

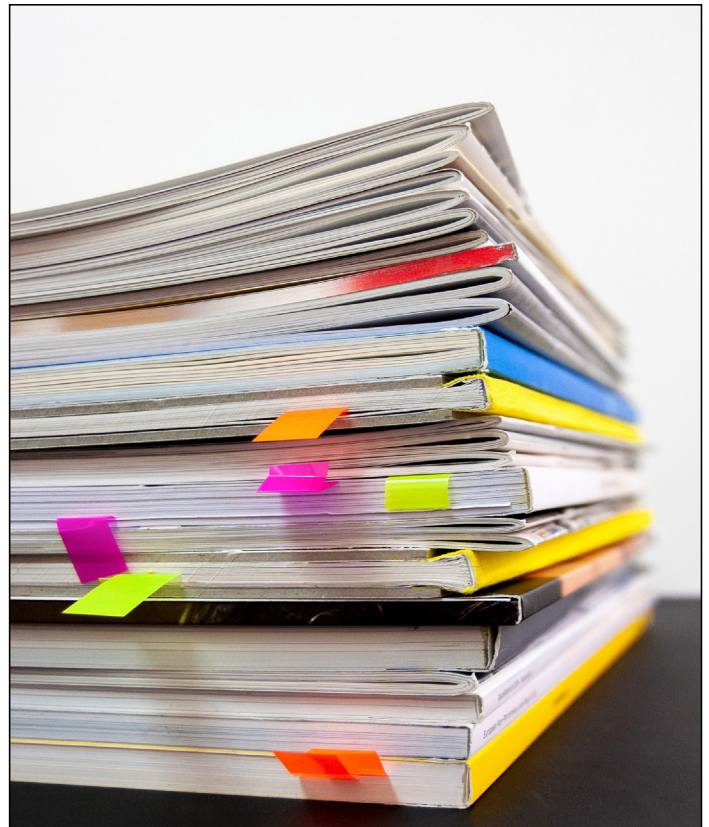
Educational Models and Practices grant reports serve as resources for member schools

BY STEPHEN R. GRAHAM

With many ATS schools preparing to embark on planning and explorations through Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow grants, this is a good time to remind members about the reports of similar, if somewhat smaller, projects from the ATS Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education (EMP) project. More than 100 different schools received a total of 58 innovation grants and 44 faculty development grants to engage a range of projects and to report on what they had learned, challenges and opportunities, and resources—including consultants—that they had found helpful.

The 58 Innovation Grant reports addressed issues in ten broad categories: (1) innovative academic programs, (2) collaborations with partners beyond theological education, (3) competency-based theological education, (4) contextual education, (5) theological education and the criminal justice system, (6) formation of students and faculty, (7) global partnerships, (8) multicultural competence, (9) online and digital innovations, and (10) programs for Spanish-speaking constituencies.

Many of the projects, of course, bridged a number of the categories. For example, Barry University Department of Theology and Philosophy explored the use of various digital media with Spanish-speaking lay leaders on site in Cuba, facilitated by graduate theological students from Barry. Saint Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology utilized digital portfolios, in collaboration with field



education supervisors, to promote and assess student formation. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has hosted a program of theological studies at Angola Prison since 1995 and used its innovation grant to expand its partnership with the institution to offer stackable credentials for inmates, including a bachelor's degree, leadership certificates, and a Master of Arts degree. Explorations are underway to develop online programming and a Master of Divinity degree, perhaps utilizing aspects of competency-based theological education, and tailored to the distinctive needs of the prison culture. Wartburg Theological Seminary worked to integrate all of its Master of Divinity students into a single, integrated teaching and learning community, across a range of delivery methods and student locations. In so doing, it discovered the

essential foundation of relationships with educational collaborators; mentors, field educators, congregations, and synods.

General themes emerging from the innovation reports included:

Technologies

Most theological schools are finding new ways to utilize emerging technologies in support of their educational missions.

Diversities

The number and scope of diversities among and within the schools are remarkable, and each school must identify and carefully attend to them, adapting their programming and structures in ways appropriate to serve constituencies within the school's context and mission.

Student Context

Many projects were intended to help schools connect with students "where they are," in terms of geographic location, language and culture, and formational needs, and to utilize educational resources from within the context.

Student Formation

The broad theme of the formation of students emerged again and again through the EMP project and within the innovation grants.

Faculty

The evolving roles and work of faculty consistently appeared in reports and conversations, obviously within the "faculty development" grants, but also in the grants awarded in the "innovation" category.

Institutions

Some projects and discussions reflected on the changing nature of institutions and their work. Many schools are finding the need to be more flexible, nimble, and, as one project put it, needing faculty to "build muscles," enabling them to be more tolerant of a level of "chaos" in the educational process, especially as related to working

with educational and contextual partners. It became clear through the conversations how important it has become for schools to develop inter-cultural competencies across their institutions, including faculty, staff, administration, board, and students.

Relationships

The enterprise of theological education has been and continues to be fundamentally about relationships, even in the midst of dramatic changes and new modalities.

Humility

A number of those reporting on their projects noted the need for humility, especially in terms of learning from as well as learning for constituents.

Patience

Similarly, working with educational partners normally required patience from the personnel in the theological school. As one put it, "our schedule is not necessarily their schedule," often requiring adaptation to different rhythms of calendar and urgency.

The 44 Faculty Development Grants fall into eight distinctive categories: (1) competency-based theological education, (2) contextual education, (3) curriculum development, (4) engagement with the church, (5) faculty vocational identity, (6) formation of students and faculty, (7) multicultural competence, and (8) online teaching and learning.

Several trends and insights within four broad categories emerged from the final Faculty Development Grant reports:

Faculty role

1. While sometimes faculty buy-in is a challenge, several schools found that faculty are willing to engage substantive and important issues if presented with clarity and valid rationale.
2. Not every skill for ministry can or should be learned from faculty with terminal degrees.

Faculty work

1. ATS faculty are often called upon to adapt their work practices in ways for which their formal training and past curriculum practices have not prepared them, including more diverse students (in almost every way), new pedagogies, educational models, scheduling, administrative work, student formation, teaching more part-time and “in ministry” students, interdisciplinary pressures, and a range of collaborations.
2. Rapid changes in teaching and learning have made it difficult to ascertain what good teaching is, and how to assess and support faculty in developing their teaching.

Faculty development

1. Conversations and learning in one area of focus often brought benefits to other areas. Work in pedagogy for online teaching and learning, for example, frequently led to improvements in face-to-face teaching. In some cases, programming developed for students in hybrid courses and programs, was discovered to be desired by and effective with more traditional students.
2. It is important to develop a culture of ongoing faculty development.

Faculty as individuals and a community

1. Faculty development must address emotional and affective issues as well as faculty work and role. Faculty often experience a significant reality of loss in the midst of changes, and a few of the project reports noted that faculty are lonely within the “solitary calling” of academia.
2. The magnitude of change in the past decade has impacted the vocational identity of the faculty.

These summaries merely scratch the surface of the insights and resources found in the 100+ reports.



Stephen R. Graham is Senior Director of Programs and Services and Director of Accreditation at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.