

Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary invests in partnerships and AI to offer global theological education

BY ADRIAAN C. NEELE

Theological education has long been integral to preparing individuals for ministry and nurturing the intellectual and spiritual life of the global church. Seminaries not driven by tuition—like Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS)—rely on generous and sustained support from donations, endowments, and partnerships to operate. Unlike traditional tuition-based funding models, PRTS remains committed to providing accredited, affordable, and accessible education without placing a financial burden on students. At the same time, PRTS is called to uphold and maintain the rigorous standards and integrity of its ATS-accredited programs.

However, this approach encounters significant challenges when attempting to scale globally. Financial sustainability becomes precarious as reliance on external funding magnifies with the costs of infrastructure, faculty, and operational needs across diverse regions. Possible donor fatigue and fluctuating economic conditions may further exacerbate these difficulties.

Seminaries must also grapple with cultural adaptation, as theological education requires sensitivity to local languages, socio-political contexts, and religious traditions. In many regions, Western pedagogical models risk alienating or diminishing local cultural identities.



Coupled with these hurdles are the complexities of technological infrastructure, faculty recruitment, curriculum development, and accreditation—each requiring substantial investment and cross-cultural expertise. The challenge of going global lies not just in logistics, but also in maintaining institutional identity while serving an increasingly diverse church.

Addressing financial sustainability requires innovative strategies that move beyond traditional donation models. Diversifying funding streams through global donor networks and establishing respected partnerships with mission organizations or local churches can reduce financial volatility. For example, PRTS established tuition-free partnerships in 25 countries with like-minded



seminaries—often run by alumni. Whereas PRTS does not collect on the tuition, these international partners charge tuition of their students at a local, affordable rate. This micro-business initiative generates supplementary revenue for PRTS partners while engaging broader communities. Cultural adaptation necessitates robust contextualization efforts, engaging local leaders and theologians to ensure that curricula resonate with unique regional needs. Modular course designs combine (in the case of PRTS) biblical, Reformed, and experiential principles of theology with region-specific applications—all with the hope of preventing theological imperialism.

Equally critical is investing in translation and multilingual resources to bridge linguistic barriers. Combining AI tools with the development of theological specific lexicons and dictionaries—created in consultation with locally trusted partners—enabled PRTS to offer theological education that is both contextualized and upholds its mission to serve a global church with biblical, Reformed, experiential, and practical theology.

More recent technology has enabled scalability, offering a cost-effective means to expand globally. PRTS adopted flexible digital platforms tailored to low-bandwidth

regions, integrating interactive tools, offline capabilities, and mobile accessibility to accommodate students in remote areas.

Consequently, this necessitates significant investment in robust IT infrastructure and training for both faculty and students. Hybrid models that blend online education with localized workshops or group meetings have the effect of creating a community while maintaining global reach. Ensuring cybersecurity and data privacy across multiple jurisdictions remains a critical consideration for the seminary’s envisioned hybrid learning environment. In parallel, faculty recruitment and development must prioritize cultural competency and contextual theology. Equipping educators—multilingual mentors and assessors supporting the faculty—with skills for cross-cultural communication and online teaching strengthens the seminary’s ability to meet diverse student needs. The local faculty of PRTS partners, often its alums, offer deep cultural insights ensuring that theological education remains both relevant and transformative.

Finally, global partnerships are essential for addressing the logistical, cultural, and operational challenges of expansion. Collaborating with local churches, mission

organizations, and educational institutions fosters a greater capacity and effectiveness, while establishing trust and credibility. Community-centered approaches that prioritize local theological and ministerial needs can empower global partnerships to thrive. Structuring these alliances as opportunities for shared learning ensures sustainability and alignment with the mission of PRTS and the missions of its partners. Transparency, regular communication, and shared decision-making help maintain the cohesion of a global, institutional identity.

By addressing financial, cultural, technological, and partnership challenges strategically, seminaries not driven by tuition can rise to the challenge and opportunity of global theological education. They can come alongside the next generation of pastors, preachers, and teachers to serve an interconnected world, while upholding biblical integrity, confessional identity, and practical implications.



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