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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



## **Ten curriculum assessment tools every dean needs. Part 8: Entering Student Profiles**

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Theological school deans are not just theological leaders for their institution, they must be EDUCATIONAL leaders. That is, they must implement sound educational practices related to curriculum, instruction, supervision, assessment, and administration. There is a variety of ways to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum, and there are several levels of assessment (program-level, course-level, student testing, student projects, etc.). While faculty members can focus on course-level and individual student learning assessment, academic deans need to focus on program-level assessment in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's curricular course of study. Here are ten basic curriculum assessment tools every academic dean needs:



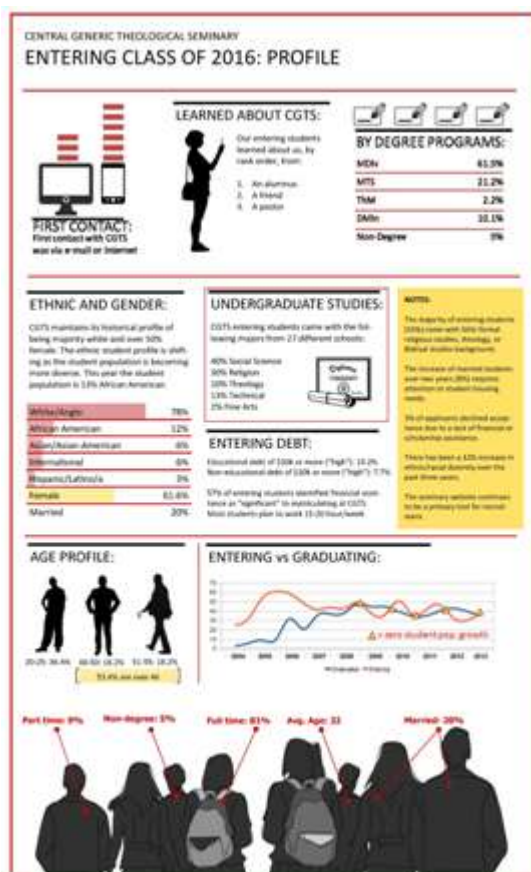
Outcomes alignment worksheet  
Syllabus assessment worksheet  
Curriculum maps  
Program-level rubrics  
Alumni survey  
Grade Distribution report  
Program retention and completion rate worksheets  
Entering student profile  
Graduating class profile  
Student course evaluations

In this series, we review these ten assessment tools. This month:

## **8. Entering Student Profiles.**

Deans do well to work with their school's recruitment staff to keep abreast of the profile of the entering class, and, its potential impact on teaching and learning, and, the culture of the school. As entering student profiles change over time, they can impact everything from class schedules and financial aid, to the potential number of credit hours taken during the academic year. Student profiles may help identify potential impediments to positive retention and completion rates, as well as to the quality of the educational experience in the classroom and the seminary community.

Communicating and interpreting the impact of the entering student profile to Faculty and Trustees is an important task for the dean. It is often the case that persons in certain parts of the institution do not readily see the "big picture" or understand how one element (entering class profile) impacts another (classroom learning experience, retention, student services, or number of credit hours that are generating tuition revenue).



Here is a sample graphic profile from the dean of the mythical Central Generic Theological Seminary (CGTS). Using information from the recruitment office, the Registrar, and from the Entering Student Questionnaire (ESQ) the dean created a one-page infographic to illustrate the entering class and its impact on the program of study. The dean shared this one-page information resource with Faculty to talk about seminary community life and curriculum issues, and with the Trustees to frame issues and questions related to institutional goals. Additionally, this data helped the Dean raise interpretive conversations with the school administrative teams related to the seminary's goals and strategic plan. You can download a copy of the infographic here [Download Enteringstudentinfographic6-2016](#)

## THE ENTERING STUDENT PROFILE

### 1. First Contact with the seminary:

Understanding how students reach out and contact the seminary can help you understand where to spend resources in the recruitment office. Do you have the right system in place with enough capacity? How easy is it for prospective students to contact you? How good is your response time for inquiries? CGTS recently repainted their website to move its functionality from information (an online brochure) to a recruitment tool. CGTS trimmed three steps from their application process and put the application entirely online, moving from paper forms and

snail mail to electronic applications. Now prospective students can scan for information more efficiently, and they can complete the application process by navigating less than four screens. A helpful online financial calculator helps students understand the potential cost of their theological education, including available tuition offset through scholarships, grants, work-study, and loans.

## **2. How entering students heard about your school:**

While a school's website is increasingly critical to recruitment (as one social media savvy friend put it, "If you don't exist on the web or in social media, you are invisible.") the power of personal contacts and recommendations still rules when it comes to helping people consider your school. Tracking the data for this item in the ESQ over time can help you spot changes in how people learn about your school. For CGTS there has been a shift from ministers and pastors being the primary promoters of the seminary (currently ranked number 3) to alumni being at the top. This should influence the seminary's strategy about cultivating relationships that lead to more entering students. Do they need to reconnect with local ministers to raise awareness and cultivate their willingness to endorse the school, or should they invest in a more intentional recruitment strategy with their alumni? One trend CGTS has seen is the increased use of cell phones by prospective students when visiting their website. The seminary is hurrying to ensure that the website's functionality and appearance can accommodate the cell phone platforms.

## **3. Entering Students by Degree programs:**

While students often switch degree programs after matriculation, the initial degree program in which they entered is an important indicator. This seminary needs to re-evaluate their ThM program. With only 2% of entering students in this program, the viability and sustainability of the program needs to be assessed. Also, the seminary needs to track the 5% undeclared (non-degree) students to see which can be converted to degree-seeking status.

The school has done a better job differentiating students in the degree program and understanding their impact on FTE, faculty workload, and potential tuition revenue. For example, they learned they could not count one full time DMin student as equivalent to a full-time MDiv student (the former potentially generates 20-24 semester hours per year, per full-time student, with a total of 90 semester hours while the latter may generate 12 semester hours per full-time student per academic year, and a potential total of up to 30 semester hours). Neither does a full-time student in a one-year ThM have the same impact as a full-time MDiv student.

## **4. Ethnic and Gender profile:**

CGTS has made progress over the past few years in the diversity of its student body. While traditionally it has had a strong gender balance (consistently a 50:50 ratio), it has struggled with attracting ethnic and minority students. They are beginning to see improvement as a result of an initiative to intentionally bring diversity to its student body. That initiative included

intentional recruitment activities, faculty development in understanding pedagogical issues of diversity in the classroom, and hiring underrepresented faculty members. In addition, they are part of a trend among theological schools that sees a slight decline in anglo/white students with an increase in minority students. Not surprisingly, this shift in the student profile has brought challenges in both student life and classroom pedagogy.

### **5. Undergraduate studies:**

Tracking the academic preparation and orientation of their incoming students has helped the CGTS Faculty identify more helpful teaching strategies for students, and has reduced, somewhat, the frequency of rants about "underprepared" students. When 15% of entering students come from technical and fine arts degree programs, academic writing will be a challenge. With over half coming from academic backgrounds other than religion or theology, there will be a greater need for remedial orientation to theological studies in the curriculum.

### **6. Entering debt:**

Most entering students indicate they plan to work 15 to 20 hours per week. This may impact their ability to maintain full-time student status. A large population of working students also requires attention to a course schedule that accommodates a fractured life-work-study schedule. For example, offering a balance of online, weekend, hybrid, intensive, and evening courses will allow for a more flexible schedule for working students. With the results of the online financial calculator students used in their application process, the admissions and recruitment staff include financial planning as part of the admissions counseling process. This has helped students with debt management and has had a positive impact on student retention. The school administration does well to keep in mind that students entering with college debt will tend to leave seminary with higher debt, and, students with no entering debt will leave with some debt. CGTS has put a cap on the amount of debt a student can carry upon matriculation.

### **7. Age and Marital status:**

This seminary has seen a growing trend in second-career, older students (53% are over 40, which was a shock when Faculty and Trustees saw the data). This means most will be married, several with children in the home. This impacts their capacity to enter and maintain their full-time student status. In turn, that can have an impact on the number of credit hours earned per semester and the time for completion rate. The school also needs to consider what student services are needed for this population. Do older working adults need a more flexible schedule? Do second career students need more support using current educational technology? Is there an increased need for family student housing? With the increase of an older student population, the school has noted the impact in reduced occupancy of its student housing, primarily designed for young single students.

### **8. Entering vs Graduating:**

Tracking the graduation vs. Entering class enrollment is a key becomes important for program level assessment. Theoretically, CGTS needs to have as many entering students to "replace" the number of graduating students each year to maintain the necessary student body size. Realistically, the increasing trend of fewer entering students being full-time means the school should anticipate a trend toward lower FTE. Pragmatically, that means the school needs to have a higher number of entering students than that of the graduating class. Plotting the intersection where there is a "point zero" in student population growth can help evaluate program level impact.

9. The bottom of the chart highlights additional metrics Faculty and administrative units should be aware of: percentage of part-time and full-time students, the number of non-degree seeking students, the average age of the incoming class, and, percentage of married students. The school will work at determining the metrics in each category that has potential for program-level curricular impact, and/or, impact on community life and student support services.

- Can a one-page infographic help you interpret to your context how the entering student profile impacts the curriculum?
- Which metrics can be useful to you as dean in your context?
- Which metrics are important for Faculty to be aware of? For Trustees? For the admissions and recruitment office? For the CFO?
- Which of these metrics are important to consider for curriculum planning? For institutional strategic planning?

<https://wabash.center/2016/06/ten-curriculum-assessment-tools-every-dean-needs-part-8-entering-student-profiles/>