

Transforming Theology

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- What are our Strengths and Not-yet-strengths?

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Incorporating Student Experience and Transformative Learning into Curriculum Design and Planning of Undergraduate Theological Degrees.

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What are our Strengths and Not-yet-strengths?

A recent set of interviews asked Australian theological stakeholders to indicate the strengths of their respective institutions, with regard to both their actual strengths and the things currently being worked on or earnestly desired.

The *actual strengths* include dominant and secondary strengths. Two dominant strengths are the personal, professional and pastoral *quality of the lecturers* and the consistent focus on *biblical orthodoxy* and principles within a culture of breadth and depth of biblical and theological scholarship, fostered in colleges and universities alike. The strong affirmation of these elements by all stakeholders provides a positive evaluation of the theological sector.

Secondary strengths were noted as the ability to *read*

a missional context and experience for the confidence to lead in that student, for students to context, based on the discover rather than internalization of the basic merely to receive principles of leadership; the theological truths.

generation of a *passion for ministry*, with a consistent sense of vocation; and a widespread fostering of *critical and adaptable theological thinking* and attitudes of tolerance and respect in personal engagement, with an increased openness of theological and ecclesiastical perspectives and a demonstrable growth in pastoral sensitivity.

Three *aspirational strengths* started with a desire for a greater sense of *curriculum management and co-ordination*, including more effective inter-relation of units in the course and the enhancement of field training, with the aim of providing an authentic

There is a desire to enhance *functional ministry capacity*, most particularly expressed by graduates and church leaders responsible for the placement and oversight of graduates.

The third area is the need for theological education to be *holistic and integrated* rather than teaching just theological data. This requires the personal and strategic integration of cognitive, practical and affective elements of the theological development of the students, involving the development of character and values as well as knowledge.

From the Research: What the Stakeholders Have Said

1. Who shapes the curriculum

The teaching faculty, especially the dominant academic leadership of the faculty

- the more autonomous the teaching institution, the more it is open to local initiative & more direct implementation of change

Desired development

- faculty to be consistently informed by contemporary needs & issues of students & stakeholders, especially regarding contemporary issues in education & ministry
- effectual two-way communication between teaching institutions & stakeholders, offering proactive developmental opportunities rather than merely reactive assessments

2. The major focus of theological education

Acquisition and mastery of biblical and theological knowledge

- main motivation & most valued outcome of theological education

Emergent questions

- theological graduates are well versed in scripture and systematic theology, but do they have a suitably wide world view, are they adequately equipped for effectual dialogue with a contemporary world, do they have the ability to integrate their learning and their life and ministry?
- what means exist for the formative development of non-ordination candidates?

Desired development

- enhancement of practical ministry skills & personal growth
- more integrated persons who can think, relate & live theologically & skilfully in a contemporary world context, not just informed & articulate theologians

3. Connecting with students' life experience

Very little formal incorporation of life experience within the curriculum

- *ad hoc* and intuitive rather than intentional or strategic
- mainly associated with extra-curricular activities
- general disconnection between theological studies and life experience

4. Opportunities for transformative learning

Typified by uncertainty

- unclear terminology, whose role it is, how it is facilitated & authenticated

Few deliberately structured transformative elements within the formal degree program

- largely informal extra-curricular activities of campus life & college missions
- limited Supervised Field Education units & practical elective units
- some recent strategic transformative units & integrative exit projects

Desired development

- holistic & integrated learning to replace compartmentalised approach to theology
- biblical & theological advancement plus authentic personal spiritual growth
- theological education as transformative rather than merely cognitive

5. Graduate Outcomes and Attributes

Common Strengths

- sound theological scholarship & biblical fidelity
- some (though not universal) suitably developed ministry skills

Desired Outcome

- more enhanced skills of appropriate leadership & social engagement
- an integrated person who has appropriated theological concepts & mastered principles of practice in a holistic expression of ministry in a variety of modern & often unpredictable contexts

Tensions

- need to serve multiple masters, with a diversity of stakeholders & students
- emerging need for institutions (especially small colleges) to re-define their core objectives & to establish viable parameters of operation

Workshop: Sydney: 27 April 2012

Registration Forms and Information Details have recently been sent to colleges and universities for this strategic event.

Participants will have a good opportunity to share successful ideas and practices.

Campuses have been allocated one or more Official Delegates. We need to limit participation to 100 delegates in all and initial indications are that the limited places available for Additional Delegates will be filled quickly.

It is imperative that we receive all registrations by **15 March 2012**, so that we may extend the original invitations to as many participants as possible.

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