Thought piece on pedagogy and our new curriculum

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This thought piece is offered to the Luther Seminary community in fulfillment of the charges laid upon the pedagogy writing team. It contains three sections. In section one we lift up the explicit and implicit pedagogical values found in the various documents we were invited to explore (the PRCR document, the strategic plan, the student and faculty handbooks) and their implications for pedagogy. In section two we make three specific proposals we believe will facilitate the implementation of our new curriculum from a pedagogical standpoint. And in section three we include lengthy formulation and analysis of the key issues and continuing questions we believe our data suggests Luther Seminary must keep in front of us from a pedagogical perspective. An appendix includes summaries of data from the faculty survey, the staff focus group, and the student survey.

I. Values which guide us

We are newly two decades into a discussion of the curriculum at Luther. The current major revision marks an explicit turn towards development of a learning community or "learning organization" as specified in our strategic plans, as well as deliberate implementation of a learning outcomes focus. The various documents our committee reviewed resonate with the greater landscape in recognizing, as Vincent Cushing has noted:

> Educators are coming to the realization that their work is more about learning than teaching. While teaching is a constituent element in any good education, it is the process of teaching that has reformulated the calculus of education. Process involves the awareness of students' cultural backgrounds, the recognition of the experiential as well as the cognitional, and the evaluation of whether real learning actually occurred. All this places the emphasis squarely on learning.[1]

A concern for *process* in teaching, not simply the *content* of what is to be shared, emerges from biblical reflection on the topic as well. Rolf Jacobson has noted that "the people that formed the Bible did not differentiate between different types of knowledge in the same ways that we moderns do…. biblical concern for the corporate good must crowd in on us when we are thinking about education. Education must be about the common good."[2] This concern for the common good is not simply pragmatic however, it is an essential consequence of the deep recognition of relationality that pervades the biblical witness, the felt sense that our Bible tells us of God's ongoing relationship with God's people.

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[1] Vincent Cushing, "Foreward," in *Educating Leaders for Ministry*, ed. V. Klimoski, K. O'Neil, and K. Schuth (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), p. V.

[2] Rolf Jacobson, "Biblical perspectives on education," in *Journal of Lutheran Ethics,* Vol. 4, #7, July 2004. Cited from the web on 5 September 2013 (http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/July-2004/Biblical-Perspectives-on-Education.aspx).

Melchert notes that:

> Congruence between the what and the how (content and method) is pedagogically striking in Jesus' teaching and in the Gospel texts. Jesus talked of the kingdom, the compassionate and just rule of God, what it was like to be a subject, and he enacted that in his interactions with people. The texts not only portray Jesus' sending apprentice-disciples to do as he did but effectively invite later reader-learners to find themselves sent as well.[3]

Similar points are being made by theologians who argue, as does Parker Palmer, that "we know as we are known."[4] Elizabeth Conde-Frasier writes that "knowledge is an activity in which the totality of one's being is engaged, not only the mind. Full comprehension is manifested in action that corresponds to the relationship apprehended."[5] A recent book centered on "theological education in a post-Christian world" is entitled *To Teach, To Delight, To Move*, claiming in its very title this integrative and congruent theological claim.[6]

Within the educational disciplines more generally, a host of studies and theories point to the essentially relational character of learning, at the same time urging that teaching and learning not be understood as either relativist or instrumental in character. Jane Vella's very popular text on adult learning is entitled *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*; while the classic text on curriculum design by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, notes that there are six facets to understanding: not only are explanation, interpretation, and application part of the process, but equally important aspects of understanding are perspective, empathy and self-knowledge – these latter three particularly implicated in relational forms of knowing.[7]

Educators continue to draw on the work of researchers in a variety of disciplines. Within psychology Robert Kegan's work is central, and his constructive developmental theorizing also argues for an intensely relational, contextual aspect to learning.[8] Sociologists working within education have also argued in this vein. University of Chicago professors Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider, for example, studied years of educational reform within the K-12 public school system in Chicago and concluded that relational trust is the key predictive element for

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[3] Charles Melchert, *Wise Teaching: Biblical Wisdom and Educational Ministry (*Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 264.

[4] While Parker Palmer is not professionally recognized as a theologian, his books certainly speak to pragmatic or practical theology. His small book *To Know As We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983) is a required text in seminaries across the country within religious education.

[5] Elizabeth Conde-Frasier, *A Many-Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 196.

[6] David Cunningham, ed. *To Teach, To Delight, To Move: Theological Education in a Post-Christian World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004).

[7] Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2001).

[8] See both Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), and Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). For an account of this work that is contextualized within pastoral ministry settings, see A. Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading: Increasing Your Effectiveness in Ministry* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2000).

whether or not reform would be successful and sustainable.[9] Even neuroscientists have begun to use the language of emotions and relationality to describe the complex processes by which synapses fire to create pathways of memory and learning. As James Zull points out:

> presenting our subjects as stories… is a way to help the learner become emotionally engaged. But there is more to effective teaching than how we present the subject. Specifically, there is how we present ourselves. And there may be no more important part of teaching than the emotional reaction of a student to a teacher.[10]

This recognition that teaching is fundamentally concerned with the process of learning, and that learning is fundamentally a relational, even spiritual practice,[11] appears over and over again throughout both the documents we reviewed and the data that emerged from the various surveys and focus groups our committee undertook. Perhaps the single most important innovation of our new curriculum is its primary goal of "the formation of evangelical public leaders."

As Heifetz, Kegan, and others note, however, we are currently living in times that present a wide assortment of adaptive challenges for such formation. As theological educators face such challenges, many teachers (not to mention institutions) have grasped at what might be termed "technical" solutions, rather than seeking to engage those challenges. Theological knowledges in postmodern contexts are not knowledges accepted *a priori* or simply through assertion. They are knowledges that must build their authority and credibility through the development of authentic agency. You can see such challenges in the numerous calls from our students for more "practical" courses, with more explicit connections to their vocational understandings. The challenges are also evident in our classrooms when we speak of the reality that we can no longer assume that our students begin from the same base of knowledge and with similar expectations, but we must build shared understanding.

We must build credibility with our students – credibility of the actual content and wisdom we seek to share, credibility of our own authority as researchers and teachers, credibility of the theological knowledge base for the contexts in which the students will be exploring and utilizing it. The recognition that authority grows out of credibility built from authentic experience arises intimately from our documents. Over and over again we speak of "providing leadership for Christian communities by giving voice to the gospel of Jesus Christ (the '*evangel*'), by teaching and confessing faith in the triune God, by entering into God's mission and service in the world and leading others in that work, and by demonstrating the skills needed to gather a community around that mission." This is language that demands authentic and integral witness, it is not simply "content" that can be "transferred" in instrumental ways.

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[9] Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider, *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, ERIC, 1996).

[10] James Zull, *The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching the Practice of Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning* (Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, 2002), p. 230.

[11] See, for instance: V. M. Miller and M. M. Ryan, eds., *Transforming Campus Life: Reflections on Spirituality and Religious Pluralism* (New York: Lang, 2001); M. A. Jablonski, ed., *The Implications of Student Spirituality for Student Affairs Practices* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); L. English and M. Gillen, *Addressing the Spiritual Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000); E. J. Tisdell, *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); S. L. Hoppe and B. W. Speck, eds., *Spirituality in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005);

The challenge of providing learning environments and learning designs which draw out such leadership is not unique to Luther Seminary. Indeed, numerous studies have pointed out that formation is increasingly the element of theological education that differentiates it from higher education more generally.[12] While "formation" is not easily nor universally defined – as the Carnegie Foundation study notes, "almost no one – even in Catholic communities who use this terminology most frequently – is truly satisfied with formation language"[13] – still, language of formation is ubiquitous, and nearly always carries affective elements to it. Where Wiggins and McTighe speak of the elements of understanding being "explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy and self-knowledge"[14] it is generally the latter three – perspective, empathy and self-knowledge — that come into play in the context of formation. All three are woven into what is meant by the phrase "authentic expression" that is used so often in these contexts.

So what are we to do? Here is where our new curriculum faces its most pressing pedagogical challenges – and also provides its richest resources. In the introductory pages to the curriculum (pages one through eight), the document lays out a very specific frame for our work together. That frame builds from the curricular goal (vocational formation of evangelical public leaders), to the curricular strategy (learning and living God's story, interpreting and confessing in the world, gathering and leading Christian communities in mission), all of which are founded upon a theological rationale:

> 1. God's promises bear God's own faithful character, which we receive as new creation in the midst of the old;
>
> 2. Community around Word and Sacrament embodies God's promises for us;
>
> 3. The world of neighbors, in all its dynamic complexity, engages us in God's continually creative and good activity.

This goal, strategy and rationale provide a very rich resource for our work together. What remains is to embody them in the day-to-day practices of our learning community – here is where our primary challenge emerges. While the curriculum document lays out a set of required and elective courses, with at least initial learning outcomes (initial because we have said we will review the curriculum in three years time), it leaves wide open how those courses will be implemented. This freedom is important for our pedagogical vitality and creative energies as a faculty, but it also poses some specific dilemmas.

If we are serious as a community about becoming a learning organization, then we must find specific ways to develop the pedagogical practices necessary for such community. One way to state such practices would be as follows:

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[12] Stephen Brookfield makes this point directly, in "How can we teach authentically? Reflective practice in the theological classroom," in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions*, M. Hess and S. Brookfield, (eds). (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing, 2008).

[13] Foster, et. al. *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006) endnote#1, 125.

[14] The rubric they use can be found in their primary text, *Understanding by Design* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2001). It is contextualized within theological education in M. Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) 42-43.

1. An understanding that we are all in this together

2. An appreciation of the value of "otherness"

3. An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways

4. A sense of personal voice and agency flowing from and thoroughly entangled with God's agency

5. A capacity to create community.[15]

Over and over again, in the faculty survey, in the student survey, in the staff focus groups, we heard from people who are seeking to embody these practices in their work at Luther, or at least who are longing for such. So how are we to exercise these practices? What mechanisms might support us in developing and assessing our learning and experiences? Here we turn to the second section of this paper.

II. Specific proposals regarding implementation of the new curriculum

It is dangerously tempting, at this point, to reach for instrumental or technical "responses" to these challenges; to develop a "recipe" for teaching. In what follows our committee makes three specific proposals that we believe are both concrete enough and yet open-ended enough, to support our development of the pedagogical practices which can embody our curriculum goals, curricular strategy and theological rationale. We offer them, however, as initial structures – scaffolding, if you will – to support our practice. As we learn together we will need to continually celebrate what we are learning, evaluate our practices, reflect upon their history and future trajectories, and modify accordingly.

1. Implement as soon as possible a structural process by which the faculty, students and staff can embody ongoing reflection on pedagogical issues, attend to the implications of assessment data, and learn with and from each other

We believe that this proposal could be implemented in two important ways structurally:

First, we continue our suggestion (first made in our provisional report to the faculty in May of 2013) that the schedule of required faculty commitments on Wednesday be revised as follows: one Wednesday of each month to be spent in reflection upon some specific piece of assessment data, one Wednesday of each month to be spent in reflection on specific pedagogical challenges emerging from our implementation of the curriculum, one Wednesday of each month to be spent on engaging faculty scholarship, and one Wednesday of each month to be spent on legislative issues (by which we intend for some time to be spent in divisional settings, and some in the formal faculty legislative body).

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[15] This formulation is drawn very closely from the work of Parker Palmer, who has described "five habits of the heart that help make democracy possible," as well as from the theorizing underlying the *Art of Hosting* and the *Respectful Conversations Project*.

Second, drawing upon both the vitality of certain of the PRCR processes, as well as the consistent data in the surveys and focus groups, we believe all but the legislative sessions of these required meetings ought to be generally open to full participation by staff and students, with the legislative sessions having student and staff representatives (continuing the practice of our current faculty meetings). Clearly the design of such meetings might occasionally require sections of a given meeting to be implemented in such a way that staff could meet with staff, students could meet with students, and faculty could meet with faculty, but the overall goal would ensure that once a week the entire community has as its focus a particular question or set of challenges.

2. Develop a template, or standardized form, for course syllabi.

This template could then be embellished and individualized in whatever ways specific faculty desire, but it would include at least the following elements in an easily accessible format: a) the basic course information (the name and description of the course, where it is taking place, how to reach the faculty member, information about accommodations, plagiarism, etc.); b) a statement of the primary learning outcomes the specific course engages from the curriculum, as well as any additional outcomes the course focuses on; c) a rubric by which the learning outcomes will be evaluated (including at least one artifact, essay or other assignment all students in that course prepare which can be matched to that rubric, and which would be particularly pointed to the portfolio process); and d) a statement which draws on the theological rationale of the curriculum and makes it accessible to the specific audience of students envisioned for the course in terms of their vocation.

3. Given the centrality of the portfolio to the curriculum, develop a process by which elective courses are offered that is built directly upon the foundation of the portfolio.

Such electives would, for instance, need to articulate specific outcomes and artifacts linked to the portfolio. Faculty proposing electives would need to submit a full syllabus for consideration, as well as a rationale based on current students' needs and the faculty member's particular gifts, for holding that course in a particular semester. Such a process would likely begin, at least initially, within more traditional disciplinary or divisional discussions, but could also be envisioned as coming to birth in an assessment or pedagogy meeting.

We believe that these three proposals are both concrete enough, and yet open enough, to create a space in which we can engage the key issues and continuing questions we have already identified as we move towards our new curriculum.

III. Key issues and continuing questions

In this section of the document we return to the ten observations we made in the May 2013 document, and underline how our specific proposals relate to each challenge. Further, you will note that there is an appendix which includes data analysis from the student surveys (data we spent the summer analyzing).

(1) Our new curriculum (and other documents) is clearly oriented towards forming evangelical public leaders in apostolic mission. This clear orientation poses pedagogical challenges, though

there was little in the surveys or focus groups that highlighted or singled out specific pedagogical tools. How might we lift up and engage the pedagogical challenges embedded in the values in our documents? How might we resource each other as we experiment and explore these challenges?

Our extensive analysis of the data suggests that on the whole students, staff and faculty are upbeat about the possibilities of our new curriculum, and their experience with our previous curriculum. Perhaps the single strongest concern, voiced over and over again in various ways, was that students need to see the pragmatic connections between the content we are engaging in our classes and their intended vocation.

This is a concern that has emerged in the past as well, and suggests that we need to find more creative and ongoing ways to support students in becoming decision makers in their own learning processes, and becoming personally invested in a specific learning event. There are no easy recipes for doing this, particularly when our students are so diverse, and come from and move towards, such diverse contexts and vocational goals.

This challenge requires transparency in pedagogical process, as well as ongoing reflection on pedagogical practice. The curriculum's primary structural innovation for doing so is the learning portfolio. We believe that implementing a learning portfolio requires intentional and ongoing reflection upon several pressing issues that are related to pedagogy and assessment, and thus offer the proposal for changing our Wednesday meetings and for moving to a syllabus template, and a clear process for proposing electives.

(2) What do we mean by "formation"? In what ways can we reasonably expect that our pedagogical practices will support formation within the Holy Spirit's ongoing gift of apostolic opportunity? In what ways does formation occur through co-curricular or extra-curricular activities and spaces? There is significant language in all of our documents that privileges issues of "health," "integration," "student learning," "formation/transformation," "diversity," and "communal learning." What can we draw from best practices scholarship to support this work here at Luther?

We have already listed five pedagogical practices scholarship suggests are necessary for embodying this work (an understanding that we are all in this together, an appreciation of the value of "otherness," an ability to hold tension in life-giving ways, a sense of personal voice and agency flowing from and thoroughly entangled with God's agency, a capacity to create community).[16] Our Wednesday meeting proposal assumes that we would specifically attend to these practices in our time together in those sessions. We have left open who would design and facilitate those meetings, but it seems appropriate that the ELC, with consulting support from pertinent staff, students and faculty[17] would be responsible for the overall design of these meetings.

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[16] This formulation is drawn very closely from the work of Parker Palmer, who has described "five habits of the heart that help make democracy possible," as well as from the theorizing underlying the Art of Hosting and the Respectful Conversations Project.

[17] For example, Mary Hess in her role as pedagogical consultant, or Amy Marga who demonstrated such expert facilitation skills during the PRCR processes, would be pertinent. Several of our students have deep backgrounds in

(3) There is language in our strategic plan, the PRCR documents, and in our responses from faculty and student surveys that speaks directly to issues of student agency. What sorts of pedagogical practices (especially course designs) best match the agency of the learner with specific kinds of learning (particularly specific kinds of content)? Are there assignments or experiences that will help students discover and take responsibility for their personal agency as learners? Are there specific co-curricular or other resources that need to be in place to help our students become this kind of learner? We have strong resources in our staff, for instance, that we could be drawing on as we support student agency.

The proposal to create a syllabus template speaks directly to this issue, as does the need for ongoing shared pedagogical reflection, both of which are necessary for implementing a portfolio-based process. Our students need more transparency from us in terms of what we expect from them, how those expectations will help them reach their vocational goals, and what is required to meet those expectations. A template offers a way to standardize the process, without unduly constraining individual faculty. Each of us would provide the same basic components, but could do so with whatever additional elements we find useful.

Further, to be very honest, we simply do not yet know what practices here at Luther best accomplish active learning on the part of our students. We can draw on the wider literature in adult learning and higher education to make some educated guesses, but in the long run our best reflection must be centered in our own unique context. Here again our committee emphasizes the need for ongoing, shared, collaborative reflection across various roles -- hence our first proposal for holding and structuring Wednesday community-wide meetings.

As the faculty continues to shrink, while Luther seeks to increase the size of the student body, such reflection will become ever more necessary and pressing, even as our capacity to spend time on it risks dwindling. This challenge to our central mission of formation of evangelical public leaders is why we believe any viable pedagogical response must be structural, it must be built into our every day responsibilities at this institution, and it must include the development of a sufficient degree of relational trust to ensure true collaboration.

(4) There is a lot of concern voiced in the student surveys, and to some degree in the faculty survey, about the differing contexts and backgrounds that students bring into our program. How can we best differentiate what we are doing in our teaching to make the most effective use of classroom time, how can we best develop assignments that support a diverse array of students with a myriad previous preparation, and how can we teach in ways that draw on and prepare our students for a multi-faith, multi-cultural world?

Here again, this question points directly at the need to do ongoing assessment of our pedagogical practices, as well as to provide room to ignite creative innovation. Our committee believes that such assessment and innovation cannot be done in isolation or a vacuum, and thus our proposal for Wednesday meetings specifies that such meetings draw on the wisdom of the whole at Luther (faculty, staff and students), rather than continuing the compartmentalization which is no longer

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pedagogy, and we have multiple staff who made crucial contributions during the task force process, all of them would be pertinent help in designing these meetings.

effective. We also believe that by instituting a syllabus template we will create a clear opportunity for faculty to be in conversation about the methods we find helpful, and the dead ends we have discovered.

(5) In our new curricula, we recognize that it is no longer viable to require that the vast majority of theological education be placed before the act of public credentialing (ordination or commissioning). For that reason, we need to be intentional about forming the habits and dispositions of lifelong learners. How is this done? What are the capacities and dispositions of lifelong learners? How might we draw on the wisdom and experience of our staff, as well as our faculty, to continue to support a community of lifelong learning?

Here again our committee points to the five practices named above (an understanding that we are all in this together, an appreciation of the value of "otherness," an ability to hold tension in life-giving ways, a sense of personal voice and agency flowing from and thoroughly entangled with God's agency, and a capacity to create community), and to the need to develop spaces and times in which we can intentionally explore these practices.

(6) The new curriculum is much more open and flexible than our current curriculum. Students will have far more electives, which could and should allow them to take ownership of their vocational formation. This openness signals a high level of trust in our students, who now will need wise and effective faculty counsel as they pursue the specific program outcomes. How will we learn to be these kinds of counselors? What structures and practices will help us to do this collegially and effectively?

All three of our proposals are aimed at this issue. By creating a structure in which ongoing reflection occurs, embodying that reflection in the design of our courses, and requiring such reflection to be embedded in the design and offering of electives based on the portfolio process, we will provide a foundation for this trust and the development of such active agency and ownership on the part of our students. What our proposals do not yet do, is to suggest specific intersections with the work of our Student Resources staff. Clearly that intersection will have a major impact on this issue, and it is the primary reason why our first proposal stresses the need for "cross border" discussions. We believe that our experience with the PRCR process, in which such "cross border" discussions were lively, creative, and crucial to the development of this curriculum, demands a continued exercise of such discussion, fully institutionalized in our shared lives at Luther.

(7) The students' need for wise and effective faculty counsel entails that faculty develop an ethos among themselves in which we are mutually supportive of each other's disciplines, pedagogies, and theological contributions. The Faculty Handbook stipulates features that guide the development of our ethos: collegiality rather than competitiveness; a spirit of freedom rather than fear; a spirit of excellence and inquiry; a spirit of equality and a practice of access; a spirit of forgiveness and love. What conversations need to be fostered in order that we might actually bring about this ethos? How might we come to understand each other's perspectives? How can we honor each other's vocations even as we honor and name the reality that we have significant disagreements regarding theology, pedagogy and ministry?

Here we have taken the five values from the ethos found in the faculty and student handbooks, placed them into discussion with the relevant literatures, and emerged with five pedagogical practices we believe our community needs to become proficient in demonstrating. As noted previously, we believe these practices can best be exercised in a weekly meeting designed to help us accomplish specific tasks together while practicing these habits.

(8) There was significant support expressed in the faculty survey and the staff focus groups for a variety of pedagogical tools that are less familiar and have been used less often at Luther: visual literacy, art and theater, forms of musical practice beyond traditional church music, service-learning, and so on. How might we draw on the gifts of staff, community members, and others for whom these tools are more familiar, so that we might integrate them into our classes and other formal learning structures?

Here again, the five pedagogical practices we note above, and the structural scaffolding we propose, are pointed directly at this issue. Having identified a need to draw upon these differing tools, now we need to find ways to do so organically, which we believe will happen by the addition of a greater variety of voices to the pedagogy and assessment discussions, but also as we share with each other our own "best practices" from our classrooms.

(9) Learning is taking place in a much greater variety of spaces and places than our pedagogical practices have generally acknowledged. There is evidence in all of the survey data and focus groups that the learning which takes place in specific contexts outside of Luther classrooms may have more urgency, applicability and formative capacity than we have been consciously drawing upon. How might we extend our pedagogical imagination and our collaborative relationships with congregations, social service agencies, and other partners to become more efficient and effective in the midst of our current economic and faculty constraints?

Here again, our proposals are all aimed at this – and based in large measure on the values to be found in our curriculum statement.

(10) Finally, as is noted throughout our new curriculum design, assessment is a crucial element driving the success or failure of our shared work in learning. How can we reflect effectively upon the assessment data we will continue to have access to, and how will we shape our daily pedagogical practices to draw more nimbly upon a variety of ongoing and in-class assessment tools? Many of us are unfamiliar with these tools, and we have a history at Luther of gathering data but not reflecting upon or incorporating it into our practices. As a learning community, how will we learn to do evaluation as collaborative inquiry?

Our first proposal is pointed most directly at this issue, by creating a monthly forum in which we will enter into carefully designed discussion about assessment data. Our second proposal builds transparency and clarity into our expectations for student learning, and develops rubrics (with related assignments) which will enhance and support such assessment through the portfolio process. Our third proposal provides scaffolding from which we can take what we are learning through assessment and develop appropriate elective courses.

Appendix.

Data analysis from the students, staff and faculty information gathering

Please note that there is significant raw data from all of these surveys. If you would like to engage that data, we would be happy to share it with you (as long as you adhere to the basic guidelines under which it was gathered). What we have included below are specific summaries of the findings.

From the student survey:

General Observations

The student survey on the curriculum received a very high response rate. This survey was sent in the midst of end of term pressures and multiple other surveys, yet still received over 200 responses. From the number and quality of the responses we are able to state the following:

a.   The student body is very invested in this school and students are very supportive of the faculty's efforts in this process. They also strongly appreciate being consulted and involved in this process.

b.   Students' responses represent a very diverse range and in most cases cannot be reduced to any particular point of view

c.   Of the respondents 77% were MDiv, 17% were MA and 6% were other degree programs.

d.   31% of respondents were DL students

e.   59% of respondents were second or third career students.

Overall Themes

Relationality

- ● The importance of relationships in both the learning process and the spiritual formation of students was an indisputably strong theme that emerged from multiple questions on the survey.
    a. 93% or respondents agreed (55% strongly agreed) that the specific person teaching was of importance to a positive learning experience.
    b. In response to the open-ended question: What about your experience at Luther Seminary has been most important in shaping your spiritual identity? 55% of all respondents to this question pointed to relationships with faculty, peers, or staff as being essential to their spiritual formation. (The second most common theme was "academic work" at 35%) See summary document for further responses.
    c. These responses seem to indicate a strong link between relationality and both learning and spiritual formation in the majority of students.

Content of Learning

    a. 94% of students agreed or strongly agreed that content and subject matter was of importance to a positive learning experience. There was a great diversity in responses as to which subject matter was of the highest importance.

    b. In response to the open ended question: Name any courses that you have taken at Luther that you feel have been indispensable to your education. Why do you consider this/these course(s) so important? The most common reason (stated by 47% of respondents) for why courses were important was that they were practical and applicable. That being said, the range of which courses were deemed to be practical and applicable was extremely broad ranging from Reading the Audiences, to Dismantling Racism, to Systematic Theology courses, to Bible courses, to CYF courses, to CPE, to Cross Cultural courses, to History courses to literally everything in between. Please read the raw data for further insight.

    c. In response to the open ended question: If you were to design a new course for Luther Seminary, what would it be called? What would be the course description? The courses suggested were in the following areas:

- 45 or 46% suggested new courses in the area of congregational mission and/or leadership
- 23 or 24% suggested new courses with an emphasis on ecumenism, diversity, interfaith or multiculturalism
- 23 or 24% suggested new courses in the area of discipleship, spiritual development/direction, pastoral identity or vocation
- 18 or 19% suggested new courses in the area of theology
- 17 or 18% suggested new courses in the area of social justice, ecology or community development
- 14 or 14% suggested new courses in the area of worship, music or the arts

Please read the raw data for further insight.

Learning Environment and Pedagogy

    a. 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a safe and respectful learning environment was important to a positive learning experience.

    b. 80% of respondents agreed (with 19% strongly agreeing) that learning outcomes being clearly outlined and achieved were important to a positive learning experience.

    c. Pedagogical methods that received the strongest endorsement as contributing to a positive learning experience included: Lecture (92% agree 45% strongly agree), Small Group Discussion (88% agree, 36% strongly agree), One-on-One Conversations (85% agree, 39% strongly agree).

From the staff focus group

A. Process

- Held staff focus group with 15 people in attendance from following offices: Office of Technology, Library, Seminary Pastor, Registrar, Contextual Learning, Graduate Studies, Global Mission Institute, Lifelong Learning, Student Affairs, Children, Youth and Family and Stewardship.
- Krista Lind and Paul Daniels facilitated a lively, engaging conversation with "ground rules" laid that candor and confidentiality would be expected and respected. A summary of the responses (with no names attached) was provided to participants. Additionally, Lind and Daniels interviewed 2 key staff members unable to attend the focus group. Their comments are included here.

B. Initial Findings/Themes

- Staff investment around teaching and learning issues (our "short-hand" for pedagogy) is very high, with a strong self-understanding of participating in teaching and learning at LS.
- Staff expertise in areas of teaching and learning is under-appreciated and under-utiltized.
- Staff are experts in areas that are needed for LS to succeed with the most effective pedagogies (these include, but are not limited to, areas of technological innovation)
- A wide variety of teachers in addition to faculty were named: internship supervisors, mentors, financial coaches, staff supervisors of student workers, teaching assistants
- Staff are deeply interested in learning strategies that include working with faculty on intentional reflection on practice, wider use of apprenticeship models, more immersion experiences and an increased openness to rapidly improving technologies to aid learning.

Values - staff reflected on core values in their understanding of the teaching and learning environment at Luther. These included:

- Contextualized learning - widening this type of experience beyond congregational setting
- Fostering curiosity and discovery in helping to create life-long learners
- Practicing generosity with wide variety of competing or opposing ideas
- All have something to learn, all have something to teach
- Establishing a true culture of risk-taking (permission to fail) in teaching and learning

C. Continuing Questions

- Increasing interactions between staff and faculty to cross-pollinate ideas and strategies for teaching and learning so that both may benefit.
- Many staff are in a position to try innovative or "risky" new methods in a way that allows permission to fail and bring opportunities to expand these ideas to other venues.
- Certain expertise are lodged in the staff and in no other places across the campus. How can we utilize these expertise?
- Everyone connected to Luther is responsible for our communal life together- how can we work together to uphold the learning values we claim?

From the faculty survey:

There were seventeen individuals who responded to the faculty survey, using over 12,000 words in their responses.

Our initial coding identified no specific consensus on favored or most effective pedagogies – there was a very wide diversity, and rich reflection offered. The modes of pedagogy identified included the following:

lecture

video lecture

use of multi-media

small group discussion

full class discussion

individual projects

group projects

reading assignments

reflection papers

final/cumulative papers

online discussions

off campus immersion experience

engagement with music

engagement with art

verbatims

one on one conversations

deliberative pedagogies

project-based pedagogy

case study

CIQ / assessment

peer review

scaffolding

It was interesting that no one wrote about final exams or other forms of summative assessment. That does mean that faculty are not using those mechanisms, but it is interesting that they were not first on faculty minds when describing pedagogical practices.

The challenges identified included:

integration

diversity

student expectations

faculty expectations

challenge of fostering mutual care and respect

student resistance

power dynamics

differentiation of learning

students reading inadequately

justice issues

reflective/learning pedagogy

God encounter

Moving from knowledge to competency

active role of context

Here there was more agreement, with frequent mention of the issues of "differentiation of learning" (that is, working students from diverse backgrounds and preparation), and the "challenge of fostering mutual care and respect."

There is a lot of support in this group of respondents for reflective practice, and support for more of it. There is a lot of support in this group of respondents for active learning on the part of students. Specific language we coded as "God encounter" occurred only later in the survey, not so much under pedagogical strategies.