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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



## Does Your Theological Curriculum Use High Impact Pedagogy?

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Today, theological school deans are under greater pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of the theological curriculum offered by their schools. Pity the new dean who needs to learn the esoteric language of higher education that is now embedded in theological education. Deans must be conversant with (if not also demonstrate competence in): metrics, demonstrable learning outcomes, norm- and criterion-referenced assessments, the use of such instruments as ESQ, GSQ, AQ, POM (I & II), accreditation standards, and the broader issues in higher education that impact theological education.

An essential part of the dean's work is demonstrating the appropriate application of many of those elements in formative assessment and curriculum revision. More importantly, at the end of the day (or by the conclusion of an accreditation visit), deans must be able to provide evidence of "demonstrable student learning outcomes."

At the heart of all these important, and potentially overwhelming, educational issues lies a question of integrity: does your curriculum, in its course of study, do what it promises to do? One may also ask:

Is your curriculum effective for what it is designed to accomplish?

Can you deliver on what you promise to students and to your constituents?

Why should a prospective student choose your curriculum over another from a similar school?

Does your curriculum's design help bring about high impact learning for your students?

## A High Impact Curriculum



Below is the finding from the American Association of American Colleges and Universities' LEAP initiative on the elements of a high impact curriculum. These are "high impact" in the sense that they are directly correlated to student success. Specifically, they are demonstrated to positively impact students' retention of learning and engagement in the learning process. The high impact pedagogies identified below do not need to all exist at the same level or to the same extent across the curriculum and its courses. Some are suitable for course-level learning approaches, while others are better suited as program-level curricular components.

In no particular order, here are the **ten pedagogical practices that lead to a high impact curriculum**:

First year seminars and experiences

Common intellectual experiences (e.g., core courses, cohort learning experiences)

Learning communities

Writing intensive courses

Collaborative assignments and projects

Field Research Projects

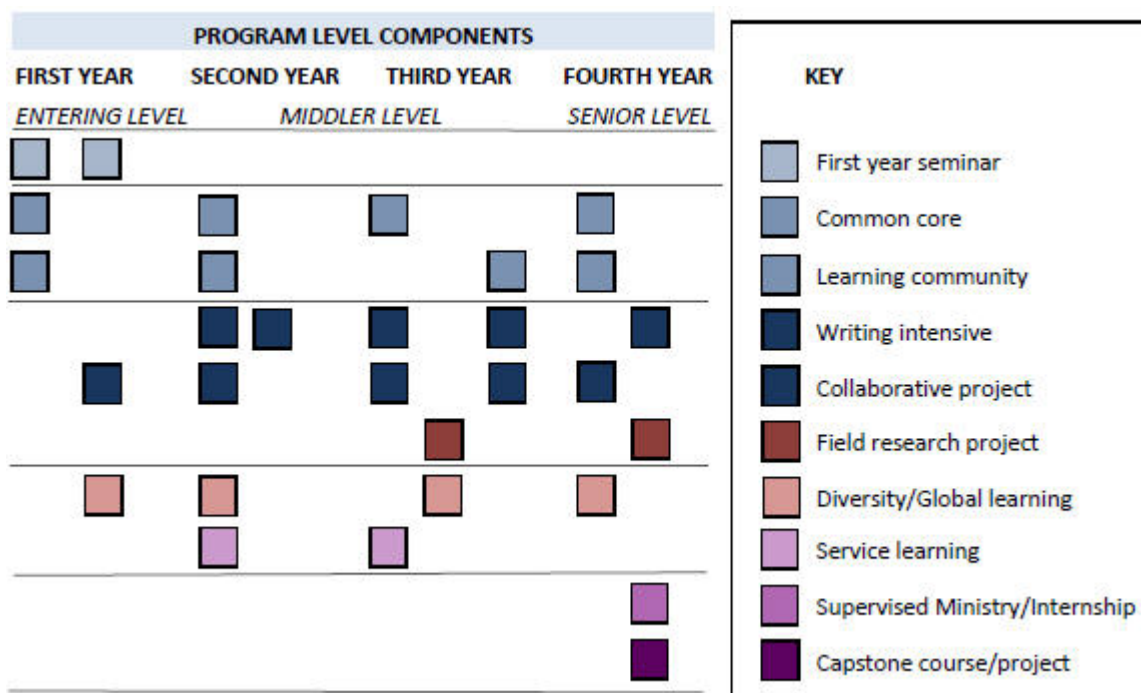
Diversity and Global Learning

Service learning, community based learning

Internships (e.g., supervised ministry experiences)

Capstone Courses and Projects.

It may be worth identifying which of these high impact pedagogies can be program-level student learning activities in your theological curriculum. For which of these may you create program-level embedded outcomes, especially those related to skills attainment and competencies? Below is an example of embedded high impact pedagogies in a four-year course of study, or in a program structured for a three year Entering, Middler, and Senior model.



### Questions:

- How many of these high-impact pedagogies can you identify in your programs of study?
- How many of these high-impact pedagogies are *standard* components of your curriculum by design? Where do they appear in the course of study?
- For those that you can identify, is there a published pedagogical rationale for their use?
- Do any of these program-level learning strategies in your curriculum have program-level assessment components?
- If any are program-level components to your curriculum, to what extent are they standardized in terms of outcomes, form, standards, and assessment? (As the study states, "...these practices *must be done well*" in order for them to be effective.).
- To what extent are these complex high-impact learning pedagogies integrated among the various components of your program of study? For example, to what extent are they aligned with individual courses in the curriculum and their student learning assignments and assessments?
- If you use these high impact pedagogies, are they clearly aligned with the curriculum's intended learning outcomes?

See: George D. Kuh. Association of American Colleges and Universities, "*High-Impact Educational Practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter.*" You can order a copy of the report from [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org)

<https://wabash.center/2014/10/does-your-theological-curriculum-use-high-impact-pedagogy/>

