



## The Lexington Seminar: Summation of the The Gordon Group Report

Garth Rosell, Consultant on Evaluation

*"In the years during and since The Lexington Seminar, the faculty have worked together better than they have for 25 years. The Seminar created space for faculty to listen well to each other. Unhealthy conflict diminished greatly, and faculty cohere as a group."*

*"In terms of other initiatives at [our seminary], it was a great example for us as to how thoughtful, intentional, and spacious moments outside of the context of being here at our own school fostered creativity, ingenuity, and freshness about some of our cherished values."*

*"I think that The Lexington Seminar ethos that was created in Maine was really extraordinary in terms of creating a learning environment that was characterized by openness, thoroughness, and honesty, and lot of enjoyment mixed in with it."*

*"The Lexington Seminar kick-started a conversation we needed to have."*

—Quotes from survey interviews

From its inception, The Lexington Seminar has sought to measure and analyze the impact of its efforts. In fact, one of my primary roles throughout the Seminar has been to evaluate its work, particularly the effect of its June Seminars and Consultations. So it was entirely consistent with its commitment to measurement and analysis that The Lexington Seminar invited the Gordon Group (a team of independent researchers led by Dr. Bryan Auday and Dr. Daniel Johnson) to evaluate the Seminar's efforts and determine the reaction of its participants.

The Gordon Group developed a two-phase study of all thirty-five participating schools from 1999 to 2005. The first phase of the study consisted of a 42-item questionnaire that was sent to all 307 participants. Responses came back from 130 participants, for a very credible 42-percent response rate. The second phase consisted of in-depth interviews with eight selected participants, who provided more detailed responses and anecdotal information.

In early 2007, the Gordon Group returned its findings in a 149-page research report. The following pages contain a summary of those findings. Direct excerpts are in quotes.

### Satisfaction with the June Seminars and Consultations

The overwhelming majority of participants in both the June Seminars and the Final Project Consultations spoke of their experiences in positive terms. More than 99 percent of participants in the June Seminars indicated that they were either satisfied (20.5 percent) or very satisfied (78.6 percent) with their experience.



## Overall Impact of the Seminar

“Whatever personal benefits attendees may have received from the June Seminar experience, they clearly looked to the educational projects themselves as the principal means by which the benefits might be extended to their home institutions.”

“When asked to reflect on how well their institutions had achieved their overall objectives, the vast majority reported favorable outcomes. Nearly three-quarters of all respondents (74.6 percent)—and 92.8 percent of those who were ready to make an assessment—indicated that their project objectives were met either extremely well or fairly well. This is an impressive figure given the number of obstacles that can hinder educational projects of this sort, as well as the fact that sometimes objectives are not met simply because they were too ambitious to start with.”

Of even greater significance is the fact that the ethos of the Seminar seemed to carry over into the institutions themselves.

“In the years during and since The Lexington Seminar,” one participant said, “the faculty have worked together better than they have for 25 years. The seminar created space for faculty to listen well to each other. Unhealthy conflict diminished greatly, and faculty cohere more as a group.”



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Such sentiments were widely shared among the respondents to the survey. “When asked to name the greatest benefit that their institutions received as a result of their involvement with The Lexington Seminar, nearly one-third (32.4 percent) drew attention to the productive dialogue among faculty members and administrators that the Seminar had fostered. More than one in five (21.9 percent) spoke appreciatively of the greater degree of intentionality with which faculty and administrators addressed the challenging issues confronting them, while nearly the same proportion (20.0 percent) spoke simply of dramatic improvements in working relationships across the campus.”

## Objectives of Educational Projects

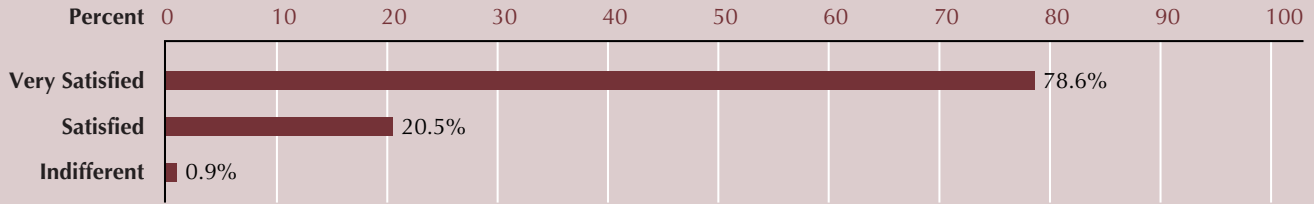
The three most common objectives of the schools’ projects developed during the Seminar were (1) faculty development, (2) curricular review and reform, and (3) effecting a change in campus culture. Less frequent objectives that institutions adopted included the following: new program development, program evaluation, student development, and research on institutional constituencies. More than 50 percent of the respondents reported that these specific objectives were met either extremely well or fairly well. Fewer than 14 percent of respondents reported that an objective was not met at all.

## Faculty Involvement

While implementing the educational project, more than half of the institutions reported that they involved all of their faculty in the following ways:

- Having faculty discuss or vote on the final project proposal
- Having faculty attend a special program or forum

### Overall Level of Satisfaction with the June Seminar.



Source: The Gordon Group Report 2007: Table 4

- Having faculty engage each other in a multi-day retreat or workshop

In regard to faculty involvement and how it has been affected, a survey participant said, "...because of the way we designed our project, it has had an enormous impact... The things that we learned from The Lexington Seminar are now informing the strategic planning that we are doing. It was illuminating for our Board of Trustees to be a part of the conversation because they learned much more about what we do than they did before."

A quarter of the schools indicated that they involved more than half of their faculty by having them:

- Engage in an ongoing series of forums or workshops
- Work on curricular review or reform
- Develop a new program

### Impediments to Success of the Schools' Projects

While the majority of the school's project objectives were met fairly well or extremely well, some objectives were not achieved. The top five reasons for objectives not being realized were the following:

1. Aims were overly ambitious (19 percent)
2. Strong leadership was lacking (15 percent)
3. Communication broke down among key parties (14 percent)
4. Funding was insufficient (14 percent)
5. Students not sufficiently involved (13 percent)

### Issues Common to Participating Schools

Despite significant variation in geographical location, institutional size, and theological identity, participating schools shared surprisingly similar concerns, including (1) increasing diversity of the student body, (2) growing demands of an expanding mission, (3) constant challenges of institutional change, (4) relentless pressures of deferred maintenance, (5) difficulty of creating appropriate boundaries, (6) faculty burnout, (7) challenges of teaching and learning, and (8) maintenance of institutional identity within a rapidly changing world.

While solutions to these kinds of problems are not easily found, many of the participants expressed appreciation for the time, space, and encouragement provided by The Lexington Seminar within which they could begin to address them. The seminar in Maine, as one participant phrased it, provided "a clearer way of defining the issues, as well as a 'team approach' to approaching them."

The Gordon Group concluded that "feedback from both the questionnaire and the interviews revealed that The Lexington Seminar provided theological institutions with a formalized process and the resources to develop and implement educational projects."

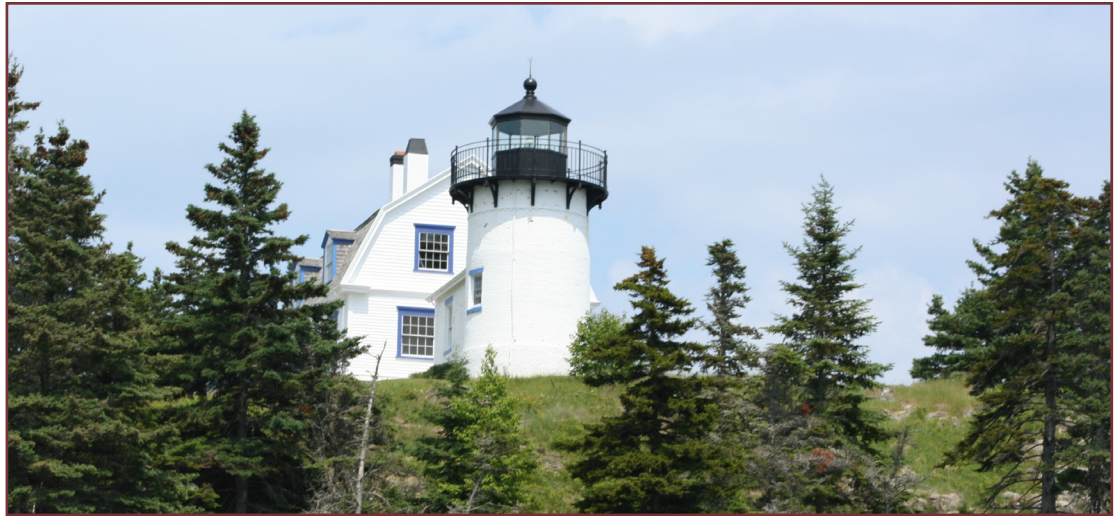
### Time and Space for Conversation is Key

"Central to The Lexington Seminar experience, as affirmed by almost every participant, is the importance of conversation. In a world of overcrowded schedules, increasing demands, and academic isolation, the rediscovery of collegial relationships, interdependency, and mutual support seems refreshingly new and almost revolutionary."

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## Survey Schools '99-'05

Ashland  
AMBS  
Austin Presbyterian  
Baptist at Richmond  
Bethany  
Bethel  
Calvin  
CDSP  
Claremont  
Colgate Rochester Crozer  
Eastern Baptist (Palmer)  
Eastern Mennonite  
Episcopal, Southwest  
General  
Gordon-Conwell  
Lancaster  
Lexington  
Luther  
Lutheran, Chicago  
Lutheran, Gettysburg  
Lutheran, Philadelphia  
Lutheran, Southern  
McCormick  
MTSO  
Pacific Lutheran  
Phillips  
Pittsburgh  
Regent College  
Seabury-Western  
Trinity Evangelical  
Trinity Lutheran  
United of the Twin Cities  
Virginia  
Wartburg  
Wesley



"The Lexington Seminar kick-started a conversation we needed to have," wrote one of the participants. It provided "a sense of hope" for how "campus culture" might be strengthened, wrote another. "We came away from Maine," wrote yet another, with "renewed excitement for our topic and lots of ideas for how to get started." It "forced us to re-examine our life as a community in relationship to our calling as teachers."

"Discovering new possibilities of facing challenges together in an atmosphere of mutual friendship and collegial trust brought many participants a fresh vision of hope. Of the many benefits of The Lexington Seminar, this may well prove to be its most enduring legacy."

### Best Practices: Factors that Contribute to Success

As a result of their study, the researchers were able to identify five themes (or best practices) that participants repeatedly mentioned as having been most helpful to them in addressing their specific concerns.

**Best Practice One: Get Faculty on Board with the Project.** Schools that invite broad faculty participation increase the likelihood that the goals of their projects will be achieved not only in the short term but for many years ahead.

**Best Practice Two: Foster an Ethos of Open Communication.** A willingness to share the goals, progress, difficulties, and achievements of a project demonstrates a school's commitment to

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the collegial exchange of ideas and thus encourages support for current and future projects.

**Best Practice Three: Create Spaces for Conversation.** "The institutions that got the most out of their educational projects were intentional about creating times and places wherein the principal parties could talk in open, unhurried, and focused ways about their plans and desires."

**Best Practice Four: Open the Circle of Conversation.** The encouragement of "new and different voices" enables solidarity, understanding, and new ideas.

**Best Practice Five: Value Theological Education.** The researchers mention that a "common refrain" among respondents was that "the Seminar leaders went to extraordinary lengths to affirm the value and importance of theological teaching and learning in the seminary context."

According to the Gordon Group, "the most important lesson to be learned from The Lexington Seminar—the very best practice to copy—may well be the most conspicuous: value theological teaching and learning for the church's ministries in practice as well as in word."