classical model of Athens in which the emphasis is on personal formation through knowledge of God, and the model of Berlin which focuses on intellectual formation through study of God.¹⁰⁰ It is Kelsey's contention that each of these models can contribute significantly to theological education and that they should not be

⁹⁹ The Association of Theological Schools, "ATS General Institutional Standards, Section 3.0."

¹⁰⁰ David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 26.

held to be in opposition but rather should become part of an integrated model for theological education which for the purposes of this paper we designate as a holistic theological education.

Kelsey asks “Can we reconceive theological education in such a way that it clearly pertains to the totality of human life?”¹⁰¹ A theological education that is holistic will seek a balance between “Athens” and “Berlin.”

Brian Edgar, in a journal article entitled, “A Theology of Theological Education” notes:

The early church adopted this educational philosophy not only because it was present culturally but also because of its obvious connections with biblical and theological emphases on holiness and the development of individual character. In theological education virtue is important and holiness essential. This approach affirmed the need for a complete, inner, personal, moral and spiritual transformation.¹⁰²

The Berlin model grows out of the approach to theological education developed by the German universities. The emphasis was on research “undertaken along enlightenment lines.”¹⁰³ The Berlin model’s emphasis on “knowing” highlights an equally crucial area of training for theological education. Individuals who receive advanced degrees should demonstrate proficiency in the knowledge base of their discipline.

¹⁰¹ Kelsey, 199.

¹⁰² Brian Edgar, “Evangelical Review of Theology,” *The Theology of Theological Education* 29, no. 3 (2005): 209.

¹⁰³ Edgar, 210.

Brian Edgar suggests that two more elements should be added to the typology suggested by Kelsey. He suggests that the addition of Jerusalem and Geneva are essential to complete the picture of a holistic theological education.¹⁰⁴

Robert Banks, writing in *Revisioning Theological Education*, suggests that a Jerusalem model would be predominantly missional in its approach to theological education. This missional model would require integration between the work of the theological setting and the Christian community as a whole. The Jerusalem model suggests the need for a skill-based element to the model for theological education. Its focus is on the skills necessary to grow the church. It is the reminder that theological education is not an end to itself but rather is education designed to meet the needs of the church for servant leadership. This missional model has at its core an emphasis on what we can term the ‘doing’ component of a holistic theological education.

Brian Edgar summarizes the models of Banks and Kelsey and then suggests a fourth model for theological education, which he terms the Geneva model of education. He notes that this choice of city is rather arbitrary but one he makes to designate an approach that is confessional. He describes this model as “an emphasis on formation through teaching about the founders, the heroes, the struggles, the strengths and the traditions that are distinctive and formative for that community of faith.”¹⁰⁵ Edgar suggests that the addition of Geneva balances the emphases of the other typologies because it brings an emphasis on the connection between the knowledge of the seminary and the living heritage of the church.

¹⁰⁴ Edgar, 210.

¹⁰⁵ Edgar, 209.

Edgar suggests that each of these typologies have strengths and weaknesses and is expressive of “debates about the fundamental theology.”¹⁰⁶ His journal article highlights the reality that each of these typologies speaks to a particular element of the tasks of ‘knowing’, ‘being’, and ‘doing’. Edgar’s chart of these four typologies, reproduced below, suggests the essential shape of a holistic theological education.

| | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| CLASSICAL <i>Transforming the individual</i> | <i>Knowing God</i> | CONFESSIONAL GENEVA <i>Seminary</i> |
| ATHENS <i>Academy</i> | THEOLOGIA DOXOLOGY | |
| JERUSALEM <i>Community</i> | MISSIOLOGY SCIENTIA | BERLIN <i>University</i> |
| MISSIONAL <i>Converting the world</i> | <i>Strengthening the church</i> | VOCATIONAL |

Figure 2.1: Four Typologies of Theological Education¹⁰⁷

It is only when considering an approach that embraces all of these elements that a holistic approach to theological education is described. In other words, a holistic theological education should involve personal, spiritual, and moral growth seeking the transformation of the individual’s character, vocational and praxis-oriented training, growth in the ability to think critically and theologically and to apply that knowledge to the mission of God in the world. Wilson W. Chow, writing on an integrated approach to theological education suggests:

Theological education should aim at training students to become servants of the Lord in His Church and equipping them to serve effectively in the Church. As it involves both ‘being’ and ‘doing’ aspects, theological training should be people-centered and task-oriented....Theological

¹⁰⁶ Edgar, 209.

¹⁰⁷ Brian Edgar, “Evangelical Review of Theology,” *The Theology of Theological Education* 29, no. 3 (2005): 209. Used with Permission, World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission. See Appendix B.

education needs also to be biblical and contextualized. . . . Thus an integrated approach to theological education involves an attempt to achieve these objectives—the ‘be’ goals, the ‘know’ goals, and the ‘do’ goals.¹⁰⁸

What Does The Internet Have To Do With The Seminary?

In considering the implications of online education in theological education, several essential issues become clear. The nature of post-modern theological education must continue to maintain strong continuity with the content of theological education in the past. The same essential skills and tasks are still necessary to provide the church with servant leaders.

Post-Modern theological education can also respond to surrounding culture in the same fashion as the theological education models of the past, seeking to respond both to the pressures of surrounding culture and to meet the needs of the church within that culture. In fact, theological education has ever been flexible in response to technological advances and has demonstrated positive outcomes when those advances are brought into the service of the church and the seminary.

Regardless of the delivery system, classroom based or online platform, theological education must seek integration between “knowing”, “being”, and “doing.” To sacrifice any of these for the sake of a more expedient delivery system is to allow the medium to dictate the message rather than asserting that the medium is a vehicle of the message. To sacrifice any of these for the sake of keeping what is familiar and comfortable and worked in previous generations is to make the same mistake.

¹⁰⁸Wilson W. Chow, “An Integrated Approach to Theological Education.” in *Evangelical Theological Education Today: An International Perspective*, ed. Paul Bowers (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1982), 49.

Theological education will need to develop awareness of how the medium of online theological education will affect the message. While the technology in and of itself is neither intrinsically good nor bad, it will have an effect on the ministry formation of the individual. The question becomes, what is that effect and does the quality of the education and formation received substantively similar to that, which is received in a seminary classroom?

In order to further examine this question an analysis of the literature available on the topic of online education and online education as it relates specifically to personal and ministry formation is necessary.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND OTHER SOURCES

Chapter Three will include a broad review of literature related to online education in theological settings and a more general discussion of academic formation in online settings for integration with the study.

It should be noted that there is a large body of writing available with regards to ministry formation in theological education and also in models for designing effective online learning courses. However, the intersection between these bodies of writing is less richly populated. Online theological education is a rapidly advancing area of study but still very much in its infancy.

Chapter Three will seek to identify the intersection between these varied bodies of writing and to provide necessary awareness of the discipline of theological education in online settings in order to better shape the research that will be designed in Chapter Four.

Ministry Formation in Theological Education

John H. Leith, writing in *Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education*, suggests that increased secularization in some seminary settings has created a disconnection between the education students receive and the needs of the church they are educated to serve. He notes, “The consequence is that theological seminaries are no longer seen as primary institutions for the training of pastors, but as institutes for the

discussion and study of religion. A new type of professor inevitably moves the seminary in a new direction away from the task of educating people to establish congregations.”¹⁰⁹ Leith believes that seminaries must include faculty members with practical experience in congregational settings who are able to infuse both practical ministry courses such as counseling and courses such as theology and biblical studies with applied skills. “The critical question for seminary education is a willingness to accept the modest task of teaching practice without which no amount of learning in therapy, or learning theory, or in theology shall amount to much.”¹¹⁰

Ronald E. Vallet, writing in *Stewards of the Gospel: Reforming Theological Education*, suggests that, “The object of theological education is to develop Christian stewards who, in turn, can provide leadership for the development of Christian stewards in Christian congregations, denominations, and in the church at large.”¹¹¹ His metaphor of theological education as stewardship encompasses the concept of the pastor as one who is both a resource for congregations and the one who encourages a congregation to use their resources to further the gospel. In this model, the seminary becomes the place in which one is trained to be a steward of one’s own gifts and to train others in stewardship according to this definition. In a later chapter of *Stewards of the Gospel*, Dan Aleshire, president of the Association of Theological Schools, notes “the traditional fourfold division of theological education—biblical, theological, history and

¹⁰⁹ John H. Leith, *Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 10.

¹¹⁰ Leith, 70.

¹¹¹ Ronald E. Vallet, *Stewards of the Gospel: Reforming Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 3.

pastoral or practical theology—fosters a sharp ...distinction between ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical.’”¹¹²

While Leith and Vallet seem to agree that something is not as it should be in theological education, a change is needed; they are representative of the variety of opinions about what specifically should be changed. Areas of agreement include the need for a balance in theological education between the practical and the theoretical, but the differences of approach are significant.

Foster, Dahill, Golemon, and Tolentino, the authors of *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, note four pedagogies of theological education which are central to the task of educating clergy: “disciplined analysis of sacred texts ... the formation of their pastoral identities, dispositions and values ... the understanding of the complex social, political, personal and congregational conditions that surround them ... and in the skills of preacher, counselor, liturgist, and leader through which they exercise their pastoral, priestly and rabbinical responsibilities.”¹¹³ These four areas of educational focus noted by the authors concur with both Leith and Vallet’s agreement that a balance must be sought in theological education between the theoretical; analysis of texts and the understanding of contexts, as well as the practical; skills in preaching, counseling, leadership, and worship.

These areas of focus in theological education are not recent traits, as noted in the preceding chapter. Theological education has long had both a practical and theoretical

¹¹² Vallet, 187.

¹¹³ Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), xi-xii.

nature. H. Richard Niehbur, writing in 1956, notes the same general areas of necessary education in his description of the ideal seminary setting:

As center of the Church's intellectual activity, animated by the Church's motivation and directed by its purpose, the theological school is charged with a double function. On the one hand it is the place or occasion where the Church exercises its intellectual love of God and neighbor; on the other hand it is the community that serves the Church's other activities by bringing reflection and criticism to bear on worship, preaching, teaching and the care of souls.¹¹⁴

Dan Aleshire, President of the Association of Theological Schools identifies similar dimensions as essential elements in theological education:

Theological schools are called to prepare leaders for religious vocation. This vocation requires persons who are faithful and knowledgeable, who understand the Christian story, who are gifted for ministry and tutored in its exercise, who understand human frailty and faithful responses to it, who understand the gospel's vision of wholeness, and who can exercise leadership to increase righteousness and justice.¹¹⁵

The same dual emphasis on practical and theoretical skills is evident.

Additionally, Aleshire notes the importance of spiritual formation as a part of theological education. "Leaders who are characterized by these qualities are not educated solely by the transmission of facts or training in practices, although both are part of it. They require educational settings with sustained, integrated, formational efforts, and when theological schools do their work wisely and well, they provide exactly this kind of education."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), 110.

¹¹⁵ Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 23.

¹¹⁶ Aleshire, 23.

This emphasis on theological education that includes spiritual formation is also indicated by the authors of *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, who note the importance for seminary students of “the formation of their pastoral identities.”¹¹⁷

The essentials of theological education include not only the theoretical and practical but also a formational element. Some writers, including Aleshire, Foster, Dahill, Golemon, and Tolentino, and notably Jeffrey Greenman, writing in *Life in the Spirit*, suggests that we are best to think of theological education as a task that engages the whole person: heart, soul, mind, and strength. This holistic or integrated approach to theological education requires an integration of the theoretical and practical with opportunities for spiritual formation of the individual. This threefold emphasis, knowing, being, and doing as it were, guards against the tendency to see theological education “merely as an academic exercise concerned to solve theoretical problems, without necessarily engaging the whole person, including matters of the heart or character.”¹¹⁸

While there is considerable agreement in the literature regarding theological education about the importance of an integrated approach, which values theoretical, practical, and formation elements in theological education there is also a well-documented sense that the former two tasks are more easily defined and carried out than the later task.

¹¹⁷ Foster et al., xi-xii.

¹¹⁸ Jeffrey P. Greenman, “Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective,” in *Life in the Spirit*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 34.

Virginia Cetuk, writing in *What to Expect in Seminary*, and addressing seminary students themselves, notes:

Because of the day-to-day grind of classes and assignments and stresses in other areas of their lives, students sometimes develop a psychological and intellectual myopia of sorts as a defense. Content on ‘just getting through,’ they often miss the opportunities for spiritual growth along the way. What is called for is a new way of seeing the seminary experience. It needs to be reframed so that it can be befriended and claimed *in toto* as self-conscious spiritual formation.¹¹⁹

The complexity of the task of theological education and the need to incorporate and integrate a formation element in addition to the theoretical and practical creates unique challenges for theological educators. It is not sufficient to transmit the skills necessary to conduct the rituals of the religious institution or the appropriate theology that undergirds the ritual. The person of the individual receiving theological education also becomes a part of the course of study. Foster, Dahill, Golemon, and Tolentino suggest that the individual who receives a theological education is expected to become “by their education and their calling . . . holy vessels . . . whose development and accomplishments entitle them to play their very special spiritual role.”¹²⁰

Peter J. Paris, writing in *The Education of the Practical Theologian* suggests that the development of the character of the student receiving a theological education is in many ways a “prerequisite for effective moral and religious training. Overlooking this fact is perilous to the goals of ministerial training.”¹²¹ Paris indicates that while practical theological education is an essential element in training leaders for the church, one

¹¹⁹ Virginia Samuel Cetuk, *What to Expect in Seminary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 35.

¹²⁰ Foster et al., xi.

¹²¹ Peter J. Paris, “Practical Wisdom and Theological Education,” in *The Education of the Practical Theologian*, ed. Don S. Browning, David Polk, and Ian S. Evison (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1989), 61.

cannot train a leader for the church solely by attending to matters of practice or solely by addressing theoretical knowledge. The person of the one being trained must be suitably shaped to be an effective mediator of the knowledge and practical skills earned through theological education.

This is also the position of Linda Cannell. “Clearly, a theology that is simply a quest for experiences that will prove God’s presence is not sufficient. However, a theology that is merely a transmission of propositions is similarly insufficient. Only a theology that allows reason and piety, virtue and service to stand together will be convincing in the context of theological education for the whole people of God.”¹²²

There is widespread agreement among theological educators regarding the need for an integrated approach that seeks to transmit theoretical knowledge and practical skills while also shaping the character of the student. The most obvious question raised becomes the question of how one accomplishes these three goals.

Consider again Virginia Cetuk’s words to seminary students:

The term crucible has three related meanings, which, when taken together, suggest something that by its very nature forces a change in the structure (or nature) of the elements within it. The holding environment of the metal container is strong enough to withstand great heat and fire while maintaining its shape. The seminary community, likewise, is a similar holding environment. It provides a strong and dependable container that remains intact despite the fiery blast of confusion, doubt and disintegration of former ways of thinking and being in the student body. The use of crucible to mean ‘a severe test [or] hard trial’ is the definition most closely related to life in seminary and the one that points to an essential truth about the total experience ... as a seminary student you will be challenged physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.¹²³

¹²² Linda M. Cannell, “Theology, Spiritual Formation and Theological Education,” in *Life in the Spirit*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 239.

¹²³ Cetuk, 88.

While Cetuk's words are intended to chasten seminary students against undertaking theological education with too little consideration for the pressures and stresses that will be brought to bear on their persons, her use of the term crucible bears consideration. A crucible acts on the elements that are placed within its containment, forces are brought to bear including heat and pressure, and the result is a refined product, often a precious metal. As a metaphor for theological education it is descriptive of the experience of the seminary student however, the metaphor is not entirely apt. Seminary students are not simply inert materials placed in a container but rather they are, or should be, active participants in their own educational and formational process. Moreover, they are not the only individuals within the educational setting. The seminary, or other theological institution, is populated by students, faculty, staff, and administrators, and has constituents, which may include denominations, local church settings, and the surrounding community.

H. Richard Niebuhr suggests that a seminary or other theological institution

... has the form of a college, that is of a collegium or colleagueship. It is a community of students in communication with one another, with the common subjects of objects studied, and with companions of the past and present in like communication with the objects. Every genuine school is such a society in which the movement of communication runs back and forth among the three--the teacher, the student and the common object.¹²⁴

Niebuhr suggests another essential element in the shape of a theological education is the role of community.

¹²⁴ Niebuhr, 117.

The Association of Theological Schools' *Bulletin 50* suggests that seminaries are “communities of faith and learning” who seek to serve the needs of “religious constituencies” and to enrich the life of the church.¹²⁵

David V. Esterline, writing in *Shaping Beloved Community: Multicultural Theological Education*, indicates, “Learning develops in a social context and emerges from the interactions and relationships that take place among learners and teachers.”¹²⁶ Theological education is more than simply the sum of classroom experiences or of theoretical concepts engaged and mastered. Rather it also includes a less readily measured reality, that of the context in which theological education takes place. The engagements of students with each other, with instructors, and other faculty staff and administrators outside of the classroom setting create an enriched environment for learning. Moreover, the broader context of theological education, the surrounding culture, and the constituencies that support the particular institutions, such as denominations or individual churches, also form a part of the culture in which theological education takes place.

The concept of community as an active part of education is not a new concept. Parker Palmer, writing in *The Courage to Teach*, notes the complex interactions of teachers and students. He suggests that teachers not only communicate knowledge but also communicate from a broader community of truth. “Our knowledge of the world comes from gathering around great things in a complex and interactive community of

¹²⁵ The Association of Theological Schools. “Bulletin 50, part 1 (2012), G-3,” <http://www.ats.edu/Resources/PublicationsPresentations/Documents/Bulletin/Part1.pdf> [accessed January 19, 2013].

¹²⁶ David. V. Esterline and Ogbu U. Kalu, eds., *Shaping Beloved Community: Multicultural Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 19.

truth. But good teachers do more than deliver the news from that community to their students. Good teachers replicate the process of knowing by engaging students in the dynamics of the community of truth.”¹²⁷

The consensus of the literature reviewed is that theological education institutions must seek to integrate the appropriate theoretical content, practical skills, and spiritual formation, which is best accomplished within the context of a community of learning in which the surrounding context and constituencies are considered. The overall goal of theological education should be this integration of skills and practices with the character. This is necessary so that the product of a theological education, the trained ministry professional, is equipped to serve in the ministry context to which he or she is called. “In such an integrated student, we are seeking to identify a kind of unity and a proper balance between intellect, practice, and identity because we are convinced that this three-part composite is fundamental to good ministry.”¹²⁸

Understanding Online Education

Online education has become commonplace. In a report published in 2003, the National Center for Educational Statistics indicated that in the 2000-2001 academic year 52% of institutions at the post-secondary level offered distance learning programs.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 117.

¹²⁸ Kathleen A. Calahan, “Introducing Ministry and Fostering Integration,” in *For Life Abundant*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 115.

¹²⁹ National Center for Educational Statistics, “*Distance Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions: 2000-2001*,” National Center for Education Statistics, July 2003. <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/peqis/publications/2003017/> [accessed October 19, 2012].

Distance-learning, in particular online learning, is no longer a passing fad but rather an established method of education. Accrediting bodies create criteria requiring educational institutions to demonstrate that such education meets the same student learning outcomes as classroom-based courses. The number of seminars and books regarding best practices for online education continues to multiply. As the number of online courses continues to multiply, the variety of courses offered has increased as well. A survey of the course offerings at the University of Phoenix, for example, reveals online courses in disciplines as diverse as business, criminal justice, education, nursing and health care, psychology, and information technology.¹³⁰

While online learning programs are becoming much more common, there continues to be considerable resistance to the idea of online learning. “About one-third of faculty members report they think that their institution is pushing too much instruction online, compared to fewer than 10 percent of administrators. Over all, fewer than one half of all professors believe that their institution has good tools in place to assess the quality of in-person instruction, while only one-quarter say the institution has good tools for assessing online instruction.”¹³¹

In the face of these concerns, a significant issue under discussion in higher education is that of pedagogy¹³² and methodology¹³³ in online education programs. The

¹³⁰ University of Phoenix, “Online and Campus Degree Programs,” <http://aptm.phoenix.edu> [accessed October 19, 2012].

¹³¹ I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman with Doug Lederman and Scott Jachik, *Conflicted: Faculty and Online Education, 2012* (Washington, D.C.: Inside Higher Ed, 2012), 2.

¹³² Pedagogy can be simply defined as the art or profession of teaching.

¹³³ Methodology, in this instance refers to the specific approach and techniques used in education.

demand for online education, often based in ease of access and increased enrollment, cannot be the only deciding factor in how programs are designed. The quality and shape of online education programs must meet the needs of learners rather than the needs of institutions. Any online education program or course must, according to accrediting bodies¹³⁴, meet learning goals¹³⁵ and generate student-learning outcomes¹³⁶ in similar fashion to face-to-face instruction.

The concerns of online teaching faculty are significant. A recent study by the Babson Survey Research Group and *Inside Higher Education* reveals that, “Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) say they believe that the learning outcomes for an online course are inferior or somewhat inferior to those for a comparable fact-to-face course.”¹³⁷

The challenge then is defining a methodology that will allow online learning to achieve the same learning outcomes as classroom-based courses. The results of the Babson and *Inside Higher Education* survey suggest that there must be a significant change in pedagogic method in order to achieve these outcomes. Despite the pessimistic reports concerning current models of online education, online educators remain optimistic concerning the potential for these courses. Roughly 50% of online educators

¹³⁴ See for example Section 3.A.3 at The Higher Learning Commission, “The Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components,” <http://www.ncahlc.org/Information-for-Institutions/criteria-and-core-components.html> [accessed January 19, 2013].

¹³⁵ Learning goals are pre-established intended and measurable results of any educational program.

¹³⁶ Student learning outcomes are assessment measures of a program or courses effectiveness based in the ability of the student to perform new activity, demonstrate new knowledge or grow in an area of personal development, as the direct result of a course or program completed.

¹³⁷ Allen et al., 9.

express optimism concerning the potential for online education programs to be “as effective in helping students learn as in-person instruction.”¹³⁸

Many educators see incredible potential in online education programs but also express concern regarding challenges created by online delivery methods. “A major challenge facing online educators is not only how to become better facilitators of knowledge acquisition but also how to help learners become more self-directed and collaborative with peers than they might have had to be in traditional, predominantly lecture-based courses.”¹³⁹

Some online educators argue for hybrid online courses, which combine a percentage of online education with a percentage of classroom-based education. “A 2009 meta-analysis of U.S. Department of Education data found that blended courses, mixing online learning and classroom instruction, resulted in better student performance than either delivery format independently.”¹⁴⁰ The hybrid or blended course provides opportunity for face-to-face interactions leading to integration of knowledge with personal growth but also takes full advantage of the online platform as a means to transmit a knowledge base to the student. The hybrid model allows for the transition to a more active learning style while still maintaining a familiar educational setting that provides stability to both the educator and the student.

¹³⁸ Allen et al., 13.

¹³⁹ Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson, *Engaging the Online Learner* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2011), viii.

¹⁴⁰ Faculty Focus, “In Blended Courses, What Should Students Do Online?” <http://www.facultyfocus.com/20-minute-mentor/in-blended-courses-what-should-students-do-online> [accessed June 5, 2013].

This emphasis on the need to transform online education from simply the acquisition of knowledge to a more active learning style that integrates knowledge, experience, and personal growth, is a dominant theme in many books concerned with the implications of online education. It is also an emphasis noted in the materials reviewed regarding theological education in general. In transforming online education to a more active learning style, the potential to engage the whole self is increased and the potential for online education to address formational issues, noted here as personal growth is also increased. George Barna, writing in *Futurecast*, notes, “Personal growth is most likely when we balance purposeful and intelligent reflection with a related action designed to produce a particular outcome.”¹⁴¹ Barna is worried that without a concerted effort by educators to provide experiences that create opportunities for personal growth, society will continue a developing trend of “moving straight to experience and bypassing, or becoming impatient with the need to acquire knowledge.”¹⁴²

It is the blend of knowledge and personal experience which create the best learning and these are best achieved in active learning settings whether online or in traditional classrooms. “Engaged learning is focused on the learner, whose role is integral to the generation of new knowledge.”¹⁴³

It is with the need for this active learning style in mind that educators seek to design online learning opportunities that are effective in meeting this goal. The initial models for online education tended toward asynchronous engagements, which did not

¹⁴¹ George Barna, *Futurecast* (Austin: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 73.

¹⁴² Barna, 73.

¹⁴³ Conrad and Donaldson, 3.

create a learning community but rather a series of individual learners engaging in the same setting. Students had little contact with each other and interaction with the instructor was limited and impersonal. While these methods allowed for the acquisition of basic information, the learner satisfaction was low and instructors often reported a sense of disengagement with their students.

Improvements in online learning platforms led to a much broader range of interactions between students and instructors including chat rooms, discussion boards both synchronous and asynchronous, opportunities for virtual office hours, group assignments, and interactions between students in real time situations. The more actively involved students became in the learning environment, the greater the student and instructor satisfaction with the learning experience. However, something was still missing from these improved platforms. While learners and instructors were interacting in much more varied ways it became clear that some instructors were more successful in online settings. These instructors seemed able to create a sense of engagement with students similar to the engagement of an instructor in a classroom. Those studying online education refer to this as “creating a sense of online presence.”¹⁴⁴

Lehman and Conceicao define the concept of “creating a sense of online presence” as the sense of the participant of “being there” and the shared sense between instructor and learners of “being together.”¹⁴⁵ The manner in which a sense of online presence is created is complex but can be understood as “the result of the dynamic

¹⁴⁴ Rosemary M. Lehman and Simone C. O. Conceicao, *Creating a Sense of Presence in Online Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 3.

¹⁴⁵ Lehman and Conceicao, 3.

interplay of thought, emotion, and behavior in the online environment, between the private world (that is the inner world) and the shared world (that is the outer world) and is rooted in the interactive (that is, enactive) perceptual process.”¹⁴⁶ Lehman and Conceicao further describe online presence as having a social, psychological, and emotional aspect. These factors allow the creation of an online learning environment in which the learner and instructor “see each other as ‘real people,’” in which “the technology becomes transparent to users” and “the ability to genuinely show feelings through words, symbols, and interactions with others” are supported.¹⁴⁷ Careful selection of the learning platform, the nature of assignments and ample opportunities for interaction with the instructor and other learners can foster this sense of presence.¹⁴⁸

Equally, key to the design of online learning environments is the realization that the learner is not only a participant in the classroom but also an individual who, in the case of distance learning programs, remains imbedded in a socio-cultural setting. This setting also informs the learning of the individual and influences what the individual learner brings into the online learning setting. This reality was noted by researchers at a regional university in Australia who engaged in a re-design of a former postal-based distance education program. They noted, “Our goal is to facilitate opportunities in the online environment for students to communicate, reflect, share, and respond to and about their sociocultural histories Our intention is to create online units facilitating a more authentic form of interaction in which students experience learning as more

¹⁴⁶ Lehman and Conceicao, 7.

¹⁴⁷ Lehman and Conceicao, 9.

¹⁴⁸ Lehman and Conceicao, 13-24.

meaningful and supportive. Our intention is for students to feel authentically and purposefully engaged in the online learning environment, rather than because they have been instructed to do so.”¹⁴⁹

Not only does the environment of the online learning setting need to be designed to allow a sense of “real presence” it should also allow for individual expression of self so that each individual participant becomes known to the other participants as an authentic person. This allows students to engage not only the course material but also each other in a fashion that approaches the kinds of interactions that take place in physical classrooms. The Australian researchers note, “We believe in facilitating opportunities for our students to share knowledge between peers and work together to problem solve and construct group responses to assessment tasks so as to create and embody new knowledge, skills and understandings.”¹⁵⁰ When this pedagogic model is employed, the opportunities for learning are significant. The key elements of this model can be understood as “moving away from efficiency of knowledge acquisition to facilitating participation and nurturing growth towards learning as knowledge creation.”¹⁵¹

The consensus of the literature reviewed regarding pedagogy and online education can be summarized in three significant points: online learning is significantly enhanced when classrooms move from a knowledge acquisition model to a model that seeks to

¹⁴⁹ Nicole C. Green, Helen Edwards, Brenda Wolodko, Cherry Stewart, Margaret Brooks, and Ros Littledyke, “Reconceptualising Higher Education Pedagogy in Online Learning,” *Distance Education* 31, no. 3 (November 2010): 261.

¹⁵⁰ Lehman and Conceicao, 262.

¹⁵¹ Lehman and Conceicao, 271.

facilitate engagement between all participants. This can be understood as knowledge creation rather than knowledge acquisition. Online learning is most effective when the learner and instructor have a sense of “real presence” in the online learning setting, and finally, online learning is most effective when the online learning setting allows for the expression of the individual’s socio-cultural setting as an extension of their learning environment.

Online Education in Theological Settings

Theological educators approach online education with the same mixture of concern and optimism as their peers in other educational settings. They have similar concerns regarding methodology and the ability of online educational models to meet their curriculum goals. They also struggle with creating an online setting in which the instructor and student have a sense of “real presence” and are concerned with the ability of the online setting to integrate the student’s context.

However, the added concern of facilitating formational growth in addition to the communication of knowledge and the acquiring of practical skills adds an additional level of difficulty to online theological teaching which, while not entirely absent in other disciplines, is critical to the task of theological education. The Association of Theological Schools reflects this concern in undertaking a number of studies over the last decade including one “which is intended to contribute to ‘increased understanding of the character of theological learning that includes intellectual content, profession skill, personal formation, and spiritual maturity.’”¹⁵²

¹⁵² Susan Lochrie Graham, “Theological Education on the Web: A Case Study in Formation in Ministry,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 5, no. 4 (2002): 227.

Susan Lochrie Graham seeks to address these areas of theological education in a course entitled “Living Belief,” which provides an online Certificate in Theology, which can then be credited towards a three-year program in theology. Her design seeks to engage students in areas of theological learning, spiritual and ministerial formation, practical preparation of ordained ministry, and growth in personal maturity. Theological learning is addressed through traditional web-based teaching methods including discussion boards, lecture abstracts and learning modules. Formational issues are addressed using electronic learning journals, which allow interaction between the learner and the instructor. Students are also interacting with each other in discussion board settings, and have shared responsibility for “student-centered learning” in which each student is responsible for the content of a portion of the entire material. Students share article summaries and respond to each other’s requests for clarification. Graham indicates that this interaction creates interdependent learning that has a formational component.¹⁵³

Brent A. R. Hege notes a similar model although not as thoroughly developed as that of Graham. Hege’s model requires weekly blogging by students and interaction between bloggers in addition to more traditional writing assignments. He notes that the online theological education model “requires a high degree of trust and comfort between students and the instructor and between students themselves. Without that trust and comfort, meaningful dialogue, personal interaction, and growth are difficult to achieve in an online setting.”¹⁵⁴ He notes that the online instructor must make deliberate attempts to

¹⁵³ Graham describes this model of theological education in detail in a case study format. Graham, 227-235.

¹⁵⁴ Brent A. R. Hege, “The Online Theology Classroom: Strategies for Engaging a Community of Distance Learners in a Hybrid Model of Online Education,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 14, no.1 (January 2011):16.

engage students in multiple modalities including Skype¹⁵⁵, social media settings, blogs, and virtual office hours.¹⁵⁶ It is clear that the demands of teaching in an online setting are as great as or greater than those of face-to-face classroom based courses.

Thomas Esselman, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology, addresses the issue of ministry formation in online theological education and notes the concerns of many theological educators. “Experienced seminary educators know all too well that the process of ministry formation is ultimately something of a mystery: more art and grace than exact science, entailing profound intellectual, moral, and religious conversion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵⁷ He acknowledges the difficulties of accomplishing these formational tasks in a face-to-face classroom and recognizes that the concerns of theological educators are “at first glance” appropriate.¹⁵⁸

He also recognizes that society increasingly views the acquisition of knowledge as gaining “a merit badge” equating the acquisition of certain skills and credentials with an effective educational process. Esselman suggests that these concerns can be overcome by adopting an approach to online education, which he terms developing a “wisdom community” in which online learners participate.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Skype is an Internet video and voice calling service which allows real time communication between two or more individuals. It is also possible to use the chat function within Skype when video connection is not supported.

¹⁵⁶ Hege, 17-19.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Esselman, “The Pedagogy of the Online Wisdom Community: Forming Church Ministers in a Digital Age,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7, no. 3 (2004): 159.

¹⁵⁸ Esselman, 159.

¹⁵⁹ Esselman, 160.

Key to developing a successful online theological community, according to Esselman, are six essential principles: creation of rapport among learners, experiential learning, self-directed learning, integration, communal learning, and the cultivation of wisdom communities of learning.¹⁶⁰

Rapport addresses the students' sense of fellow learners and the instructor as co-participants in the educational process. In particular, the instructor accompanies students through periods in which the educational and formation process results in what Esselman terms "destabilization,"¹⁶¹ the moments of struggle and change common to theological education. An online theological education program must support the development of rapport among faculty and learners if it is going to be effective. Esselman suggests that this goal is best accomplished in hybrid programs where some element of face-to-face encounter exists.¹⁶² It should be noted that Esselman does not consider the use of virtual technologies such as Skype, video-conferencing, Google Hangouts¹⁶³, and other social media platforms, which allow face-to-face encounter in a synchronous setting. His online experiences appear to be in predominantly asynchronous text-based delivery models.

Experiential learning seeks to assist students in connecting theory and praxis. In online theological education, this requires students' engagement both in the online setting but also in actual ministry settings, which allow exploration of the intersection between theory and praxis. Online education can facilitate the discussion of experience but it

¹⁶⁰ Esselman, 162.

¹⁶¹ Esselman, 162.

¹⁶² Esselman, 160.

¹⁶³ Google Hangouts are a function of the G+ online social media site which allow a group of invited individuals to participate in a live video chat session.

cannot allow opportunity for that experience. Again, Esselman argues that this is best accomplished by hybrid course delivery.¹⁶⁴

Integration, a key goal of theological education, requires both time for reflection and interaction with other learners in order to develop new concepts. Esselman suggests that online theological education does not provide the extended periods of time found in traditional classroom settings but instead substitutes more intense and shorter interactions. Much of integration in online theological education may well happen outside of the classroom context.¹⁶⁵

Esselman suggests that communal learning is also key since students engaged in theological education will typically be involved in communal settings throughout their professional careers. He notes that technology provides unique kinds of communal learning, which bring together students and instructors across distances that would otherwise make these interactions impossible. Students also tend to remain embedded in existing communities allowing for another location for communal learning that is typically disrupted by traditional models of theological education.¹⁶⁶

Esselman believes that the most significant online theological education takes places when a cohort model allows for interaction between groups of students both within and outside of the classroom setting, creating a “wisdom community.”¹⁶⁷ According to

¹⁶⁴ Esselman, 163. It should be noted that Esselman uses the term hybrid course delivery to describe any course in which some portion of learning happens using an online platform and some portion takes place in a face-to-face setting.

¹⁶⁵ Esselman, 164.

¹⁶⁶ Esselman, 164.

¹⁶⁷ Esselman, 164.

Esselman, a wisdom community moves through three stages: articulating personal experiences, critical reading of the academic and ecclesial tradition, and finally integrating or transforming the shared knowledge in dialogue with personal experience, critical interpretation, and tradition. This wisdom community grows not only in knowledge but also in formation as they engage each other and the concepts presented in an online learning setting. The added dimension of the cohort experience allows for this deeper level of formational learning.

Esselman's experience in teaching online using this model suggests, "The Web format significantly contributed to the cohort's developing identity as a learning community Web instruction should not be envisioned as simply a means of providing learners with access to information; it should be designed to engage students in cooperative learning."¹⁶⁸ However, Esselman suggests that web-based instruction cannot replace the formation growth engendered in real time engagement of students and instructors. He advocates for the judicious use of web-based learning in support of hybrid courses designed around a cohort model.¹⁶⁹ Esselman, writing in *Educating Leaders for Ministry: Issues and Responses*, describes this hybrid approach as "bricks and clicks," a model in which web-based learning supports the face-to-face educational setting.¹⁷⁰

Esselman should be understood as the voice of traditional education when confronted with the possibilities of online educational settings. Many of his evaluations

¹⁶⁸ Esselman, 66.

¹⁶⁹ Esselman, 169.

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Esselman, "What Technology Can Teach About Theological Education," in *Educating Leaders for Ministry: Issues and Responses*, ed. Victor J. Klimoski, Kevin J. O'Neil, and Katarian M. Schuth (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 151.

can serve as helpful cautions in development of online theological education. Other theological educators are more optimistic regarding the potential of online theological education.

John Gresham suggests that our focus on the physical differences between face-to-face classrooms and online education settings may be misguided. He notes,

The instructional environment is less significant. It seems that virtual instruction can be incarnational if it points students toward response to the gospel in their daily lives and if the instructor communicates his or her own lived participation in the truth. The presumption that physical proximity alone makes classroom instruction somehow inherently *incarnational* and the lack of such physical presence disqualifies online education for use in theological learning must be questioned.¹⁷¹

Gresham quotes the work of Mary Hess, indicating that Hess notes theological education is not disembodied but rather embodied in the student's own environment whether the learner is in a library, classroom, or his or her own home environment. The learner and the environment of learning are inextricably connected. Additionally, she notes that the online learning classroom is also embodied in the digital world of the computer hardware and software.¹⁷² In similar fashion, the online learner and the digital environment are inextricably connected.

Gresham suggests that a model of theological education for online settings can be overtly incarnational in the sense that both the student and the instructor are present in the learning environment and as such have a shared sense of virtual presence. They are, in their own settings, fully embodied in the real physical sense as they engage in the real

¹⁷¹ John Gresham, "The Divine Pedagogy as a Model for Online Education Teaching," *Theology and Religion* 9, no. 1 (2006): 27.

¹⁷² Gresham, 27.

world but also embodied in a virtual sense as students and the instructor in the online setting. As they become more at home in the online learning setting, as formational experiences and learning are shared, they grow into knowledge of each other. Over a period of time and through multiple engagements with the virtually experienced reality of the others' presence, they become a faith community and as such embody a kind of virtual ecclesial dimension.¹⁷³ While this virtual ecclesial community is not the fullest expression of the body of Christ, it does reflect a similar incarnational reality to the face-to-face classroom setting. In a classroom setting, the individuals gradually become more fully known to each other and therefore more fully present. The student and the instructor both participate actively in creating the faith community that is formed.

Gresham is of the opinion that theological education can be enhanced through online learning because it

... emphasizes the active participation of the student in his or her own learning. Student responsibility for his or her own learning can be emphasized in any educational environment but the online environment has been noted for fostering an active role for the student. Rather than the passive absorption of information delivered through a lecture typical of classroom teaching, online learning almost by necessity requires a more active role for the student.¹⁷⁴

Gresham also suggests that online education allows for the "rich use of signs and symbols to communicate."¹⁷⁵ He notes that the use of media and other digital technologies seem more natural in online settings and assist in creating a learning environment, which reflects what he terms "divine pedagogy," that is a learning environment similar to that of Jesus during his earthly ministry. Gresham notes that the

¹⁷³ Gresham, 27.

¹⁷⁴ Gresham, 28.

¹⁷⁵ Gresham, 28.

incarnational, communal, participatory, and symbol-rich teaching of Jesus can be modeled in an online classroom as effectively as in a face-to-face setting.¹⁷⁶

Those educators who are willing to move beyond concern with formational issues and experiment with online education in theological settings agree that key to overcoming this concern is the appropriate pedagogic design. It is insufficient to simply transfer classroom based teaching methodologies into online platforms. Rather, online theological education must take advantage of the unique ability of internet-based applications in order to educate effectively. This will require that online theological educators consider the goals and learning outcomes for the course and choose online methodologies that are best suited to their content area. Simply creating text to be read by the online learner will not suffice nor does it take advantage of the flexibility of the learning environment that can be created online. A creative online theological educator will take advantage of the ability to link to online content such as video clips, web page content related to the topic, podcasts, or other audio content, and will use tools available in most learning management systems such as surveys, quizzes, wikis, blogs, and discussion boards. The learning environment created by attention to these resources will create a rich and varied experience for the learner that will enhance learning.

Lester Ruth, a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, writes concerning his experiences in developing an online course “One of the best things that ultimately advanced my teaching felt initially like a setback of a sort: being required to think through the issues to convert my on-campus pastoral liturgy course to an online

¹⁷⁶ Gresham, 28.

environment.”¹⁷⁷ Ruth quickly recognized that online teaching would require a complete re-thinking of “basic pedagogical approaches”¹⁷⁸ which he had assumed were essential to his ability to teach.

Ruth identified the significant shift as one from a lecture-based model to a discussion-based model. He would no longer be the lecturer but rather take on a new role, which he identifies as “creator and shepherd.”¹⁷⁹ He identifies this role as essential in creating an online classroom that is “subject-centered”¹⁸⁰ a term he borrows from the writings of Parker Palmer.¹⁸¹

Ruth used recorded lectures to provide connections between assigned readings or “to explore topics where good published material”¹⁸² did not readily exist. Sometimes these recorded lectures were an opportunity to consider alternative viewpoints that might challenge a student’s existing understanding. He saw these as fundamentally different than his previous purpose in lecturing which was “to cover a wealth of data and convince the students that my opinion was right.”¹⁸³ Previously, students arrived in class expecting to be given knowledge. In this new model, students are responsible for acquiring knowledge through reading, viewing provided lectures and carrying out assigned

¹⁷⁷ Lester Ruth, "Converting My Course Converted Me: How Reinventing an On-campus Course for an Online Environment Reinvigorated My Teaching," in *Teaching Theology & Religion* 9, no. 4 (October 2006): 236-242. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost [accessed January 19, 2013], 236.

¹⁷⁸ Ruth, 237.

¹⁷⁹ Ruth, 240.

¹⁸⁰ Ruth, 240.

¹⁸¹ Palmer, 116-118.

¹⁸² Ruth, 240-241.

¹⁸³ Ruth, 240.

practical exercises. They enter into the online learning environment in order to share their learning with each other and with the instructor who serves as the mediator and guide for the conversation.¹⁸⁴

Ruth notes that students report increased learning in the online classroom setting, which is in part a reflection of their being embedded in parish settings which allow real practices of the skills being acquired, but also, in Ruth's opinion, as a direct result of the move to subject-centered approaches. So convinced of this is Ruth that he has reshaped his traditional face-to-face course offerings using a similar approach and many of the same materials he developed in order to teach online. Ruth notes, "The initial shock of relearning how to teach by transitioning to an online environment has led to many discoveries I now carry over into my on-campus teaching. To discover that many are things advocated by writers in pedagogy is a welcome confirmation of the shifts I have begun."¹⁸⁵

The sources reviewed regarding online theological education have a common concern with the ability of online educational platforms to provide formational growth in students. They express similar questions about the best method for communicating necessary information and demonstrate a wide range of approaches to responding to these concerns. The resistance of some theological educators to online learning in general can be understood as concern about the ability of online education to generate the same student learning outcomes as classroom-based settings. Some theological educators suggest that theological education may best be served by hybrid course, which include a

¹⁸⁴ Ruth, 240-241.

¹⁸⁵ Ruth, 242.

cohort-learning component but a fully online program seems beyond their ability to envision. This may also be the result of lack of exposure to online theological programs that are successful. It is difficult for some to imagine what they have not experienced.

When theological educators move outside of their comfort zones and experiment with online theological education, they describe many of the same challenges and successes as their secular teaching colleagues. It would seem that theological education could learn a great deal from the success of secular online programs and successful pedagogies.

Summary of Literature Review

In reviewing the literature related to theological education, online education, and online theological education several common themes have emerged. Despite the differences of context between theological education and secular education settings, they share a common concern for excellence in education. Theological and secular educators are in agreement that online education has value but in both cases there are certain values and specific content that cannot be sacrificed to any delivery system. This is what Mary Hess refers to as, “all that we cannot leave behind.”¹⁸⁶

There is also some consensus that online education can provide learning that is equivalent to that of face-to-face settings and that in some courses online education may allow learning that is more effective than that of analogous face-to-face settings.

Theological educators believe that theological education, whether online or in face-to-face settings must include practical experience, knowledge acquisition, and

¹⁸⁶ Mary Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind*. (London: Sheed and Ward, 2005), 80.

ministerial formation of the individual. There is disagreement concerning how this is best accomplished but agreement that these are the necessary content for a theological education. Some educators argue for hybrid or blended classroom models while others embrace a fully online learning model.

The shift from a knowledge acquisition model of education to an active learning environment is another key to creating online learning environments that are effective. Both online educators and those in theological education are expressing the benefit of this shift in pedagogy. It seems that this methodological shift may be the key to addressing theological educators' concerns regarding formational growth.

In similar fashion, online secular educators are concerned with pedagogic methodology and acquisition of knowledge but they have also begun to define best methods, which include the need for the "real presence" of the instructor and student in a relational, active learning environment. There is broad consensus, among the sources reviewed for this chapter, that online education can achieve learning outcomes in ways equivalent to or perhaps even superior to, face-to-face educational settings. The concept of 'real presence' seems closely related to the theological concept of incarnation. An approach to online theological education that seeks to create a sense of the instructor and student as participating together in a shared incarnational context may provide the necessary theoretic framework for such a learning environment. An environment that is identified as seeking to impact formation through shared incarnational context may assist in addressing concerns regarding formation in theological education.

Awareness of socio-cultural context is another consensus point in both secular and theological online education settings. This is evidenced in theological education's

pre-existing emphasis on field education as a part of the standard curriculum. Integrating socio-cultural context seems a natural fit for online theological education.

In evaluating the literary sources available in areas of theological education, online education, and online theological education some clarity has been gained by this writer in terms of the need for a holistic approach to online theological education as described in the problem statement of this project.

A holistic approach to online theological education must include acquisition of knowledge, practical experience, and formational growth. The literature review has clarified that the shift from knowledge-based learning to active learning can readily address the need for practical experience and the acquisition of necessary knowledge. The concepts of real presence and an incarnational understanding of the shared learning experience created in active learning environments hold promise in addressing the area of formational growth.

Implications of the Literature Review for Survey Design

The literature review suggests that the survey and data collection planned for this project will need to include some measure of students' and instructors' sense of being 'present' in the online educational setting. This emphasis has emerged directly from the literature review and was not reflected directly in the original research questions formulated in the prospectus.

As previously determined, it will be important to survey instructors and students with experience in both secular and theological online settings to determine if there are in fact any distinctive qualities to theological education that create unique circumstances for online theological educators.

Additionally, both students and instructors will be asked for feedback regarding best practices in online theological education programs. Attention will be paid to the effectiveness of active learning versus knowledge acquisition models of online theological education.

Finally, it will be necessary to survey students and instructors with experience of theological education in online theological settings, hybrid, or blended settings, and in face-to-face settings to determine if they experienced qualitative differences in the ministry formation receive in the fully online, hybrid, or face-to-face settings.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Chapter Four will further define the research process and describe in detail the survey and interview questions that will be used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Of particular interest to the researcher is the experience of the student and the instructor in online, hybrid, and face-to-face classrooms in terms of their acquisition of formational qualities, knowledge, and practical skills and secondarily, the experience of each of the survey groups with the formation of community, or perceived community each setting provides.

Research Methodology

Quantitative methods used to study the problem will include use of statistical data available through ATS (Association of Theological Schools) reflecting Graduating Student Survey¹⁸⁷ results. An additional survey will engage students graduating from a variety of seminary settings, evaluating the percentage of courses completed online, the overall academic success of the student, and the student's perception of the formational elements of the coursework. This survey, using a Survey Monkey¹⁸⁸ tool, will be conducted using e-mail and social media. Students surveyed will reflect a variety of

¹⁸⁷ The Association of Theological Schools, "ATS Graduating School Questionnaire," <http://www.ats.edu/Resources/Student/Documents/Questionnaire/GSQ/2010-2011GSQ.pdf> [accessed September 2, 2011].

¹⁸⁸ Survey Monkey is a website which allows for customized survey tools to be created and distributed. <https://www.surveymonkey.com>

educational experiences including fully online degree programs, partially online degree programs, hybrid programs, and fully classroom-based programs. Students may have experience in more than one of these instructional methods.

Instructors in theological settings will also be interviewed using a Survey Monkey survey tool. These individuals will also reflect a variety of educational experiences including those teaching in fully online degree programs, partially online degree programs, hybrid programs, and fully classroom-based programs. Some instructors receiving surveys will have experience in more than one of these teaching contexts.

Qualitative methods will include both interviews, conducted in person or by video conferencing technology, and case studies. Interviews with a selected number of students will provide qualitative data regarding a student's satisfaction with their course of study from both an academic and a formational perspective.

Interviews with professors and seminary staff will seek to determine their satisfaction with the formational, practical, and theological capacity of online education as it relates to their specific institution. These interviews will be drawn from faculty representative of institutions with fully online degrees, partially online degrees, and those with limited online courses as a part of the degree program. Appropriate faculty will be identified using the Association of Theological Schools listing of schools offering six or more courses online.

The interview process will generate case studies that will be used to identify differences between students engaged in online courses of study, those engaged in a hybrid of online and classroom study, and those engaged in classroom based study. The

interview process will also collect anecdotal material, using comments, which will describe student and faculty experience of community in online program settings.

Research Questions to Guide the Research Project

1. What, if any, are the differences between ministry formation and the sense of community as experienced by students in online theological programs and students in classroom-based programs?
2. What are the essential ministry formation needs of theology students and can these be addressed in online theological education programs. How should this impact the design of online theological programs?
3. What pedagogic methods can best be used to address the need for ministry formation in online education programs?

Quantitative Research—Designing the Research Surveys

In considering the various demographic groups intended as targets for survey regarding online theological education it became clear that several different research surveys would be necessary.

The researcher belongs to several social media sites and intends to use contacts in these venues to create a list of potential respondents. Additionally, the researcher will contact ministry colleagues in her own and other denominations via e-mail and will accept referrals from initial respondents in order to create a broad base of respondents.

The surveys will be collected using the Survey Monkey website. Survey Monkey is a survey tool that is web based and user friendly. The potential respondent receives an e-mail with a link to the survey that connects them directly to the appropriate survey. The researcher can receive the survey results by e-mail or by purchasing an upgraded package through which the results can be downloaded in a spreadsheet format. For an additional fee, it is possible to have Survey Monkey identify potential respondents from their

databases. It is the researcher's intention to allow respondents to opt in and not to select respondents. This will allow a more organic sample to develop.

A survey will be designed to engage theological students who have completed their theological education. Since this research project focuses specifically on the question of theological education the group polled will be limited to those students who have majored in a theological discipline. The researcher will collect demographic data regarding the specific degree completed by the student.

A second survey will be designed to engage faculty who are involved in online, hybrid, and classroom-based theological education. In this instance, the researcher intends to identify faculty and staff in theological education institutions that are comparable to the institution where the researcher is currently employed. As an ATS accredited institution Winebrenner Theological Seminary has a cohort group of seminaries to which the institution's data is regularly compared. The researcher intends to seek faculty and within these institutions since there is significant correlation between these institutions and the researcher's own institution. In addition to this pool of faculty, the researcher will seek other theological educators who have experience in a variety of pedagogic models and delivery systems. This survey will also be administered using Survey Monkey.

Interviews will be conducted with theological institution graduates and with faculty of theological institutions. Each type of interview will be conducted using questions developed in advance of the interviews in order to maintain some consistency for the purposes of coding the responses. The researcher has existing relationships with

several potential research subjects but will also use the previously described surveys as opportunities to identify subjects for interview.

It is the researcher's intention to develop several case studies that represent specific issues or to respond to the research questions stated above.

The Surveys

The survey for graduates from theological education settings will include the following questions:

1. Please provide the following contact information
 - a. Name
 - b. E-mail Address
 - c. Phone Number

2. How many years ago did you complete your theological education?

3. What is your age?

4. What is your gender?

5. What is the highest theological degree you have received?
 - a. MA(Theological Studies)
 - b. MDiv
 - c. MA in a specialized area of study
 - d. DMin
 - e. ThD
 - f. PhD
 - g. Other

6. What is your overall level of satisfaction with the theological education you received?
 - a. Very Dissatisfied
 - b. Dissatisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Satisfied
 - e. Very Satisfied

7. What percentage of your total program was completed using online delivery systems? Please choose the percentage closest to your total.
 - a. 0%

- b. 25%
- c. 50%
- d. 75%
- e. 100%

8. How satisfied were you with courses completed using online delivery systems? If you did not complete any course work online, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

9. How satisfied were you with the ability of the online delivery system to address formational issues? If you did not complete any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

10. How satisfied were you with the ability of the online delivery system to address practical skill acquisition? If you did not complete any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

11. How satisfied were you with the ability of the online delivery system to address knowledge acquisition? If you did not complete any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

12. How satisfied were you with the ability of the online delivery system to create a sense of community with other students and the instructor? If you did not complete any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

13. What percentage of your total program was completed using a hybrid/blended delivery systems? Please choose the percentage closest to your total.

- a. 0%
- b. 25%
- c. 50%
- d. 75%
- e. 100%

14. How satisfied were you with courses completed using a hybrid/blended delivery systems? If you did not complete any course work online, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

15. How satisfied were you with the ability of a hybrid/blended delivery system to address formational issues? If you did not complete any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

16. How satisfied were you with the ability of a hybrid/blended delivery system to address practical skill acquisition? If you did not complete any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

17. How satisfied were you with the ability of a hybrid/blended delivery system to address knowledge acquisition? If you did not complete any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

18. How satisfied were you with the ability of a hybrid/blended delivery system to create a sense of community with other students and the instructor? If you did not complete any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

19. What percentage of your total program was completed using a face-to-face delivery systems? Please choose the percentage closest to your total.

- a. 0%
- b. 25%
- c. 50%
- d. 75%
- e. 100%

20. How satisfied were you with courses completed using a face-to-face delivery systems? If you did not complete any course work face-to-face, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

21. How satisfied were you with the ability of a face-to-face delivery system to address formational issues? If you did not complete any course work using face-to-face delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

22. How satisfied were you with the ability of a face-to-face delivery system to address practical skill acquisition? If you did not complete any course work using face-to-face delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

23. How satisfied were you with the ability of a face-to-face delivery system to address knowledge acquisition? If you did not complete any course work using face-to-face delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

24. How satisfied were you with the ability of a face-to-face delivery system to create a sense of community with other students and the instructor? If you did not complete any course work using face-to-face delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

25. How willing would you be to complete another degree using a completely online delivery system?

- a. Unwilling
- b. Somewhat Unwilling
- c. Willing
- d. Somewhat Willing
- e. Very Willing

26. How willing would you be to complete another degree using a hybrid or blended delivery system?

- a. Unwilling
- b. Somewhat Unwilling
- c. Willing
- d. Somewhat Willing
- e. Very Willing

27. How willing would you be to complete another degree using a completely face-to-face delivery system?

- a. Unwilling
- b. Somewhat Unwilling
- c. Willing
- d. Somewhat Willing
- e. Very Willing

The survey for instructors in theological education settings will include the following questions:

1. How many years have you been teaching in a theological education setting?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is the highest theological degree you have received?
 - a. MA Theological Studies
 - b. M.Div
 - c. MA in a specialized area of study
 - d. DMin
 - e. ThD
 - f. PhD
 - g. Other
5. What percentage of the courses you taught in the last two academic years used online delivery systems? Please choose the percentage closest to your total.
 - a. 0%
 - b. 25%
 - c. 50%
 - d. 75%
 - e. 100%
6. How satisfied were you with courses taught using online delivery systems? If you did not instruct any course work online please select N/A
 - a. Very Dissatisfied
 - b. Dissatisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Satisfied
 - e. Very Satisfied
 - f. N/A
7. How satisfied were you with your ability to use the online delivery system to address formational issues (personal and spiritual growth and development)? If you did not instruct any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

8. How satisfied were you with your ability to use the online delivery system to address practical skill acquisition (pastoral counseling, preaching, worship leadership, etc.)? If you did not instruct any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

9. How satisfied were you with your ability to use the online delivery system to address knowledge acquisition? If you did not instruct any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

10. How satisfied were you with your ability to use the online delivery system to create a sense of community between students and instructor? If you did not instruct any course work using online delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

11. What percentage of the courses you taught in the two academic years were completed using hybrid/blended delivery systems in which some portion of your course was online and some was classroom based? Please choose the percentage closest to your total.

- a. 0%
- b. 25%
- c. 50%
- d. 75%
- e. 100%

12. How satisfied were you with courses taught using hybrid/blended delivery systems in which some portion of your course was online and some was classroom based? If you did not instruct any course work using a hybrid delivery please select N/A

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

13. How satisfied were you with your ability to use the hybrid/blended delivery systems to address formational issues? If you did not instruct any course work using hybrid delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

14. How satisfied were you with your ability to use the hybrid/blended delivery systems to address practical skill acquisition? If you did not instruct any course work using hybrid delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

15. How satisfied were you with your ability to use the hybrid/blended delivery systems to address knowledge acquisition? If you did not instruct any course work using hybrid delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

16. How satisfied were you with your ability to use the hybrid/blended delivery systems to create a sense of community between students and instructor? If you did not instruct any course work using hybrid delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral

- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

17. What percentage of the courses you taught in the last two academic years used face-to-face delivery systems? Please choose the percentage closest to your total.

- a. 0%
- b. 25%
- c. 50%
- d. 75%
- e. 100%

18. How satisfied were you with courses taught using face-to-face delivery systems? If you did not instruct any course work face-to-face please select N/A

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

19. How satisfied were you with your ability to use face-to-face delivery systems to address formational issues? If you did not instruct any course work using face-to-face delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

20. How satisfied were you with your ability to use face-to-face delivery systems to address practical skill acquisition? If you did not instruct any course work using face-to-face delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

21. How satisfied were you with your ability to use face-to-face delivery systems to address knowledge acquisition? If you did not instruct any course work using face-to-face delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied

- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

22. How satisfied were you with your ability to use face-to-face delivery systems to create a sense of community between students and instructor? If you did not instruct any course work using face-to-face delivery, please select N/A.

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Satisfied
- e. Very Satisfied
- f. N/A

Qualitative Research Methods—Conducting the Interviews and Case Studies

The intent in this qualitative research is to provide a counterpoint to the quantitative data and to assist in understanding the quantitative responses. The researcher will employ “...the strategy of combining quantitative and qualitative methods—the triangulation of different methods on the same problem.”¹⁸⁹

The Interviews

The interviews that will be conducted with theological institution graduates will focus on the experiences of those who have experienced some online theological education programs. Each interview will be of fifty minutes duration and the student will be informed of this at the beginning of the interview. All interviews will be taped, with the interviewee’s permission, in order to improve collection of information. At the beginning of each interview, the subject will sign a consent form indicating their willingness to participate and to allow the researcher to quote the individual in the final

¹⁸⁹ Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds., *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 108.

project. If specific material from the interview is quoted in the final project, the subject will be notified of the intent and will have opportunity to verify the accuracy of the quotation.

Interviews with theological educators will focus on their experiences with a variety of teaching settings including the online setting. Each interview will be of ninety minutes duration and the educator will be informed of this at the beginning of the interview. All interviews will be taped, with the interviewee's permission, in order to improve collection of information. At the beginning of each interview, the subject will sign a consent form indicating their willingness to participate and to allow the researcher to quote the individual in the final project. If specific material from the interview is quoted in the final project, the subject will be notified of the intent and will have opportunity to verify the accuracy of the quotation.

Several general questions will be asked of all those interviewed:

1. How many online courses have you taught? Hybrid? Face-to-face?
2. What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of each educational experience?
3. Reflect on the theological education systems that you have experienced and comment briefly on the effectiveness of each system to:
 - a. Allow the creation of a sense of community for the students and the instructor?
 - b. Facilitate formational growth?
 - c. Teach practical skills?
 - d. Aid in knowledge acquisition?
4. If you could design or re-design a theological education program, would you prefer to learn/teach in a completely online, hybrid or face-to-face system? Why?

5. If you could design or re-design an online theological education program, what would you consider essential teaching methods? Why?
6. If you could design an ideal theological education model, what would you consider the essential components and options for the delivery system?

Identifying the Case Studies

It is the researcher's intent to use the interview process to identify individuals with experiences that will allow for the development of one or more case studies. Ideally, there will be a case study based in the responses of a student and another based in the responses of an instructor. The criteria for selecting the interviewees to form the basis of the case study will include the richness of the engagement, the clarity and honesty of the individual's responses, and attention to cases which are either supportive of the researcher's hypotheses, or which stand in direct opposition to the same. It is important to consider case studies that do not support the hypotheses of the researcher since "failure to search for anomalies can lead to a kind of sterility in research [programs]."¹⁹⁰ These case studies will further serve to enrich the researcher's ability to describe the responses in a fashion that gives clear voice to the responses of representative individuals.

Summary

Upon receipt of the research data, the researcher will code the responses and seek to determine patterns of response that are helpful in addressing the research questions upon which this study is based. The survey process and responses, the process for coding those responses and the researcher's analysis of the data received through both qualitative and quantitative means will be reflected in Chapter Five of this study.

¹⁹⁰ Brady and Collier, 233.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Chapter Five engages analysis of the research data gathered via the online survey tool and through selected case study interviews.

Individuals surveyed can generally be categorized as either recipients of theological education or providers of theological education. Careful attention will be given to differences in perception between these two distinct survey groups as well as areas of correlation. This data will also be compared to limited data available from The Association of Theological School Graduate Student Survey Total Profile.¹⁹¹ This formal data will serve as a point of comparison to the data collected by this researcher.

Of particular interest will be the perceived outcomes of online theological education versus those received in hybrid settings or in face-to-face settings. Both theological educators' and theological students' responses will aid in creating an overall picture of the similarities and differences in these demographic groups.

Additionally, the willingness of both educators and students to engage in online, hybrid or face-to-face settings will be correlated with their actual experience to determine the percentage of both, who having experienced online education, would be willing to continue in this setting or even prefer this setting versus the other modalities.

¹⁹¹ The Association of Theological Schools, "ATS Graduating School Questionnaire Total School Profile 2013-2014," <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/student-data/documents/gsq-total-school-profile-2013-2014.pdf> [accessed December 12, 2014].

Interviews will be conducted with students who have experience in online theological education settings and with instructors who have experience teaching in online theological education. These interviews will provide additional qualitative data that will be coded and used to further develop a data set.

The resulting data analysis will be used to respond to the original problem posed by the writer of this project. “The lack of a holistic approach in online theological education may result in students who attain diminished levels of ministry formation in comparison to students in traditional classroom-based models.”¹⁹²

Responses from the Survey of Theological Graduates

The survey of theological education graduates was launched on SurveyMonkey and resulted in seventy-one respondents between January 25, 2014 and February 6, 2014. Respondents were solicited using posts to several social media sites including a general Facebook post, a Facebook post to a closed group for theological graduates, and a tweet to a Twitter account. Additionally, respondents were encouraged to share the survey link with acquaintances with similar educational background. This approach resulted in a sample that reflected a broad range of ages, experiences, denominational affiliations, and educational experiences. A limitation of this sample is that the online survey may have excluded individuals who are not technologically competent.

Question one requested contact information in the event of follow up interview. Responses were received from all participants. Question two requested the number of years since completion of the respondent’s theological education. Answers reflected a range from those still in the process of receiving theological education to a respondent

¹⁹² Kathryn Helleman, *Doctor of Ministry Project*, 20.

who completed their education thirty-three years ago. The average of the responses was thirteen years ago. Question three requested the age of the respondent. Ages ranged from twenty-seven to sixty-four years of age with an average age of thirty-six. Question four requested the gender of the respondent. Of the seventy-one respondents, forty were female and thirty-one male. This response reflects a higher number of female respondents as compared to statistics regarding women in ministry settings.¹⁹³ Questions five asked, “What is the highest theological degree you have received?” Of those responding, 79.41% earned a Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree, 7.35% a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree, 4.41% a Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MA[TS]), 4.41% a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), and 4.41% a Masters Degree in a specialized area of study.

In response to Question six, “What is your overall level of satisfaction with the theological education you received?” None indicated they were very dissatisfied, 4.23% indicated they were dissatisfied, 5.63% were neutral in their assessment, 47.89% indicated satisfied, and 42.25% indicated they were very satisfied.

In response to Question seven, “What percentage of your total program was completed using online delivery systems?” Two-thirds of those surveyed indicated 0% of their program was completed online, slightly less than one-third indicated 25% of their program was completed online, with minority respondents indicating 50% or 75% of their program was completed online, and no respondent indicated a completely online program. This response rate represents a 2/3 to 1/3 split between those with no experience of online courses and those with some experience however limited.

¹⁹³ A 2009 Barna Group survey indicates that 10% of Senior Pastors in Protestant churches are female. Barna Group, “Number of Female Senior Pastors in Protestant Churches Doubles in Past Decade.” <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/leadership/304-number-of-female-senior-pastors-in-protestant-churches-doubles-in-past-decade> [accessed December 29, 2014].

Questions eight through twelve focused on online delivery systems. These questions sought to evaluate the satisfaction of students with the ability of the delivery method to meet core theological education needs.

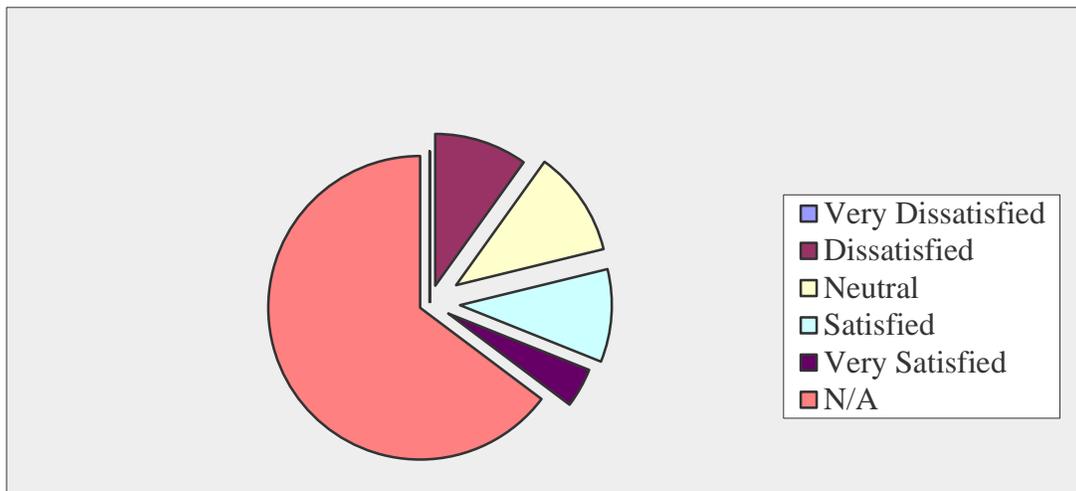


Figure 5.1 Satisfaction with Online Delivery Systems

As is evident in Figure 5.1 the number of respondents with online experience was limited, with only twenty-five of seventy-one respondents selecting an option other than N/A. While this is a low number of data points, it remains statistically significant, and demonstrates the beginning of an emerging pattern.

Question ten, Figure 5.2, resulted in a similar pattern produced with twenty-five of seventy-one respondents selecting an option other than N/A. In order to draw any inference from this data it is necessary to focus only on those respondents with online experience. As demonstrated in Figure 5.2, 7% were dissatisfied with their online education experience, 9% were neutral, 14% were satisfied, and 6% were very satisfied. In other words, of those with online education experience, 55% were satisfied or very satisfied while 25% were neutral and 20% were dissatisfied with the ability of online theological education to address practical skill acquisition. None were very dissatisfied.

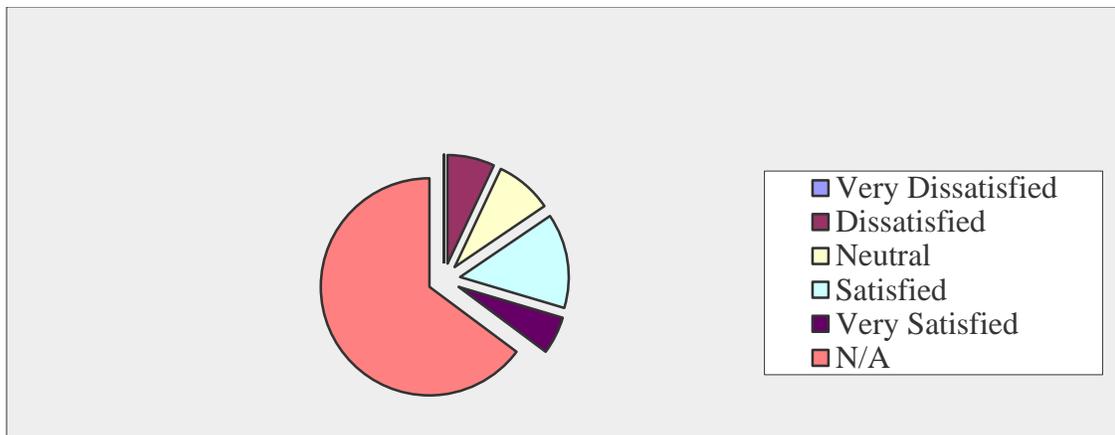


Figure 5.2 Satisfaction with Online Delivery Systems and Practical Skills Acquisition

Question eleven, Figure 5.3, resulted in responses other than N/A from 24 of 71 respondents, and demonstrated a variation in the response pattern. In response to this question regarding knowledge acquisition, none of the 24 respondents selected dissatisfied. With the exception of those who selected N/A, responses fell in the neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied ranges. Again, by eliminating those who selected N/A, it is evident that 24% were neutral in their opinion regarding acquisition of knowledge, 42% were satisfied, and 34% were very satisfied. It is evident that levels of satisfaction with the ability of online theological education to provide adequate knowledge acquisition are higher than the levels of satisfaction with practical skills acquisition.

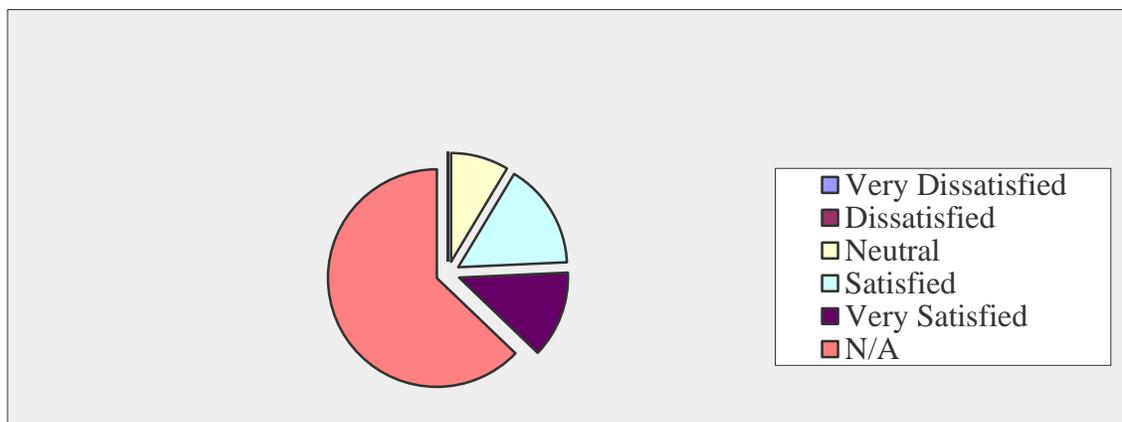


Figure 5.3 Satisfaction with Online Delivery Systems and Knowledge Acquisition

Of the twenty-four respondents to Question 12, Figure 5.4, 7.14% indicated they were very dissatisfied, and an additional 7.14% indicated they were dissatisfied. Of those who responded, 4.29% were neutral in response while 10% and 8.57% were satisfied and very satisfied respectively. The responses evidence a clear split of opinion into two nearly equal groups, those expressing some degree of dissatisfaction, and those expressing some degree of satisfaction.

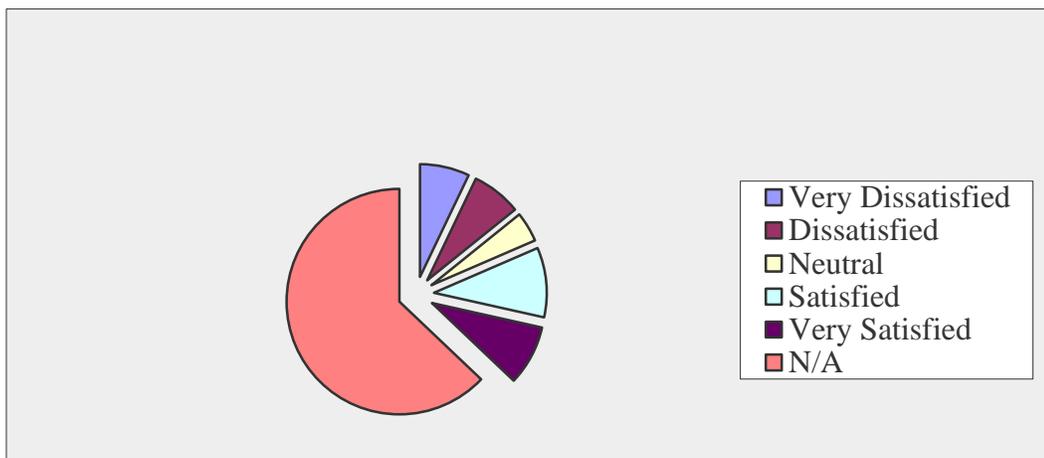


Figure 5.4 Satisfaction with Online Delivery Systems and the Creation of Community

Questions thirteen through eighteen focused on delivery systems in which courses are hybrid or blended, with some classes taking place online while others are face-to-face. In response to Question thirteen, Figure 5.5, “What percentage of your total program was completed using hybrid/blended delivery systems in which some portion of your course was online and some was classroom based? Please choose the percentage closest to your total.” In similar fashion to Question seven, 66.2% of respondents reported no experience with hybrid educational systems, 23.35% reported 25% or less of their programs completed using hybrid delivery, 2.82% reported 50%, 2.82% reported 75%, and 2.82% reported 100%. This experience rate represents a 2/3 to 1/3 split

between those with no experience of hybrid courses and those with some experience however limited.

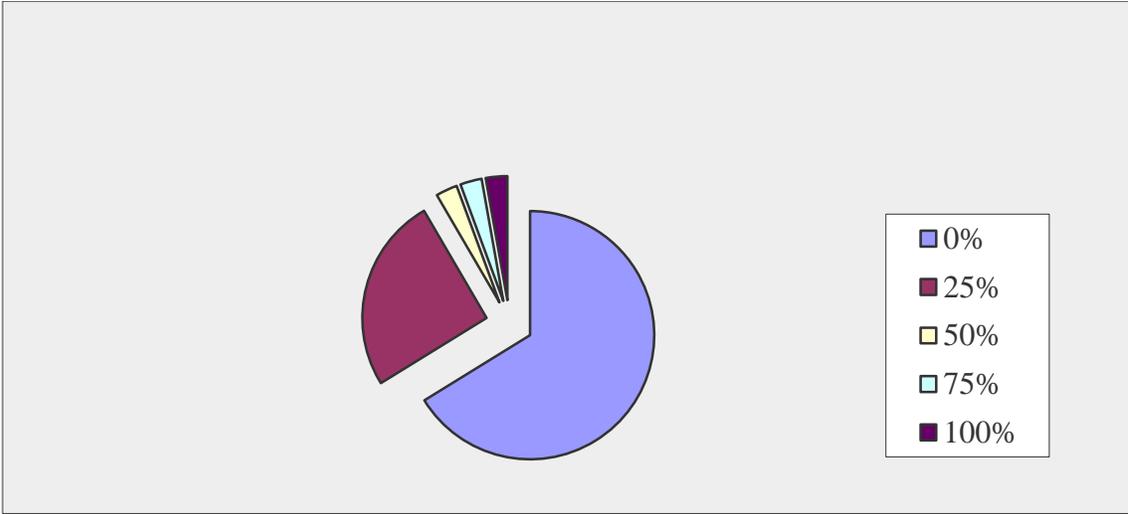


Figure 5.5 Percentage of Program with Hybrid Delivery Systems

Question fourteen, Figure 5.6, asked, “How satisfied were you with courses completed using hybrid/blended delivery systems in which some portion of your course was online and some was classroom based? If you did not complete any course work in hybrid settings, please select N/A.” Of those who did not respond N/A, 1.41% reported themselves very dissatisfied, 4.23% reported themselves dissatisfied, 4.23% were neutral in their response, 11.27% were satisfied, and 9.86% were very satisfied.

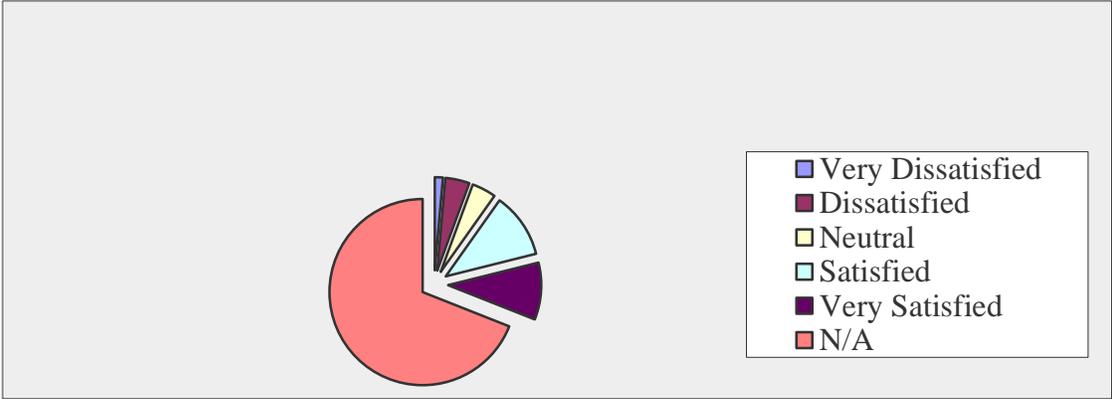


Figure 5.6 Satisfaction with Hybrid Delivery Systems

Question fifteen, Figure 5.7, asked, “How satisfied were you with the ability of the hybrid/blended delivery systems, in which some portion of your course was online and some was classroom based, to address formational issues? If you did not complete any course work in hybrid settings, please select N/A.” None of the respondents were very dissatisfied. Of those who responded, 5.71% were dissatisfied, 10% were neutral, 10% satisfied, and 7.14% very satisfied. The charted data for Question fifteen is remarkably similar to that of Question nine that asks the same question regarding online delivery systems.

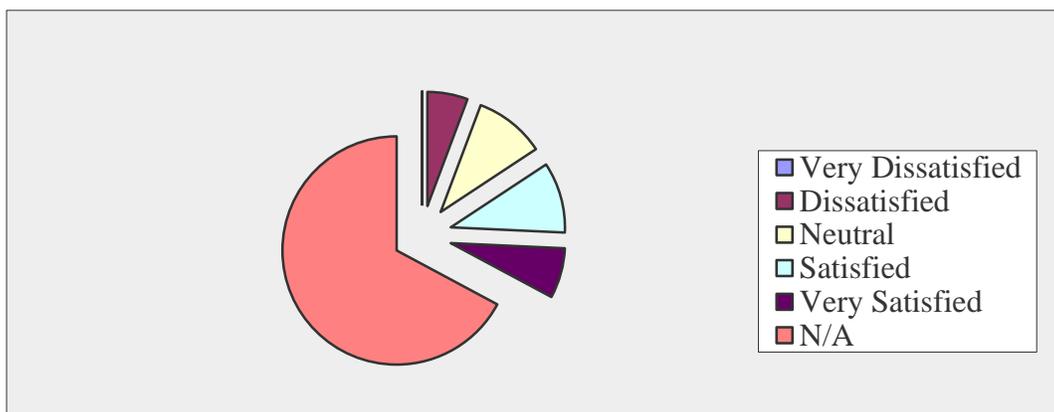


Figure 5.7 Satisfaction with Hybrid Delivery Systems and Formational Issues

Question sixteen, Figure 5.8, asked, “How satisfied were you with the ability of the hybrid/blended delivery systems, in which some portion of your course was online and some was classroom based, to address practical skill acquisition? If you did not complete any course work in hybrid settings, please select N/A.” Responses to Question sixteen were similar to those of Question eleven regarding online education. Of those who responded, 1.4% were very dissatisfied, 4.23% were dissatisfied, 9.86% were neutral, 11.27% were satisfied, and 5.63% were very satisfied.

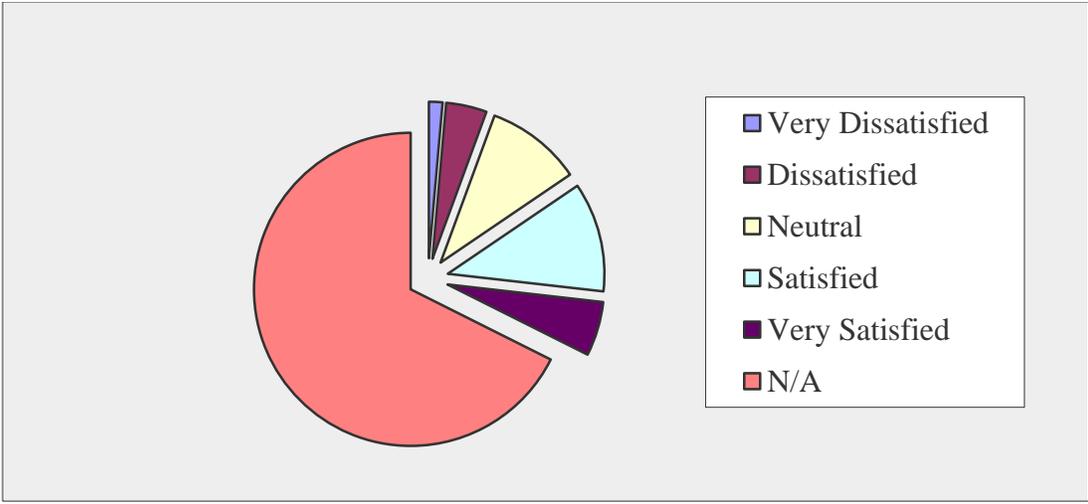


Figure 5.8 Satisfaction with Hybrid Delivery Systems and Practical Skills Acquisition

Question seventeen, Figure 5.9, asked, “How satisfied were you with the ability of the hybrid/blended delivery systems, in which some portion of your course was online, and some was classroom based to address knowledge acquisition? If you did not complete any course work in hybrid settings, please select N/A.” Here also, responses mirror those concerning online education. None indicated they were very dissatisfied, 2.86% indicated they were dissatisfied, 7.14% were neutral, 12.86% were satisfied, and 10% were very satisfied.

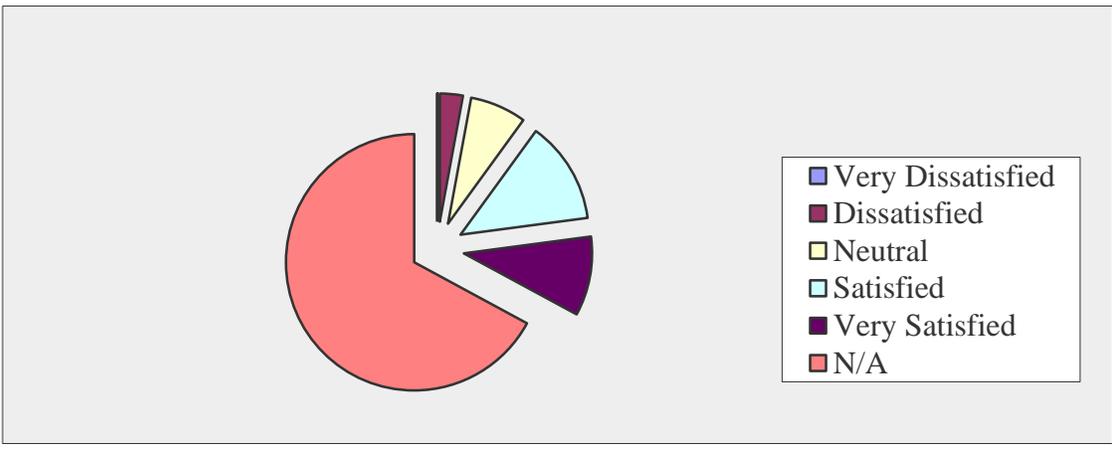


Figure 5.9 Satisfaction with Hybrid Delivery Systems and Knowledge Acquisition

Question eighteen, Figure 5.10, asked, “How satisfied were you with the ability of the hybrid/blended delivery systems, in which some portion of your course was online and some was classroom based, to create a sense of community with other students and the instructor? If you did not complete any course work in hybrid settings, please select N/A.” Of those who did not respond N/A, 5.63% of students were dissatisfied, 9.86% were neutral, 8.45% were satisfied, and 8.45 % were very satisfied. These responses also parallel the responses for online delivery systems.

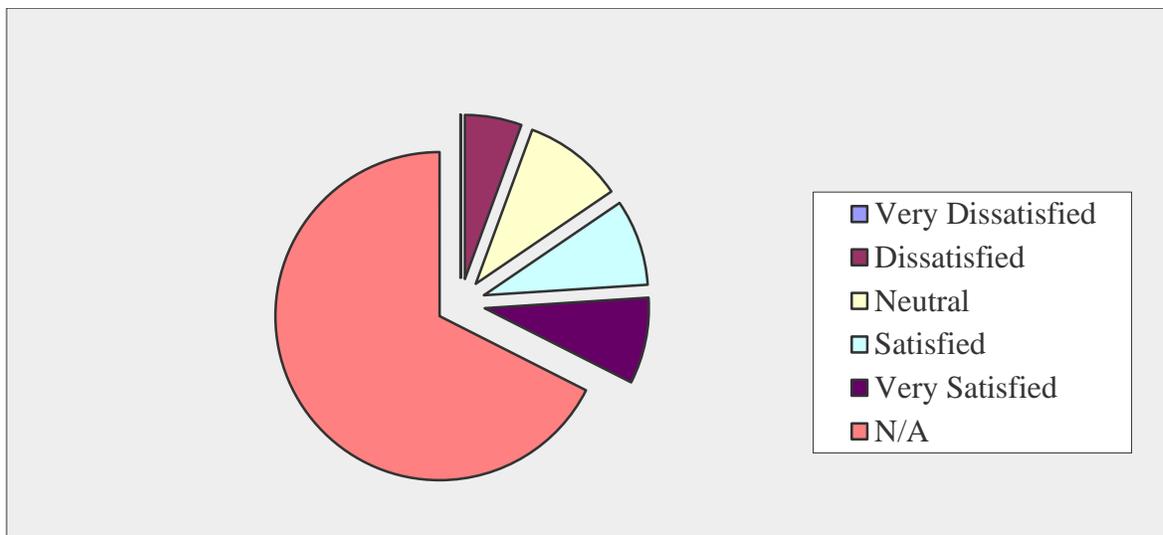


Figure 5.10 Satisfaction with Hybrid Delivery Systems and the Creation of Community

Questions nineteen through twenty-four focused on theological education delivered in face-to-face settings. Question nineteen, Figure 5.11, asked, “What percentage of your total program was completed using face-to-face delivery systems? Please choose the percentage closest to your total.” Of those who responded, 4.23% indicated no face-to-face instruction, 8.45% indicated 25% of their program was face-to-face, 4.23% indicated 50% of their program was face-to-face, 23.94% indicated 75% of their program was face-to-face, and 59.15% indicated that 100% of their program was face-to-face.

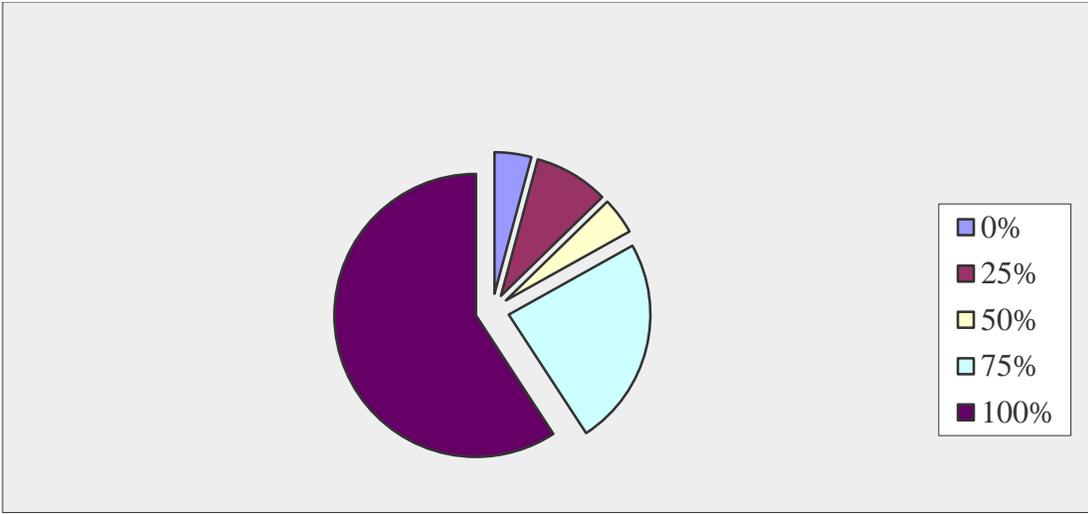


Figure 5.11 Percentage of Course Work Completed Using Face-to-Face Delivery Systems

The survey responses to Question twenty, Figure 5.12, “How satisfied were you with courses completed using face-to-face delivery systems? If you did not complete any course work in face-to-face settings, please select N/A” contrasted with similar questions eighteen and fourteen. Question twenty respondents selected only neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied concerning the courses completed. Most striking is the 52.11% very satisfied response. It is evident that satisfaction with face-to-face delivery systems is much higher than the satisfaction with either hybrid or online delivery systems.

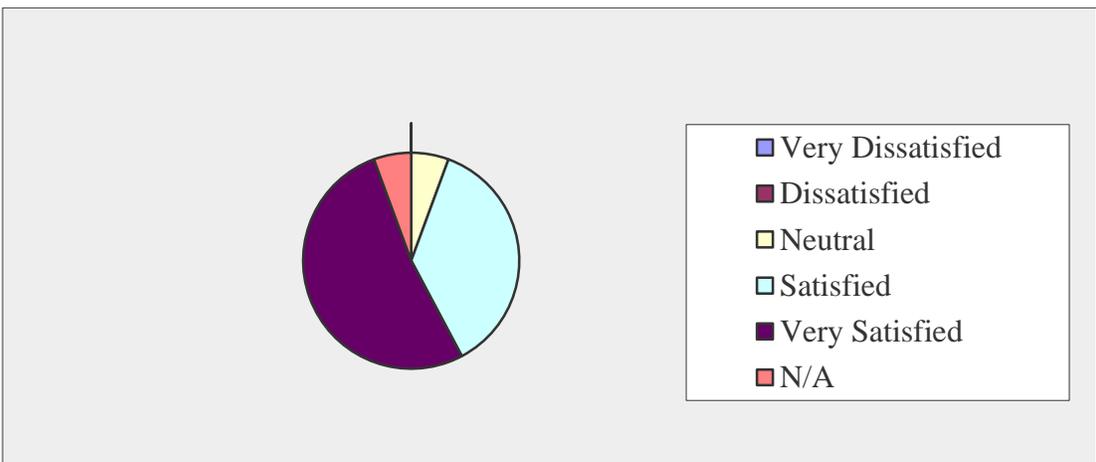


Figure 5.12 Satisfaction with Face-to-Face Delivery Systems

Question twenty-one, Figure 5.13, asked, “How satisfied were you with the ability of the face-to-face delivery systems to address formational issues? If you did not complete any course work in face-to-face settings please select N/A.” No respondents indicated they were very dissatisfied, 2.86% were dissatisfied, 5.71% were neutral, 28.57% were satisfied, and 57.14% were very satisfied. The trend here is similar to that of Question twenty with markedly high levels of satisfaction as compared to either hybrid or online delivery systems.

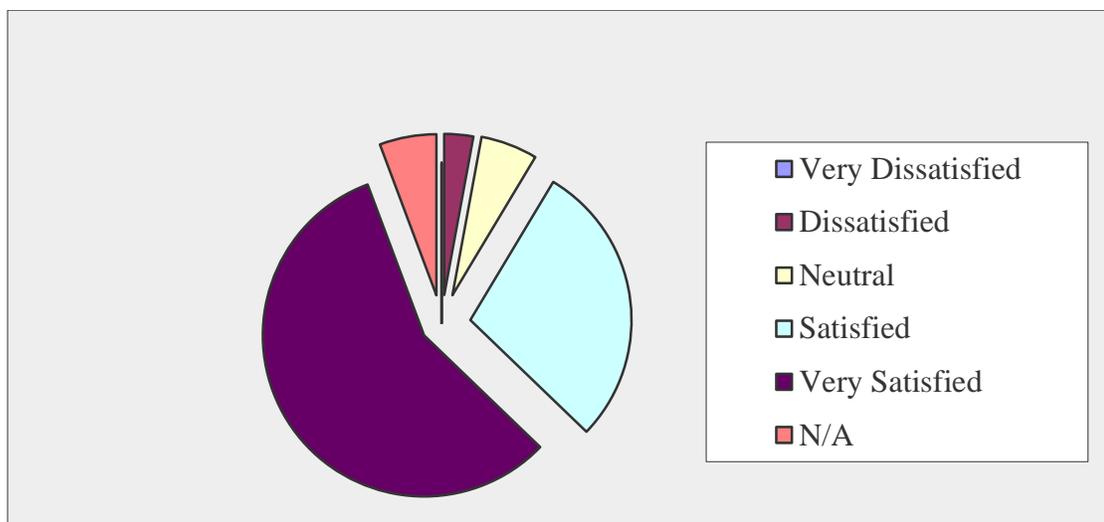


Figure 5.13 Satisfaction with Face-to-Face Delivery Systems and Formational Issues

The same is true of Questions twenty-two, Figure 5.14, “How satisfied were you with the ability of the face-to-face delivery systems to address practical skill acquisition? If you did not complete any course work in face-to-face settings please select N/A.” A mere 1.45% indicated very dissatisfied, 2.90% dissatisfied, 10.14% neutral, 34.78% satisfied, and 46.38% very satisfied. While there is a slight variation here, with some reporting very dissatisfied, overall satisfaction with face-to-face instruction is high.

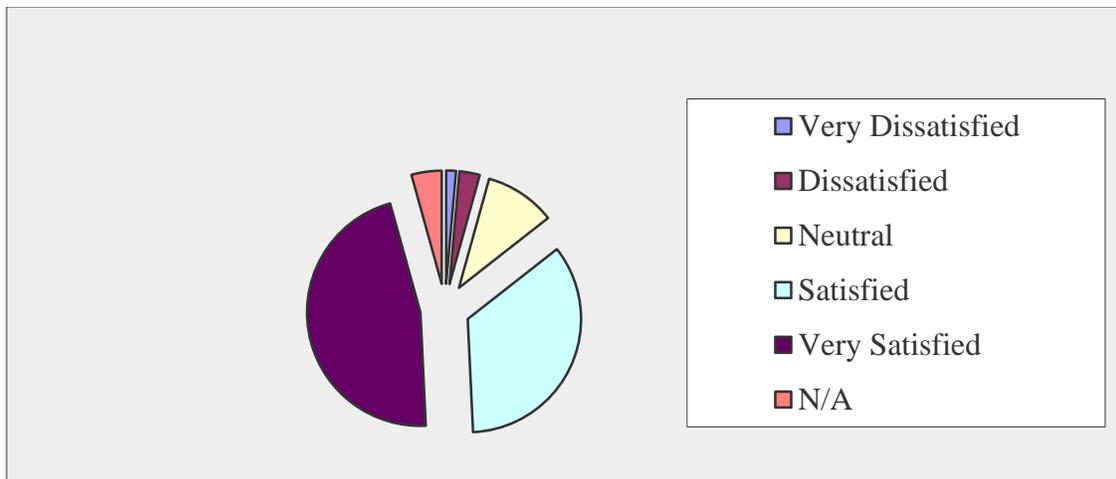


Figure 5.14 Satisfaction with Face-to-Face Delivery Systems and Practical Skills Acquisition

Question twenty-three, Figure 5.15, asked, “How satisfied were you with the ability of the face-to-face delivery system to address knowledge acquisition? If you did not complete any course work in face-to-face settings, please select N/A.” These results indicate even stronger satisfaction with face-to-face settings. None reported themselves very dissatisfied or dissatisfied, 4.23% were neutral, 30.99% were satisfied, and 60.56% were very satisfied.

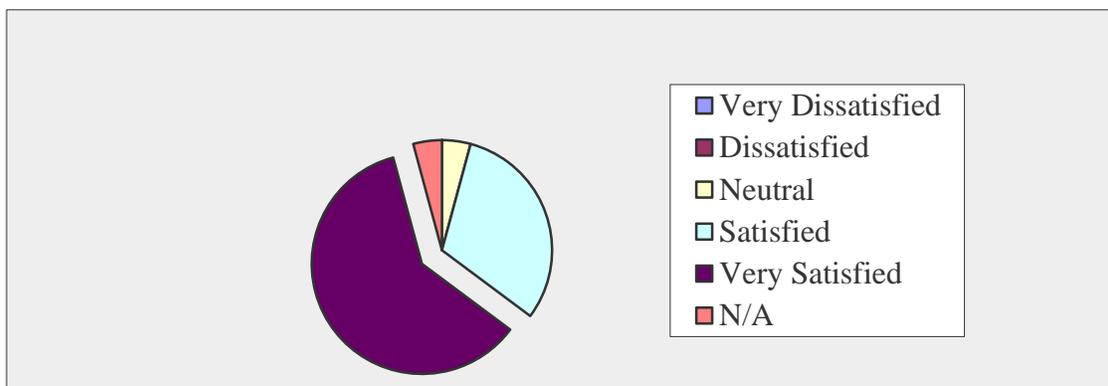


Figure 5.15 Satisfaction with Face-to-Face Delivery Systems and Knowledge Acquisition

Question twenty-four, Figure 5.16, “How satisfied were you with the ability of the face-to-face delivery systems to create a sense of community with other students and the instructor? If you did not complete any course work in face-to-face settings please select

N/A.” Responses here followed a similar pattern to those of questions 19-23: 0% were very dissatisfied, 2.9% were dissatisfied, 4.35% were neutral, 27.54% were satisfied, and 60.87% were very satisfied.

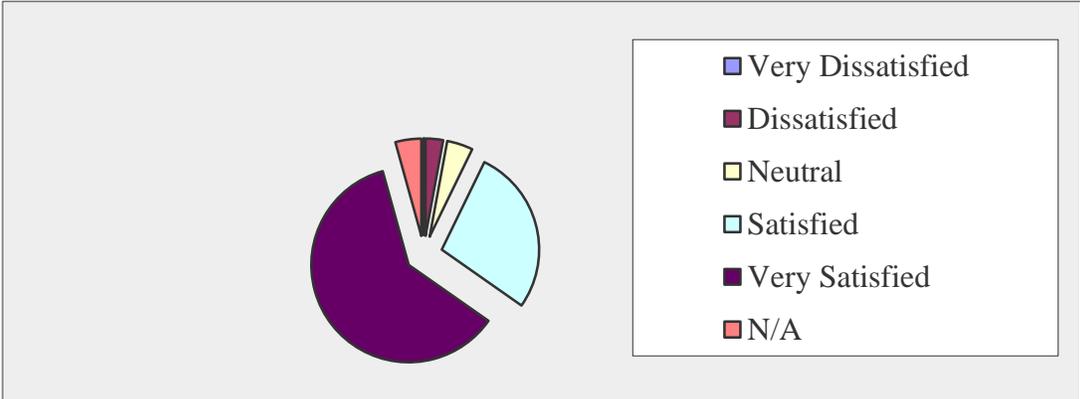


Figure 5.16 Satisfaction with Face-to-Face Delivery Systems and Creation of Community

Question twenty-five, Figure 5.17, asked, “How willing would you be to complete another degree using a completely online delivery system?” Of those who responded, 47.14% were unwilling, 44.29% were willing, and 10% were very willing.

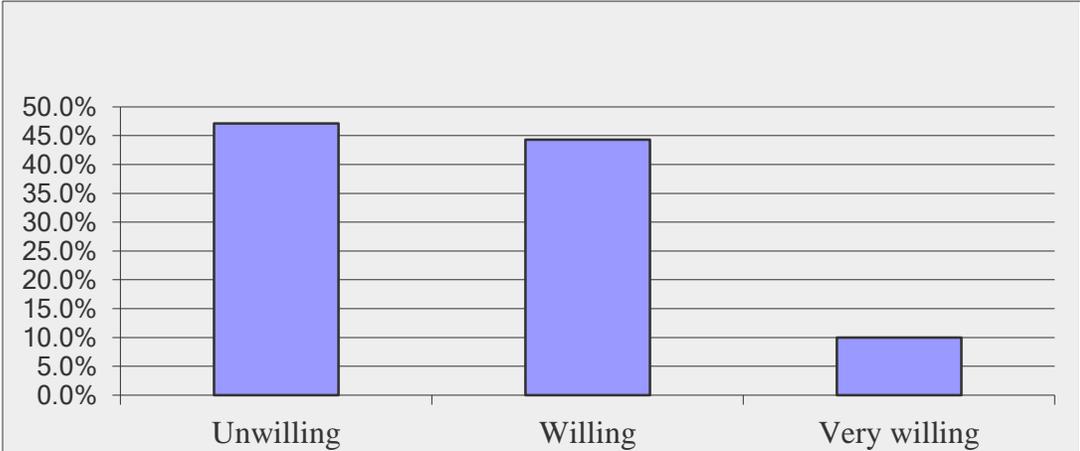


Figure 5.17 Willingness to Complete Another Degree Using Online Delivery Systems

Question twenty-six, Figure 5.18, asked, “How willing would you be to complete another degree using a hybrid or blended delivery system?” Of those responding, 17.14% were unwilling, 65.71% were willing, and 17.14% were very willing.

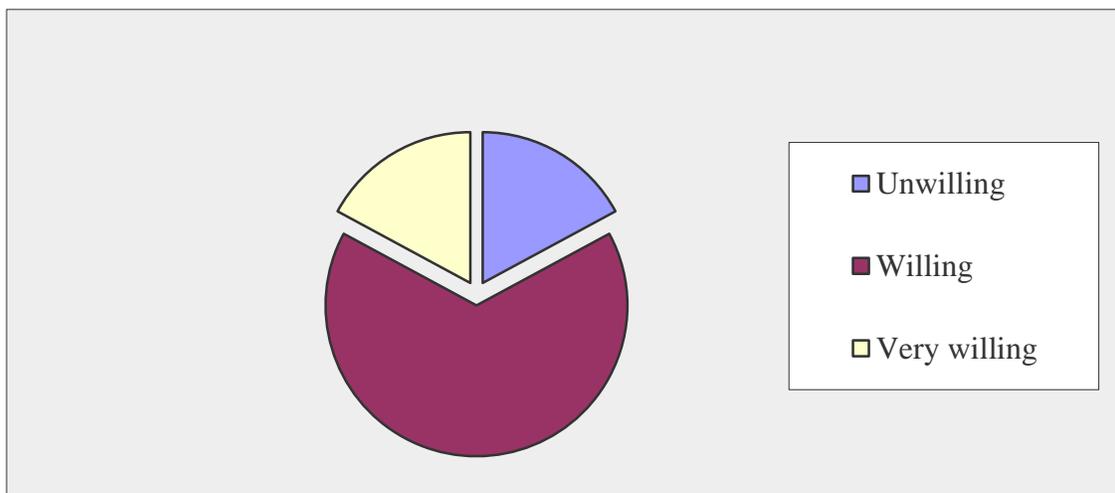


Figure 5.18 Willingness to Complete Another Degree Using Hybrid Delivery Systems

Question twenty-seven, Figure 5.19, asked, “How willing would you be to complete another degree using a face-to-face delivery system?” Of those responding, 12.86% were unwilling, 48.57% were willing, and 38.57% were very willing.

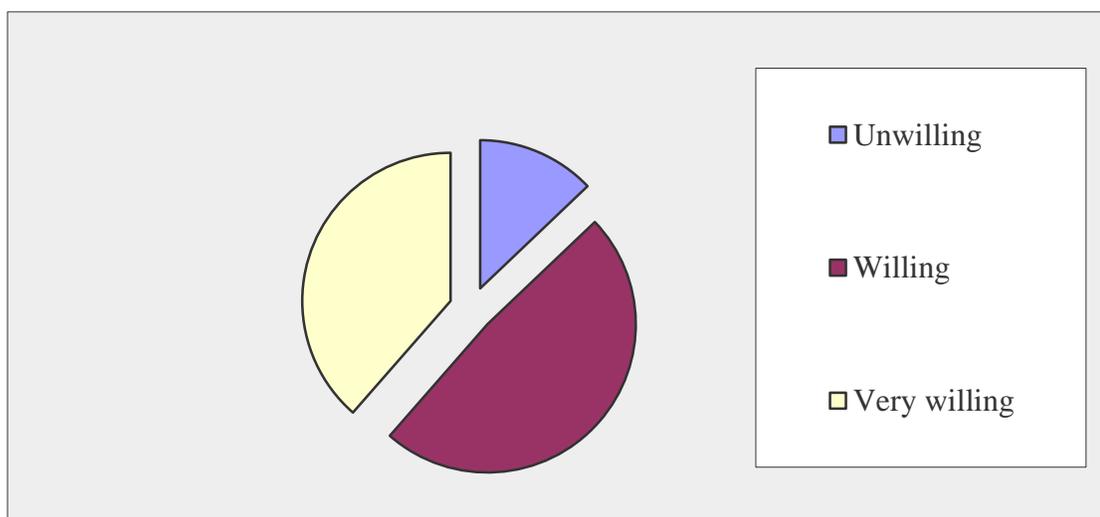


Figure 5.19 Willingness to Complete a Degree Using Face-to-Face Delivery Systems

ATS 2014 Graduating Student Total Schools Questionnaire Results

Beginning in 2014, The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada added a series of questions to its Graduating Students Questionnaire. These questions focused on the educational contexts of students in member schools and included options such as main campus, with traditional daytime, evening, or intensive classes, extension sites, online settings, and hybrid classes. Questions also asked students to indicate satisfaction with the delivery methods' ability to meet key educational effectiveness, personal growth, and practical skills markers.

Individual schools receive the results of their graduating students. Additionally, ATS compiles the results from all member schools into a total survey summary that is provided to all participating schools. The following charts, Figures 5.20a and 5.20b, are drawn from that summary document.¹⁹⁴

Review of this initial chart provides the information that only 2.9% of all students in ATS member schools are in 100% online programs. Of those students enrolled in ATS accredited schools, 8.8% are receiving their education through hybrid courses and another 6.1% are engaged in intensive courses. The remainders are in daytime or evening classes at a main campus or extension site. In other words, 82.2% of students in ATS schools have limited or no experience of online theological education. This high percentage correlates with the small number of respondents in this researcher's survey of theological education graduates who indicated that their education took place in largely online or in hybrid settings.

¹⁹⁴ ATS Graduating School Questionnaire Total School Profile. Used by Permission. See Appendix B.

| Educational Context for Majority of Degree Program | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|------|---------|------|---------|------|-----------|------|-------|------|
| Context | MDiv | | Prof MA | | Acad MA | | All Other | | Total | |
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Main campus - traditional daytime classes | 2,407 | 73.7 | 400 | 46.6 | 688 | 63.9 | 529 | 48.3 | 4,024 | 63.9 |
| Main campus - evening classes | 365 | 11.2 | 189 | 22.0 | 159 | 14.8 | 58 | 5.3 | 771 | 12.2 |
| Main campus - intensive courses | 53 | 1.6 | 37 | 4.3 | 25 | 2.3 | 272 | 24.8 | 387 | 6.1 |
| Extension site of main campus | 106 | 3.2 | 62 | 7.2 | 63 | 5.8 | 48 | 4.4 | 279 | 4.4 |
| 100 percent online/distance courses | 62 | 1.9 | 45 | 5.2 | 44 | 4.1 | 30 | 2.7 | 181 | 2.9 |
| Hybrid courses - combination face-to-face/online | 228 | 7.0 | 113 | 13.2 | 84 | 7.8 | 132 | 12.1 | 557 | 8.8 |
| Did not complete > 50 percent in any of the above contexts | 45 | 1.4 | 12 | 1.4 | 14 | 1.3 | 26 | 2.4 | 97 | 1.5 |

Figure 5.20a Educational Contexts¹⁹⁵

| Educational Contexts Used During Degree Program | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|------|---------|------|---------|------|-----------|------|-------|------|
| Context | MDiv | | Prof MA | | Acad MA | | All Other | | Total | |
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Main campus - traditional daytime classes | 2,620 | 38.5 | 501 | 29.7 | 780 | 35.8 | 569 | 36.7 | 4,470 | 36.6 |
| Main campus - evening classes | 1,533 | 22.5 | 405 | 24.0 | 502 | 23.0 | 191 | 12.3 | 2,631 | 21.5 |
| Main campus - intensive courses | 1,213 | 17.8 | 281 | 16.6 | 330 | 15.1 | 420 | 27.1 | 2,244 | 18.3 |
| Extension site of main campus | 305 | 4.5 | 116 | 6.9 | 132 | 6.1 | 84 | 5.4 | 637 | 5.2 |
| 100 percent online/distance courses | 428 | 6.3 | 142 | 8.4 | 200 | 9.2 | 77 | 5.0 | 847 | 6.9 |
| Hybrid courses - combination face-to-face/online | 711 | 10.4 | 244 | 14.4 | 237 | 10.9 | 208 | 13.4 | 1,400 | 11.4 |

Figure 5.20b Educational Contexts¹⁹⁶

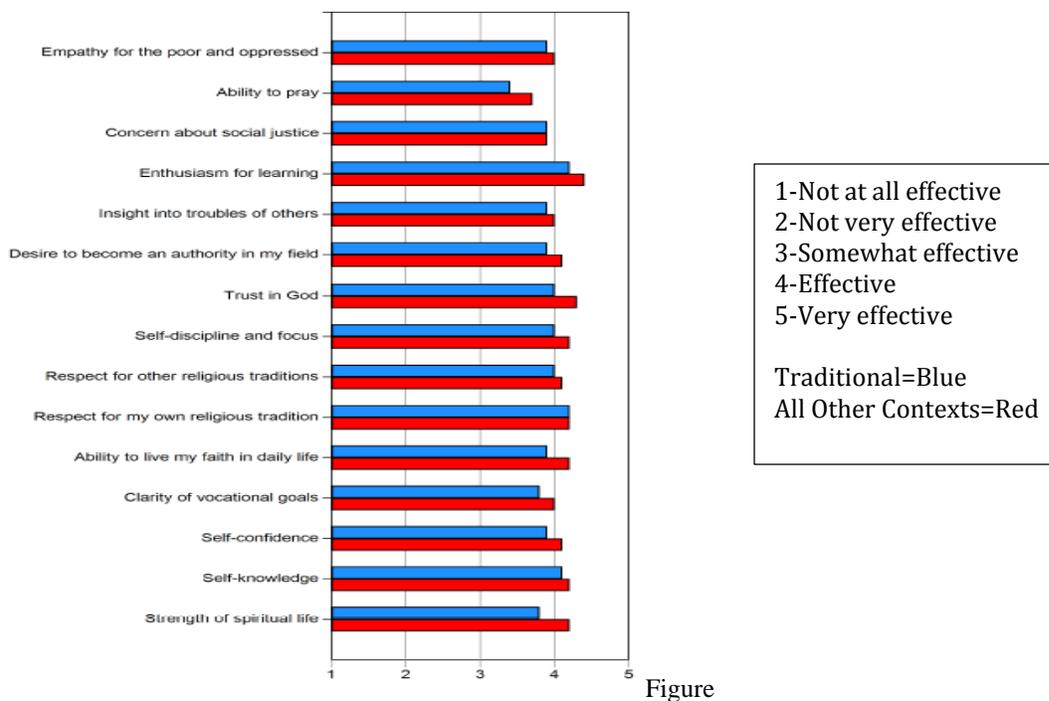
¹⁹⁵ ATS Graduating School Questionnaire Total School Profile. Used by Permission. See Appendix B.

¹⁹⁶ ATS Graduating School Questionnaire Total School Profile. Used by Permission. See Appendix B.

The following two charts, Figures 5.21 and 5.22, ask students in both traditional (evening and daytime classes at main campus) and those at extension sites, in online, intensive, and hybrid classes to indicate their perception of the effectiveness of the setting in developing specific knowledge, personal growth, and practical skills.¹⁹⁷

Figure 5.21 measures qualities of character and perspective related to personal growth. This diverse set of metrics seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of a theological setting in forming students for the work of ministry.

Figure 5.22 measures the effectiveness of educational settings to provide training practical skills acquisition and knowledge acquisition areas.



5.21 Measures of Educational Effectiveness and Growth¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ ATS Graduating School Questionnaire Total School Profile. Used by Permission. See Appendix B.

¹⁹⁸ ATS Graduating School Questionnaire Total School Profile. Used by Permission. See Appendix B.

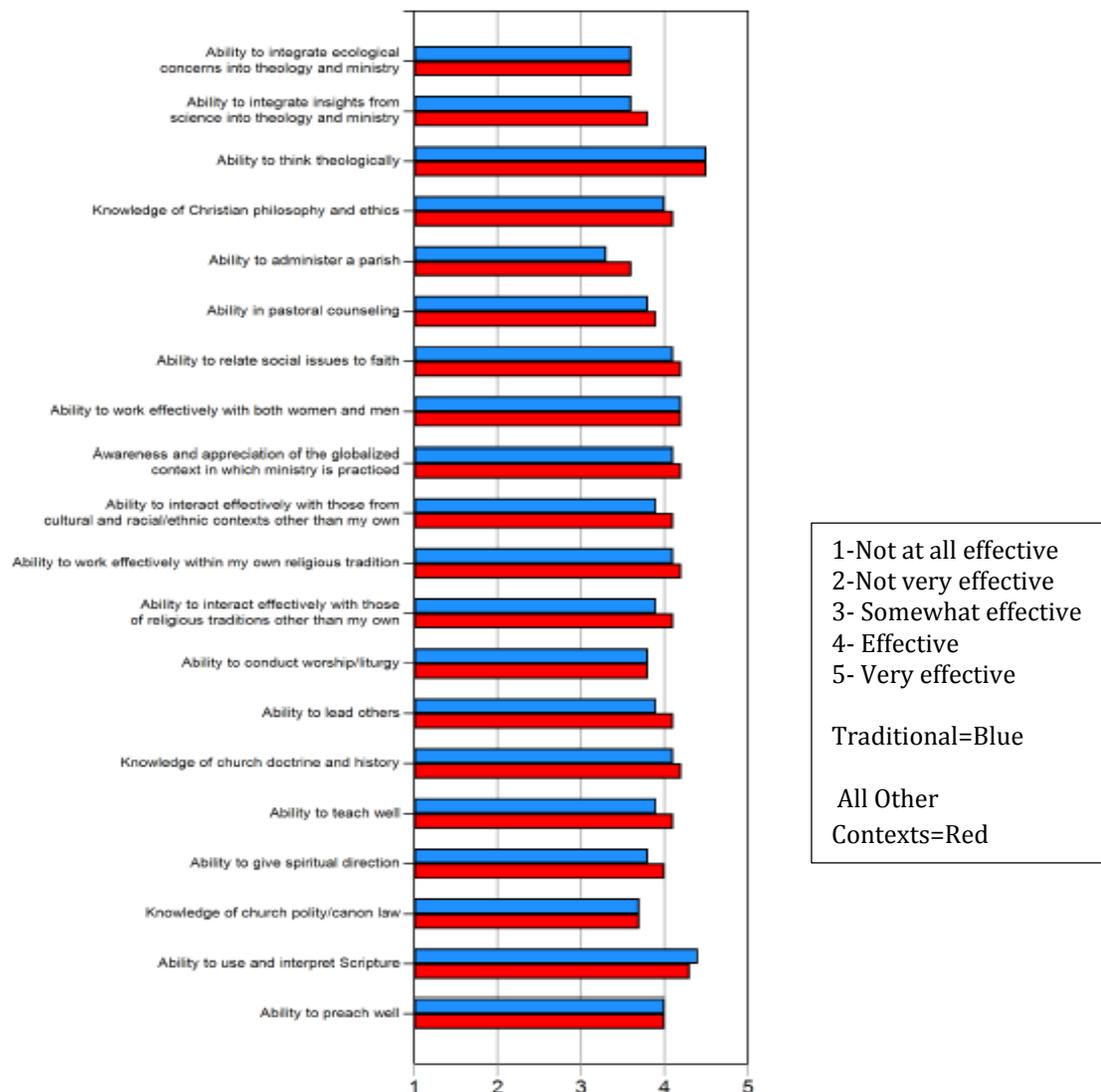


Figure 5.22 Educational Effectiveness in Facilitating Skills by Area¹⁹⁹

In both figure 5.21 and 5.22, the blue color indicates students in traditional daytime campus base settings. The red indicates students in all other settings. It should be noted that since the data in Figures 5.21 and 5.22 is not sub-divided it does not provide clarity regarding the effectiveness of those in completely online programs versus those in

¹⁹⁹ ATS Graduating School Questionnaire Total School Profile. Used by Permission. See Appendix B.

intensive and hybrid settings. Despite the lack of granular data, it is clear that non-traditional settings are in general as effective as the traditional settings in meeting the theological education needs of students in ATS member schools.

What is not clear is whether students in online programs would rank their programs as highly as those in intensive or hybrid settings. In this researcher's survey instrument data it was clear that students in both hybrid and online settings expressed similar rates of satisfaction with knowledge acquisition, formational growth, and acquisition of practical skills. Where the researcher's data differs is in the satisfaction of students in traditional, face-to-face settings who consistently expressed higher levels of satisfaction in all areas of theological education as compared to the data set in the ATS Graduate Student Survey. This disparity may in part be a reflection of the ATS sample representing students who are recent graduates of theological education while the survey sample in the researcher's own survey represented individuals with a variety of years post degree. It is the researcher's premise that students may evaluate their experiences differently as they gain more time and distance from the experience.

The final chart selected from the ATS Graduate Student Survey asks students to reflect on the three most important influences on their educational experience. As in the previous charts this data is divided according to the setting in which the student experience their theological education. All students in traditional evening or daytime classes are in one category and all students in hybrid, intensive, and online settings are tabulated in the second category.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ ATS Graduating School Questionnaire Total School Profile. Used by Permission.

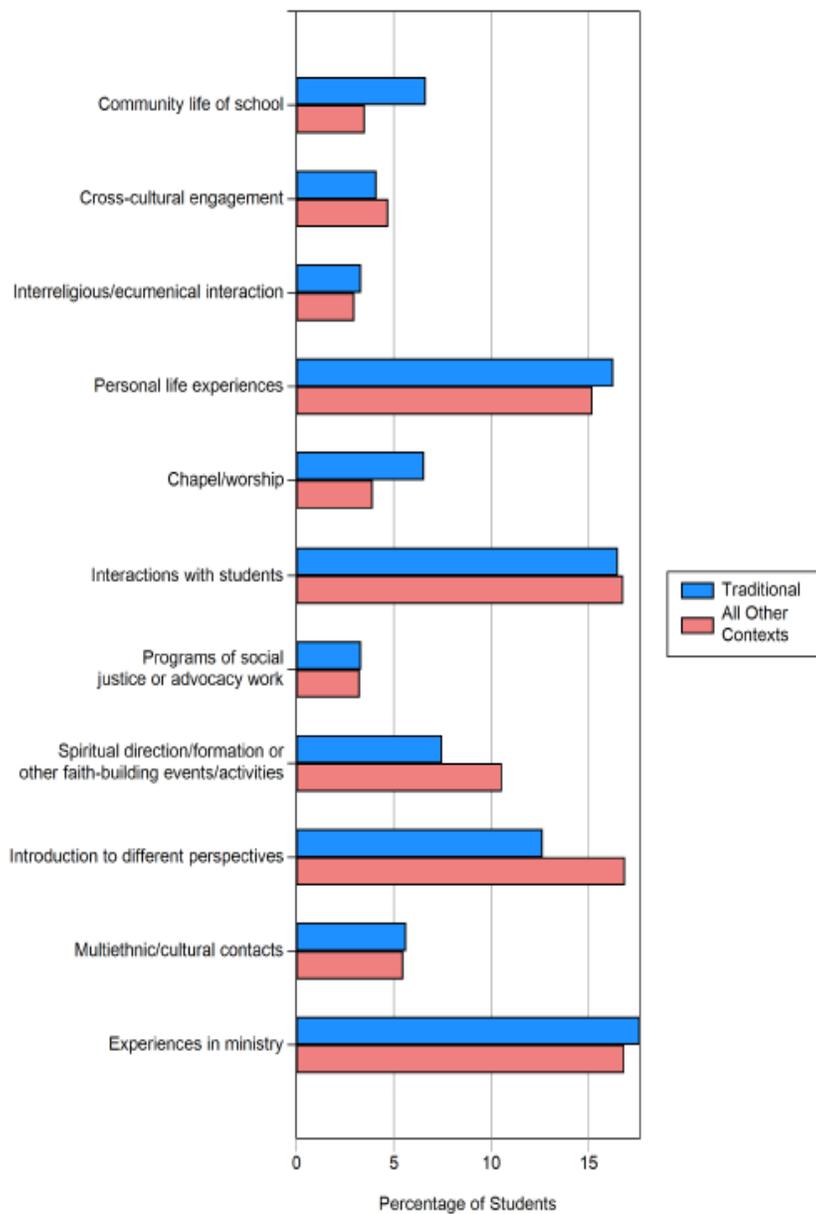


Figure 5.23 Three Most Important Influences on Educational Experiences²⁰¹

As in the previous chart, there is remarkable coherence between the traditional and non-traditional contexts. Also in common with the previous chart the online, hybrid, and intensive settings are not sub-divided, limiting the ability of the researcher to

²⁰¹ ATS Graduating School Questionnaire Total School Profile. Used by Permission.

interpret the data. However, it is of interest to note two areas of significant divergence. The first is with regard to the influence of the “community life of the school.” In this single area, students in traditional settings rate this more highly than do students in non-traditional settings. At first glance, it would seem self-evident that community life in a traditional setting would have greater influence, and yet, students in the traditional setting are twice as likely to rate this as a significant influence. Equally curious is the rating with respect to “Introduction to Different Perspectives.” In this instance, students in the non-traditional settings have noted greater influence in this area than those in the traditional settings. While the reasons for this divergence are opaque it would seem that in some fashion students in non-traditional settings are either experiencing greater exposure to different perspectives, raising the possibility of their selecting this as a response, or in some fashion the online setting heightens the student’s sense of “difference.” It was not until the researcher had conducted interviews with two students who had experience in online education that these seemingly random data points become a part of an emerging pattern.

Interviews with Students—Their Perspective

Interviews were conducted with two students. The first, an MDiv graduate, completed both undergraduate and master’s degree through an online educational platform. The student earned an undergraduate degree in the early days of online education when much of the instruction was in the form of pre-recorded videos that the student viewed asynchronously. The assignments were typically written and assessment took the form of grading of assignments and exams that were proctored offline. The second student, a DMin graduate, completed undergraduate and master’s degrees in face-

to-face settings but completed the doctoral degree in an online program. The online program consisted of a weekly synchronous discussion with cohort members and the program director, weekly asynchronous discussion board posts, and an ongoing writing project. At the beginning of the program, the cohort met for an initial weeklong orientation. This weeklong intensive seminar was repeated on an annual basis for the duration of the four-year program.

Both students interviewed identified the primary strength of the online theological education they received as convenience. In each instance, they were individuals already engaged in ministry settings, one as a youth pastor and the other as senior pastor. Neither could have completed the degree while maintaining the existing ministry setting due to a lack of seminary locations nearby offering appropriate programs.

Further, both indicated that the online program was attractive because of the flexibility it offered in terms of class schedule. The asynchronous portions of the courses were completed at the convenience of the student and did not interfere with ministry or familial obligations.

When asked to consider the primary challenges or failings of online theological education the MDiv student indicated that were it not for the mentoring influence of a senior pastor acquisition of practical skills would have been very difficult. Additionally, the student indicated that the instruction was uneven. Some encountered very strong instructors who were competent in online teaching, while others were either lacking in online skills or lacking in teaching skills. This disparity in competence resulted in some courses that were difficult to complete because the student found it difficult to remain focused during dry delivery, or in the midst of technology challenges.

The DMin student suggested that the greatest challenge was the technology required to complete the course. Each student was required to have a webcam, high-speed Internet, basic typing skills, and a degree of computer competence. When those components were lacking during the synchronous course sections, some students were unable to connect or unable to maintain the pace of the conversation while typing.

When asked about the ability of online theological education to provide formational experience both students indicated that the online theological settings were less effective than the classroom setting. When opportunities existed for synchronous engagement, they indicated that more formational opportunities existed. In a strictly asynchronous setting, the ability for formation to take place was depended on the ability of individual students to connect with each other and the professor to form a meaningful learning community.

The DMin student indicated that this happened more effectively in the asynchronous settings because the same cohort also had opportunity for an annual face-to-face gathering and for weekly synchronous engagement.

The MDiv student reflected difficulty in formational growth in the online setting. Any growth occurred incidentally and with more impetus from the ministry setting than from the online setting. The student wondered if there would have been any formational growth at all in the absence of the ministry work setting. This respondent contrasted the formational growth experience in an online setting with that of a hybrid class and noted that the hybrid class provided much richer opportunity for spiritual growth and for mutual accountability.

When asked about the ability of online theological education to provide practical skills acquisition both students indicated that practical skills were typically described and discussed in the online setting but the actual practice and acquisition happened in field education or existing ministry settings. While opportunity existed to discuss these experiences with others in the online setting difficulties were presented by the variety of settings in which students in the program were serving. The DMin student noted that an ideal situation would allow each member of the cohort to visit and observe the other members settings. This sense of context would improve the ability of other students to provide appropriate reflection and feedback to the student.

When asked about the ability of online theological education to provide knowledge acquisition both students indicated that an online theological education was effective in providing opportunities for knowledge acquisition. The DMin student noted that the online discussion board allowed for each member of the cohort to review materials multiple times, which facilitated learning. The MDiv student also indicated that the ability to watch video clips and listen to audio lectures multiple times improved retention of critical materials.

When asked to consider the ability of the online theological education setting to provide opportunity for the creation of a sense of community both the MDiv and DMin students interviewed shared similar responses. They noted that courses in which a sense of community developed led to deeper interactions with peers in the course and with the instructor. This “deeper” engagement contributed to a sense of learning more effectively.

The community factor correlates with the ATS Graduating Student Survey in which the traditional students note the significant impact of community life at a much

higher rate than the impact noted by the non-traditional students. When community life is not possible, its absence is noted. Equally, students in the ATS sample noted the importance of introduction to diverse perspectives as a significant factor in their educational experience in the online setting. This student perspective may reflect a greater diversity of students in the online programs since students can be drawn from diverse geographic locations. It also suggests that students in the non-traditional settings are encountering each other at levels that allow for engagement, which results in exposure of significant differences. This student perspective suggests the kind of “deeper” learning referenced by both students interviewed.

Responses from the Survey of Theological Educators

The survey of theological educators was launched on Survey Monkey and resulted in forty-two respondents between August 4, 2014 and September 2, 2014. Respondents were solicited using a combination of e-mail request and social media posting. An e-mail message was sent to 185 theological educators who were identified as affiliated with an ATS accredited institution where at least six online courses are currently offered. (See Appendix B)

The ATS website offers a list of these affiliated institutions. The institutions were selected for a diversity of denomination background, size, and geographic location. The research then used the institutions’ website directories to identify potential respondents. Additionally, the researcher posted a survey link in a general Facebook post, another survey link to a closed group for graduates of theological education, a tweet on a personal Twitter account, and a post to the researcher’s LinkedIn profile. Of these attempts to solicit responses, the e-mail requests were the most effective. Of the forty respondents

who provided e-mail addresses, all but nine were responses from individuals at theological institutes who received direct e-mails. Of the nine responses not attached to a theological institute e-mail, eight of those nine were individuals with a social media connection to the researcher of several years standing.

Question one requested contact information in the event of follow up interview. Responses were received from all forty-two participants. Question two requested permission to use responses as part of research for the writer's dissertation project. It offered the clarification that an additional waiver would be sought in the event of direct quotation. All respondents provided the researcher with permission to use their survey responses and comments as a part of this project.

Question three requested the age range of the respondent. Ages ranged from twenty-five to over seventy-five years of age. The majority of the respondents, 64.29%, fell in the forty-five to sixty-four years of age range. The highest and lowest ranges, twenty-five to thirty-four years of age, and seventy-five or older each had a single respondent.

Question four requested the gender of the respondent. Of the forty-two respondents, 1/3 were female and 2/3 were male.

Question five requested the number of years the individual has been engaged in teaching in a theological setting. Of the forty-two respondents, the respondent with the least experience had been teaching one year while the respondent with the most experience had been teaching forty-three years. The average of the responses was thirty-six years of teaching experience.

Question six, Figure 5.24, asked, “What is the highest theological degree you have received?” Of those responding, 71.79% have earned a PhD degree, 17.95% have earned a DMin degree, 7.69% have earned an MDiv, and 5.13% a MA(TS). None of the survey respondents reported earning a ThD or MA in a specialized area of study.

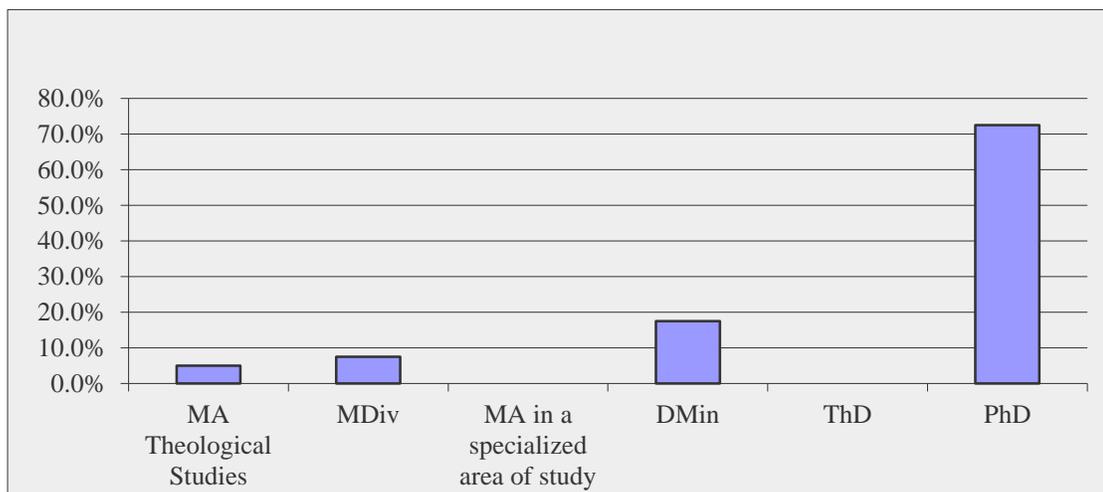


Figure 5.24 Highest Theological Degree Received

Question seven, Figure 5.25, asked, “What percentage of the courses you taught in the last two academic years used online delivery systems?”

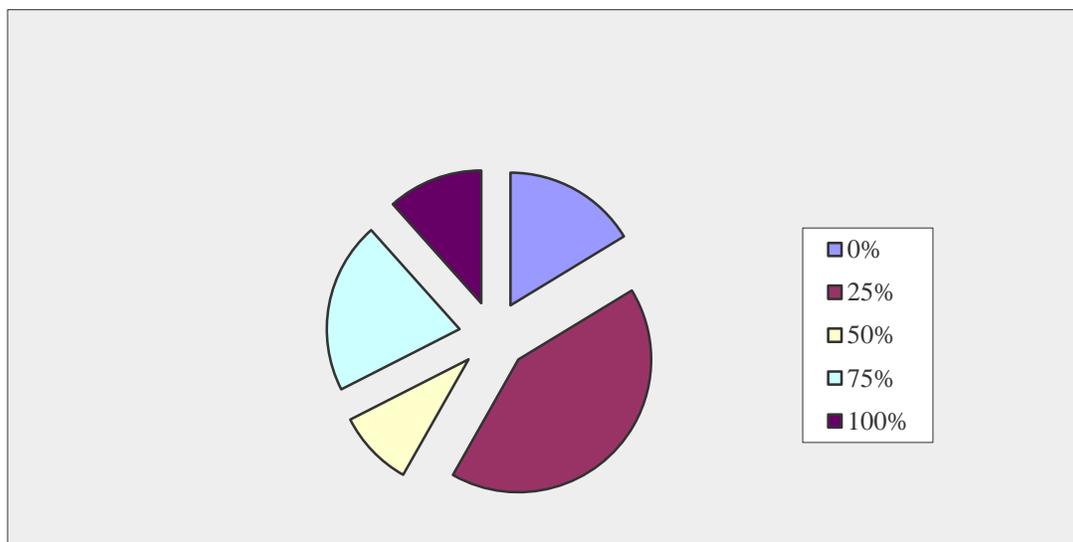


Figure 5.25 Percentage of Courses Taught Online

Responses to this question indicated that 18% of respondents did not teach online in the previous academic year. Several of these individuals provided comments indicating that their institutions did not currently have online instruction capacity. A single respondent in this category declared a clear antithesis to online education.

Of those who did teach online, 42% taught less than 25% of their load online. Only 10% taught 50% of their courses online, while 18% taught 75% of their load online, and the remaining 12% taught 100% online. In total, 82% of the forty-two respondents have some experience teaching in an online setting within the previous two academic years.

This range of responses reflects the gradual adoption of online capacity in theological education. This is in part a reflection of the slow adoption of online education by the Association of Theological Schools of which the institutions represents were all a part.

Question 8, Figure 5.26, asked, “How satisfied were you with courses taught using the online delivery systems?”

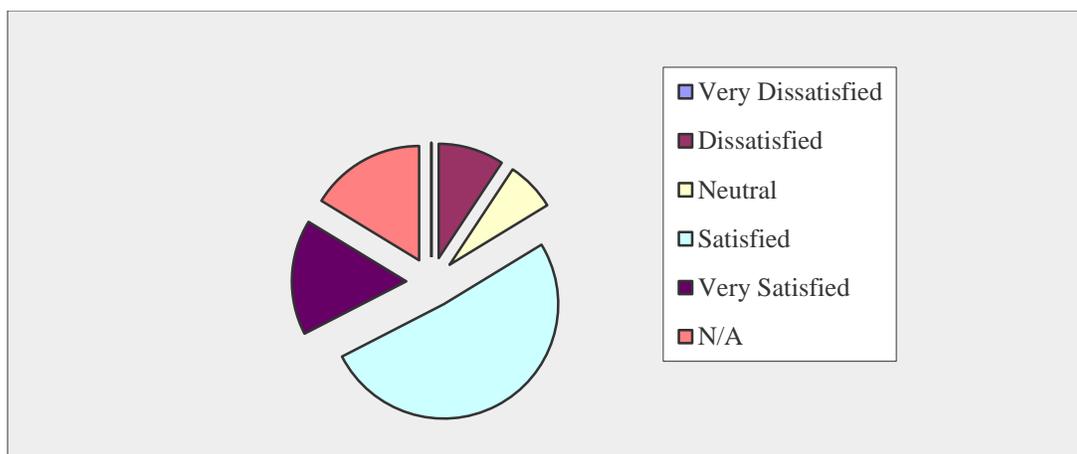


Figure 5.26 Satisfaction with Online Teaching

The responses to this question reflect a remarkably high level of instructors who were either satisfied or very satisfied. Of those responding 65% expressed satisfaction of extreme satisfaction. A small sample, 8%, were neutral in response, reflecting neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction. A 10% minority were dissatisfied but none were very dissatisfied. It should be noted that the question asked is very generic, while seeking to measure overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with online theological teaching. The following questions address satisfaction with four specific instructional areas: formational issues, practical skills acquisition, knowledge acquisition, and an overall sense of community.

Question nine, Figure 5.27, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the online delivery system to address formational issues (personal and spiritual growth and development)?”

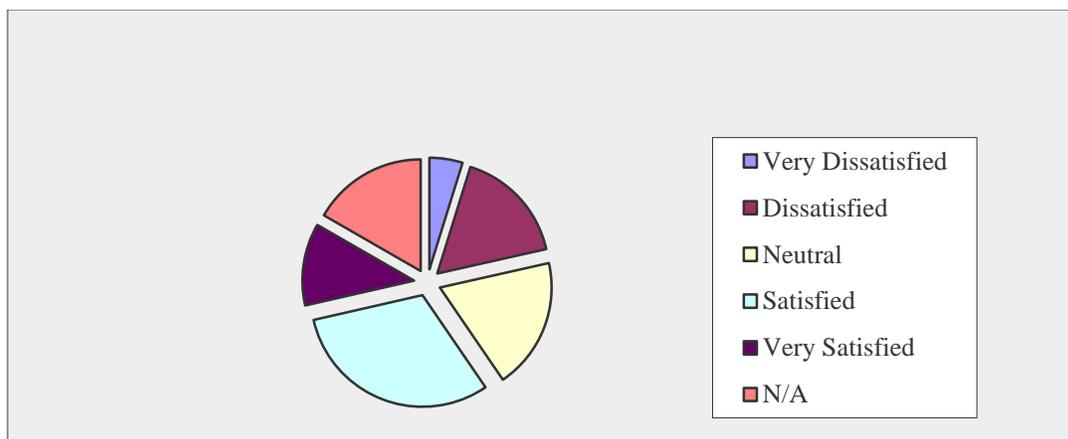


Figure 5.27 Satisfaction with Online Addressing Formational Issues

In response to specific reflection on personal formation there is an evident shift in satisfaction. Only 42% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied. This represents a 23% reduction from the more generic question asked in Question eight.

Of those surveyed, 19% were neutral in response and 23% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Again, there is an evident shift in response from the more generic question. 13% more instructors were dissatisfied. Clearly, when the respondents focus on this particular area of theological education fewer instructors were satisfied with the effectiveness of online theological education to provide appropriate formational growth opportunities.

Question ten, Figure 5.28, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the online delivery system to address practical skill acquisition (pastoral counseling, preaching, and worship leadership)?”

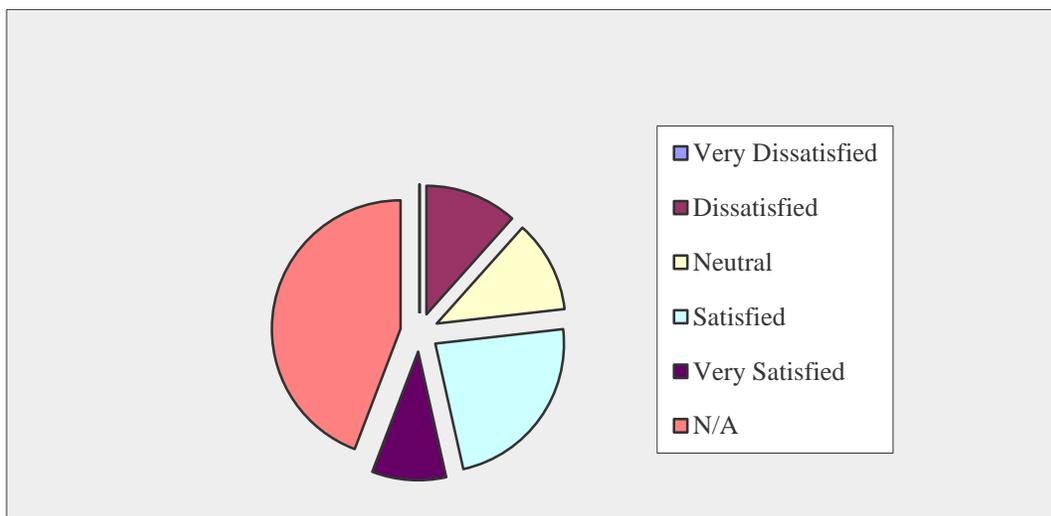


Figure 5.28 Satisfaction with Online Addressing Practical Skills

The responses to Question ten include a high response in the Not Applicable category, 45%. This reflects an absence of instruction in practical skills in many online theological education courses. One respondent noted in the comments section that the particular courses the individual had instructed were focused solely on knowledge acquisition. Others indicated that practical skills courses were not taught in online

settings or were only taught using hybrid delivery systems. Still, 33% of those who were using online courses for practical skills were satisfied or very satisfied, 9% were neutral in response, and 11% were dissatisfied. None were very dissatisfied. It would appear that those who have attempted practical skills instruction online were satisfied but many have simply chosen not to use online settings for this area of theological education.

Question eleven, Figure 5.29, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the online delivery system to address knowledge acquisition?”

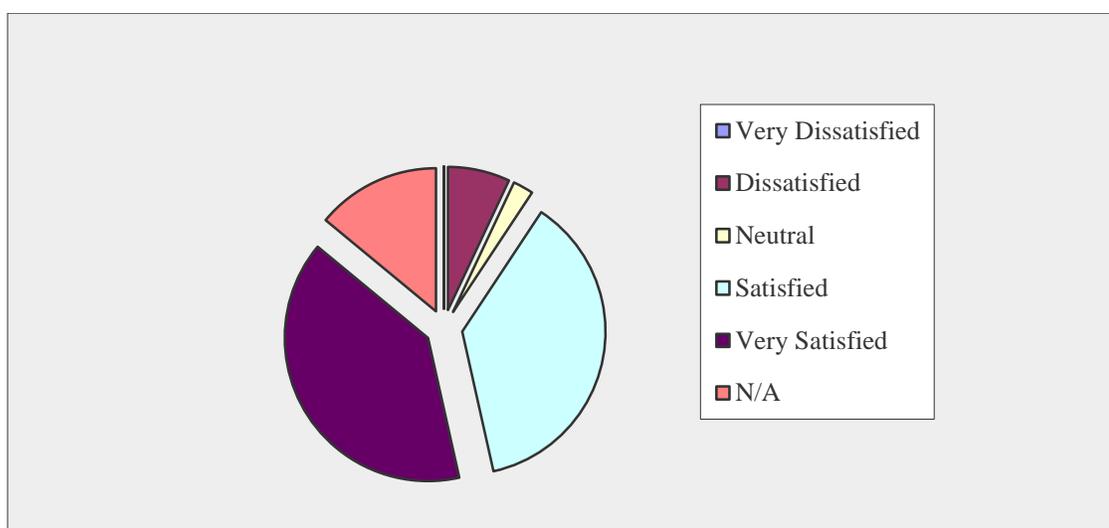


Figure 5.29 Satisfaction with Online Addressing Knowledge Acquisition

This question reflected the highest level of satisfaction with online theological education. A total of 75% were satisfied or very satisfied. A small minority of 2% were neutral and another 8% were dissatisfied. This reflects the ability of online theological education to provide effective instruction for knowledge acquisition.

Question twelve, Figure 5.30, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the online delivery system to create a sense of community between students and the instructor?”

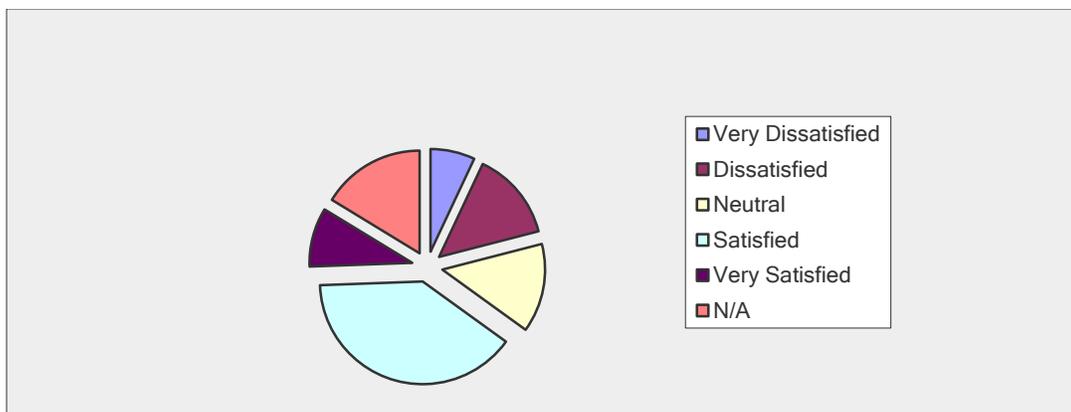


Figure 5.30 Ability of Online to Create Community

The responses to this question reflected the highest level of dissatisfaction with regard to teaching in an online setting. Of those surveyed, 23% expressed that they were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied. An additional 15% were neutral. Of those who responded, 38% were satisfied, and 18% were very satisfied. Although many of those surveyed reflected dissatisfaction those who were satisfied outnumbered those with a negative perspective by 2:1.

Question thirteen, Figure 5.31, asked, “What percentage of courses taught in the last academic year were completed using hybrid/blended delivery systems in which some portion of your course was online and some was classroom based?”

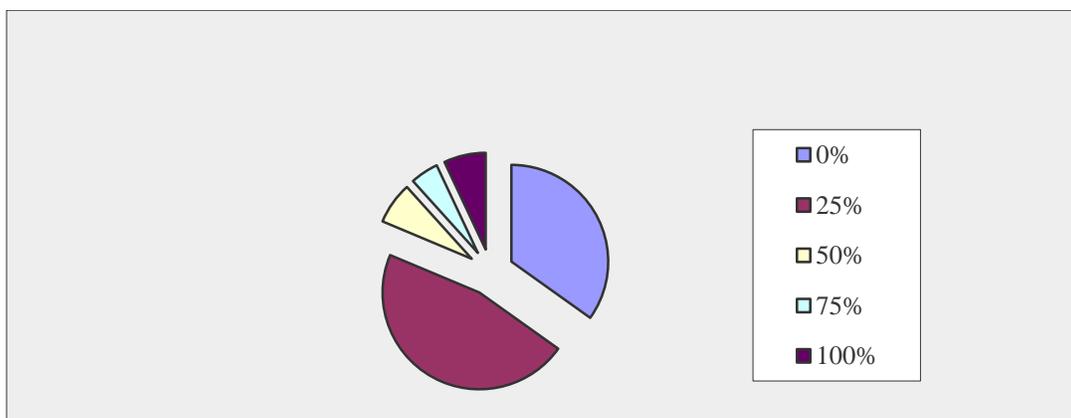


Figure 5.31 Percentage of Courses Taught in Hybrid Setting

Clearly, many institutions are not using blended or hybrid delivery systems. Of those surveyed, 80% indicated that 25% or less of their teaching in the past 2 academic years was in a hybrid format. Less than 10% taught 50%, 75%, or 100% of their courses in the past two years in a hybrid delivery model.

Question fourteen, Figure 5.32, asked, “How satisfied were you with courses taught using hybrid/blended delivery systems in which some portion of your course was online and some was classroom based?”

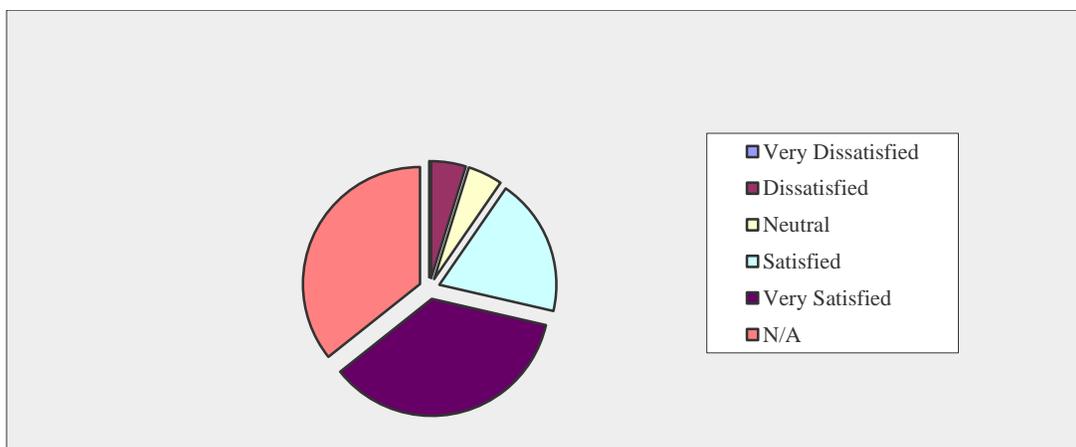


Figure 5.32 Satisfaction with Hybrid Courses Taught

Although a small number of those instructors surveyed were using hybrid delivery systems, satisfaction levels were very high among those using this model. Of the respondents who were engaged in hybrid delivery, 58% were satisfied or very satisfied. This is notable given that 32% responded N/A. A minority, 5%, were neutral and 5% were dissatisfied.

Question fifteen, Figure 5.33, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the hybrid/blended delivery systems to address formational issues?”

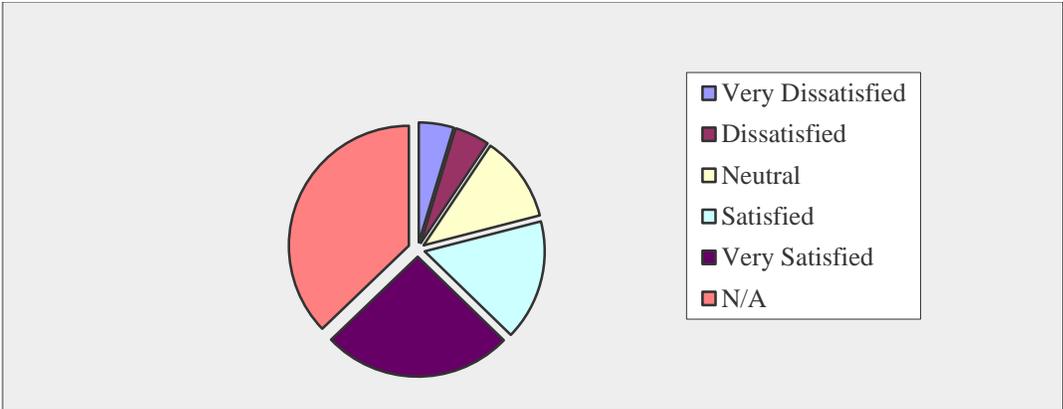


Figure 5.33 Ability of Hybrid Delivery to Address Formation

Responses to this question were of particular interest when compared to the responses to Question nine. In Question nine, only 42% were satisfied or very satisfied with the ability of online delivery to address formational issues. In response to the same question in a hybrid delivery system, 46% were satisfied or very satisfied. A slight increase is evident in this response set.

Question sixteen, Figure 5.34, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the hybrid/blended delivery systems to address practical skills acquisition” As in the question set regarding online education there is a higher degree of satisfaction with the ability of the hybrid delivery to address practical skills.

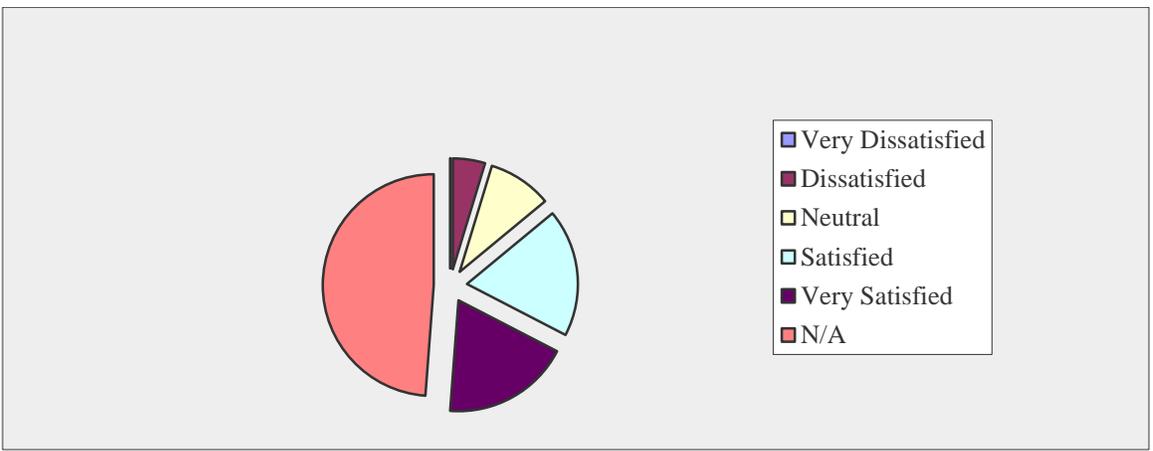


Figure 5.34 Ability of Hybrid Delivery to Address Practical Skills

Question seventeen, Figure 5.35, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the hybrid/blended delivery system to address knowledge acquisition?” Again, in this question there is a strong correlation between the online and hybrid responses.

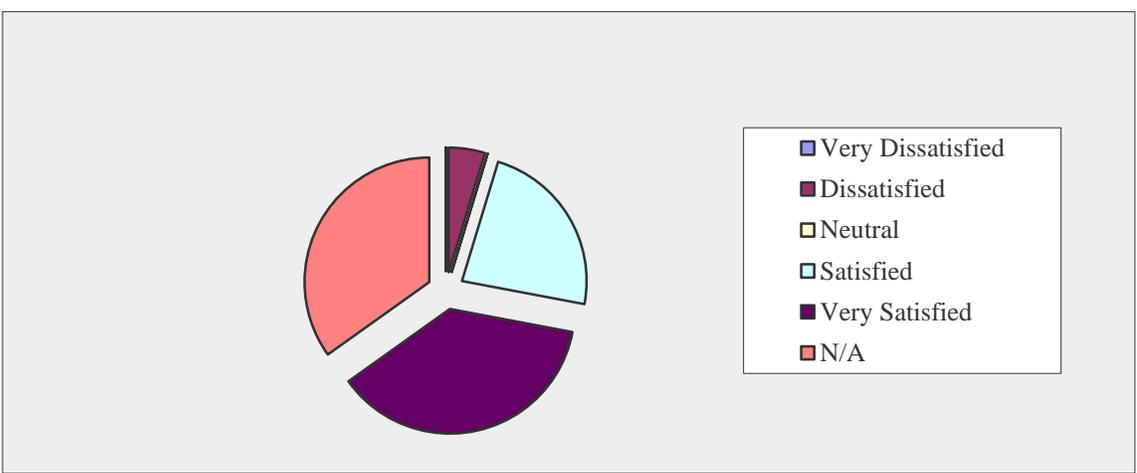


Figure 5.35 Ability of Hybrid Delivery to Address Knowledge Acquisition

Question eighteen, Figure 5.36, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the hybrid/blended delivery system to create a sense of community between student and the instructor?”

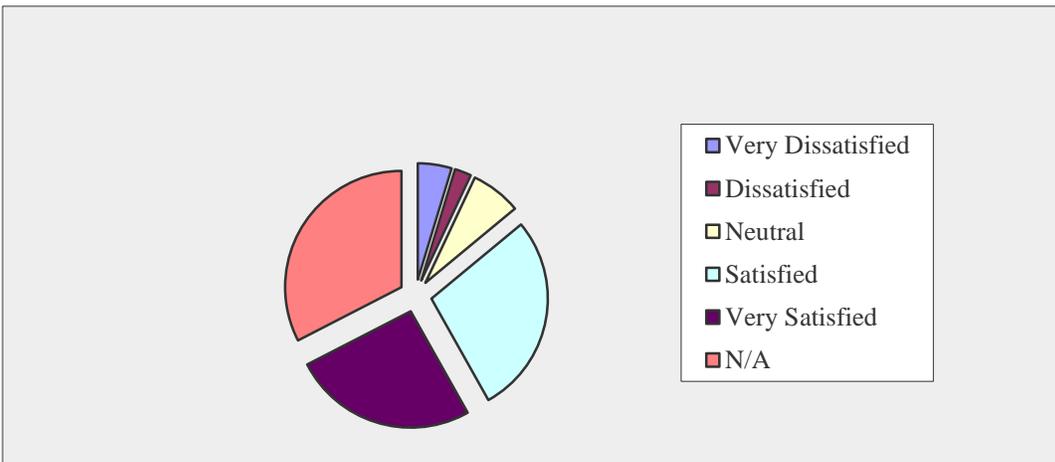


Figure 5.36 Ability of Hybrid Delivery to Create Community.

The responses to the question of community formation in hybrid courses indicate a slightly higher degree of satisfaction than those in online settings.

Question nineteen, Figure 5.37, asked, “What percentage of courses taught in the last academic year were completed using face-to-face systems?”

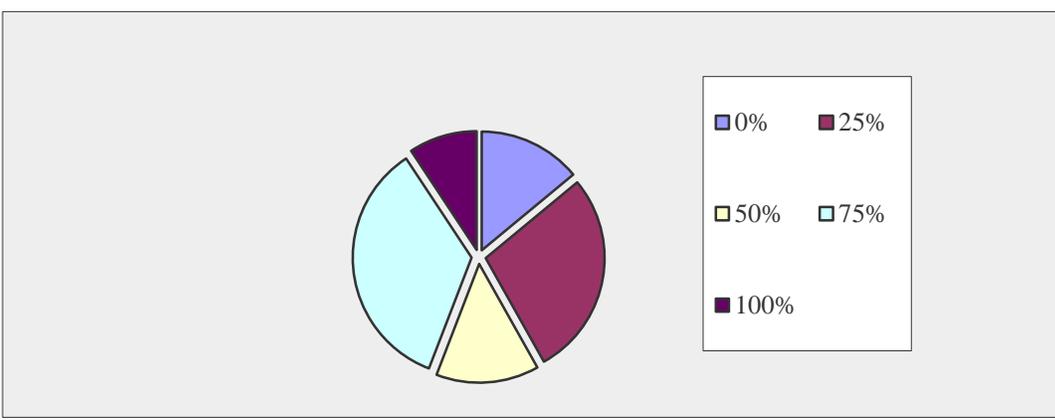


Figure 5.37 Percentage of Courses Taught Face-to-Face.

Of those surveyed, 10% taught in settings that were entirely face-to-face and 35% taught in settings that were ¾ face-to-face setting. Only 14% taught courses that were 1/2 face-to-face and 35% taught 1/4 of their courses face-to-face. A mere 15% did not teach face-to-face at all. This suggests that in general theological institutions continue to instruct in largely face-to-face delivery models.

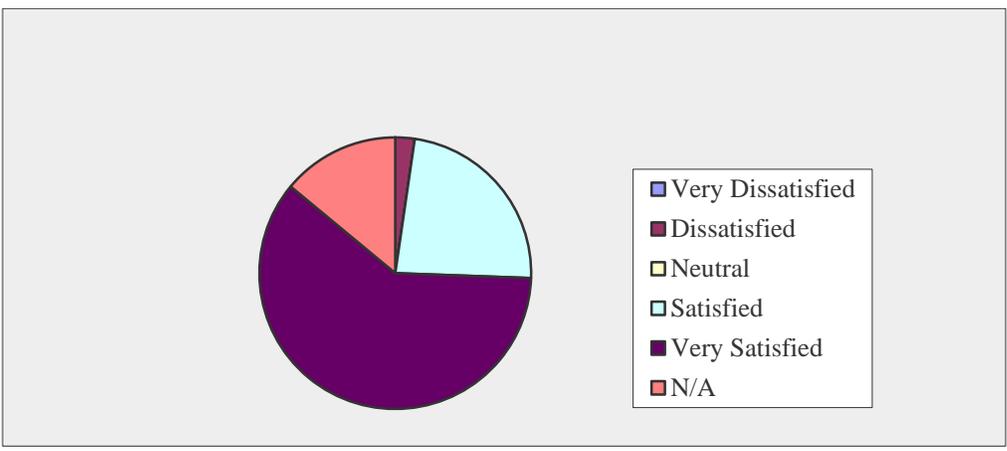


Figure 5.38 Overall Satisfaction with Face-to-Face Delivery System.

Question twenty, Figure 5.38, asked, “How satisfied were you with courses taught using face-to-face delivery systems?”

These responses indicate the highest overall degree of satisfaction with teaching delivery system. Of those responding, 83% were satisfied or very satisfied, 2% were dissatisfied, and the remaining 15% did not teach online and selected N/A.

Question twenty-one, Figure 5.39, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the face-to-face delivery systems to address formational issues?”

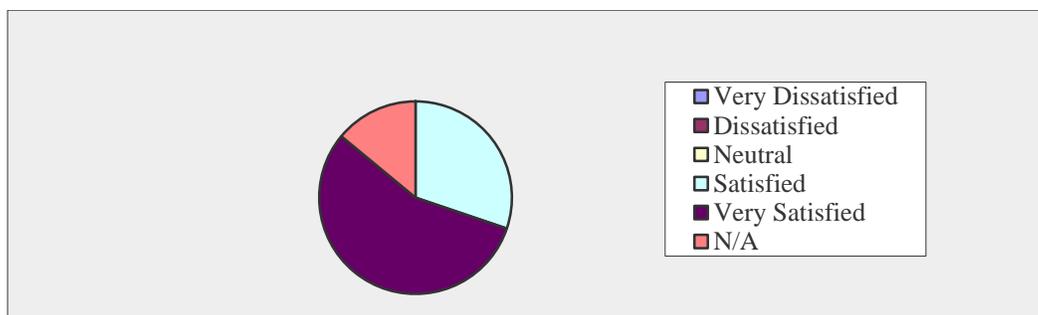


Figure 5.39 Ability of Face-to-Face Delivery to Address Formation.

Again, there was a marked satisfaction with the ability of face-to-face settings to address formational issues. No instructors indicated a neutral or dissatisfied position. Those very satisfied or satisfied constitute 86% of those surveyed.

Question twenty-two, Figure 5.40, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the face-to-face delivery systems to address practical skills acquisition?”

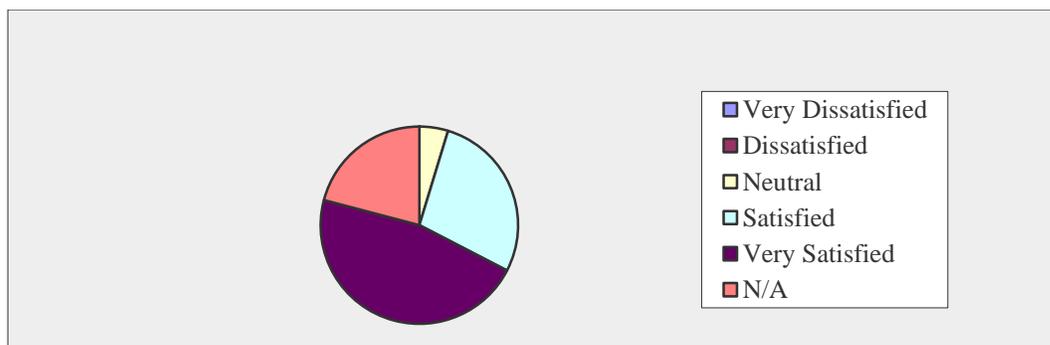


Figure 5.40 Ability of Face-to-Face Delivery to Address Practical Skills.

While there was a small neutral response, again the majority were satisfied or very satisfied with the ability of the face-to-face setting to provide practical skills acquisition.

Question twenty-three, Figure 5.41, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the face-to-face delivery system to address knowledge acquisition?”

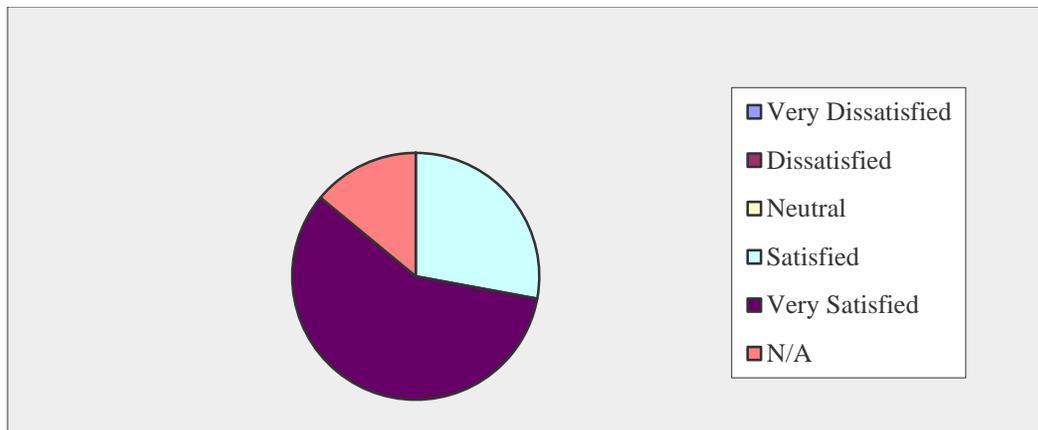


Figure 5.41 Ability of Face-to-Face Delivery to Address Knowledge Acquisition.

As in all preceding questions regarding face-to-face delivery there were marked high levels of satisfaction.

Question twenty-four, Figure 5.42, asked, “How satisfied were you with your ability to use the face-to-face delivery system to create a sense of community between student and the instructor?”

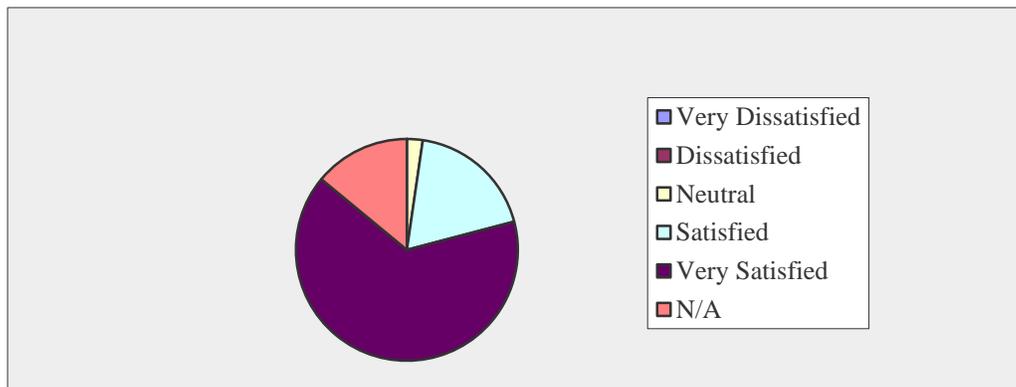


Figure 5.42 Ability of Face-to-Face Delivery to Create Community.

The pattern of satisfaction continued in this response as well. It is clear that all those surveyed had a marked preference for face-to-face settings as best able to provide all areas of a well-rounded theological education, practical skills acquisition, personal formation, knowledge acquisition and the formation of a community of learners.

Question twenty-five, Figure 5.43, asked, “How willing would you be to teach in the next academic year using a completely online delivery system?”

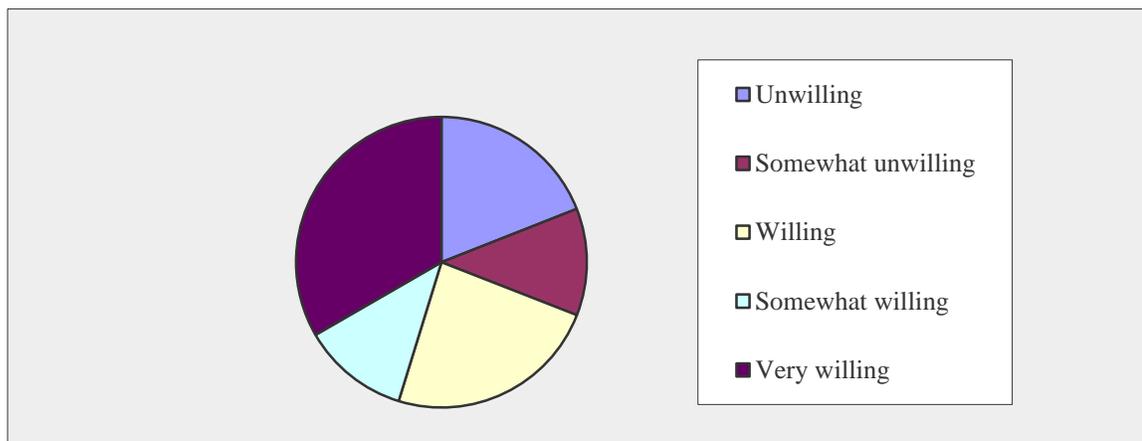


Figure 5.43 Willingness to Teach Online

Question twenty-six, Figure 5.44, asked, “How willing would you be to teach in the next academic year using a hybrid or blended delivery system?”

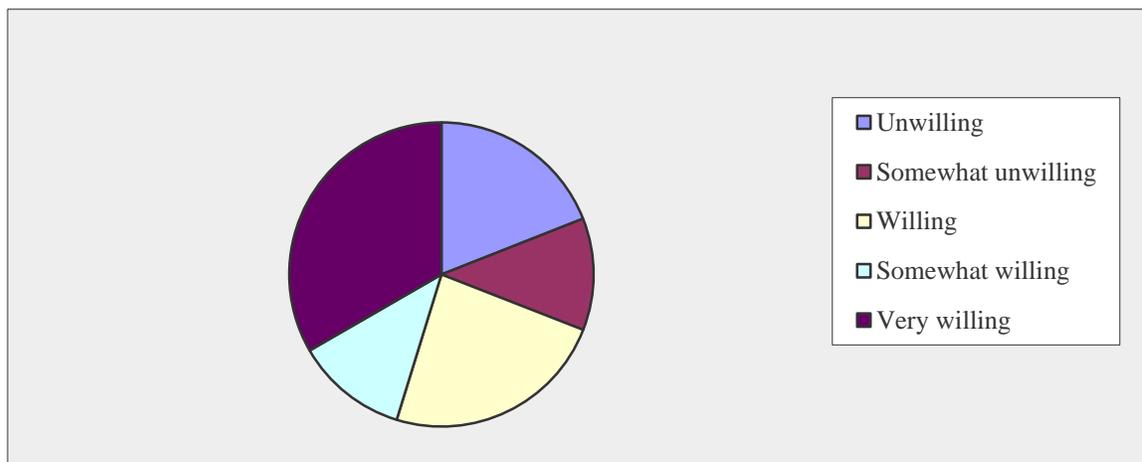


Figure 5.44 Willingness to Teach in Hybrid Setting

Question twenty-seven, Figure 5.45, asked, “How willing would you be to teach in the next academic year using a face-to-face delivery system?”

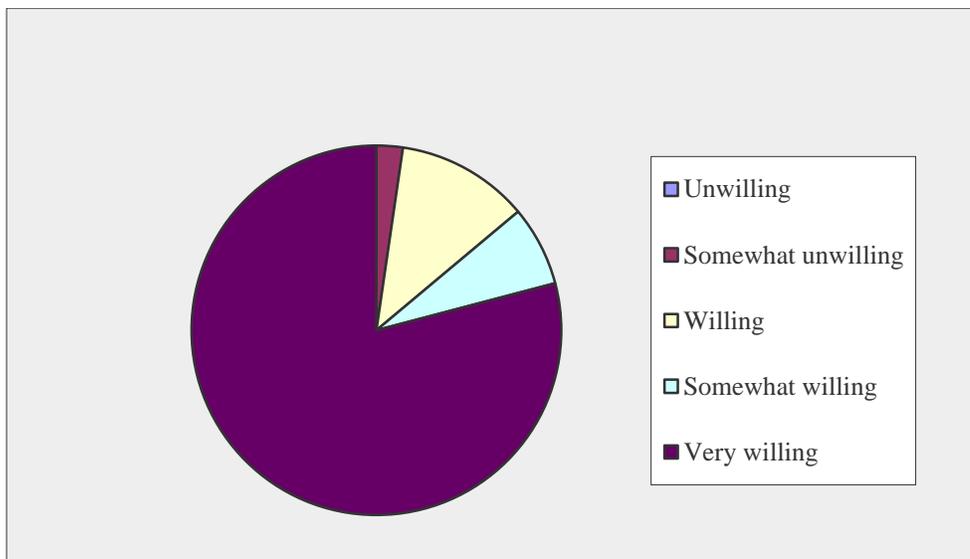


Figure 5.45 Willingness to Teach Face-to-Face

It is evident that those surveyed preferred face-to-face delivery. Hybrid systems and online systems were viewed as less desirable. Attitudes to hybrid and online systems were similar with instructors seeming as un-willing to teach in either hybrid or online settings. It is possible that this is due to a lack of exposure to these delivery systems, or an overall unwillingness to experience new teaching modalities.

Those with experience teaching in online settings believed that knowledge acquisition was most easily attainable, with practical skills acquisition slightly less easily instructed, and personal formation the most difficult of theological education areas to engage. Results for hybrid systems reflected slightly more satisfaction with the ability to engage personal formation, but similar results for practical skills and knowledge acquisition. Community was most readily formed in the face-to-face setting with hybrid and online settings presenting roughly equivalent challenges. One respondent notes:

No matter what I've tried, it doesn't seem students are helped in formational ways as easily and as well online as it is when there is face-to-face interaction. The same is true with building and creating community. Spiritual and emotional formation is not fully possible in isolation - it needs authentic community. The missing elements when learning is done online are: someone being present and really seeing you and listening to you, sharing honest vulnerability in a safe place (words that are written down can be accessed over and over), and the nonverbal communication that is so important but unavailable when learning online. I agree that some of this happens when doing sessions online in real time, but real human presence has an element that can't be duplicated in media. When teaching hybrid courses, I try to do the formation and open sharing in person, while doing the knowledge and practical skill acquisition online. This puts the different elements in the places best suited for the learning process.²⁰²

This instructor's perspective reflects the consensus of those interviewed based on the survey responses and comments provided. Online learning can be effective for knowledge and practical skills acquisition but formation and community are best suited to face-to-face settings. The preference for face-to-face instruction is clear. However, the data regarding the ability of hybrid settings to address formation and community suggests that this may also be an effective instructional method.

Interviews with Instructors—Their Perspective

The researcher conducted interviews with two online instructors whose survey responses and comments suggested that they would provide rich interview materials in order to further understand the perspectives of online instructors

The first of the two instructors interviewed is new to higher education but has previous experience teaching in other settings. The majority of this individual's teaching experience has been in the online setting or in hybrid settings. The second has more than forty years of teaching experience in a variety of settings from K-12 through higher

²⁰² Online Survey Respondent #39, Faculty survey, August 14, 2014.

education, and in a variety of countries including the United States, Australia, several African nations, and Canada. This individual began teaching in distance education programs in the early 1960's and made the transition to online teaching as the technology advanced. Currently, this professor is semi-retired but continues to teach as an adjunct for three theological education institutions.

When asked about the ability of online theological education to provide knowledge acquisition both educators who were interviewed agreed that this is a strength of online education. Students can access information presented in written, audio, video, or some combination of these formats. In asynchronous delivery systems, the student can review the information multiple times, and thereby, improve retention versus a classroom lecture. If the instructor uses a robust Learning Management System, the student is able to respond to peers via a discussion board, maintain a personal journal, blog, co-edit a wiki, view video recorded by the instructor, view external video clips, review documents, view webpages, and listen to audio or video lectures which may be augmented with a written text. This variety of instructional methods can allow multiple learning styles to be accommodated.

When asked about the ability of online theological education to provide practical skills acquisition the instructor who was teaching in a first academic year noted that practical skills were most effectively instructed when there was a hybrid component or support for skills acquisition in the local church setting. This interesting perspective correlates with the comments on the MDiv student previously in this chapter regarding his learning experience.

The instructor with a significant body of online educational experience noted that the acquisition of practical skills can be evaluated through a student's reflection on their experiences but it remains necessary to anchor those experiences in a physical setting either during or after the period of theological education.

It would seem that a hybrid or face-to-face setting would be preferable for practical skills acquisition in the opinion of these educators.

When asked about the ability of online theological education to provide formational experience both instructors were cautious in their responses. They agreed that it was possible for formation to take place, but difficult to measure that formation. Both agreed that formation is much more readily engaged and assessed in the face-to-face setting. "There is certainly a sense of community and a sense of camaraderie when you are face to face. Questions and answers are instantaneous. Discussions can very rich and deep."²⁰³

Coding the Research Data in Quest of Themes

After completing four interviews, the researcher transcribed these from recorded audio into text. While this was a labor-intensive task the resulting text could be easily reviewed, read, and re-read, and a process of coding this qualitative data more readily engaged.

The researcher first read each of the interview transcripts several times. An initial reading served to re-familiarize the researcher with the flow of the interview.

During the second reading pass, descriptive codes that best typified the content of a particular response were identified. These were noted on the transcript using a

²⁰³ Martin Johnson, interview by author, Findlay, OH, September 23, 2014.

designated color code. Descriptive codes that were negative in tone were enclosed in brackets to capture this nuance.

A third reading of the transcript noted process codes, those words or phrases that described actions, or activities, related to online learning or teaching. These were coded in a different color.

A fourth reading of the same transcript allow for the researcher to note in vivo coding, those particular phrases or words used by the interviewee which captured the particular character, personality, or nuance of the interviewee's responses. A third color was assigned to these codes.

This process was repeated for each of four interviews. Finally, the researcher reviewed the codes within all four documents, seeking points of coherence or dissonance. These emerging themes were noted in the margins of each document. A sub-set, which occurred in all four interviews, was selected for further review.

The researcher then reviewed the comments provided by the individuals who responded to both online survey tools and coded these comments using the same descriptive, process, and in vivo color-coding. The documents were also reviewed for overarching themes revealed by the coding process.

The themes that emerged from the interviews were compared to the themes that emerged from the comments gleaned from the survey tools. A high degree of coherence with the themes from the interviews was observed. This final sub-set of themes provided a framework for evaluating the qualitative research portion of this project. These themes are: convenience, deep learning, creating community, learner centered, technological challenges, preparation, and best practices.

Convenience

Many of the students and faculty who responded to the surveys and participated in formal interviews commented on the theme of convenience. In some instances, this theme was heard in the comments of the student who appreciated online theological education because the asynchronous components of the course allowed for access on the student's schedule. "... the online allows people from different locations to be in the school . . . when I considered starting my doctorate I wasn't limited and could go to any program with an online program."²⁰⁴

It was also evident in students who reflected on the ability of online education to allow them to remain in an existing church or work setting and minimally disrupt their family life in order to engage theological learning. One such student noted, "I was doing almost all my online classes while I was working either as a children and youth director or as a pastor."²⁰⁵

While less common as a positive theme in the comments of faculty several instructors reflected on the ability to instruct from anywhere in the world and to provide theological education for students in remote settings who would otherwise be unable to attend class.²⁰⁶

Convenience also appeared as a negative theme with one commentator noting that convenience was really about income for schools. The convenience of a single adjunct teaching a pre-designed and constructed course meant more income for the institution.

²⁰⁴ Danny Russell, interview by author, Skype, September 24, 2014.

²⁰⁵ Kyle Timmons, interview by author, Oak Harbor, OH, October 2, 2014.

²⁰⁶ Patricia Harrison, interview by author, Skype, November 25, 2014.

“Hybrid and on-line courses are just another way for schools to cut financial corners. The tuition for them is the same as face-to-face courses and the cost to the institution is less. Plus it is another way to put a professor out of work since one professor can cover the work of multiple professors. We are not interested in our students. It all revolves around the almighty American dollar.”²⁰⁷

Still others questioned the sense of call of students who were unwilling or unable to relocate to a seminary setting. A single instructor noted the inconvenience of adjusting to a new teaching model and the inconvenience of learning a new way of exercising old skills.

It seems that there is a tension between the convenience of online theological education and instructors who create that convenience through significant sacrifice in designing an online course, learning new methodologies, and potentially, receiving less income versus a face-to-face teaching setting.

Deep Learning

Students and faculty who expressed positive online theological learning experiences often described these as “deep.” Typically, they noted that online asynchronous settings allow the individual student to write deliberately, to think deeply about responses, and to respond to others with equal deliberation and depth. Instructors noted that responding to students in online discussion boards allows for a more deliberate response and sometimes for a deeper response than is possible in a face-to-face classroom where responses happen much more immediately and may lack depth. It may be that

²⁰⁷ Online Survey Respondent #60, Theological Graduate Survey, January 26, 2014.

some of those describing deep learning are introverted learners who find the pace of online theological education more generally suited to their personality types.

In the antithesis to this theme, students and faculty expressed concerns regarding the ability of students to engage in theological online settings through a minimum of effort and with little intentional engagement. A student can respond in a very cursory fashion, with little transparency or self-awareness, and still meet the stated guidelines in the course. The MDiv student noted, “I can honestly say that if it was a subject that I wasn't all excited about I could put the least amount of work into it and gain the least amount of knowledge but still pass.”²⁰⁸ In a face-to-face setting this would inevitably result in a request to go deeper in response, or at the very least, in the instructor noting the lack of authentic and thoughtful engagement. In the online setting a student can hide. Another of the students interviewed noted, “Not having the face-to-face time... with other peers struggling with the same theological questions was ... the biggest [challenge] we came across. There were a lot of times where having discussion in a classroom setting would have benefited myself more. Some of that was compensated through class online discussions but not as in depth as it would have been if we were verbally communicating.”²⁰⁹

Equally, an instructor in an online classroom can give very little to students and still meet minimum expectations. An instructor can use previously scripted responses, respond to an entire class with a single post, or only respond to direct questions. This

²⁰⁸ Kyle Timmons, interview by author, Oak Harbor, OH, October 2, 2014.

²⁰⁹ Danny Russell, interview by author, Skype, September 24, 2014.

kind of shallow engagement would be more evident in a face-to-face class but may be less evident and therefore more accepted in an online setting.

Creating Community

A frequent theme for both instructors and students was that of creating community. Students noted that they preferred to learn in settings in which they could directly engage the instructor and other students. The creation of community was most easily accomplished in face-to-face settings, but it could also be experienced readily in hybrid delivery systems. The DMin student noted, “We had our face-to-face week gathering to start the program and out of those relationships we were able to do the online things. I think it would be really hard to do online schooling without that first initial face-to-face interaction. It would be hard to build those relationships through computer and not know people's stories and background.”²¹⁰ A sense of community was most difficult to create in an online setting. Effective methods for creating community in the online setting included synchronous engagement and the effective use of video clips recorded by the instructor.

Instructors noted that creating community in the classroom was further augmented by engagement in the hallways and other public spaces of an educational institution. Community was typically a function of proximity. For some instructors, the inability of online education to meet this need becomes a step too far:

It may be my age and/or limited electronic abilities, but I obviously have an aversion to online, even hybrid theological education. I believe in the power of the interpersonal educational process in all the areas questioned above. My personal theological educational philosophy is that the classroom is sacred space where learning is as much about formation as it is information. It is incarnational

²¹⁰ Danny Russell, interview by author, Skype, September 24, 2014.

and mutual; the holy manifested in persons, both the teacher/learner and the student learner.²¹¹

However, several noted that online community could be created through synchronous engagement even while noting limitations, “Online does allow community development but it always seems behind the time line.”²¹²

While all agreed that, a sense of community, of being learners within a community of learners, was essential to theological education there was a diversity of opinion regarding the best methods for attaining this community.

Learner-Centered

The theme of learner-centered education emerged both overtly and obliquely. Several students commented on class settings in which they felt that the instructor focused the instruction on the needs and learning styles of the students. Learner-centered education moves from the traditional lecture model in which the educational setting is focused on the instructor to a setting in which students are actively engaged in learning. This didactic procedure may take the form of small group discussion, student-led learning activities, video clips that the student selects and shares with the class, and a variety of other modalities. These have in common the student as the one who is engaging his or her own learning process.

One instructor spent considerable time discussing the value of this learner-centered model. The instructor had gradually reduced the number of lecture-based modules in the online classes he instructed and had replaced them with activities that the

²¹¹Online Survey Respondent #3, Faculty Survey, August 7, 2014.

²¹²Online Survey Respondent #17, Faculty Survey, August 7, 2014.

student engaged and reported upon. The student designed these activities with input from the instructor, in order to meet the needs expressed by the particular student. The potential of online theological education to support learner-centered education is significant since it is easily customizable on a student-by-student basis.²¹³

Technological Challenges

A significant theme that was universally negative in tone was that of technological challenges. Stated challenges ranged from difficulty in connecting to an online Learning Management System, struggles with typing in text-based courses, videos that would not play back, audio that would not allow the individual to be heard, tests or quizzes that could not be accessed, missing, or lost passwords, and a myriad of other issues.

Synchronous settings, including chat and video, seemed to exacerbate these technology issues due to the time sensitive nature of the interactions. Regarding an online typed chat a student noted, “You might have a thought, want to contribute but you are three or four lines from it, and it has already moved to something else. So you really got to be on top of the interaction of that.”²¹⁴ Students who do not have adequate typing speeds can slow down the entire process.

In some instances, both students and instructors shared frustration with technology limitations or in the sharp learning curve involved in beginning to learn or teach in an online delivery platform. Instructors described the time and energy involved

²¹³ Martin Johnson, interview by author, Findlay, OH, September 23, 2014.

²¹⁴ Danny Russell, interview by author, Skype, September 24, 2014.

in creating an online class as significantly greater than that involved in creating a face-to-face classroom.

Preparation

Many respondents noted the need for intentional preparation to both teach and learn in the online delivery system. A faculty respondent, in a moment of great candor shared that it was possible, after many years of teaching experience, to enter the classroom with little preparation and “wing it.” It was, in this individual’s judgment, much more difficult to “wing it” in an online setting where lecture or lesson preparation generally required recording a video or audio lecture, producing a text version of a lecture, linking to multiple external resources, or producing a voice-over PowerPoint presentation. All of these lesson components require advance preparation and design. Another faculty respondent also noted the complexity of creating and teaching in the online setting:

There can be so much work involved in setting up a quality online course that it becomes difficult to improve or change it, for reasons of cost as well as of time.... This tends to mean that once a course is written, it is likely to stay pretty much the same for years, while the campus version moves more with the times... The relative difficulty of updating and improving online courses also means that many faculty will have to tutor and grade courses designed by someone else, perhaps someone they have never met.²¹⁵

A student respondent indicated that the quality of the course is directly connected to the ability of the instructor, “The quality of the online class was almost totally dependent on the professor's competence and comfort teaching online. I had one horrible

²¹⁵ Online Survey Respondent #26, Faculty Survey, August 9, 2014.

online class that almost caused me to quit seminary. I also had a couple of classes with the dean (who preferred teaching online) that were excellent.”²¹⁶

Students noted that in a face-to-face classroom it was possible to come to class unprepared and to “hide” amidst the comments of other students. It was, in their judgment, more difficult to “hide” in an online classroom since engagement generally required the same amount of response from individuals. A faculty member echoed this observation, “My (limited) experience is that in an online environment, it's harder for students to hide that they haven't done the reading or haven't read carefully, so their knowledge acquisition was, on the whole, better than in face-to-face environments. I was very pleasantly surprised with the level of engagement among students as well as between students and professor as well.”²¹⁷

One respondent, with experience teaching in both online and in face-to-face settings noted the difficulty engendered by the rapid growth of online education in general, “In my opinion, the biggest issue in this area is that the need to offer courses through various modes has outpaced the training and strategic thought about those modes.”²¹⁸

Relating the Research to the Original Problem Statement

This research project began with the premise that, the lack of a holistic approach in online theological education may result in students who attain diminished levels of

²¹⁶ Online Survey Respondent #8, Theological Graduate Survey, January 25, 2014.

²¹⁷ Online Survey Respondent #41, Faculty Survey, August 16, 2014.

²¹⁸ Online Survey Respondent #36, Faculty Survey, August 12, 2014.

ministry formation in comparison to students in traditional classroom-based models. For the purpose of guiding the research the researcher posed three specific questions:

4. What, if any, are the differences between ministry formation and the sense of community as experienced by students in online theological programs and students in classroom-based programs?
5. What are the essential ministry formation needs of theology students and can these be addressed in online theological education programs? How should this impact the design of online theological programs?
6. What pedagogic methods can be used to best address the need for ministry formation in online education programs?

The surveys and interviews, as well as the data available via the ATS Graduate Student Survey Tool, provided clarity in regards to these research questions and serve to assist in response to the original problem as stated by the researcher.

Sense of Community

Learners do not learn in a vacuum. While some individuals may be able to gain information solely through individual study of text resources the majority of learners find that their experience is enriched when they have access to a community of learners. The Association of Theological Schools holds this concept in such esteem that it forms one of the standards by which a theological education institution is evaluated for accreditation. The role of a sense of community in theological education was therefore an important consideration for this study.

Data collected in the online survey tools demonstrates that students in online theological programs are evenly divided between those who are satisfied with the ability

of the program to create a sense of community and those who are dissatisfied. However, it should be noted that satisfaction levels are significantly lower than those in a classroom-based program. Interestingly, hybrid programs have levels of satisfaction related to community formation that are nearly equal to those of face-to-face settings.

Data collected in the online survey tools demonstrates that faculty members teaching in online theological programs are slightly less satisfied with the sense of community than students in similar programs. Faculty satisfaction levels with regard to creating a sense of community are highest for face-to-face settings. Faculty members are less satisfied than students with the ability of hybrid settings to foster a sense of community.

Interviews with both faculty members and students further clarified the importance of a sense of community. From the perspective of the instructor, it is difficult to instruct without the nuances of communication that are received in face-to-face settings. In the completely online classroom, non-verbal communication is largely absent unless synchronous video conferencing is in use. These cues are critical in the ability of students to read each other and the instructor. Without these cues conversations become more cautious, more stilted, and less rich and deep. In a hybrid setting, there is some opportunity to form an understanding of individual students and to observe their interactions. These are of use in asynchronous sections of the course and become a part of the interpretative grid the instructor uses to gauge student responses.

From a student's perspective, the instructor is equally difficult to understand without these cues, provided in a face-to-face setting. Critique of the student's work can be difficult to accept because it seems to come from an unengaged source. The student

may feel isolated and may not have a support system, if one is not created in the classroom setting. Other students remain equally opaque. Misunderstandings among students are common in online classrooms since text only communications tend to be the norm. One cannot hear tone of voice in text-only engagement.

While the face-to-face classroom is measurably the preferred setting for both faculty and students to form community in a theological education institution it should be noted that the hybrid class offers some of the convenience and benefit of the online classroom but also improves over the ability of the online classroom to aid in the formation of community.

In order for online theological education to be effective, methods must be developed to form a sense of community among learners for learning to take place in a manner comparable to that of the face-to-face or hybrid classroom.

Ministry Formation

To evaluate the ability of online theological education to aid in ministry formation it was necessary to determine the key components of an effective theological education. Through the literature review, the researcher noted three specific areas of formation that were deemed necessary. They were knowledge acquisition, personal formation, and practical skills acquisition. While some materials reviewed labelled these differently there was consistency in these areas when the researcher considered the intended meaning in addition to the simple label. In order for a student to receive an effective theological education in any setting, these components must be supported and instructed. In summarizing the survey responses and the wisdom shared in the interview process, it

is clear that not all delivery systems are equal in their ability to create effective theological education that includes these areas.

Most simply, the relative effectiveness of each of the online, hybrid, and face-to-face settings as determined by the various research modalities of this study are summarized below.

| | Online | Hybrid | Face-to-Face |
|------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Very Effective | Knowledge Acquisition | Knowledge Acquisition Personal Formation | Knowledge Acquisition Personal Formation Community |
| Effective | Practical Skills | Practical Skills Community | Practical Skills |
| Acceptable | Personal Formation Community | | |
| Ineffective | | | |
| Very Ineffective | | | |

Table 5.1 Three Most Important Influences on Educational Experiences

Best Practices

A final research question focused on the question of best pedagogic methods to address ministry formation in the areas of knowledge and practical skills acquisition, personal formation, and the creation of community. Numerous faculty and students reflected the belief that online theological education could be effective but it required the use of specific practices. While there was some variation among these responses, certain

core practices were frequently referenced. These included attentiveness, mastery of technology/training/orientation, personalization, and real presence.

Summary

The data received through interview and surveys provides a rich source for reflection on the research questions of this project. Each of the surveys, the survey of theological educators, the survey of theological graduates, and the ATS graduating student survey, provide a general understanding of the overall satisfaction of these individuals with the capacity of online education to provide the essential components of theological education. These components, knowledge acquisition, practical skills acquisition, personal formation, and the creation of a community of learners, are essential to a holistic setting. It is clear that all of the survey samples are more satisfied with face-to-face theological education than with online theological education in the current level of technology and curriculum development.

The interviews allow for a more nuanced understanding of this result. While there is more satisfaction with face-to-face theological education, there is also a sense that online theological education is necessary and can be effective. In order for online theological education to be effective, there will need to be a re-imagining of the pedagogic methods and best practices. This evaluation and re-imagining will form the substance of Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Theological education seeks to equip individuals for a diversity of ministry roles and settings. In order to carry out this work of equipping future ministry leaders, seminaries must develop an educational model that provides essential knowledge, practical skills, and attends to the spiritual formation and character of the individual. This is best accomplished in a community of learners in which there is opportunity for the engagement of peers and instructors, both in and outside of the classroom. Historically, this education took place in a residential setting in which daily classes, worship, and study provided the necessary growth. The last several decades have seen a shift from this paradigm to commuter-based campuses, followed by hybrid courses, intensive weeklong courses, and most recently, online theological education.

This shift is the result of various pressures being brought to bear on theological education and ministry candidates. Seminaries are facing financial challenges as the number of students decreases, expenses increase, and the demand for attention to standards devised by accrediting bodies increases. Ministry candidates struggle with finances as well. Many are seeking the best education at a reasonable expense.

Additionally, the present culture values convenience and the right of the individual to the least disruption of their normative lifestyle while seeking advanced degrees. This desire is in part the result of changes in culture including but not limited to marriages in which both partners have careers.

Seminaries, such as the one where this researcher is employed, must balance the demand for online theological education against an experience that is comparable to that provided in a face-to-face classroom setting. Accrediting agencies are beginning to focus intentionally on the need for this coherence between differing delivery systems within the same degree program.

The possibilities of online theological education are exciting. Online theological education offers the potential for a diverse group of learners, embedded in their own settings, engaging each other using state of the art technology, to gain the necessary skills and character for ministry leadership. It also offers the potential for an education that is lacking in substance and results in individuals who are poorly prepared for ministry. How then will seminaries navigate through this challenging time?

Summary

The writer of this project began with an intent to explore the world of online theological education. This exploration included consideration of the biblical and theological concepts that supported this approach. Existing literature regarding both online education in general, theological education, and the intersection of the two were reviewed. Additionally, this dissertation evaluates the experiences of both instructors and students engaged in online theological education. Chapter Six seeks to create a point of convergence for the research questions and stated problem with the researcher's engagement with biblical and theological themes, a literature review, various research methods, and the data they generated.

The writer began this research by stating the problem as, "The lack of a holistic approach in online theological education may result in students who attain diminished

levels of ministry formation in comparison to students in traditional classroom-based models.”²¹⁹ In order to investigate this thesis, attention was given to the biblical and theological concepts underlying the use of technology in theological education. This led to the statement that theological education requires the transmission of information, followed by the assimilation of that information in a fashion that results in the transformation of the individual and in new patterns of living. This pattern of transmission, assimilation, and transformation was evident in the Old Testament instructions to the Israelites, through the teachings of Jesus, and the encouragements of the Apostle Paul. If theological education makes effective use of technology, it must maintain each of these elements.

An overview of the history of theological education revealed a consistent emphasis from the earliest formal theological education of the early church, through monastic periods, the creation of the first university based theology programs, North American frontier training schools, and a variety of other settings. This emphasis on a three-fold pattern of knowledge, skills, and personal formation helped to direct the research portion of the project and confirmed the researcher’s description of theological education as holistic.

The researcher also devoted some attention to the question of the impact of the online delivery system to theological education. There is a tendency in some of the literature to assume that all technology is in and of itself a negative force. It is this researcher’s contention that in many ways technology is simply a new language in which humankind can communicate. Much like any language, the uses can be both positive and

²¹⁹ Kathryn Helleman, DMin Project, 20.

negative. As in Genesis 1, language can be a creative force.²²⁰ Conversely, language can be used for divisive and destructive purposes as in the Genesis 11 account of the Tower of Babel.²²¹ This researcher concludes that technology is neither positive, nor negative, but does affect the education received through it. As Marshall McLuhan notes, “The ‘content’ of a medium is like a juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind.”²²² Attention must be paid to the impact of the technology on the education being received.

However, the same is true for face-to-face instruction. The content, the juicy meat, can prevent the instructor from paying attention to the method by which the meat is shared. An institution can easily slide into a model of delivery that serves up hamburgers under the guise of T-bone steaks. Any educational model must be reviewed and considered in terms of its efficacy in delivering the best product possible.

Finally, the literature overview revealed that online learning is significantly enhanced when classrooms move from a knowledge acquisition model to a model that seeks to facilitate engagement between all participants. This learning process can be understood as knowledge creation rather than simple knowledge acquisition. This knowledge creation model translates well into an online education setting.

Online learning is most effective when the learner and instructor have a sense of “real presence” in the online learning setting. Online learning is most effective when the

²²⁰ Gen. 1-2.

²²¹ Gen. 11:1-8.

²²² Eric McLuhan, *The Essential McLuhan*, ed. Frank Zingrone and Marshal McLuhan (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 158-159.

online setting allows for the expression of the individual's socio-cultural setting as an extension of their learning environment.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of current models of online education, and to gain insight into the experiences and perspective of both educators and students the researcher created two online survey tools. These sought to engage a broad range of individuals with some experience of theological education, preferably in an online setting. Additionally, the researcher reviewed survey results produced by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, and conducted interviews with two students and two educators. Numerous faculty and students reflected the belief that online theological education could be effective but it required the use of specific practices. While there was some variation among these responses, certain core characteristics were frequently referenced.

It was clear that both educators and students preferred face-to-face classroom settings, with hybrid education second in satisfaction, and online theological education running third in overall satisfaction.

It should be noted that online education was perceived as able to provide knowledge acquisition with levels of satisfaction equal to hybrid settings and only slightly less effective than face-to-face settings. However, in areas of practical skills, personal formation, and the ability to form community, online education did not fare as well in satisfaction ratings.

Those respondents, both to survey and interview, who did indicate satisfaction with the effectiveness of online theological education understood that there was a tradeoff between the convenience of online theological education and the quality of the education

received. This dilemma is a significant question for theological education institutions. Can the desire of the student, and the felt need for convenience, be allowed to determine the method by which that education is received? This researcher would argue that students are most effective learners when they believe that the learning setting is conducive to their own needs and desires.

The theological educators who were interviewed provided the perspective of preferring face-to-face settings but recognizing the efficiency and convenience of the online setting. Of particular note was the ability to extend theological education to those in remote regions or without the socio-economic resources to engage in a residential seminary setting. They recognized that there are many challenges inherent in online theological education but did not consider these challenges insurmountable. They reflected instead on the need for creativity, flexibility, and training in order to provide successful online theological education. The advances in technology seemed to be an opportunity for optimism about the future of theological education in general and online education in particular.

Students interviewed recognized the deficits of the education they had received but also believed that these deficits were more than outweighed by the ability provided to remain embedded in their own ministry settings. They indicated that personal formation and practical skills acquisition were functions of these embedded settings while the online theological education setting provided primarily knowledge acquisition and the concepts of practical skills acquisition. One of the programs described created opportunity for the formation of community, while others did not, but the students in question had an existing community of support in which learning could be embedded.

Perhaps because of their embedded settings both of the students interviewed, and those in hybrid settings in the online survey sample, saw merit in a hybrid setting which would allow the benefits of the online experience and strengths of a community of learners, and an opportunity to practice skills within an embedded setting.

Educators were also more optimistic regarding the ability of a hybrid or blended delivery system to provide effective education in the areas of knowledge acquisition, personal formation, practical skills, and the creation of community. Of those educators with experience in hybrid settings, 58% were satisfied or very satisfied with this delivery system.

Hybrid settings, with online and face-to-face opportunities, seemed to be the preference of both educators and students. All indicated that the hybrid setting could allow for knowledge acquisition in the online classroom, introduction to concepts related to practical skills, and some personal formation and creation of community. However, the addition of face-to-face engagement, even in modest periods, enhanced both personal formation and creation of community and it improved the overall educational experience. It is here that potential for new models of theological education emerge.

Findings

The research questions that guided this project focused on the ability of online theological education to facilitate knowledge acquisition, practical skills acquisition, personal formation, and the creation of community.

Review of the research generated suggests that knowledge acquisition is the easiest of these tasks in an online setting. While certain essential best practices result in the most effective learning, students in general report their highest levels of satisfaction

with the ability of the online setting to provide knowledge acquisition. Of those with online experience in theological education, 75% expressed satisfaction with the ability of this medium to provide for knowledge acquisition. The simple transfer of a body of information from the instructor to the student can be accomplished through audio, video, or written lecture materials, or even through the assignment of textbook or supplemental reading materials. While the quality of the knowledge acquisition may be quite low, resulting in poor retention, or an inability to apply the information, the knowledge can be acquired at the most basic level. The more effective the pedagogic methods employed, the greater the potential for that knowledge to be retained and applicable to real life situations. One can argue that in many ways this does not differ substantially from the face-to-face classroom.

Practical skills acquisition in the online classroom can also be attained with moderate levels of success and student satisfaction. The research revealed that 33% of instructors were satisfied with the ability of online courses to provide practical skills acquisition. A significant 45% reported no experience with practical skills in online settings, suggesting that many programs avoid this medium for instruction in this area of theological education. It is important to clarify that the actual application of practical skills is difficult to execute online. However, the instruction in method and approach is certainly attainable. One can teach how to write a sermon; patterns of preparation, methods for exegesis of passages, appropriate delivery approach, suitable supplemental materials, the church year cycles, and various other necessary concepts. However, one cannot create opportunity for the student to preach before a group of fellow students and receive feedback in a purely online asynchronous class. The question of how to replicate

this situation is better reframed as the method for creating an analogous experience. The student may preach before a congregation and receive feedback to be shared with the instructor and other students. Again, the method and basic skills can be taught online. The application of those skills will need a 'real world' setting in which to be applied and honed.

Personal formation remains the greatest challenge and the areas of lowest satisfaction among those surveyed. Instructors reported 42% satisfaction with online personal formation. When students only engage in asynchronous online delivery systems there is a sense that they are not participating at anything more than a very shallow level. They can construct responses that fall within the expected norm of response. They can hide any concerns, fears, or deficits by careful self-editing. The lack of real engagement makes this possible. Even if the instructor is very wise, and very skilled at reading and interpreting typed communication, there is potential for a student to show little to no growth in formation. When there is some synchronous engagement the situation is somewhat improved. The instructor has the ability to probe, to encourage, and to question in a manner similar to that of a face-to-face setting but again; there are limitations to this engagement that result in limitations to the potential for growth.

The creation of a sense of community is also a significant challenge for the online delivery system. If there is no synchronous engagement students have little opportunity to get to know each other as individuals. Group projects may be beneficial in this regard, however, students are often unwilling to participate in group assignments or may choose to provide less than an equitable share of the workload.

Minus the engagement of a classroom and without the ability for hallway conversations, it is possible for a student to move through an online program without knowing or being known in any substantive way. When there is some synchronous engagement the situation is somewhat improved but not dramatically.

The instructor is also left teaching in a void rather than in a classroom in which there is a sense of shared learning. Community is not easily formed in the vacuum of online education. One might argue that the student can create community through social media engagement with some peers, but this does not replace the community formed through the engagement of all students in a classroom. This may result instead in the formation of multiple communities but not a single shared community.

It is evident from the reading, theological reflection, interviews, and surveys conducted by this researcher that a fully online delivery system by definition lacks a holistic approach. It cannot fully provide for necessary development in all areas, to include knowledge acquisition, practical skills, and personal formation. A fully online delivery system is by its very nature limited in a critical dimension of theological education. It does not create a community of learners who share a common task of learning and growing together.

If a fully online theological education system cannot provide holistic theological education, should we then simply dismiss online theological education as an unhelpful modality? As will be demonstrated below, the potential exists for a fully online system to provide holistic theological education but this would require intentional focus on certain key areas and characteristics. These are discussed in the conclusion and recommendations sections of this project.

Conclusions

Characteristics of Exceptional Online Theological Education

A holistic approach to online theological education can result in students who attain levels of ministry formation comparable to students in traditional classroom-based models. In order for online theological education to reflect best results, it must have the following characteristics:

1. Allows opportunity for knowledge acquisition using pedagogic methods that support student-centered learning, individualization, and are developed for the online setting rather than simply transferred from the face-to-face setting.
2. Creates opportunity for, and evaluation of, practical skills acquisition through a mentoring, or embedding system.
3. Seeks to foster habits and character through formational experiences either in online engagement, in intensive settings, or through a mentoring system.
4. Provides opportunity for the formation of community between the student, peers, and the instructor either through synchronous online delivery, or in intensive format.

It should be noted that these characteristics are not entirely new in the historic sweep of theological education. Monastic settings, early cathedral schools, and many of the primitive North American settings offered similar characteristics.

In monastic settings a strong emphasis on personal formation, the fostering of habits and character, and the effective use of a mentoring system resulted in individuals who were formed in such a way as to be effective servants of the church. These settings also offered substantial time for solitary learning and study, often under the enforcement of a vow of silence, but also ample time for community among both the student and the instructors. Novices in these settings were routinely evaluated and set tasks intended to meet their particular needs. This practice might be termed an early form of student-

centered learning. Practical skills were learned through apprenticeship and in order to meet the practical needs of the community. It is in this model that the closest parallel exists to the characteristics of a holistic online theological education. There is a certain irony in noting that an embrace of the wisdom of the past would require effective use of the technology of the present and future.

Student-Centered Learning and Individualization

One of the strengths of online theological education is the ability of the instructor to design learning that allows students to individualize their learning experience. Multiple modules are made available to the student with some content that is mandatory but also providing other supplemental material. The student who desires more learning in a particular aspect of the course subject matter can access this supplemental material. Each student selects how much and which of the supplemental materials are engaged.

This can be further refined if students are allowed to identify their own learning goals within the broader course defined learning outcomes. This may take the form of allowing the student to self-select the final project, paper topic, project format, or material engaged. The student chooses the product that allows them to engage the area of study in which they are interested or in which they feel deficient.

The flexibility of online education allows for this individualization and student-centered learning without requiring the instructor to attempt this in the midst of the give and take of the face-to-face classroom. The potential of this student-centered learning is for students to learn more deeply in areas that they have interest or to develop in places that they need development.

It should be noted that a student-centered learning environment using an online delivery system can also be used to augment face-to-face instruction in the classroom setting. This would allow students to explore concepts beyond those addressed in the classroom setting.

Some educators raise concerns regarding the workload involved in creating more student-centered learning. It is true that there is a greater preparation burden initially in curating a collection of materials for use in each course but over time, the online educator can create a rotating collection of materials for use. Other educators are concerned that students in online settings may opt for the bare minimum to complete necessary course work. It should be noted that this is also possible in a face-to-face classroom. The online setting allows for tracking of students' activity if that is desired. Students in online classes can be held accountable for work in much the same fashion as those in face-to-face settings.

Mentoring and Embedding

Another essential for successful online theological education is the development of mentoring or a system of embedding the fully online student in an existing ministry setting. This mentoring process is similar to an internship system, except that the student has not completed their knowledge acquisition, but is rather in the midst of their education while they are experiencing the challenges and blessings of ministry.

The student in an embedded setting can receive immediate opportunity to practice skills that have been discussed in class, and perhaps practiced in a structured setting. The immediate experience and the immediate feedback allow the student to adapt and reform

knowledge into experience based learning. The embedded setting may be a paid ministry position, or it may be one in which the student is a supervised volunteer.

The presence of a mentor can further enhance this experience. It should be noted that the mentor does not serve as the supervisor for the embedded setting. Rather the mentor is a companion on the learning journey. This wise practitioner serves as sounding board, resource, listening post, and encourager providing the student with a direct ability to process the day-to-day world of ministry.

While creating a system of mentors would place a significant burden on both the seminary and the church, such a system would assist with formational growth that is otherwise difficult to engender in an online delivery system.

Formational Engagement

The area of formational growth and engagement is perhaps the most difficult to ensure in an online delivery system. Those educators who report successful outcomes in this area describe various methods including mentors, internships, synchronous engagement with peers and instructors, or the formation of regional cohort groups. Fundamentally, each of these approaches recognize that to some degree formational growth requires not only the work of the individual student in identifying strengths and challenges, engaging spiritual disciplines, and striving to be transformed in the image and likeness of Christ, but also the work of a community in which the individual is held accountable for growth and change. One such scenario is described in the recommendations section of this project.

While it is true that this is a challenging task, it is also essential to the development of individuals who will engage in various forms and settings of ministry.

The use of a more student-centered approach, as described above, will assist in this regard since it places the responsibility for determining the necessary growth on the shoulders of the student learner as well as the educator. Embedding in a ministry setting, and working with a mentor, can also substantially improve the experience of the student, and their potential for formational growth and development.

Creation of Community

Perhaps the most essential element of an effective online theological education is the creation of community. Community, in which the learner learns within the context of a cohort or peer group, is an essential for any learning setting. Dialogue, engagement with ideas not one's own, and listening and responding to the words of others—these are all essential skills for the ministry leader in training. Much of the work of the ministry leader will require careful engagement with a community who are served by the ministry in question. The ability to engage and to communicate with a community is non-negotiable.

Yet, the online learning setting can easily become a very solitary setting in which the learner thinks privately and individually, responds without engagement, and presents positions and ideas but does not have these challenged in any direct and immediate manner. The asynchronous nature of many online theological programs supports this reality. Synchronous engagement requires a time commitment that may negate the flexibility and convenience that are chief attractions of the online delivery system.

In order to create community the online theological educator must first create a sense of himself or herself as a 'real presence' in the online classroom. When engaged in virtual settings most modern individuals are aware that one can create a counterfeit

presence. A fabric of lies and half-truths or even a subtle improvement of self-presentation can easily create a false sense of the self. The online theological educator must present an authentic version of himself or herself while still maintaining appropriate boundaries. The techniques for this are various but include the use of video conferencing in which the student is able to both hear and see the educator in real time, the use of pre-recorded video in which the instructor can be heard and viewed, and contact with students through e-mail, telephone call, virtual office hours, and face-to-face informal engagement when feasible.

It is also helpful for both students and the instructor to create an online profile within the Learning Management System, much like a social media profile, which allows other students in the class to become familiar with the student's setting and culture. This could be expanded to include video introductions recorded by each student to deepen the sense of knowing each other as "real" in the virtual setting.

The online educator must work to facilitate creation of community among the students in the online classroom. This requires designing the class so that students must directly engage each other despite the difficulties of asynchronous delivery. This can be accomplished in part through careful assignments that make use of discussion boards, requiring posts that are substantive, and responses that directly engage peers.

Other effective methods include students recording and posting video responses to a particular question or topic. These might take the form of a mini-lecture the student makes as presentations to their peers. In response, others in the class might post typed

comments, or provide video links to supplemental materials related to the topic. Wikis²²³ can be used to allow students to create a shared database of terminology, produce mini-presentations on a topic, or even a curated collection of websites and resources for future reference. Students may also use audio recordings to post content to a Learning Management System, or may engage each other in synchronous settings either as a whole class or in small groups. These synchronous settings might include video conferencing, typed chat, or even telephone conference calling.

The more deeply developed the students' and instructor's sense of being present and engaged in a real community of learners, the deeper the potential for learning and growing as individual students and as a group.

Best Practices to Support Exceptional Online Theological Education

In addition to the characteristics noted above there are several best practices that seminaries should adopt in order to support the development of exceptional online theological education programs. These recommendations will assist seminaries in developing robust online theological education programs and will improve both student and instructor satisfaction:

1. Course outcomes that are clear and attainable, and include opportunity for practical skills acquisition, knowledge acquisition, and personal formation.
2. Carefully curated course material with attention to student learning styles.
3. Well-trained instructors who are technologically competent.

²²³ A wiki is a website or electronic collection that allows collaborative editing of its content and structure by its users.

Course Outcomes

In order for online theological programs to grow in acceptance and significance in the higher education community, it will be necessary to demonstrate that program outcomes can be effectively met through this delivery system. Moreover, the effectiveness of an online theological education program must be comparable to the effectiveness of a similar program taught in a face-to-face setting.

This requires careful evaluation of online programs, with attention paid to assessment measures that are realistic, understandable, measurable, believable, and attainable. This does not differ in any significant manner from assessment of face-to-face programs. However, methods of measurement must be adapted to the online setting. The standard participation grade given for classroom attendance and engagement must be modified to include participation in discussion boards, synchronous video conferencing, responsiveness to e-mail exchanges, and other methods of engagement. The quiz can still be used to assess learning but the instructor must assign and grade the quiz in a virtual setting. Each assessment point will require careful thought and adjustment to be an effective assessment of online education.

The program outcomes for any theological education program intended to prepare ministry leaders, regardless of the intended setting, must include knowledge acquisition, practical skills training, and personal formation. The online program cannot omit any of these components and expect to produce competent ministry leaders.

Course Materials

It is tempting for theological educators to simply move their face-to-face class content to the online education setting. This might consist of recording class lecture audio

and uploading it to the Learning Management System. Others may provide typed lecture notes or transcripts of lectures. While these are essential components, they do not effectively communicate in the online setting. The effective face-to-face lecture is not necessarily an effective online education tool.

Students learn differently in a classroom setting where they can see and interact with the instructor. Even if the class consists only of lecture the student is gaining further information from the instructors non-verbal communication, the responses of other students, both verbal and non-verbal, and from the opportunity to process all of these information streams at the same time. Use of a recorded audio lecture for online education engages only the student's capacity to listen. There are no visual cues, no peers whose reactions contribute to the experience, no external visual resources to help create focus; in short it is an experience that is only effective for the most auditory of learners.

If the only material provided is a written lecture, those students who effectively comprehend written material will excel while auditory and visual learners will not. Conversely, if only videos are used the visual and auditory learners may be satisfied but other learning styles will suffer.

The wise instructor will provide a variety of learning opportunities that engage the student as fully as possible and increase the potential for learning.

An effective instructor in the face-to-face classroom does not necessarily become an effective online instructor. The online instructor must consider new methods and the most effective methodology for each element of the class they intend to instruct. An online instructor must re-think the material that is effective in the face-to-face classroom and determine the best method for transferring that effectiveness to the online classroom.

Training Instructors

Many of the instructors interviewed and surveyed for the purpose of this project indicated their frustration with the lack of training and support received when they are expected to begin teaching in online settings. They describe institutions in which the expectation was that the faculty member would 'figure it out.' Rarely did faculty receive compensation for the extra time involved in first time online class design. Few had formal training, and of those who did, most sought this training on their own after unsuccessful online experiences. Many of those teaching in online settings were adjuncts who were poorly compensated and minimally connected to their institutions.

Students also told tales of instructors who could not perform the most basic of online tasks, did not respond to e-mail in a timely fashion, produced audio or video that was of poor quality that impeded learning, and in some instances failed to 'show up' for class, sometimes for several weeks.

This highlights the need for faculty to receive adequate training in online education so that both the technology and the best practices of online education do not become areas of failure for the program. It also highlights the need for online theological educators to be motivated to do the work of online education. Neither the student nor the instructors are well served by an educator who has reluctantly given up a face-to-face classroom for an online world that they do not value or in which they feel inept.

Many universities now offer online education training as well as support for their instructors in the form of basic training, workshops, and tech support that is available 24/7 to match the 24/7 cycle of teaching in which many online educators are engaged.

Smaller seminaries may have limited resources, which will necessitate seeking to provide training through other higher education institutions. They may also have limited resources to pay for quality tech support. However, without basic levels of training and support online theological education will struggle. Additionally, seminaries must value online education in order for the instructors to value this course delivery system. Online education cannot be treated, viewed, or resourced as a second-class form of theological education. Online educators should rarely be adjuncts. They should be members of the full-time faculty, with tenure where applicable, and provided with necessary resources of time and training.

Recommendations

So What About David and Anna?

Remember David?²²⁴ This amalgamation of several students known to the researcher served to introduce the issues of a completely online theological education. David struggled to acquire practical skills, lacked clear growth in personal formation, and felt isolated during his studies. He questioned whether the knowledge he was acquiring would have practical application and whether the convenience of his online course work was an appropriate tradeoff for the other difficulties he faced. He felt continually pulled between the demands of his education and his ministry setting. His spiritual life suffered as a result of his educational commitment.

Imagine for a moment that David is enrolled in a hybrid delivery system instead of the completely online delivery system. Each week, David spends time in a synchronous video conferencing classroom. He has the opportunity to select from several

²²⁴ Kathryn Helleman, DMin Project, 1.

time slots and finds that the early morning slot best fits his busy schedule and allows him to juggle both his ministry obligations and his education. During this weekly session, David and his cohort members discuss the assigned reading for the week, review the writing assignment due at the end of the course, chat informally about their lives and ministry settings, and also receive some encouragement and information from their instructor. David also participates in a weekly asynchronous discussion board, and views video lectures provided by the professor of record for the current course.

David also attends a weeklong intensive class twice a year. During these weeks, several classes are taught, opportunities exist for fellowship with cohort members, and worship time is shared.

David has a supervisor who is a pastor in a local church setting. This experienced ministry practitioner provides David with opportunities to practice skills, implement ideas from his coursework, and in general gain practical skills for future ministry. He also has a mentor with whom he meets periodically for coffee, fellowship, prayer, and support. Both the supervisor and the mentor complete an evaluation of David at the end of each course session. This information is provided to his program advisor. These serve to inform semester end conversations with this advisor who seeks to help David identify areas of strength and of needed growth.

David is still able to keep his ministry job and to study full-time. However, he no longer feels isolated. He has a cohort of peers, direct contact by video with his instructors, and opportunity while on campus to meet with instructors face-to-face. He is gaining knowledge, but he also has opportunity to both learn and practice ministry skills under the supervision of a pastor who is an experienced practitioner. His personal

formation needs are met both through the mentoring relationship, and in his engagement with peers and the instructors online. David has attained the convenience of online education and is receiving an exceptional theological education.

Remember Anna?²²⁵ This amalgamation of several educators served to introduce the issues faced by online education instructors. Anna was stressed by the transition to online theological education and unsure of her ability to teach in this delivery system. She felt disconnected from her students, and did not believe she was providing effective education.

Imagine for a moment that Anna received training both in the technology necessary to teach online but also in the most effective methods to teach online. Anna was provided with a one-on-one training session that taught her the basic of the Learning Management System in use at the seminary. She was also able to attend working sessions where tech support was available to help her attain new skills. She also has access to multiple video tutorials that give her direction when tech support professionals are unavailable. Anna also has several colleagues who teach online at the seminary. They meet once a semester to share best practices. She has been provided with several excellent resources regarding the most effective online pedagogic methods and has attended several webinars that have dramatically improved her skills.

Each week, Anna records a brief video lecture. In this lecture, she addresses the more difficult aspects of the weekly reading, defines complex terms, and clarifies areas where the text does not provide sufficient information. She uploads this into her online class. Anna also provides a PowerPoint presentation with voice over. She recorded all of

²²⁵ Kathryn Helleman, DMin Project, 6.

the basic lessons for this class at the beginning of the academic year and stored them in an online content collection for ease of access. She knows that these presentations, which form the center of her course, meet all of the learning outcomes for the course. Her other video lectures serve to augment these core teachings.

Additionally, Anna uploads several supplemental documents and links to online video clips related to the topic. She indicates to her students that these are supplemental and available to augment their reading if they are interested in more depth. She has noted that roughly half of the students in her online class take advantage of this material each week. Some of these materials are the result of questions or concerns raised by students in her online class. She believes it is important for her students to be active participants in their own learning.

Anna has instructed her students to write a reading reflection this week and she collects it via the Learning Management System. She has developed an online rubric, which she uses to grade the reflections. This results in a grade posted to the online grade book that her students can see immediately. Once a week, Anna is available to her students in online virtual office hours. She has video conferencing software that allows her to meet with a single student or several students. Often these virtual gatherings are focused on a specific question but they also allow her students opportunity to receive individual attention from Anna.

Anna is looking forward to an intensive week in the summer in which she will be teaching a face-to-face class. Many of the students in her online classroom will be present. She is excited about the opportunity to engage them directly.

These snapshots provide a glimpse of the best possible world in online theological education. They describe programs that are largely online but with intensive components, local mentors, and cohort engagement. In these imaginary programs the instructors are well trained, comfortable with the technology, thoughtful about the best practices in online education, able to form connection with each student, and supported themselves by a community of online theological education peers. This researcher believes that these imaginary scenarios are well within the ability of most seminaries with some careful thought and planning.

Holistic Online Theological Education Design

Finally, the evidence suggests that holistic online theological education is best accomplished using a hybrid format. This recommendation should be further nuanced by the understanding that a hybrid program is best described as one in which a portion of the teaching happens in a face-to-face setting and the remainder in an online setting. The relative ratio of face-to-face to online can vary significantly. A format of course work offered 25% face-to-face and 75% online format can be very effective in meeting the needs of holistic online theological education. For the purposes of description, this scenario will engage a 72 credit hour M.Div. Program. See Table 6.1.

Each academic year (AY) a student attends six online classes of 12 weeks duration and attends two one-week long intensives. The student completes two courses simultaneously in each trimester and may complete an intensive class. Each class completed grants 3 credit hours of earned credit. Each AY, two weeklong intensives take place separated by a 6-month period. This creates opportunity for students to meet peers and instructors.

In addition to the coursework, each student is required to have a ministry setting in which they are embedded for the final year of course work. Six credit hours in the final year will be earned through working in this setting and in meeting practical skills requirements.

The student is also required to identify a mentor, a wise ministry practitioner, or lay leader, who will serve as a companion throughout the student's seminary journey. This individual will receive a stipend and will provide periodic reporting on the student's progress and development.

| | Intensives | Fall-Online | Winter-Online | Summer-Online |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Year One | 6 cr. hrs. | 6 cr. hrs. | 6 cr. hrs. | 6 cr. hrs. |
| Year Two | 6 cr. hrs. | 6 cr. hrs. | 6 cr. hrs. | 6 cr. hrs. |
| Year Three | 6 cr. hrs. | 6 cr. hrs. | 6 cr. hrs. | 6 cr. hrs. |

Table 6.1. 72-Credit-Hour Hybrid M.Div. Program

Weeklong intensive sessions include eight hours daily of course work, organized lunch and dinner fellowship meals, corporate worship, and opportunity to schedule time with a faculty advisor. Students on campus for the one week intensive will meet with their program director or other designated support person.

Courses selected for these weeklong intensive sessions will include those courses best instructed in a face-to-face setting or where maximum growth will best occur with face-to-face engagement. These would include course such as homiletics, worship, spiritual formation, discipleship, and others with similar content.

All students would begin with an orientation class that would take place in the first one-week intensive of their academic program. This course would include basic

training in the Learning Management System in use at the seminary, orientation to the online resources of the library collection, evaluation of writing and reading skills and comprehension, basic personality assessments, and other baseline measurement testing. This foundational approach would assist in evaluating the needs of students as they move through their area of study.

Instructors in a program of this nature would require training to teach in a hybrid program and in the use of the Learning Management system. They would require extensive resources in terms of technology and support resources. However, the seminary that invests in training their instructors to be effective online educators would see a compensating increase in student enrollment as a result of programs that are effective.

To Teach, To Delight, To Persuade

From the earliest centuries of the church to the present day, there has been recognition that individuals who will lead the church must possess certain skills, knowledge, and qualities of person in order to serve the mission of God in the world. At the advent of the church, this training had a local and personal form. As the church grew and the need for leaders grew more formal methods were developed, leading to the great cathedral schools, and finally to universities. The seminary, a standalone higher education program, was a natural progression. Each model for theological education developed in a particular time and culture to meet the needs of that place and time. Monastic schools developed to meet the needs for an educated and practically trained clergy in a largely illiterate society. Primitive North American schools met the need for training lay leaders in order to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding population settling new territories. Seminaries emerged from the academy as focused and deliberate attempts to provide

academically rigorous and spiritually rich programs. Online theological education is simply the most recent development in this historic progression.

Each model for theological education has excellent examples and less effective examples. The same is true for online theological education. Some programs provide less than holistic education and produce graduates who lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and character for ministry. Other programs produce graduates with exceptional knowledge, well-practiced skills, and qualities of character that will serve the church well in its future.

The seminary that chooses to invest in online theological education must determine that this education will produce exceptional ministry leaders and then must invest the necessary energies and resources in producing that education. A wise seminary will consider how best to provide an education that is holistic and produces a graduate who is equipped and ready to lead the church of the twenty-first century. It is this researcher's prayer that this project serves to guide seminaries that have begun this journey of developing new models for theological education, and those students who seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the theological education program in which they choose to engage.

Augustine, writing in *City of God*, references the writings of Cicero, noting, "Accordingly a great orator has truly said that 'an eloquent man must speak so as to teach, to delight, and to persuade.' Then he adds: 'To teach is a necessity, to delight is a beauty, to persuade is a triumph.'"²²⁶ Teaching ministry leaders for the sake of God's work who are holistically equipped to teach, to delight, and to persuade is the intent of all

²²⁶ Cicero quoted in, Augustine, *City of God and Christian Doctrine*, chapter 12. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.v.IV_1.12.html#fna_v.IV_1.12-p3.1 [accessed January 9, 2015].

theological education and must be the intent of online theological education. If online theological education is the future of seminary education then institutions must engage it as both mission and ministry, seeking to provide leaders who are able to teach, to delight, and to persuade.

APPENDIX A

A Manual for Theological Education Settings
Considering the Implementation and Improvement
of Online and Hybrid Delivery Systems

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January 27, 2015

Forward

This manual is the result of research completed in the Winebrenner Theological Seminary (WTS) Doctor of Ministry Program. In addition to my role as a DMin student at the seminary, I also serve as the Assistant Academic Dean with responsibilities for assessment and for curriculum design and review.

WTS, like many other small evangelical seminaries, has been slow to embrace online theological education. This reluctance has been in part practical and in part theological. It is simplest to refer to these concerns as the questions of “How Will We Do This Well?” and “Should We Do This At All?”

This manual is an effort to respond to both of these concerns and to give practical direction to WTS and other institutions desiring to increase their online offerings.

SHOULD WE DO THIS AT ALL?

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*²²⁷

Survey the faculty of any institute of higher education regarding their attitudes to online education and you will discover a high degree of skepticism about the effectiveness of online education and a distinct reluctance to engage in teaching online. Survey the administrators of the same institution and you will find a growing sense of excitement about the potential of online education. These are the findings of a 2012 study by The Babson Survey Research Group and Inside Higher Ed.²²⁸ How then can an institute of higher education, and for the purposes of this manual, an institute engaged in theological education, evaluate the potential of online theological education, and make an educated decision to engage or not engage this technology?

What is Theological Education?

Essential to the conversation regarding online theological education is the understanding of the nature of theological education in general. The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada suggest, “A theological school is a community of faith and learning that cultivates habits of theological reflection, nurtures

²²⁷ Romans 12:2 [NIV].

²²⁸ I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman with Doug Lederman and Scott Jachik, *Conflicted: Faculty and Online Education*, 2012. (Washington, D.C.: Inside Higher Ed, 2012), 2.

wise and skilled ministerial practice, and contributes to the formation of spiritual awareness and moral sensitivity.”²²⁹

Theological education has four essential components. These are reflected in any seminary setting engaged in theological education. It is first, a community in which learning takes place. It is also a setting in which those preparing for ministry leadership gain necessary knowledge for that future role. In addition to the acquisition of knowledge, those in a seminary setting gain practical skills that will be used in ministry settings. Finally, the character of the seminary student is formed so that the necessary qualities and habits of personal and spiritual wholeness exist to support the ministry role. Each of these components, knowledge acquisition, practical skills, and personal formation, are best developed and engaged in a community of learning.

The formation of community, or a sense of belonging, creates an environment in which students and faculty engage together in the process of forming individuals for ministry leadership in diverse settings. This shared learning provides rich opportunity for the student, peers, and faculty to challenge and encourage each other. A community of learners create a setting in which the pursuit of knowledge, skills, and personal formation, are valued and nurtured. Mutual accountability, encouragement, dialogue, exposure to new ideas and positions, engagement with diversity, and opportunity to know and be known become essential components of the seminary journey.

Knowledge acquisition is perhaps the most readily identifiable element of seminary education. Students engage the scriptures, study the writings of theologians past

²²⁹ The Association of Theological Schools, “ATS General Institutional Standards Section 3.0,” <http://www.ats.edu/Accrediting/Documents/10GeneralInstitutionalStandards.pdf> [accessed February 21, 2011].

and present, review the traditions and practices of their own denomination, consider the history of Christianity and its impact on the world, are exposed to a multiplicity of spiritual practices and concepts, and synthesize this diverse body of information through their own research and writing. The knowledge acquisition of a seminary student is not a quest for knowledge for the sake of knowledge but rather the acquisition of knowledge that will be applied in a variety of ministry settings ranging from the parish to the academy. It consists not only of the acquisition of knowledge but also the necessary mental and spiritual skill to know what of this diverse body of learning can and should be applied in various ministry events and occasions. Moreover, it is not simply knowledge about the nature of God and the church but rather “learning that results in knowing God.”²³⁰

Practical skills acquisition is also essential for the seminary student. The expectation of both the parish and the academy, typical first settings for seminary graduates, is a practitioner who will have the necessary skills to preach, to teach, to lead, to counsel, to facilitate groups, and to lead in worship. This diversity of skills must first be described and studied before the student engages in actual practice of these skills.

The necessity for understanding the skill and then practicing the skill adds to the complexity of seminary education. For example, we learn to preach by studying the work of sermon preparation, considering various methods of sermon delivery, the elements of an effective sermon, viewing and reviewing the preaching of others, and finally, by preaching and receiving critique of that preaching. Many seminaries require internships or field education during which these practical skills can be developed under supervision

²³⁰ Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 35.

and with significant feedback before the graduate must utilize them in the parish or academy.

Perhaps the most challenging component of a seminary education is personal formation. In addition to the knowledge and skills acquired, the successful seminary graduate must also develop qualities of character and habits that will equip them for the rigors and challenges of parish and academic settings. These spiritual and professional practices are cultivated both in the classroom setting, one-on-one engagement, worship settings, small groups, informal settings, and through field experiences.

Holistic Online Theological Education

In order for online theological education to be successful, it will be necessary to develop online programs that meet all of these essential tasks of a theological education. Knowledge acquisition, practical skills acquisition, personal formation, and a community of learners in which these skills are developed will be essential to any online setting. There are certain values and specific content that cannot be sacrificed to any delivery system. This is what Mary Hess refers to as, “all that we cannot leave behind.”²³¹

What Would We Gain Through Online Education?

An essential question for any theological education setting or institution considering the addition of online components or programs is the question of benefit. What is the benefit of online education? What will the institution and the individual student gain from moving learning to an online platform? Will the benefits outweigh the

²³¹ Mary Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind* (London: Sheed and Ward, 2005), 80.

challenges presented by online theological education? Can we teach as effectively online as in the classroom?

When students are surveyed regarding the desirability of online theological education the most common response is a desire for convenience. They cite the need to work while attending seminary, not surprising given the rising costs of higher education, and the desire to remaining in a setting familiar to family while engaged in theological education. A generation ago, seminary students relocated to the seminary of choice, or the seminary recognized by the sponsoring denomination. They moved family to that setting, and lived nearby, often in seminary provided housing. They did not work while going to seminary. Today's students are most typically working full time in ministry or non-ministry settings, have working spouses who may be reluctant or unable to relocate, and will be studying in seminaries which have become increasingly commuter-based. In this context, the desire for online education that provides greater flexibility and convenience is not surprising.

There are other subtle factors at play in a student's desire to study online. The current generations of seminary students who are in their twenties and thirties have been raised in a world in which the digital technologies are full integrated into their day-to-day lifestyle. They have received their elementary, high school and college educations in technology rich environments. Smart boards, tablets, laptops, digital media, and online libraries are normal facets of their educational experiences. They expect this same technology use from institutes of higher education, including seminaries. For these student community is formed both through face-to-face *and* online engagement. They consider a conversation with a friend in a coffee shop and a conversation via Facebook

chat to be equally satisfying. They are what researcher Marc Prensky termed “digital natives.”²³²

By contrast, many faculty in theological education settings are not digital natives. They have learned to engage the digital world and its technology in much the same fashion as one engages a second language. They are digital immigrants to use Prensky’s terminology. They do not view community formed in online settings as comparable to that of the “real world.” They do not move with facility through the intricacies of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, or even through the teaching platforms of Blackboard and Moodle with fluency. Faculty who engage online education will gradually become digital natives, which will provide them with greater fluidity and the ability to use social media to form community with students and peers. There is, however, a significant learning curve before this fluidity is attained.

Students and faculty who engage online theological education will gain the ability to be in community with a diverse group of learners, some of who, without the potential of online education, would never meet. This also suggests another advantage of online learning, the ability to provide theological education to individuals who are remote from the seminary location. This is of particular interest to seminaries working with indigenous pastors in remote locations or for seminaries intent on reducing the cost of theological education. Individuals can remain in settings in which they are employed while studying full-time. Students who participate in online programs do not have the costs of travelling or relocating to a seminary’s geographic location.

²³² Mark Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,” <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf> [accessed March 21, 2015].

The institution that pursues online theological education may see an increase in the number of students enrolled. Equally, there is an additional cost in providing instructors for those courses. The cost effectiveness will need to be evaluated by administrators. There is also a need to consider the necessary software and hardware. These concerns will be addressed in more depth in the section titled, “Do we have the infrastructure?”

Perhaps the most exciting gain for a seminary that engages online theological education is the potential to expand the access of students to materials used in both face-to-face, hybrid, and online classrooms. Online learning systems can be used for online classes but they can also be used to provide a repository of documents and resources for face-to-face classes, to provide video clips which augment the in class lectures, to allow a discussion board in which students can continue the classroom discussion, a vehicle for groups to work on shared projects and exchange documents, or for the instructor to host virtual office hours for commuter students. Even the instructor who does not teach in an online class can gain significantly from familiarity with and use of this online technology. This technology spill over will benefit not only those faculty members who teach online, but also the seminary community as a whole.

Do We Have the Infrastructure?

Before a seminary makes the decision to teach online classes, the question of resources must be engaged. These resources are three-fold, software, hardware, and human resources.

Software resources will include a choice of Learning Management System. (LMS) Varieties of platforms are available to meet the needs of any institution. Licensing

costs vary considerably. Other desirable software will include online searchable library resources and databases.

Hardware resources will include the necessary network, servers, and infrastructure to support the LMS and related software. Network and Internet resources must be sufficient to allow multiple instructors to access the Internet and upload large files. Individual instructors will need adequate access to personal computers equipped with webcam and microphone.

Students must also have access to comparable personal computers. Students will require high-speed Internet access that is reliable and affordable. Ideally, students will have webcams and microphones in order to participate in video conferencing technologies, which provide for a richer experience.

Human resources include well-trained instructors who can teach in the online setting as digital natives. Support for online education will include technology support and on demand help lines to assist in technology issues for students and instructors. Librarians will require familiarity with online teaching and electronic resources that are available to students. Administrators must value the work of online instructors and provide appropriate resources of time as well as adequate compensation. Too often online programs become a kind of teaching ghetto in which adjunct faculty labor with inadequate training and support and receive inadequate compensation for their labor.

Students should also be considered in evaluating the human resources for online education. A student population where the necessary technological skills and hardware are not readily available will require the school to consider how best to meet these needs.

Students in general will require some training in use of the LMS. In some circumstances, schools may consider underwriting the cost of hardware purchase.

How Far is Too Far?

There is a debate in the world of North American Christianity that directly affects the theological education setting which intends to engage online theological education. Some Christians will argue that we must set ourselves apart from culture, others that culture must be approached with caution, and still others that we should embrace and use culture for the purposes of the kingdom of God.

This debate plays out in areas of male/female gender roles, sexual orientation, divorce, and remarriage, and separation of church and state. Denominations and individual believers take positions that reflect the surrounding culture, oppose the surrounding culture, or adopt a median position.

These are not new arguments. H. Richard Niebuhr, writing in 1951 articulates five positions regarding the relationship between Christ and culture.²³³ He describes these as Christ against culture, The Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture. He further subdivides these into a new law type (Christ against culture), a natural law type (Christ of culture), and three median types (Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ transforming culture).

These subdivisions also reflect the typical positions of those approaching online theological education. Some, typifying Niebuhr's new law position, will argue that online

²³³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper One, 2001), xxxvii-lv.

education is a bridge too far. These individuals will insist that technology brings with it inherent dangers and should have no place in theological education.

Those who adopt a natural law position will argue that all technological developments can be understood as gifts from God that should be exploited for the sake of the kingdom. Online theological education is an extension of previously adopted methodologies and technologies in education.

Those in the median positions approach technology with caution and seek to understand the impact of the technology on theological education. They ask, “Should we do this at all?”, and “If we do this what will change?” It is to this wrestling median group that this remarks are addressed.

In the letter to the church at Rome, the apostle Paul, writes, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”²³⁴ Paul indicates that simple conformity with the pattern of the world is not God’s intention for believers. Rather, we are called to transformation through the renewing of our minds. Transformation and renewal suggest that we are being called to change. It should be noted however; that this is not change for the sake of change, or change because the world changes, but rather changes that have been evaluated in terms of God’s will for the world. How then should we understand the relationship between change of this type, online education technology, and God’s will for the world?

When we consider the history of the church and the intersection of this history with that of technological advancement it is evident that all but a handful of Anabaptist

²³⁴ Romans 12:2 [NIV].

groups have embraced some degree of technological advancement. We might consider the response of the church to the printing press as analogous of the use of online technologies.

Martin Luther considered the printing press, “God's highest and extremist act of grace, whereby the business of the gospel is driven forward.”²³⁵ The printing press allowed the fathers of the Protestant Revolution to provide the Scriptures in popular languages and to mass-produce the Scriptures for public use. The Catholic Church was not as positive in its response. “In 1487... Pope Innocent VIII required that Church authorities approve all books before publication.”²³⁶ The printing press was viewed as potentially aiding in the spread of heretical translations. This parallels the polarity in responses to online theological education.

It would seem that rather than an overt embrace of all online teaching technology, or a complete rejection of the technology, seminaries must create criterion for use of online theological education. Criterion would allow the institution to assess and measure its own usage and to determine what course material will be taught online, how it will be instructed, and how this instruction will be evaluated.

²³⁵ Quoted in, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1983), 147.

²³⁶ University of Texas, “*Guttenberg’s Legacy*,” <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/educator/modules/gutenberg/books/legacy/> [accessed January 28, 2015].

HOW DO WE DO THIS WELL?

If a theological education institution designs a new program or modifies curriculum it will often begin by asking, “What are the desired outcomes and how will we achieve them?” We know that in online theological education the desired outcome is a theological education program that provides knowledge acquisition, practical skills acquisition, personal formation, and creates a sense of community.

This researcher’s Doctor of Ministry project centered on the ability of online theological education settings to provide holistic education. Through survey and interview the following list of best practices was developed.

Best Practices for Online Theological Education

- 1) Allows opportunity for knowledge acquisition using pedagogic methods that support student-centered learning, individualization, and are developed for the online setting rather than simply transferred from the face-to-face setting.
- 2) Creates opportunity for, and evaluation of, practical skills acquisition through a mentoring, or embedding system.
- 3) Seeks to foster habits and character through formational experiences either in online engagement, in intensive settings, or through a mentoring system.
- 4) Provides opportunity for the formation of community between the student, peers, and the instructor either through synchronous online delivery, or in intensive format.
- 5) Identifies course outcomes that are clear and attainable, and include opportunity for practical skills acquisition, knowledge acquisition, and personal formation.
- 6) Uses carefully curated course material with attention to student learning styles.
- 7) Provides well-trained instructors who are technologically competent.

Student-centered Learning

Cari Crumly, writing in *Pedagogies for Student-Centered Learning*, defines student-centered learning as “...a learning model placing the learner in the center of the learning process. Students are active participants in their learning, learning at their own pace and using their own strategies; they are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated; and learning is more individualized than standardized.”²³⁷

Student-centered learning requires the instructor to become a facilitator and the student to become the primary teacher for themselves and for peers. This interplay between the instructor and the student creates a community of learning in which the instructor and student have shared responsibility for learning to take place.

In order for student-centered learning to be effective the instructor must consider the population being educated, the learning styles of those learners, the available resources, the desired learning objectives of the learners, the models in which the learners will effectively learn, and use these variables to create opportunities for learning.

Learning methods common to student-centered learning will include active learning with discussion, problem solving, activities that include reading and writing as a shared task, and analysis of class content. Self-paced learning is a common tactic in student-centered learning. Case-based learning, demonstrations, and collaborative learning is typical. Rather than passive recipient of knowledge, the student becomes active seeker of knowledge with the instructor as companion rather than guide. While student-centered learning will require the theological education setting to rethink

²³⁷ Cari Crumly, *Pedagogies for Student-Centered Learning: Online and On-Ground (Seminarium Elements)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), Kindle Location 124.

methodologies, the underlying pedagogy and philosophies of education can remain the same.

Online theological education provides rich opportunity for student-centered learning. Modules can allow students to move through materials at a self-selected pace, choosing those materials which will augment their particular need for information. Students can provide material to be reviewed, analyzed, and discussed by other students. These mini research assignments can be posted as wikis, blogs, or whitepapers. Discussion boards can allow for all students in a class to engage on an assigned topic or for groups of students to self-select the topic that is of greatest interest. Learning Management Systems allow for quizzes, surveys, and tests, which can be used to evaluate pre-course knowledge, identify areas of needed knowledge acquisition, and to demonstrate learning that has taken place. Online education can also allow for Just-In-Time learning in which students identify areas of needed teaching or clarification and the instructor responds with modules, exercises, or materials that respond to the student identified needs.

A limitation of online education is its tendency towards linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. More commonly, these intelligences support teacher-centered learning. Intelligences such as spatial, kinesthetic, and musical, are more difficult to reach using online methods. However, interpersonal and naturalistic intelligences can easily be adapted to online settings. These will further support a variety of intelligences incorporated into online learning settings.²³⁸

²³⁸ See chapter 4 for detailed descriptions of these learning styles. Cari Crumly, *Pedagogies for Student-Centered Learning: Online and On-Ground (Seminarium Elements)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

Embedding and Mentoring

Writing in *Clergy Mentoring: The Tie That Binds*, Pastor Mark Conforti, recommends that denominations adopt a formal process for mentoring pastors in their first call. He shares the following anecdote:

A scene from the television show ‘ER’ illustrates the significance of mentoring extremely well. Two attending physicians are walking the hallways of the emergency room, discussion the performance of their medical interns. One is obviously frustrated with his student’s inability to complete ordinary task, such as drawing blood or taking vital signs. The colleague wisely replies, ‘Remember, medical school makes them doctors; it’s our job to make them physicians.’²³⁹

Seminary may well equip a student with the necessary knowledge and skills to serve in a ministry setting. Mentoring makes the seminarian into a pastor. For some theological education settings, this process begins in field education experiences. In some cases, it continues with a denominationally sponsored internship. In order for online theological education to be successful, it must provide opportunity for students to practice skills and implement knowledge, as well as continue the process of personal formation, in a ministry setting. They must move from the laboratory of the online classroom to the real life setting.

Mentors serve as wise companions who are able to walk with the new pastor, or the seminarian, in their ministry setting, and to encourage appropriate growth as well as recommend areas for improvement.

Ideally, online theological education programs would require every student to be embedded in a congregation or other ministry setting for the duration of their online study. In addition to the role of the mentor, the student would have a supervisor who

²³⁹ Mark Conforti, *Clergy Mentoring: The Tie That Binds* (n.p.: Mark Conforti, 2014), Kindle location 164.

oversees the work of the student in the embedded setting. This individual would have input into the student's educational process, provide formal feedback on a regular basis to both the student and the educational institution and work with the student to ensure that necessary experiences are engaged. The supervisor would help identify areas of needed growth, skills that needed to be strengthened, and qualities of character that should be focused upon in order for the student to become equipped for solo ministry.

The development of a system of mentors and embedded settings would be simple for denominational seminaries and those in episcopal systems in which students could be placed in formal internships. This task is more difficult, because it would require collaboration, for seminaries that are not within episcopal systems, or seminaries that educate students from a broad range of denominational backgrounds. The network of embedded settings, and the vetting of mentors would require careful design and supervision to ensure that all students' experiences were beneficial and of sufficient rigor. It would be wise for a non-denominational seminary, or one with a diverse student body, to develop an administrative position focused solely on the recruitment and oversight of these mentors and settings.

Formational Experiences

Of significant concern in the creation of online theological education programs is the matter of formational experiences. It is clear that in the face-to-face theological education setting formation happens through the engagement of the student with the instructor, peers, and in intentional self-examination. It is more difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of online theological education to provide formational growth. Some will argue that student formation does not only take place in the classroom but rather in a

variety of settings, in the hallways, at home, in ministry settings, in personal reflection, and in a myriad of ways. The Holy Spirit is at work in all these settings and can effect spiritual growth in a willing participant regardless of the setting. This is the argument of Maddix, Estep, and Lowe:

If student formation empowered by the Holy Spirit takes place in a variety of settings and contexts—some of which involve physical proximity, some of which involve virtual community, and some of which involve individual encounters with texts, images, sounds, and their own mental constructs—then the model that has been proposed enables us to consider all of these as potentially beneficial to student spiritual development. We can no longer focus on one dimension to the exclusion of the others....²⁴⁰

Others suggest that formational growth would be best developed through internship, embedded, or mentoring setting. These settings would provide necessary opportunities for reflection, engagement, community as accountability, and provide both encouragement and challenges necessary for spiritual growth. Key to this spiritual formation is the ability for the student to experience community, whether in the virtual or physical setting.

Creation of Community

When a student attends a class in a face-to-face setting, he or she enters into a community that has been created for learning. The instructor serves as the facilitator of community. The other students are members of the community. Through peer interaction learning is enriched, ideas are shared, perspectives not one's own are heard and considered, concepts not fully grasped in advance can be clarified through others

²⁴⁰ Mark A. Maddix, James R. Estep, and Mary E. Lowe, eds., *Best Practices for Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 61.

reflection on them. The environment creates a rich setting in which each participant brings unique qualities and concepts that are shared during the class time.

When a student enters an online course, the same potential exists for community but that community must develop in a different fashion than that of a face-to-face class. Many of the normal cues that are available in face-to-face settings may be absent from online interactions. Facial cues, body language, tone in speech, and speed of speech, are not available to augment text engagement. Video engagement can be carefully recorded to present a curated self-image. However, research indicates that community is still created. This community has a different shape but is still real and can provide a platform in which a community of learners can develop. Maddix, Estep, and Lowe explain,

Developing community-based models for theological distance education requires the realization that technology alone cannot create or maintain human relationships and should not replace them. Furthermore, this approach embraces an ecosystems view of one's contributing community on the learning process. Advances in technology have shaped our ability to build community, both positively and negatively, but the reality is that community building happens despite the limitations some see in various forms of media. The growing body of resources found in pedagogical media is forcing some to rethink previously held notions of limited communication. Much of the same research is changing the way we view embodiment in online communities. Hess (2000) argued that online education is an embodied form of learning. Students interact with the medium of technology through the use of the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.²⁴¹

One can view online education settings as providing opportunity for embodied presence that is mediated through the online learning system. Individuals in online settings share elements of their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual selves in much the same fashion as in face-to-face settings even if the medium in which these

²⁴¹ Mark A. Maddix, James R. Estep, and Mary E. Lowe, eds., *Best Practices for Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 60.

formational elements are communicated differ. Digital natives will find this virtual community more readily accessible than those who are digital immigrants.

Course Outcomes, Course Materials, and Instructor Training

In addition to the need to provide for the core components of a theological education, knowledge acquisition, practical skills acquisition, personal formation, and the creation of community, and the need to identify the most effective methods for providing each of this components, it is essential to consider the responsibilities of the institution seeking to offer online theological education.

This responsibility is clearly defined in the ATS General Standards, which apply to all theological school accredited by the association:

Institutions using instructional technology to enhance face-to-face courses and/or provide online-only courses shall be intentional in addressing matters of coherence between educational values and choice of media, recognizing that the learning goals of graduate education should guide the choice of digital resources, that teaching and learning maintains its focus on the formation and knowledge of religious leaders, and that the school is utilizing its resources in ways that most effectively accomplish its purpose. They should also establish policies regarding the appropriate training for and use of these resources.²⁴²

Course outcomes

Any theological education institution that intends to offer online courses must be attentive to the need for those courses to be coherent with identical courses taught in the classroom. Attention to the course outcomes for each course and for adherence to those outcomes regardless of the methodology or technology involved in educating will be necessary. Actual assignment content, methods of evaluation, granular content may vary

²⁴² The Association of Theological Schools, “ATS General Institutional Standards, Section 3.0,” [http:// www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/standards-of-accreditation.pdf](http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/standards-of-accreditation.pdf) [accessed February 2, 2015].

but each course, regardless of setting, should result in the student attaining the same course outcomes.

In order for this coherence to be assured schools should develop assessment methods that allow for comparison between the student outcomes success in online and face-to-face settings.

Moreover, attention should be paid to the potential for an online version of a course to meet the same course outcomes. Not all courses will translate well to the online setting. Some may be more effective as hybrid courses, intensive courses, or face-to-face. Schools must make deliberate decisions about the medium in which a course is delivered.

Course materials

There is a natural tendency for the experienced face-to-face instructor to simply transfer existing course plans to the online setting. While this is an understandable approach, based in continuing to teach in what is a known and effective lesson plan, the reality is that online theological education settings differ significantly from the classroom. The effective online instructor will consider the best materials to communicate the same material as that of the face-to-face setting.

Materials in an online class must be designed to engage multiple intelligences in the student population. An audio lecture will not be as effective as a video lecture. The video lecture assists in providing missing visual cues that the audio only lecture cannot. A written text, accompanied by supporting video clips, supplementary reading, voice-over PowerPoint, will provide a rich learning environment.

Instructor training

From the perspective of faculty members one of the greatest frustrations and barriers to effective online instruction is the lack of training provided to instructors. Many seminary administrators assume that an effective face-to-face classroom instructor will automatically be an effective online instructor. The reality is that the transition to teaching online requires instruction in the use of the LMS, training in effective pedagogic methods for online settings and in course design, exposure to digital materials that are available to the instructor, and coaching in the most effective teaching methods.

Seminaries that choose to increase the number of online courses will be wise to provide in house training if the resources exist, or to purchase training courses for faculty. Administrators should also recognize that the design of a new online course requires significant time commitments. The instructor should be compensated for the additional labor. Adjunct instructors should rarely be assigned the creation of a new online course unless significant consideration is given to compensate them for additional time incurred.

To Teach, To Delight, To Persuade

From the earliest centuries of the church to the present day, there has been recognition that individuals who will lead the church must possess certain skills, knowledge, and qualities of person in order to serve the mission of God in the world. At the advent of the church, this training had a local and personal form. As the church grew and the need for leaders grew more formal methods were developed, leading to the great cathedral schools, and finally to universities. The seminary, a standalone higher education program, was a natural progression. Each model for theological education developed in a particular time and culture to meet the needs of that place and time. Monastic schools

developed to meet the needs for an educated and practically trained clergy in a largely illiterate society. Primitive North American schools met the need for training lay leaders in order to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding population settling new territories. Seminaries emerged from the academy as focused and deliberate attempts to provide academically rigorous and spiritually rich programs. Online theological education is simply the most recent development in this historic progression.

Each model for theological education has excellent examples and less effective examples. The same is true for online theological education. Some programs provide less than holistic education and produce graduates who lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and character for ministry. Other programs produce graduates with exceptional knowledge, well-practiced skills, and qualities of character that will serve the church well in its future.

The seminary that chooses to invest in online theological education must determine that this education will produce exceptional ministry leaders and then must invest the necessary energies and resources in producing that education. A wise seminary will consider how best to provide an education that is holistic and produces a graduate who is equipped and ready to lead the church of the twenty-first century. It is this researcher's prayer that this project serves to guide seminaries that have begun this journey of developing new models for theological education, and those students who seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the theological education program in which they choose to engage.

Augustine, writing in *City of God*, references the writings of Cicero, noting, "Accordingly a great orator has truly said that 'an eloquent man must speak so as to

teach, to delight, and to persuade.’ Then he adds: ‘To teach is a necessity, to delight is a beauty, to persuade is a triumph.’²⁴³ Teaching ministry leaders for the sake of God’s work who are holistically equipped to teach, to delight, and to persuade is the intent of all theological education and must be the intent of online theological education. If online theological education is the future of seminary education then we must engage it as both mission and ministry, seeking to provide leaders who are able to teach, to delight, and to persuade.

²⁴³ Cicero quoted in, Augustine. *City of God and Christian Doctrine*, chapter 12, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.v.IV_1.12.html#fna_v.IV_1.12-p3.1 [accessed January 9, 2015].

APPENDIX B

PERMISSIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Request for Follow-up Interview

You may recall that in January of this year you participated in an online survey about theological education. As a part of my DMin research I wondered if you would be willing to answer some follow up questions regarding your online theological education experiences as a student. The interview would take roughly 30 minutes and would be conducted by Skype or in person (depending on your geographic location).

Please advise is you are willing to participate....

Kathryn Helleman, M.Div.

Assistant Academic Dean

Director of Assessment

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khelleman@winebrenner.edu

Permission from World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission for Figure 2.1

Dear Kathryn,

We are happy to grant you a one time, non-exclusive use of this diagram.

Please acknowledge the source quoting the full name and author of the article, along with the issue volume number and date with page number and the words, Used with Permission, World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission.

As with Brian, we would be interested in hearing your results and about your book!

Thanks,



Evangelical Review of Theology

"Discerning the obedience of faith"

WEA *Theological News*

Executive Editor: Dr David Parker

david@dparker.net.au

General Editor: Dr Thomas Schirmmacher

WEA Theological Commission: chair_tc@worldea.org

From: Brian Edgar [<mailto:brian.edgar@asburyseminary.edu>]

Sent: Tuesday, 27 January 2015 9:02 AM

To: khelleman@winebrenner.edu; David Parker

Subject: Fwd: Message from: Kathryn Helleman

Hi there Kathryn and David,

Thanks for your request, Kathryn. I am glad that you want to use the diagram. I am perfectly happy for that. But, to fulfil all righteousness I am also passing this on to Dr David Parker, the editor of ERT who is actually responsible for the copyright.

I hope that the DMin goes well, Kathryn. As someone teaching on-line quite a bit I would be interested in what you come up with.

And I trust that you and Dianne are well, David,

regards

Brian

----- Forwarded message -----

From: khelleman@winebrenner.edu <khelleman@winebrenner.edu>

Date: Tue, Jan 27, 2015 at 7:09 AM

Subject: Message from: Kathryn Helleman

To: brian.edgar@asburyseminary.edu

Dr. Edgar,

I am a DMin student at Winebrenner Theological Seminary, Findlay, Ohio. My topic of research is the use of online education in theological settings. During my research phase I read a journal article entitled "The Theology of Theological Education" published in the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, July 2005. I believe you are the author.

I would like permission to use the figure titled "Typology in Diagrammatic Form."

Please advise,

Kathryn Helleman

--

Brian Edgar

Professor of Theological Studies

Asbury Theological Seminary

See Brian's Public Theology [blog and website](#)

- *Committed to a vital evangelical faith*
- *Grounded in the Wesleyan tradition*
- *Stressing the free grace of God.*

Permission from Danny Russell to Identify and Quote

Kathryn,

Yes, I am glad that our conversation helped you with your dissertation research. You have my permission to identify me by name in your footnotes and bibliography in my acceptance of these quotes and concepts from our Skype interview. I am glad to hear you are moving forward in completing your DMin work.

Thank you for including me,

Danny

Dr. Danny Russell,

Pastor

Chadbourn Baptist Church

504 N. Howard Street

Chadbourn, NC 28431

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Cell: 910-840-1823

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On Mar 30, 2015, at 10:48 AM, Kathryn Helleman <khelleman@winebrenner.edu> wrote:

Danny,

Several months ago you participated in a Skype interview. The results form a portion of the research presented in my DMin dissertation. The following reflect quotes or concepts that are attributed to you. Would you please reply to this e-mail indicating your willingness to be identified by name in the footnotes and bibliography and also your acceptance of these quotes or concepts as reflective of our interview.

“... the online allows people from different locations to be in the school . . . when I considered starting my doctorate I wasn't limited and could go to any program with an online program.”^[1]

“Not having the face-to-face time... with other peers struggling with the same theological questions was ... the biggest [challenge] we came across. There were a lot of times where having discussion in a classroom setting would have benefited myself more. Some of that was compensated through class online discussions but not as in depth as it would have been if we were verbally communicating.”^[2]

“We had our face-to-face week gathering to start the program and out of those relationships we were able to do the online things. I think it would be really hard to do online schooling without that first initial face-to-face interaction. It would be hard to build those relationships through computer and not know people's stories and background.”^[3]

“You might have a thought, want to contribute but you are three of four lines from it, and it has already moved to something else. So you really got to be on top of the interaction of that.”^[4]

Thank you,

Kathryn

Kathryn Helleman, M.Div.

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Permission from Kyle Timmons to Identify and Quote

You may.

Kyle

From: khelleman@winebrenner.edu
To: pastorkyletimmons@live.com
Subject: Dmin Permission
Date: Mon, 30 Mar 2015 14:53:55 +0000

Kyle,

The following reflect quotes or concepts that are attributed to you in my DMin project. Would you please reply to this e-mail indicating your willingness to be identified by name in the footnotes and bibliography and also your acceptance of these quotes or concepts as reflective of our interview.

“I was doing almost all my online classes while I was working either as a children and youth director or as a pastor.” [1]

“I can honestly say that if it was a subject that I wasn't all excited about I could put the least amount of work into it and gain the least amount of knowledge but still pass.” [2]

Thank you,

Kathryn

Kathryn Helleman, M.Div.

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Permission from Marty Johnson to Identify and Quote

Kathryn,

You have my permission to quote me in your dissertation. The quotes/concepts are reflective of the interview. You also have permission to use my name in association with the interview.

Martin Johnson

March 30, 2015

--

Martin Johnson, M.A., M.Div.
*Student Academic Support Coordinator,
Supervised Ministry Coordinator*



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On Mon, Mar 30, 2015 at 10:44 AM, Kathryn Helleman <khelleman@winebrenner.edu> wrote:

Marty,

The following reflect quotes or concepts that are attributed to you in my DMin project. Would you please reply to this e-mail indicating your willingness to be identified by name in the footnotes and bibliography and also your acceptance of these quotes or concepts as reflective of our interview.

“There is certainly a sense of community and a sense of camaraderie when you are face to face. Questions and answers are instantaneous. Discussions can very rich and deep.”^[1]

The potential of online theological education to support learner-centered education is significant since it is easily customizable on a student-by-student basis. ^[2]

Thank you,

Kathryn

Permission from Patricia Harrison to Identify and Quote

That's fine, Kathryn. I consent to the use of my name and I agree that this quote fairly represents the matter in question, as discussed in our interview.

Best wishes with your dissertation!

Patricia Harrison

Sent from my iPod

On Mar 31, 2015, at 1:56 AM, Kathryn Helleman <khelleman@winebrenner.edu> wrote:

Patricia,

Several months ago you participated in a Skype interview. The results form a portion of the research presented in my DMin dissertation. The following reflect quotes or concepts that are attributed to you. Would you please reply to this e-mail indicating your

willingness to be identified by name in the footnotes and bibliography and also your acceptance of these quotes or concepts as reflective of our interview.

While less common as a positive theme in the comments of faculty several instructors reflected on the ability to instruct from anywhere in the world and to provide theological education for students in remote settings who would otherwise be unable to attend class.^[1]

Thank you,

Kathryn

Kathryn Helleman, M.Div.

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Verification From The Association of Theological Schools regarding Public Domain
Usage for Figures 5.20A, 5.20B, 5.21, 5.22, 5.23

Hi Kathryn,

Thanks for your e-mail...as long as you have appropriately cited the materials found on our website, you should be fine.

Best of luck with your dissertation!

Sincerely,

Lisa

^[1] Patricia Harrison, interview by author, Skype, November 25, 2014.

Lisa Kern | External Relations Coordinator

The Association of Theological Schools | The Commission on Accrediting

10 Summit Park Drive | Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1110 | 412-788-6505, ext. 245 |
kern@ats.edu | www.ats.edu

From: Kathryn Helleman [<mailto:khelleman@winebrenner.edu>]

Sent: Saturday, March 28, 2015 2:19 PM

To: Communications

Subject: Use of Website Materials

I'm currently working on a Doctor of Ministry dissertation focused on the topic of online theological education. As the Director of Assessment for my home institution I routinely view ATS publications such as the General Standards, and also the Total School Profile data for entering and graduating students. I've referenced several of these materials, found on the ATS website, in my dissertation. They have, of course, been appropriately cited but I wondered if I should also ask for specific permission to use these materials. The final dissertation will be copy written and published to an electronic database administered by ProQuest.

Please advise of steps I should take,

Kathryn

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