

FINAL REPORT
to The Lexington Seminar by
Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School
Northeast Harbor, Maine 17-20 June 2004

Background Issue and Context

In June 2002, the faculty team from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School presented a narrative that attempted to articulate the consequences for theological education of the fragmentation of contemporary life. We were particularly concerned about the legitimate but often competing loyalties—loyalties to studies, to families, to sources of financial support, to student parishes and churches, and to one’s self before God—with which the vast majority of CRCDS students struggle. As we prepared for the 2002 Lexington Seminar, we also acknowledged that the issues we identified in the lives of students are also present in the lives of faculty, especially but not only those with children and other significant family responsibilities, e.g., aging parents or an ailing partner.

Concern for the integration of learning and teaching with the whole of life has been uniquely nurtured at Colgate Rochester Crozer by the divinity school’s unique legacy of the Social Gospel, as shaped by alumnus and long-time professor, Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch was passionately convinced that the kingdom of God is to embrace all life here on earth. He believed the Christian gospel was to guide and shape not only the churches, but to inform the churches’ call to transfigure all of life—social, economic, cultural, and political institutions, the family and individual lives. Rauschenbusch’s doctrine of God recognized divine activity in all of creation, not only in religious institutions. From this legacy has come Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School’s tradition of concern for social justice, civil and human rights, and the rights of women.

The Social Gospel is, in other words, the wellspring of present-day concern about the integrity of the lives of those of us who are members of the teaching, learning, and worshiping community on The Hill in Rochester, New York. We are committed to an education that is also formation of healthy, integrative, committed students who are able to practice their ministries in ways that begin to embody the kingdom of God here on earth.

As the CRCDS faculty team continued to reflect, together with many of you, in Northeast Harbor two years ago, we identified one major goal, to be implemented by four objectives and five action steps. The goal was:

To create a **culture** able to nurture and sustain a teaching, learning, and worshiping community that embodies curricular commitments [founded in the Social Gospel] and that is characterized by a “trinity of purpose:” academic excellence, “compassionate pedagogy,” and “the seamless integration of study, formation, and life,”¹ toward a new paradigm for theological education at CRCDS.

Objectives included:

- a) Faculty development/transformation.
- b) Faculty/student engagement around issues of pedagogy.
- c) Community reflection on the school's deepest traditions so they are transformed for the 21st century.
- d) Reflection on pedagogical implications of the divinity school student body as gathered and as dispersed, i.e., how to maximize both students' off and on campus settings and commitments to preparation for ministry.

Action steps to implement this goal and these objectives were identified as follows:

- a) Faculty retreats (August, January, June).
- b) Faculty/student colloquia to explore and enact being/becoming a teaching, learning, worshiping community.
- c) Colloquia with key constituencies (students, faculty, staff, trustees, alums) to think through the future shape of the school's most cherished traditions and programs, e.g., the Social Gospel, Black Church studies, Women & Gender studies, ecumenical diversity as integral to the fullness of the Christian tradition.
- d) Community engagement of case studies around negotiating issues of fragmentation and committed, compassionate coherence in theological education, i.e., how to address competing claims on the lives of students and faculty so all dimensions of our lives are respected and engaged in the context of the rhythms of a teaching, learning, worshiping community.
- e) To celebrate and express the visions and values of the divinity school in newly created worshiping community that honors both denominational distinctiveness and ecumenical commitment.

Project Design

The first action step was taken at the August 2002 faculty retreat that reviewed and discussed the narrative, a report of the seminar in June, together with the above noted goal, objectives and action steps. This was an important time both to deepen and refine our collective sense of the issue,² and also to get the whole faculty on board with the Lexington Seminar process. We also discussed as a faculty the design of the project.

By November 2002, the faculty agreed that, consistent with the philosophy of the Lexington Seminar, the whole community's best thinking about the issue in all its complexity could best happen in the context in spaces to breathe and enjoy new ways of being together rather than under the pressure of unrelenting work and meetings. As we came to this clarity, the theme of "hospitality" came to the fore.

A steering committee was created to offer leadership to a fuller, more detailed project design. The seven members of the steering committee were two students, two faculty, two staff, and the Director of the Office of Student Life. A student was also hired to be chairperson of the committee and project coordinator. The Vice President of Academic Life & Dean of Faculty was named *ex officio*. The group was later renamed the Committee for the HILL (Hospitable Integration of Learning and Life).

At its first meeting, the Committee for the Hill articulated a vision (to seek to promote a healthy, integrative lifestyle at CRCDS by extending hospitality in ways that positively impact students, faculty and staff as they pursue current and future vocations.) Members also agreed to a mutual covenant, along with a methodology for working together. The covenant was to listen respectfully to one another, participate faithfully in meetings and discussions, maintain confidentiality, make decisions by prayerful discernment and consensus-building. All meetings began with scripture and prayer.

In order to gain a better understanding of the CRCDS community and assess the present strengths and weaknesses of community hospitality, the Committee for the HILL designed and carried out a "Slice of Life Survey." Questions asked were: What do we do well? What needs improvement? What needs to be done to address negative responses? What plans can be made for the future to address these issues and make our community warm & friendly to all? Information was gathered about student dependents, student work responsibilities, the enrollment status of students, commuter status, activities participation, honoring previous experience, general campus atmosphere, ways to enhance hospitality.

Responses to the survey were mostly positive, e.g., affirmation of an ethos of welcome, the personal approach of professors in relation to students, feeling listened to and respected in the diverse give-and-take in classes, egalitarian environment on campus and inclusiveness, dorm life. Concerns were raised about the stress of being a commuter student (loneliness), having a more conservative theological perspective at a progressive school, inadequate spiritual formation, connection to wider Rochester community and with local churches, spouses and children not always invited to events, heavy course loads, inefficiencies re: database and financial aid, insufficient library & media center hours, impending closing of the dorm.

Suggestions made were to have more cultural activities, more certificate programs, a peer mentoring program, more spiritual formation, longer library hours, more morning classes, once-a-week tea time for more faculty/student informal interaction, a games night, a cookout, early morning Bible study and prayer group.

From the “Slice of Life Survey,” in the Spring 2003 the Committee for the Hill designed a Lexington Project Logic Model for Desired Outcomes, identifying priorities, short- and long-term outcomes for each of five semesters (Spring 2003-Spring 2004). See Exhibit A. These incorporated most of the activities identified by the team at the 2002 seminar in Northeast Harbor. It was also informed by the survey and a committee reading and discussion of an article,³ led by Professor Gay L. Byron.

In the Fall 2003 semester, the Committee for the HILL also sponsored a very successful family picnic and worked diligently toward the creation of a Student Commons in the basement of one of the apartment buildings. Several community workdays were held to toward this end. The Committee for the HILL, together with the Student Life Cabinet, also instituted a peer mentoring program, pairing entering students with 2nd and 3rd year students, and organized study groups for those who wished to participate. These initiatives were very well received.

Two other community hospitality events were held during the Fall 2004: one, a new Giving Thanks Event and one, a long-standing tradition renewed, Christmas by the Hearth. Both were very well attended , with many more family members present at Christmas by the Hearth than in past years.

All events were followed by community-wide evaluation and analysis of the evaluative data by the Committee for the HILL.

Early in the Spring 2004 semester, the committee invited community members to attend focus groups to enable to speak together face-to-face about hospitality in a learning, teaching, worshiping community, calling forth “the biblical image of the great banquet [that] highlights the importance of diversity—a banquet open to strangers, concretely sharing the gifts of the table, and expecting fulfillment.” Focus groups were convened for staff, students, faculty, Black Church studies, and multi-constituency. An outside consultant facilitated the groups and then compiled, consolidated and analyzed data into a final document.

There were unanticipated problems with the process by which the report, entitled “Organizational Climate Report,” was directed and distributed. The Committee for the HILL sent the report directly to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, and the committee refused to receive it because the report had not first been received by the President’s Council. This is to say, as the Committee on the HILL later acknowledged (see below), this was improper protocol, since it is the President’s Council that reports directly to the Executive Committee on behalf of faculty, students, and staff. When the report did reach the President’s Council, a number of good suggestions contained in the report were recognized. However, it was also noted that “there are serious problems with the report in that it departs substantially from the purposes for which the grant was given.” The President’s Council therefore recommended the report not be distributed.

Here it is important to view the project design retrospectively in relation to larger issues with which the divinity school has been wrestling since the 2002 seminar here at the Asticou Inn. Within months of the seminar, it became clear that, despite major cost-cutting already undertaken, other, more radical options needed to be explored and pursued. This exploration, including the

development of a short-term strategic plan, claimed the time and attention of senior administration officials to the exclusion of other matters, including the Lexington Seminar.

The senior administration had confidence that the Committee for the HILL would move forward with the project as designed. But as fear and anxiety among members of the community took on a life of its own, particularly during the spring term of 2003 and throughout the academic year 2003-2004, the consultant-facilitated group process veered the project from the focus of the CRCDS Lexington Seminar project. As it had been designed, the focus was the cultivation of a teaching, learning, worshiping community that embodies curricular commitments (in the legacy of the Social Gospel) and is characterized by a “trinity of purpose:” academic excellence, compassionate pedagogy, “the seamless integration of study, formation and life,” toward a transformative philosophy and pedagogy for theological education at CRCDS in the 21st century, informed by an exploration of the nature and practice of hospitality. Instead the group process focused the community’s fear and anxiety into critique that was strikingly *inhospitable* in tone and inappropriate to the Lexington Seminar project. In other words, rather than seeking to address philosophical and pedagogical issues toward a new model of theological education at CRCDS, the Lexington Seminar project process became the conduit for community grievances. Hence, the comments made above in response to the Organizational Climate Report.

To be sure, as also noted above, there were positive affirmations—of the quality of education at CRCDS, of the highly respected faculty, of the history and traditions of the school, of the library, of the inspiring campus and grounds, and of the caliber and diversity of the student body, support for students from faculty and staff. But during the spring term of 2004, in the face of institutional financial crisis and the consequences thereof, a healthy integration of study and life in a teaching, learning, worshiping community at CRCDS seemed more elusive than ever.

Toward the end of the spring term of 2004, however, several community fora were convened, and community members—including leadership of the board of trustees, faculty, students, staff—engaged in both passionate and compassionate conversation about the future of the school and life together on the Hill. It is improbable that these conversations would have been possible without the foundations laid by the Committee on the HILL’s work on the Lexington project as designed at the outset.

Project Results and Reflection on Teaching and Learning at CRCDS

Following commencement in mid-May, the Committee on the HILL met several times to review the results of the project and, in particular, what was learned. Key learnings, as identified by the committee, are predominantly process, even bureaucratic, rather than pedagogical in character:

- Need to develop a method for sharing information to various community constituencies—staff, Board of Trustees, President’s Council, faculty, students—more

effectively, i.e., communication processes need to be more intentional and institutionalized.

- Need to address challenges presented by commuter students relative to their fullest participation in community life, e.g., in meetings and community fora, including attention to overall school schedule.
- Internal evaluation processes need to be refined so they yield the information prerequisite to modifying these communication and commuter issues.
- Committee's process for distributing the Organizational Climate Survey report was flawed, as key constituencies were left out of the conversational loop.
- The attempt to balance events, studies, work and family responsibilities, within the time constraints, continues to challenge community to address issues of hospitality, as well as of boundary setting and respect amid diversity.
- The focus on hospitality within the Committee for the HILL bore the fruit of hospitality within the wider CRCDS community.
- In spite of the continuing challenge of fragmentation and competing claims on time, there has been overall positive response from the committee and wider community to initiatives undertaken.

Another continuing challenge to the healthy integration of the teaching, learning, worshipping community at CRCDS is concern for the Black Church studies program. In June 2003, there was a leadership change and a Black Church Studies Taskforce was appointed to review and evaluate the program and set a vision for its strengthened future. However, as the year progressed, it became clear that the fear and anxiety present among all students is even higher among African American students. Does the divinity school continue to be committed to the Black Church studies program? Are curricular offerings adequate? What leadership and staffing is needed? Does overall institutional ethos reflect the school's commitment to Black Church studies? These questions need to be attended to with renewed seriousness as questions of a transformed philosophy and pedagogy for theological education are addressed.

The Committee for the Hill also made a number of recommendations for the future:

- Define hospitality more substantively and specifically.⁴
- Define more fully a holistic teaching, learning, worshipping community and ethos, including educational programs, policies, and practices (including scheduling) that have integrity, and develop a plan for ongoing review and evaluation.
- Explore a model other than the three-year model for completion of the M.Div.

- Develop rationale and rubrics for a coherent rhythm of entry, mid-way, and capstone experiences for students during their CRCDS experience.
- Honor students' life and faith journeys, e.g., challenges and gifts.
- Nurture Sabbath-keeping practices to replenish and inspire community members.

In sum, the whole divinity school has indeed been impacted by the project, whether in constructive or still challenging ways. On one hand, it is heartening to discover that it is possible to nurture certain characteristics and values embedded in more traditional residential theological schools, e.g., hospitality, in ways that “work” amid the new realities of students’ lives. On another hand, the project most certainly helped clarify and confirm the ongoing challenges for the cultivation of a teaching, learning, worshiping community at CRCDS. And it deepened the community’s commitment to addressing them, creatively and respectfully. As noted above, a foundation for further conversation has been laid.

However, the issue of a transformative philosophy and pedagogy for the 21st century was sidelined amid the financial crisis, particularly as the participation and attention of the faculty was diverted. Faculty began to reintegrate this conversation at its retreat in August 2004 and to explore new models for theological education. Two aspects of such a model have already been put in place for the fall term of 2004: a) the transition from 4-credit to 3-credit courses; b) a pilot Friday/Saturday intensive course that will meet every other weekend during the term. It is hoped that this Friday/Saturday format will also address concerns about reaching out to the wider Rochester community and to local church members who wish to pursue theological education as lay leaders. The faculty will also engage each other in a series of colloquies during this academic year around pedagogical substance and style as embedded in the design of course syllabi. Finally, the faculty intends to review the student evaluation process in light of curricular revisions and to develop a more cohesive continuing education for present students, alums, and members of the wider community.

Sharing the Wisdom

Those responsible for the Lexington Seminar project—senior administration and faculty, as well as the Committee for the HILL—have more reflection to do here. Several observations, however, may make for fruitful discussion, now and in the future:

- Theological education is still predominantly founded on the monastic model, i.e., of individuals who pursue studies without other responsibilities competing for their time and energy, albeit with a typically four-part curricular structure that was set forth in 19th century Berlin. Until this model is thoroughly examined, top to bottom, both critically and appreciative (there may be, as noted above, values that can be embodied anew), we will continue simply to problem-solve around students living in a very different “reality” world rather than to craft a transformed philosophy and pedagogy for theological education in the 21st century.

- Students were much more concerned about the claims of family responsibilities competing with their studies, than about the claims of their workplaces. Might this reflect the increasing number of women students in theological education, to whom willy nilly heaviest family responsibilities—whether for children, spouse, partner or aging parents—fall? In other words, although a majority of women now work outside the home, or have gone on for degrees, women are still the primary caregivers and responsible for all things domestic. Moreover, male students can no longer count on a wife at home to take up the slack, as it were. This suggests that underlying the challenges for a healthy integrative model of theological education are significant sociocultural shifts that in turn challenge certain initial assumptions with which we began to reflect on the problematic of competing claims and healthy integration. Perhaps a response to the challenges we posed must be more basic, i.e., radical—reshaping institutions around new policies that cherish values such as “communication across lines of authority, the work of caring, relationship building.”⁵ This would mean “we need to move our circles of life, public and private, into greater overlap to create one continuous community, allowing work and family to intersect the way they would if our society hadn’t forced them apart.”⁶ Of course, this would also entail a rethinking and new practices of power and authority, for both men and women.
- Theological education is still predominantly predicated on Euro-American models that are problematic to the fullest participation of diverse racial & ethnic groups as well as of women. One example of the pedagogical challenge: How do we value oral communication as compared to written communication? In other words, here the challenge is not simply adding content to the curriculum, but examining the values embedded in the methods we employ to evaluate students’ work.
- Finally, it is important to explore whether and how the financial crises facing so many theological schools, particularly progressive schools, are related to the changing faces and lives of students who constitute student bodies, i.e., reflect racial, economic, and gender injustice and the unequal distribution of resources.

Respectfully submitted,
Melanie A. May

Notes

1. See Gail A. Ricciuti, "The Tensile Core: Theological Pedagogy in a New Context," *Teaching Theology and Religion*, The Wabash Center, April 2003.
2. For reading preparatory to the retreat, see L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, eds., *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of a Theological Teacher* and Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, "A Sacred Heart: Meditations on Vulnerability, Leadership, and a Life Fully Lived."
3. See Jack L. Seymour, "Reflections on Institutional Issues Related to Race and Ethnicity in ATS School," *Theological Education*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2002): 63-70.
4. See Video, Committee for the HILL Report.
5. See Marie C. Wilson, "Closing the Leadership Gap," *MS*. (Summer, 2004):14-15.
6. Ibid.