

Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion  
GRADUATE PROGRAMS TEACHING INITIATIVE  
SUMMATIVE CONFERENCE  
April 23–25, 2012

**TEACHING PREPARATION IN THE PH.D. PROGRAM**

Dallas Theological Seminary

Richard A. Taylor

Students in the Dallas Ph.D. program have access to various opportunities to enrich their preparation as future teachers in the biblical and theological disciplines. The following are some of these opportunities.

- CE215 *Teaching in Christian Higher Education* is a master's-level elective course offered on a regular basis by the Christian Education department. Ph.D. students may take this course as a non-required component of their doctoral program. This course is described in the catalog as “a seminar on the philosophy, organization, process, and procedures of designing an academic course in a Christian college or seminary.”
- CE2005 *Seminar on Christian Higher Education* is a doctoral-level elective course that is offered on a regular basis by the Christian Education department. Ph.D. students may take this course as a non-required component of their doctoral program. This course is described in the catalog as “a seminar on the status of Bible colleges, Christian liberal arts colleges, and seminaries at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with attention to administration and teaching in those schools.”
- Ph.D. students may apply to serve as paid graders for members of the faculty. In this capacity students grade quizzes, examinations, and written assignments required of master's-level students. Graders are provided with grading keys, and assignments are discussed in advance so that graders know exactly what faculty are looking for in these assignments. The grading is reviewed by the faculty member and, when necessary, discussed with the grader.
- Ph.D. students may choose to do an academic internship with a member of the faculty. In this capacity the student may occasionally attend departmental and general faculty meetings, assist with faculty research, and engage in conversation with a faculty member regarding various aspects of the teaching process.
- Ph.D. students occasionally are asked to fill-in for a master's-level class when a professor must be out of town. Such opportunities are normally preceded by a thorough discussion of what needs to be done during the class, and a debriefing takes place afterward with the student.
- Ph.D. students sometimes travel out-of-town with professors to assist with teaching opportunities either in the U.S. or abroad. On these occasions the student provides assistance with grading, tutorial assistance, or classroom teaching.

- Ph.D. students may choose to teach a course in the Dallas Seminary lay institute. The lay institute is a non-credit program of biblical and theological study provided for interested lay persons who do not seek an academic degree.

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**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE GPTI**

Dallas Theological Seminary  
Richard A. Taylor

On March 30–April 1, 2011 the Ph.D. studies program of Dallas Theological Seminary hosted on the Dallas campus a Graduate Programs Teaching Initiative. The goal of this event was to evaluate how well the Dallas Ph.D. program prepares its graduates to step into a teaching ministry upon graduation and to identify ways in which we can strengthen this aspect of our doctoral program. Participants in the conference included two external consultants who led the sessions, five Dallas resident faculty who have had long involvement with the Dallas Ph.D. program, and eight recent graduates from the program who are now several years into their teaching careers. The interactive discussions affirmed certain strengths of the program that we will continue to nurture and refine in future years. There was also a general consensus with regard to certain weaknesses in the program with regard to preparing graduates to assume teaching roles within their academic discipline. The following points summarize general agreement that surfaced with regard to these strengths and weaknesses, as well as action steps for improving the program.

***Strengths of the Program***

- Course content is of a consistently high quality. Course offerings are available in a wide variety of areas relative to the academic emphases of the program, including a number of ancient languages.
- Professors who teach in the program are well prepared and maintain an appropriate level of scholarship in their academic disciplines.
- Professors for the most part model good teaching skill, although not all make sufficient use of varied teaching techniques.
- Professors maintain rigorous but gracious standards throughout the program.
- The confessional roots of the institution provide a distinctive framework for doing academic research.
- There is a diverse and gifted student body that is enriched by the presence of a large number of international students.
- The availability of other Ph.D. programs in the local area provides student access to certain areas of expertise that may be unavailable on the Dallas campus.

- The emphasis on ancient languages, hermeneutics, theology, and skills of critical thinking prepare students well for independent research.
- The breadth of faculty expertise in a fairly wide variety of interests provides students with exposure to many different approaches to biblical and theological research.

### ***Weaknesses of the Program***

- The program should be more intentional in preparing effective teachers than we have been in the past. Our focus has been oriented more toward academic content, with less conscious attention given to preparing students to become good teachers.
- The program should find ways to develop and nurture mentoring relationships between students and faculty. Students can learn much from an apprenticeship relationship that takes place largely outside the classroom.
- The program should become more deliberate in encouraging and fostering student development with regard to good teaching skills and effective pedagogical methods. We have not provided enough instruction in identifying these skills and methods.
- The program should provide more guidance in calling attention to common institutional expectations for new teachers. Some graduates indicate that they were insufficiently aware of the multi-faceted roles they were to enter in academia.
- The program should find ways to help students cope effectively with the length of time and the financial expenses associated with the program.

### ***Improving the Program***

- We will provide more opportunities for hands-on student involvement with such things as course structure, syllabi preparation, testing methods, course workloads, etc.
- We will provide students with more opportunities for supervised classroom instruction.
- We will encourage wider student participation in the already-available courses CE215 *Teaching in Christian Higher Education* and CE2005 *Seminar on Christian Higher Education*.
- We will implement periodic teaching workshops, when possible in partnership with the Wabash Center.
- We will implement a more structured program of faculty mentorship of students.
- We will solicit periodic feedback from current students and alumni with regard to ideas for improving the teaching component of the Ph.D. program.