



**Adaptive Expertise: Developing Faculty for Problem-Based Learning**  
**A Project Grant Proposal**  
**Prepared for the Wabash Center**

**Drew Theological School**  
**February 2019**

**Framing Question or Problem:**

Today's Christian leaders must be adaptive experts who are able to think and act creatively and credibly in the changing and complex contexts of ministry within and beyond the church. While the theological disciplines deepen expertise in Christian thought, practices, and responses to historic and contemporary challenges, theological educators must also develop in their students the capacity for entrepreneurial and problem-solving adaptivity. This work must be infused throughout a ministry curriculum in order to prepare students for future ministries--some of which do not yet exist. Drew University Theological School seeks a project grant to support two retreats that gather faculty with leaders from innovative, entrepreneurial ministries and community organizations. Through conversation and workshops, we will develop case studies and problem-based learning projects for the seminary curriculum that are student-centered and hands-on, and refuse a divide between theory and practice and study and action. The retreats will expand Drew faculty capacities for praxis-oriented teaching that reflect our shared values. We will also more deeply connect with and learn from socially-engaged churches and emergent ministries in our region and develop our partnerships with them in the work of theological education.

Faculty have traditionally looked to contextual education to provide on-the-job and immersive learning that ensures students are able to traverse from theory to practice. In framing our new curriculum, we have combined notions of competency-based learning from the arenas of contextual and distance education with concepts like adaptive expertise from the fields of education, medicine, and business. Educators of teachers and doctors, for example, have long discussed how the best professionals have two kinds of expertise--one that can efficiently practice the routines of the field, and one that can adapt them to solve novel problems. Learning design focused on adaptive expertise suggests that the traditional routines of a field, in our case, the rootedness of Christian heritage and practice, are best taught after students are free to experiment and problem-solve. This inverts the order of Drew's ministry curriculum, which previously moved from foundational introductory courses into more experimental electives. With this project, we continue to think through these kinds of insights in order to develop a distinctly Drew form of capacity-based learning, which will include multidisciplinary knowledge

acquisition and professional skills demonstration, but most especially the cultivation of adaptability, courage, and wisdom in and for a changing world.

In Fall 2018 the Theological School faculty began offering a new Master of Divinity curriculum inspired by Drew's mission to empower rooted, innovative, and courageous thought and action to advance justice, peace and love of God, neighbor and the earth. The new program is the result of a multifaceted process of curriculum transformation under the leadership of Dean Javier Viera. Over three years, the Theological School faculty and deans participated in extensive self-study, gathering information about the changing landscape of theological education, and seeking wisdom from denominational thought leaders on what is needed from theological education for the 21st century church and the world. What has emerged is a ministry curriculum that features active learning, interdisciplinary study, and vocationally-distinct preparation. Three key pedagogical concepts--rooted, innovative, and courageous--provide the scaffolding for the curricular design:

- **Learn together:** (1) study and experiment in and for socially diverse communities (in classrooms and with community partners); (2) form cohorts for sustained personal and social reflection;
- **Learn by doing:** (1) deconstruct theory and practice through lab- and problem-based learning; (2) structure apprenticeship learning experiences toward demonstration of key vocational capacities;
- **Learn for the World's Good:** cultivate Christian self-identity, social maturity, and moral courage to empower the radical gospel of Jesus Christ for the world's good and the revitalization and reformation of the institutions of the church and society.

Our aim is to cultivate students with abilities for improvisation anchored in tradition and for problem-solving for real world solutions to enhance common good for all creation. Signal elements of the new curriculum are (1) a team-designed interdisciplinary core reflecting the integration of the theological disciplines and practices characteristic of the life of faith; (2) problem-based learning courses that are highly student-centered and organized around pressing problems or questions in the world; (3) an articulation of four shared values that the faculty seeks to infuse across the teaching and learning at Drew. These shared values are articulated and framed pedagogically in the Faculty Curriculum Handbook under the following titles:

- Dismantling Racism: Toward Racial Justice
- Toward Interfaith and Ecumenical Understanding & Solidarity
- Toward Ecological Understanding and Environmental Justice
- Toward Sexual and Gender Justice

In the Fall of 2018, the course, "Race, Place, and Privilege," a newly designed problem-based learning course exemplifies our efforts to infuse these shared values into active student learning. In the course students completed a research project on the history of race and racial privilege at Drew while also reflecting on their role in a team and engaging theological thinkers about the work of dismantling racism through models of reconciliation and reparations. While the students

discovered a lot they had not known about the history of Drew, they also cultivated skills in leadership and problem-solving, and explored the opportunities and challenges for convening projects that seek understanding and address the inheritances of racial privilege in a community. Partnering with leaders in emerging ministries and socially-engaged churches will help us to continue to develop problem-based courses and assignments that are credibly reflective of and responsive to the real world interests and challenges in which students do their ministries.

A key feature of the curriculum transformation process is a strong commitment to a dynamic culture of curricular development and adaptation. The faculty governance model has been completely revised to prioritize student learning and routine curricular adaptation. In this way, faculty work has also been transformed by the pedagogical principles of experimentation undergirding the new curriculum, which seeks to be responsive to the ever-changing landscape of ministry today and the complexity and urgency of the world's needs.

### **Project Goals**

The proposed retreats will model faculty professional development as project- and problem-based learning. If the curriculum transformation process is to be more than a revision of delivery systems or a renaming of courses, we ourselves must embody adaptability in our faculty development process.

The goals of this project are as follows:

- To increase Drew faculty capacity for student-driven problem- and competency-based teaching
- To engage community leaders in Drew's ongoing and dynamic curricular process
- To increase faculty knowledge about the pressing problems and challenges that are emerging in current contexts of ministry and the individual characteristics and spiritual practices crucial for personal and professional resilience and sustainability.

This work is particularly pertinent for our community partners in this reimagining process. Our attempt to realign the curriculum to the leadership needs of their organizations will deepen our collaboration, mutually impact and influence emerging strategies, and help our students experience direct resonances between their studies and their vocational aspirations.

At the conclusion of the grant project, the Drew Theological faculty will be better equipped to:

- create student-centered assignments, problem-based projects, and case studies that develop that adaptive expertise
- infuse Drew's shared values into new and existing courses in ways that are current, complex, and relevant to real world contexts and challenges
- invite partner ministries and organizations to design immersive learning experiences, workshops, and mentoring events as part of the Drew Theological School curriculum

## Description of Activities

This project will fund two retreats gathering Drew faculty and community partners. Although open to revision, our current timeline would be for the first retreat to be held in early September before the academic year gets fully underway and the second in January or May of 2020. For both retreats, we will gather at the United Methodist Greater New Jersey Mission and Resource Center in Neptune, NJ. Each will be led by a facilitator who has expertise in convening curricular collaborations with professional experts and community partners. All members of the Drew tenured and full-time contract faculty will be expected to participate in at least one of the two retreats and preferably in both.

Generally, the retreats will include the following activities:

- Conversations that identify and articulate student learning outcomes relevant to the contexts of our ministry and community partners
- Backward design workshops that envision and design cases studies and projects that develop and demonstrate student learning outcomes.
- Shared meals, small group conversations, and relaxation to deepen collegial connections among participants

### Retreat One

The first gathering will focus on convening conversations and workshops with ministry partners from the Greater New Jersey and New York Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church. Bishops John Schol and Thomas Bickerton, working with select District Superintendents, will help us to identify 10-12 emerging and/or experienced leaders serving in new ministries and socially-engaged churches in the NY-NJ metropolitan area whom we will invite to participate in this shared learning event.

We will invite Dr. Kent Anderson from Northwest Baptist Theological Seminary to work with us as facilitator. Under Anderson's leadership, Northwest has developed a competency-based Master of Divinity that works outside of the credit hour concept of learning, emphasizing students demonstrating mastery of outcomes by proceeding through a scaffolding of assignments and projects keyed to a range of learning outcomes. This curriculum was developed by the Northwest faculty and denominational ministry partners in a process of collaborative design. The Drew faculty worked with Kent Anderson in a faculty retreat in Fall of 2017 with great success.

Anderson will work with the Project Director, Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, along with Associate Professor of Theology, Christopher Boesel, who leads the teaching team for the new first-year Transforming Theologies course, and Kevin Newburg, Assistant Professor of Church History, who is one of the faculty co-convenors of the new Master of Divinity degree. An initial design of the retreat is as follows:

Day One      Gathering and Introducing Ourselves

Learning Together About Competency-Based Theological Education  
Round Robin Workshop Around Ministry Contexts and Drew's MDiv  
Learning Outcomes

What outcomes are most important for ministry partners?

What is missing from the list of outcomes?

Identify five competencies crucial for adaptive ministry today

Evening meal and social time

Day Two

Gathering and Reviewing Our Work

Backward Design Workshops

Teams of partners and faculty design and present a case study or project assignment for each competency for discussion and assessment.

How does this case or project develop the identified competency?

How does this case or project challenge the the student to engage the Christian tradition to address complex and changing contexts?

What skills and resources would be needed to ensure student success?

What/who is missing from this case or project and what can we learn from considering that question?

How are Drew's Shared Values engaged in this case or project?

Wrap Up Conversation

What are the opportunities and challenges of competency-based learning design in theological education?

At the conclusion of the retreat, faculty will be invited to identify specific cases and projects that they are willing to develop further and integrate into one of their Spring 2020 courses.

Retreat Two

The second gathering will focus on convening conversations and workshops with socially-engaged, faith-based initiatives, community leaders, and non-profit organizations. The Rev. Dr. Gary Simpson, Lead Pastor of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, NY, and Associate Professor of Homiletics at Drew Theological School, Dr. Amy Koritz, Director of the Drew University Center for Civic Engagement, and Dr. Charon Hribar, Director of Cultural Strategies at the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice will be invited to help us identify 10-12 emerging and/or experienced leaders in the NY-NJ metropolitan area. We will aim to invite partners who work in a range of areas, such as community organizing, public health, interfaith cooperation, local politics, and addressing social and economic inequities.

We will invite Dr. Daniel Pascoe Aguilar, Associate Provost for Experiential Education and Career Development at Drew University, to facilitate this retreat. Pascoe Aguilar has a M.Div. from Palmer Theological Seminary, a M.S. in instructional design, and Ph.D. in instructional systems technology. He has 30 years of experience in religious and higher education working in

career development and experiential learning. He brings expertise in design thinking as well as a strong professional commitment to initiatives for diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations.

To plan the retreat, Dr. Pascoe Aguilar will work with the project director and two faculty members who have expertise in problem- and community-based learning and faith-based community organizing--Kate Ott, Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, who is also a co-convenor of the new MDiv, and Elias Ortega Aponte, Associate Professor of Religious Ethics. The initial design of the retreat resembles the first retreat:

Day One	Gathering and Introducing Ourselves Learning Together About Problem-Based Learning Round Robin Workshop Around Pressing Problems and Drew's MDiv Learning Outcomes What are the pressing problems being addressed by ministry partners? What outcomes are most needed for addressing these problems? What necessary competencies are missing from Drew's outcomes? Identify five competencies crucial for adaptive ministry today Evening meal and social time
Day Two	Gathering and Reviewing Our Work Backward Design Workshops Teams of partners and faculty design and present a problem-based learning experience for each competency for discussion and assessment. How does this experience develop the identified competency? How will this experience seek solutions for pressing real world problems? How does this experience challenge the the student to engage the Christian tradition to address complex and changing contexts? What skills and resources would be needed to ensure student success? What/who is missing from this experience and what can we learn from considering that question? How are Drew's Shared Values engaged in this experience? Wrap Up Conversation What are the opportunities and challenges of problem-based learning in theological education?

At the conclusion of the retreat, faculty will be invited to identify a pressing problem around which they will develop a problem-based learning course or section of a course in the 2020-2021 academic year.

The design of the retreats will be developed and adapted further in the May Wabash workshop as well as by the teams of faculty in conversation with the facilitator and in light of feedback from the first retreat.

## **Supportive Literature**

Two bodies of literature have informed our process of Curriculum Transformation and will be engaged further in designing and preparing for the retreats. The first is the literature related to competency-based education, which emphasizes beginning with students and contexts and redesigning curriculum around competencies that transcend a course and are demonstrated over the course of the student's program. Curriculum revision at the course and program level entails backward design that begins with outcomes and builds authentic, hands-on, and complex learning experiences. The resources provided at the first international conference on Competency-Based Theological Education (CBTE) lay an important foundation for our ongoing engagement with this educational reform movement as it can revitalize theological education.

The second body of literature we draw upon for this project orients around problem-based learning in professional fields like medicine and education. This literature highlights the importance of a well-crafted question that launches learning. The question must be designed to drive students to course content, be at the appropriate level of challenge for the students, and be perceived by students as relevant. Problem-based learning focuses on process as much as or more than results. To be successful in problem-based learning, students must develop real-world skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. Therefore, feedback, assessment, and self-evaluation activities should include these skills along with disciplinary knowledge and skills.

Examples of the material we are engaging:

- Emily Dustin. Transforming Learning With CBE. Motivus learning. E-book.
- Richard A. Voorhees. "Competency-Based Learning Models: A Necessary Future," *New Directions for Institutional Research* 110 (Summer 2001): 5-13.
- William C. Rivenbark and Willow S. Jacobson, "Three Principles of Competency-Based Learning: Mission, Mission, Mission," *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 20 (2014): 181-192.
- John R. Savery, "Overview of Problem-based Learning: Definitions and Distinctions," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning* 1 (2006): 9-20.
- Brenda L. Gleason, et al. "An Active-Learning Strategies Primer for Achieving Ability-Based Educational Outcomes," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 75 (2011): Article 186.

## **Assessment, Evaluation, and Response**

Drew Theological School faculty is in a process of curriculum transformation and thus of self-transformation: new skills, knowledge, and ways of doing things are required. This is no

easy task for faculty, let alone one that has been somewhat constant for at least 10 years. These retreats are part of the ongoing process of self-transformation. This is not something that can happen in the engrossing routines of teaching and assessment. We do not presume that student-centered learning and infused shared values will simply materialize into transformed courses, assignments, and rubrics. Indeed, “moving to competency-based education (CBE) is a transition and not a light switch that you will magically turn on.” (Dustin, Transforming Learning). We need to implement change over time.

With this project, we seek to intentionally set time aside for focused and energizing conversations and hands-on workshops. This project will support our interest to be continually experimenting and learning with and from each other and community leaders.

We will assess the project specifically in two ways:

- A survey of all participants after the first retreat to inform the design of the second retreat and after the second retreat to identify the most effective outcomes for faculty and partners. Faculty leaders will also do select follow up conversations based on this feedback.
- In Drew’s new Mentored Portfolio all ministry students reflect with faculty mentors on course assignments across their program. The portfolio professors will work with relevant faculty to design rubrics and track student learning outcomes specifically connected to projects and assignments developed out of the retreat.

We would also like to encourage publications and presentations that emerge from this learning process. Throughout the project and in the year after, Drew will dedicate up to \$2,500 to incentivize the following types of products: a blog for Drew’s Social Justice Leadership Project, a Teaching Tactic for Wabash’s teaching and learning journal, a presentation to the community by Drew students who participated in a problem-based learning course, bringing a community partner to visit a course or speak on campus, a class visit to a community partner’s ministry setting, or a meal and conversation between a faculty member and one or two community partners to reflect together on a project or assignment that was implemented as a result of the retreat.

## **Budget**

Funding for the project goes directly to two types of costs: lodging and meals for the retreat and program leadership (faculty and facilitator). The costs for the hotel and meeting space are based both on our past experience with the two vendors and their current estimates for this project. If the lodging and meal costs change, Drew Theological School will supplement costs to keep the project within budget. The total costs for lodging include housing and meals for the facilitator. Drew will cover notable vehicle or commuter train travel costs for invited community partners.

	<b>Itemization</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Lodging (breakfast included) at the Residence Inn Marriott, Neptune, NJ	30 persons x 1 night x \$130 each	\$3,900
Dinner at Porta in Asbury Park, New Jersey	30 persons x \$100 each (including bar)	\$3,000
UMC Greater New Jersey Conference Center Meeting Space and Lunches	30 persons x \$30 each	\$900
Faculty Planning Team	2 Faculty stipends @ \$600 each	\$1,200
Facilitator	Stipend	\$4,000
Facilitator	Travel	\$600
<b>PER RETREAT TOTAL</b>		<b>\$13,600</b>
TOTAL for Two Retreats		\$27,200
Indirect costs (10%)		\$2,720
<b>PROJECT TOTAL</b>		<b>\$29,920</b>