



Faculty Development at Majority World Schools of Theology: A Strategic Framework

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A few years ago, Paul Bowers, then Deputy Director of ICETE, likened African evangelical theological schools to monasteries of medieval Europe:

“Just as the great monastic centers held things together for the Christian movement through those centuries of chronic disruption and confusion... [modern] theological schools have remained linked together as beacons of steadfastness, hope, and constructive engagement. It has been these schools, and their stream of graduates moving out into leadership roles across the continent, that have anchored, sustained, and equipped, through circumstances not so dissimilar from those of the medieval monasteries, with survival ever-threatened, but nevertheless surviving and conserving and rejuvenating.”¹

To extend Bowers’ metaphor, just as monastics were the core of medieval monasteries, modern faculty – talented, well-trained, dedicated teachers – are the core of theological schools. It follows that faculty development is essential to sustaining and equipping the Majority World church and to enabling schools of theology to be beacons of steadfastness, hope and constructive engagement.

However, few Majority World theological schools have comprehensive plans to develop their faculty. In good part this relates to those ever-present threats to survival, noted by Bowers, that come from being part of an environment in which it is difficult to focus on the long-range. Consequently, faculty development, rather than being driven by unique opportunities and needs at each school, typically responds to programs common in Western theological schools, offered by Western agencies. These programs – for leadership skills, pedagogy, fund raising, writing, publication – are generally high quality with positive aims. However, they are rarely integrated with one another and, most important, they focus on the objectives of the program rather than those of the school.

With that in mind, and to become more effective in carrying out our ministries, OVERSEAS COUNCIL (OC) and SCHOLARLEADERS INTERNATIONAL (SL) wondered if an alternative model for faculty development might be defined. We invited three schools to work with us: Asian Theological Seminary (ATS, Manila), Ethiopia Graduate School of Theology (EGST, Addis Ababa), and South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS, Bangalore). Each school is a regional leader, connected to the church, concerned for other schools in its region, and led by a capable team devoted to the mission of the school. Each fulfills roles in education and thought-leadership. And all three have made progress in transitioning from missionary sponsorship to indigenous leadership. Over 18 months, enabled by two generous foundations, leaders from OC, SL, and the three schools worked together closely to develop plans and learn about planning.

Although some work continues, this article is to report what we have gleaned thus far, organized in five areas:

Mission & Economics
Faculty Compensation
School & Faculty Objectives
Structure
Faculty Plan Elements

I write on behalf of the team that led the project, including: David Baer, Sam Barkat, Ashish Chrispal, and Victor Nakah (OC); Tite Tienou, Doug McConnell, John Azumah, and Evan Hunter (SL); Linda Cannell (consultant); Timoteo Gener and faculty at ATS; Desta Heliso and faculty at EGST; Ian Payne and faculty at SAIACS. Foundation executives choose to be anonymous.

Mission & Economics

No one pursuing profit should enter theological education. Even the most successful Western theological schools run operating deficits, covered by fund raising and endowments. In the West, tuition typically exceeds the teacher's salary, course materials, and other direct costs. Not so in the Majority World. No significant program in either of the three institutions generates cash; i.e., the direct costs of providing a class, excluding fixed and overhead expenses, is more than tuition. Every program therefore requires the administration to raise support. The more students, the larger the deficit.

The three presidents and their colleagues do not believe it is possible to significantly alter these economics in the near future. First, there is little opportunity to raise tuition because courses draw mostly poor students and prepare them for a profession that does not pay well. Second, faculty salaries, a primary cost factor, are already low, in some cases unsustainably so. Third, technology helps, but carries incremental costs that will not be quickly amortized. And the ability to leverage technology to increase capacity is limited in the Majority World due to its less developed infrastructure and, in general, a greater need for instructors to work one-on-one with students.

Administrative leaders can easily miss these economic realities because all costs seem fixed at a point in time. No school wants to lose *any* indigenous faculty or give up *any* facility. Consequently, *any* student who provides fees seems to contribute cash to the institution. In this situation – with poor economics not well understood – new programs to attract potential students often seem like a good idea but, ironically, can just as easily endanger the institution because each new student adds to the operating deficit. Moreover, school leaders must focus attention on innovative but sometimes non-core objectives, thereby diverting management from attracting students and raising funds for the core.

Disciplines outside of theology present particular challenges. Each of the three schools engages professionals in psychology & counseling, teacher education, community development & social services, and business & management. Christian leaders in these fields benefit from reflecting theologically on their vocations, and instructors learn about challenges leaders face in vocations other than theology and theological education. These considerations provide solid rationale for continuing education and professional forums focused on these and other professions. Each seems essential to developing a vital and uplifting society, and each might be informed by and inform Christian theology.

However, engaging other disciplines does not require a degree program. An architect or lawyer who wishes to reflect theologically as a Christian professional does not need a

theology degree to practice his or her profession. The same logic applies to psychology, primary education, social services and business. In these cases a theological school's role is to engage and educate, not necessarily to certify the professional in his field. The choice to educate and certify in these fields must reflect the school's mission, and some important uniqueness or advantage relative to other teaching institutions. In general, the further the program is from theology and pastoral leadership the less likely a degree program to certify the professional will be warranted.

These comments are emphatically not to diminish the importance of non-theological fields. In some Majority World settings, high quality programs in these areas may be needed but not available, and a few will warrant investment by a theological school. But leaders should have their eyes open regarding the economics of doing so, coupled with a commitment to offer a program of uniquely high value, something that cannot be offered with lower time and financial investments through dialogue with professionals, perhaps in cooperation with local schools focused on the profession of interest.

Development of Christian universities on foundations established by theological schools, now underway in various settings, may be a case in point. I fear some of these efforts will, rather than strengthening the seminary, lead to a mediocre university coupled to a mediocre school of theology.

Economic challenges are exacerbated when the school nears capacity and raises funds for facilities. Before expanding, it is crucial to assure that hosted programs are core to the school's mission and that none are best hosted elsewhere. Effective capacity might be increased by backing away from non-core programs, holding classes at other sites (e.g., mega-churches, with programs designed with the congregation), and technology-enabled learning, employing a mixture of residential and non-residential modules. It is also important to note that even donated buildings are accompanied by ongoing maintenance costs, for the life of the building.

Every program and building requires raising funds and, since money and time to raise it are scarce, leaders should choose with great care. As in all organizations, one role of leaders is to prioritize; i.e., to decide not to pursue some initiatives in order to free resources to pursue those core to the mission. Sometimes it is better not to grow.

Faculty Compensation

Faculty in Majority World schools confront personal economic challenges consistent with those faced by their institutions. At stronger schools, indigenous faculty receive compensation that, when supplemented by a working spouse, enables a family to live safely and send their children to quality schools. Little if any is left for savings, retirement, and the like. These levels provide a simple, dignified standard of living, minimal but consistent with the personal dedication and calling of faculty members.

Not all schools reach this minimum level and, when compensation is below it, faculty members with families find it difficult to devote themselves to the school and its mission. Some take additional compensated work to earn enough for basics, which distracts them from the school's mission and limits faculty cohesion and effectiveness. Others resign or even leave teaching ministry. This points to the first step in developing a faculty: assure it can be sustained.

Compensation is not the entire story. None of the three schools sets aside adequate funds for sabbatical breaks, or for membership and participation in international academic

societies. This limits the faculty-scholars' ability to interact with peers on theological issues of shared interest. As a practical matter, when the instructor is not a member of the academic society closest to his interests and unable to attend its conferences, the opportunity and incentive to develop and share his ideas and engage peers is substantially reduced. Moreover, the global church loses these uniquely important voices from the Majority World.

In this area, the first step is for institutional leaders to accurately and objectively define the situation. What total compensation and benefits do faculty require to live a life of dignity? And what allowances do they require if they are to be part of and contribute to theological dialogue?

The institution may choose to raise funds for these needs by soliciting contributions for individual elements of the total – society memberships, travel, children's education, housing – but how to raise funds is only a tactical consideration. The overall strategy must somehow contemplate adequate total funding to enable faculty to focus on the institution's mission, as well as their continued development as theologians and contributors to theological dialogue.

School & Faculty Objectives

Preparing pastors is the traditional and still-critical rationale for forming and growing Majority World theological schools. In Ethiopia, for example, there are almost 20,000 evangelical congregations for more than 15 million self-identified evangelicals, an average of more than 750 per congregation. However, only about 4,000 pastors have received formal ministry education. EGST believes the church needs to train 3,000-5,000 pastors per year to close this gap and replace retirees, yet only 50-60 active teachers are qualified, at the master degree level, to teach prospective pastors. This number should rise, in EGST's view, to 250-400 teachers, and a unique mission of the school is to prepare these teachers.

In the three urban communities that host these schools – as in others, including in the West – traditional congregations are being overtaken by mega-churches. This is important to the seminary because large, typically non-denominational churches have different needs from and expectations of theological schools. The perceived value of certification is lower than in traditional denominations; they place a higher value on practical material and insist on its efficient delivery. If schools of theology wish to contribute to these movements, programs need to fit their needs and structures. ATS in particular is considering how to bring the seminary to the mega-church.

Strategic initiatives emerged at each of the three schools in the course of this project. SAIACS, for example, intends to form a Christian center for Islamic Studies. ATS is particularly concerned to reach and enable the ministries of overseas Filipino workers. EGST is establishing itself as a research center grounded in the unique context of the Ethiopian church. Each priority is the product of faculty reflection and prayer, and of careful deliberation to determine that a need exists, consistent with the mission of the school, and that the institution is uniquely able to fill that need.

- SAIACS: A Christian center for Islamics will equip the church in its mission to and in the context of 170 million Indian Muslims and hundreds of millions more in surrounding nations. Ministers active in and near Muslim communities express a hunger for academic support and guidance. No other active, evangelical center exists in the region. India, unlike its less tolerant neighbors, is legally able to host a center. SAIACS is a

leading school for evangelical Christianity in India, based in the multi-faith community of Bangalore. It feels called to this field. Immediate challenges: develop the faculty and library; draw students.

- ATS: About one million evangelical Filipinos are employed as overseas workers. Some hope to be encouraged in their faith, others to be equipped for lay ministry among fellow expatriates, and a few are mission-minded. Many work in nations in which Christianity is a minority. This presents a unique challenge, well suited to distance learning complemented by intense classroom preparation when the overseas worker is home in the Philippines. Immediate challenges: develop technology and related curriculum; draw students.
- EGST: Ethiopia has an ancient Christian heritage, recorded in the Amharic language and reflected in its unique liturgy and Canon. All this exists alongside a range of evangelical believers and a substantial Muslim movement, in a modern society that often seems dominated by the United Nations, Organization of African Unity, and related NGOs. Christians hunger for theological guidance regarding how to live for God and bear constructive witness to his Son in this unique context. EGST is the only evangelical institution equipped to reflect and write on a broad scale. Immediate challenges: free time to reflect and write; develop a journal for Ethiopian theology.

Objectives for faculty selection and development are unique to each school, driven by its unique calling, characterized by answers to two questions: Which students to prepare for what purpose? Which fields of knowledge to explore and develop, to what end?

Structure

Worldwide, educators including those at the three schools in this project, are considering alternatives to traditional Western models. Considerations range from organization structure and curriculum to use of technology, all to gain flexibility to meet unique, contextual needs.

ATS, for example, is modifying curriculum to better form students for their chosen vocations and investigating whether to reorganize its faculty to increase vocational focus. Formally, all instructors (about 15) would continue to report directly to the academic dean, but each would also be part of one or more vocational teams, for students who intend careers as: pastors, elders and church workers; counselors; educators for Christian and secular schools; researchers and academic leaders; NGO and community development leaders; missionaries; Christians in business and not-for-profit organizations. This approach will reinforce the importance of student formation, including but not limited to academic progress. It will facilitate integration across the faculty in program design, and assure programs are directed at vocations. The dean's role would shift toward leading faculty to set objectives related to vocational formation.

Each school has opportunities in technology-enabled learning but is taking only tentative steps to implement programs. Investment requirements are significant and technological resources relatively limited in some regions. Also, larger and better-resourced schools in the West are resolving technical issues and may drive worldwide standards. While there is good reason to be cautious about substantial investments, this is an area that warrants attention and limited investment as schools address a few key questions, including: How to assure all faculty gain experience in learning and effective teaching in a technology-enabled environment? Might material related to some subject areas be sourced outside of context

(e.g., first-year Hebrew, Greek), thus freeing local faculty for higher-value and contextualized teaching and, perhaps, modestly reducing costs? Might specific student groups thrive in a technologically-enabled environment (e.g., Overseas Filipinos)? The general need is to remain abreast of available course material and consider its contextual suitability. The schools agree it is good to expose faculty to the environment and to consider whether technology offers new ways to employ contextually-savvy, 'affiliate' faculty; e.g., retired instructors, pastors qualified to teach, individuals from other institutions, and nationals living abroad but still in touch.

All three schools are considering ideas that require increased scheduling flexibility, often involving intense periods of residential instruction and formation. This is the case with online programs that couple distance learning with short residency periods. As in the West, more students enter the seminary from an established career in another field so study while working, making traditional residency unrealistic. Certificate programs at mega-churches tend toward short duration. Majority World writing sabbaticals are for shorter periods than in the West, rarely for entire semesters or a year. Finally, faculty exchange with Western and Majority World institutions is often limited to a few weeks. In light of these factors, a modular system, with terms measured in weeks rather than months, often makes sense.

Faculty Plan Elements

Step one is to analyze the situation and define priorities, answering questions such as:

- What are the needs of the church in context? What theological issues should be addressed for the good of the church and society? Are mega or other new churches a growing factor and, if so, what are the perceived needs of these unique movements?
- What other schools of theology serve these needs? How do the resources and skills of this institution match with those of other schools?
- In that light, what are the core priorities of this institution? What is essential to advancing the work of the church in context? What initiatives would be of highest value? What current programs are of secondary importance?
- What are the economics of this school, considering enrollment by course, degree, and vocation? What programs have attracted substantial donations? What is this institution's physical capacity?
- Are faculty compensated to a dignified standard that enables them to focus on this school's mission? Is there adequate funding to enable faculty reflection and publication?
- Is this organization set up to encourage students' vocational formation?

Answers to these questions provide a context for planning faculty development. Each of the three schools in this project chose a different topical subset for initial development.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Observations from three schools</i>
<i>Faculty size and additions</i>	Faculty size is, of course, driven by the number and type of students that the school intends to prepare, and the theological topics to which the school intends to contribute. So, for instance, SAIACS' interest in Islam is naturally reflected in its faculty plan.

<i>Indigenous faculty retention</i>	Like most Majority World schools, these three institutions emphasize indigenous faculty development, hoping to bring a depth of cultural engagement that comes only from growing up in an environment, and increased faculty stability. A related challenge, arguably a responsibility, is for indigenous faculty to observe how faith is uniquely understood and expressed in its context, and to contribute that perspective to the global Christian movement.
<i>Women faculty</i>	EGST expresses a particular concern here, noting that the school's 60 female students do not have a female, permanent faculty member as role model. Moreover, the faculty believes that providing a constructive, biblical example of male-female equity is important to the nation and has therefore defined a program to prepare specific women as faculty members.
<i>Faculty sourcing</i>	These three institutions are able to source a good share of new and replacement faculty, especially in their established fields, from their most promising Master-level students. SAIACS in particular has a defined process for doing so, including: identifying potential faculty, seeking shared discernment of their calling to teach, supporting doctoral work, and promising a permanent position when the doctorate is complete.
<i>Faculty exchange</i>	All three schools host visiting faculty from the West, who typically pay their own way through a sabbatical or other grant. The more interesting challenge is to host faculty from other Majority World institutions, those who have developed expertise that may be particularly suited to another context in the Global South. As in other areas, funding is the challenge, although costs are limited to transportation if a mutual exchange is coincident.
<i>Spiritual formation</i>	As elders, faculty are responsible for leading students in formation, so the spiritual formation of faculty is also essential. Challenges range from personal habits to life in a society in which corruption is a daily challenge. Each school has initiatives related to student formation, each sees more that could be done, and each is concerned about practical time limits. Specific priorities across various schools and within a school will vary over time. And new challenges will emerge with technology-enabled learning.
<i>Teaching skills</i>	Each of the three schools invests in the faculty's pedagogical skills to generally good reviews. A separate and particular challenge relates to preparing faculty to employ technology.
<i>Church connections</i>	All three schools share the view that faculty connections to the local church are essential to effectiveness. Many teachers preach regularly and/or serve as elders, and otherwise contribute as theologians. Each school regularly hosts national consultations on important church issues, some with ecumenical participation.
<i>Research</i>	Time challenges are exacerbated by the lack of funds to attend international conferences (as above).

Leading the institution

Each school recognizes the necessity for administrative leadership programs such as those offered by OC (*Institutes*), SL (*PeerLeader Forum*), and ICETE. Although valuable, these programs often neglect the challenge that established faculty face when they move into an administrative role, such as president or principal. No additional program recommendation emerged, however, because challenges are highly individual. This is an area for the principal, dean, colleagues, and board to consider.

Concluding Thoughts

A president or principal bears the key executive role in the school, with a wide range of responsibilities. If the school's mission and strategy are not well defined, then the senior executive must deliberate with his faculty, board, and staff to clearly define them. If the school needs personnel, the executive must recruit them. If there are not enough students with the right qualities, the leader's job is to locate and attract them. If the school intends to prepare faculty for Bible schools, the executive must build bridges to those institutions. If mega-churches are within the school's mission and require curriculum modification, it is up to the leader to assure changes are made. If the financial plan does not consider the overall picture and inform strategic choices, the leader must assure one is developed. Moreover, once the school has established fund-raising targets, the chief executive assures that needs are effectively presented and money raised. All this is difficult and very different from the role to which most academics originally aspired, but it is the job.

For SCHOLARLEADERS and OVERSEAS COUNCIL this was an eye-opening experience. We learned about planning for theological education, especially the importance of mission focus and choices, and about challenges facing schools and individual faculty. We were consistently encouraged by school initiatives. And we renewed our appreciation for leadership challenges in these settings, for the quality of faculty, and for their dedication. All this refreshes our own commitment to encouraging and enabling these leaders.

Globally, theological education faces severe challenges and opportunities. Financial concerns are most obvious, a symptom of church growth in some regions, weakening denominations (the traditional source of students and support), new movements with different perceived educational needs, and pedagogical challenges from changing technology. These forces, whether viewed as negative or positive, are more apparent in the Majority World than the West because of the fragility of relatively small institutions operating in environments with limited resources. Perhaps even more than in the West, there is a need for effective executive leadership to guide strategy formulation, and to assure it is reflected in effective faculty development.

*Wisdom prevails over strength,
knowledge over brute force;
for wars are won by skillful strategy,
and victory is the fruit of detailed planning. (Proverbs 24.5-6 NEB)*

i Paul Bowers, "Theological Education in Africa: Why Does It Matter?" from the AIM-SIM Theological Education Consultation (South Africa, March 2007). Bowers followed and noted Andrew Walls' use of the monastic metaphor. He addressed African schools but observations ring true for institutions in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.