

Report to the UUA Panel on Theological Education

From: Meadville Lombard Theological School (ML)

RE: Grant to develop ministerial formation opportunities for UU students in non-UU schools

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Meadville Lombard Theological School is grateful to the UUA Panel on Theological Education for funding the project which proposes to identify pivotal points in the formation of UU seminarians/ministers, discern where those pivotal points could be enhanced for seminarians in non-UU schools, and identify new opportunities for such seminarians. The project, although not yet complete, is pointing the school toward developing ways to make integrated praxis/reflection learning opportunities available to students in those schools.

CHRONOLOGY OF STEPS AND RESULTING FINDINGS

1. **November –December, 2007:** The ML Provost interviewed members around issues of ministerial formation. The faculty voiced unanimous agreement that the internship is a key conditioning factor in the formation process. Further, they agreed that internships, in general, are uneven experiences that are assessed by Schools and the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, in large measure, once the experience has been completed. The Internships could be greatly enhanced if they were better integrated into the formal educational process. The faculty concurred that there is a readiness for learning that only occurs after the experiences in the internship year – learning about church leadership/administration, conflict mediation and transformation, spirituality and vocation, congregational social advocacy – that are not necessarily provided for following the internship.

2. **January 2008:** The Educational Leadership (President, Provost, Dean of Enrollment and Student Services considered the Auburn Theological Seminary Study, "How Are We Doing? The Effectiveness of Theological Schools as Measured By the Vocations and Views of Graduates" (released in December 2007). This is a

key study which confirmed the views of the ML faculty by stating that, of four categories of formation, seminary education is least effective in preparing for the practical elements of ministry while it is considered the second most crucial for ministry, just behind “Personal and Spiritual formation.”

3. **January 2008:** ML’s Leadership held a first meeting with Consultant Dr. Wayne Goodwin (former Dean of the Charlotte campus and head of Distributive Education at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary), who confirmed the need for a more integrated approach to practical elements of ministry across all denominational lines. He also suggested options to addressing this need for a more integrated praxis/reflection approach for both ML students and UU seminarians at non-UU schools.
4. **January 2008:** ML’s Education Leadership met with consultants; Rev. Meg Riley, Rev. Greg Stewart and Rev. William Schulz; all of whom have expertise in UU ministry and acquaintance with theological education in non-UU seminaries. Discussed the Auburn study and its applicability to the needs of UU students. Discussed blended courses (online/face-to-face) and a two tiered program as a means of creating a more integrated approach to the internship (see item #5).
5. **February 2008:** An ML faculty retreat was held to consider the Auburn study and to consider alternate ways of meeting needs of students on internship. The faculty discussed the possibility of creating a two tier program, one that guides students as during the internship experience and another program of contextual ministry that would take place following the internship year. The hallmarks of this potential program were outlined as follows:

Internship support practicum:

One credit course – offered to all UU students during internship year. Blended course – meet face to face once a quarter, rest of the time online contact

Program in Contextual Ministry:

Post-internship – blended courses offered to D.Min students and 4th year students, with focus on needs identified in Auburn study and through consultation with faculty and with Stewart, Riley and Schulz: administration/leadership, public ministry/contextual ministry, spirituality and vocation, advanced preaching and worship.

6. **February 2008:** ML gained a deeper understanding of numbers, financial resources, and time availability of non-UU seminary students from Rev. David Pettee, the UUA’s Ministerial Credentialing Director. As a result of that

conversation, the Education Leadership determined that the two tiered program would not be feasible for a large percentage of those students.

7. **February 2008:** In a meeting with Dr. Wayne Goodwin, the ML Education Leadership considered an alternate proposal to the two tiered program. It is a mentored ministry rotation model that is integrated into a three year ML M.Div. program. Geared toward specific competencies, this model consists of site work, reading, seminars and cohort groups. It could be carried out in residence or at a distance. It could be made available, in segments or in its entirety, to students who are enrolled in non-UU seminaries. It represents the truest integrated praxis/reflection model of formation. Its feasibility is dependent upon incorporating it into the ML M.Div. program.
8. **March 2008:** The President of the School met with the Chair of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee to discuss the possibility of ML and the MFC partnering to assess the effectiveness of a mentored ministry rotation model. The Chair encouraged ML to open this discussion with the entire MFC later in the month.
9. **March 2008:** The President and Provost of ML met with the full MFC to further discuss the possibility of partnering to assess the effectiveness of the mentored ministry rotation model. The MFC appeared to be favorably disposed toward such a partnership, but has yet to notify us formally of its decision. The "Next Steps" will be outlined in more detail once we have heard from the MFC.

NEXT STEPS

With approval from the MFC, ML will take the following steps:

1. Begin planning the mentored ministry rotation model for ML students.
2. Conduct research to assure applicability of our program with needs of UU seminarians in non-UU seminaries.
3. Develop enrollment and marketing plan to assist those students.
4. Begin offering mentored ministry rotations to non ML students in Fall 2009

FINANCES AND FUNDING

Because the project has not been completed, the grant has not been fully expended. The remaining funds (\$2970) will be used to defray fees and expenses for our consultant.

CONCLUSIONS

Once again, Meadville Lombard expresses our gratitude to the UUA panel. We believe this grant has allowed us to lay a foundation that will greatly enhance opportunities for students in non-UU seminaries in one of the pivotal aspects of ministerial formation. This grant, along with work our School is doing in other areas of formation, will go a long way to fulfill the hopes of the “Excellence in Ministry” initiative. Thank you.