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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



## Does Your Theological Curriculum Use High Impact Pedagogy?

Israel Galindo, *Columbia Theological Seminary*

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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.



