



Board Notes

December, 2017

This is the final edition of Board Notes for 2017 and comes amid the great anticipation that characterizes the Advent season. We trustees also face a time of change in the work we are called to do for Saint Paul. President Blair and I wish you continued joy in your witness and the doing of God's work in the coming year.

Work of the Executive Committee of the Board

The Executive Committee met on December 15 to receive a number of updates on important projects. The initial renovation plans for East Wing at Church of the Resurrection were presented as was a summary of the status of the voluntary faculty reduction plan initiated in November. It is anticipated that the administration will present a comprehensive, integrated proposal, including a draft multi-year sustainable budget, to the full board at a called special meeting on January 19, 2018.

Museum of the Bible

Saint Paul alumni (M.Div. 2011) and trustee Chris Ruddell has played a central role in the development of the Museum of the Bible, which opened to the public this fall. The museum is located just off the national mall in Washington, D.C. not far from the Air and Space Museum. Among his other duties, Chris has been responsible for developing the navigational mobile device that guides visitors through the museum and provides additional audio background on the exhibits. "My education at Saint Paul prepared me well for my current work in terms of critical thinking skills, church history and the new ethical considerations associated with technology," Chris said in a recent telephone interview. When asked about surprises one might encounter at the museum, he pointed to the fact that a billion people on earth today do not have access to the Bible in their native language.

Chris and his wife, Rev. Crystal Hughes (M.Div., 2010), and their two children live in Guthrie, Oklahoma where Crystal serves a local church.

Competency-based Theological Education

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Competency-based education (CBE) is a flexible way for students to receive credit for what they know, build on their knowledge and skills by learning more at their own pace, and earn high-quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials that help them in their lives and careers. CBE focuses on what students must know and be able to do to earn degrees and other credentials.¹ Part of the growing popularity of CBE is that it is an educational model that focuses on assessing what students have actually learned, rather than how long students sit in a classroom. Given recent criticisms of U.S. higher education regarding poorly performing students who are not ready for the workplace and who often graduate at low rates with high debt, it is not surprising that CBE is receiving increased attention from theological schools as an alternative educational model.²

These concerns, along with comments from judicatories related to students' proficiency in practices of ministry (with preaching and fiscal management among the top areas noted), are factors that affirm Saint Paul's continued emphasis on a praxis-based approach to theological education that integrates theory and practice. Given a large percentage of students whose undergraduate degrees are not in religious studies or philosophy, this integrated approach serves as a basis from which to provide our students with a theoretical foundation that informs practices of ministry. In light of these realities, Saint Paul continues to place value on competencies for ministry. While a praxis based approach may be an aspect of CBE, Saint Paul's educational model is not a CBE approach. For clarity, it is important to note that irrespective of the educational model, competencies that students master typically include knowledge of their faith tradition's theology; the ability to interpret and apply biblical texts; proficiency in performing key ministerial duties; and personal and spiritual formation. Beyond these expectations, a school can add any number of competencies that address constituents' needs.

While definitions vary, the guidelines adopted by the U. S. Department of Education and the U. S. regional accrediting agencies (such as HLC) generally agree that CBE is an educational model that emphasizes at least these four things: (1) learning over seat time, (2) mastery of professionally-oriented competencies, (3) a series of well-planned learning activities or assessments (class-based or not; online or onsite) that students may complete at their own pace, and (4) a community of learning in which there is regular and substantive interaction between qualified faculty and students.² Established in 2013, the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) describes CBE as a model that combines an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic model in which the time it takes to demonstrate competencies varies and the expectations about learning are held constant. Students acquire and demonstrate their knowledge and skills by engaging in learning exercises, activities and experiences that align with clearly defined programmatic outcomes. Students receive proactive guidance and support from faculty and staff. Learners earn credentials by demonstrating mastery through multiple forms of assessment, often at a personalized pace.³

In its draft report to Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the educational models peer group on competency-based theological education (CBTE) identified three common characteristics as fundamental to all CBTE programs, especially in a theological, ministerial setting. In no particular order, CBE is:

- *Customized*- students work with teams assembled and overseen by a credentialed member of the faculty. This team creates a unique pathway through the degree, using resources inside and outside the seminary. The path follows no predetermined route. Students pursue competencies at their own pace and in their chosen order.
- *Communal*- students travel the path in the company of peers and mentors. Interactions are substantive and occur in a secure and private environment, although contact is not always face-to-face. To help participants bond with each other, the seminary may form affinity groups, with members sharing the same faculty mentor or coming from the same denomination. Credentialed faculty members initiate and engage in dialogue that addresses content related to the competencies.
- *Contextualized*- the ministry context of a student is intentional and integrated into the educational process, the design of assignments, and the assessment of learning. The context helps shape the journey and may result in students enrolled in the same degree program completing different sets of assignments.

In a CBTE model, the role of faculty is less about creating and imparting content and more about helping students navigate content, acquire knowledge, master skills, and think theologically.² Given Saint Paul's praxis approach to theological education, this generalized understanding of CBTE is fraught with questions about pedagogy (approaches to teaching) and student-centered learning.

Conversations about CBTE can benefit from research conducted by HCM Strategists, a group of policy advocates and strategists who are committed to working towards equitable and meaningful change in the realms of education and health.⁴ In May, C-BEN released the first ever set of Quality Principles & Standards designed specifically for post-secondary CBE programs. With the continued expansion of CBE programs across the nation, there is a growing need to define more clearly the elements of quality in competency based education. Developed through a year-long process led by a diverse group of C-BEN institutions, the Quality Principles & Standards are designed to be universal enough to apply to all CBE programs, regardless of model variations, but specific enough to provide strong assurance of quality in the development and implementation of competency-based learning programs.

As Saint Paul continues to assess student learning, ever attentive to our institutional mission, we will need to think carefully and strategically about the scope and design of our degree programs. This may necessitate further conversation about the value of a CBE model in light of our mission and the contexts in which our students serve. A presenting challenge will be customizing an approach to learning that aligns with the U.S. Department of Education and HLC standards for CBE approval. Another is ensuring the model addresses all four M.Div. content areas described in Standard A (sections A.2.2-5): religious heritage, cultural context, personal and spiritual formation, and capacity for ministerial and public leadership. To move towards a CBE model will necessitate due diligence that includes program review and justification, as well as projected costs associated with staffing, assessment and training.

¹ "What is Competency-Based Education?"

http://www.cbenetwork.org/sites/457/uploaded/files/About_CBEN_101615.pdf

(accessed December 18, 2017)

² "A Preliminary Resource Paper for ATS Member Schools Considering Competency-Based Education" (June 2016)

³ Competency-Based Education Network: A National Consortium for Designing, Developing and Scaling New Models for Student Learning. <http://www.cbenetwork.org/competency-based-education/> (accessed December 18, 2017)

⁴ For information on HCM Strategists, see <http://hcmstrategists.com/us/team/> (accessed December 18, 2017)

Educational Models and Practices

The Association of Theological Schools recently announced the online publication of a long-awaited report titled "Explore, Assess, Affirm." This is the culmination of a lengthy study conducted by 18 peer groups representing over 100 ATS member schools. It includes insights into challenges facing most theological schools, including the scope, duration, and identity of our degree programs; accessibility for minority students; and generally held myths about online education. This is a must-read for trustees of seminaries and will no doubt shape thinking on educational mission, strategy, best practices and accreditation standards in the years to come. You can download a copy of the report at:

<https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/ed-models-and-practices-peer%20group%20reports-reveal-insights.pdf>

Click on the words online in the abstract paragraph to access the report.

January Special Called Meeting of the Board of Trustees

The January meeting of the Board of Trustees noted in certain motions passed at the October board meeting has been delayed until **1:00 PM, Friday, January 19, 2018** to assure a thoughtful and well-integrated plan.