

The Training of the Campus Minister

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The invitation to do a piece for this issue of *The Campus Minister* stipulated that I approach the subject from the perspective of a seminary faculty person. This means, obviously, that I am speaking officially for only one faculty member in one seminary, but I trust that many of my comments are reflective of faculty persons in other seminaries who are directly involved in training students for this field of service. Neither a research nor consensus paper was requested, but content guidelines were suggested which I shall try to follow.

I am aware that the use of such terms as "student," "student director," and "student work" connote for some persons a narrow conceptualization of our Southern Baptist approach to the campus and a disregard for other-than-students in the academic community. But such interpretation, as I see it, is not supported by Baptist Student Union's theological/philosophical foundations or by a careful examination of its history and practice. Surely one of its basic strengths has always been its concentration on the student as its primary focus. I use these *terms* in this paper, therefore, on the basis of my philosophical persuasion.

As I meet my classes at the beginning of each semester, I find myself wishing the impossible: that all of my students were prepared to move out with me from the same starting point in their knowledge of and experience in Baptist Student Union. The truth of the matter is, of course, that some barely know what the initials BSU stand for while others come with positive experiences from excellent BSU organizations throughout the country, bringing with them from one to four years of deep commitment. And, among them are those who sense God's call to minister within the campus community.

So, with this glorious "mix" I never fail to thank God for the privilege of sharing in one seminary's educationally sound and deeply sincere effort to help prepare students to work through a Christ-

centered student movement/fellowship/program/organization originated and sponsored by Southern Baptist for six decades.

And, although "ideal" seminary student backgrounds are among things my weary mind conjures up following a not-so-productive class session, I am persuaded that the two most helpful things a prospective director can bring to the seminary are broad and positive experiences in Baptist Student Union and well balanced childhood-youth-young adult involvement in a local church. In fact, I am almost persuaded that no amount of post-college training fully compensates for deficiencies in these areas.

CURRICULAR CONSULTATION

What are the relative merits of the Master of Religious Education and the Master of Divinity degrees for one who feels led to prepare for Baptist student work? Do state BSU directors have strong preferences? Can I choose electives by which I can get needed strengths in both degree patterns? These are some of the early questions.

Although many students entering seminary have already made the decision regarding the degree to be pursued, many others have not. Hence, a curricular consultation service is initiated within the matriculation process and continues throughout the student's entire seminary training.

Each semester I talk with students who are considering changing from one degree to the other. Here again concerned, skilled faculty persons find opportunities to minister to students academically, professionally, and spiritually.

Some of the most critically important guidance service comes at the point of elective selections. From my perspective, I believe the wisdom with which one manages his electives is a vital factor in the total equipping experience of seminary preparation.

No discussion of curricular consultation should fail to acknowledge the tremendous influence of peer counselors. The teacher may close his office door and go home for the evening or the week-end or depart for that "major" engagement, but the counseling goes on: student-to-student. This, too, is a "service" rendered within the seminary family — and the Lord can use "them" as well as "us" as instruments through whom he communicates his will for the life-ministry of seminarians.

As a state Baptist Student Union director, I always felt that the "ideal" seminary equipping experience can be realized by one's earning the basic degrees in both theology and religious education, and I have known a substantial number who have gone this route. Several students in my classes this semester are working on a second degree. This, in my judgment, would afford a person the best of both seminary worlds. Time and resources and the desire of many for a doctorate if five years are to be invested tend to reduce the number of students who choose this degree pattern.

I am excited that at least two seminary faculties have under current study a three-year combination Master of Divinity-Master of Religious Education degree pattern. This combination degree would require cores of both theological and religious education courses plus a balanced pattern of electives in both areas.

COURSE WORK

Regardless of the degree sought, the student who senses God's leadership toward BSU service should give high priority to courses in Baptist student work and/or campus ministry — identified variously in the six catalogue listings.

My bias is showing when I confess that I am disappointed each year to have several last-semester students speak to me about BSU jobs, only to reveal that they have not been enrolled in a single course in the field. Late discovery of interest in student work is understandable, but omission of course work in this area is not always attributable to an eleventh-hour revelation. BSU staff persons can render an assist by suggesting to prospective student workers that they make plans early to include BSU courses in their programs.

I have the privilege of offering three such courses. The titles of the three indicate the nature of each: Campus Ministry—an examination of all organized Christian approaches to the college campus; the Baptist Student Director; and, the Church's Ministry with the Student. The offerings of the six seminaries vary in course descriptions, but all are designed to provide basic concepts and practical training for one preparing to enter the field.

A survey of the degree patterns in our seminaries indicates that all of them identify student work within the religious education program. But, heavy elective involvement in the Master of Divinity degree should be regarded by the student as "required"—regardless of the degree toward which the student is working.

PROFESSIONAL EXPOSURE

Persons who share in the seminary training of prospective BSU professional leadership can make available to interested students, numerous opportunities for dialogue with state, local, and national BSU staff people whose contributions will greatly enrich their understanding of Southern Baptist student work.

I schedule guest presenters for each of my classes who represent various categories of BSU work and also persons who minister in other-than-Baptist programs. This practice is well received by the students and proves to be a continuous updating experience for the teacher.

Class members are urged to attend state and national BSU conventions and conferences if it is feasible to do so, to practice the discipline of continuing to read in the general field of campus ministry, and to become a diligent "student of student work."

INTERN PROGRAM

Two seminaries have student work intern programs in operation, and at least one other is involved in developing a similar program.

Basic features of the internship opportunity include the following: the student must have faculty approval; the term of the internship is nine months; the employment must be directly related to Baptist Student work; hours of credit earned vary from 8 to 16 for the nine months; the internship follows one year of resident study; there must be a seminary-approved supervisor; and periodic reports are sent to the designated faculty person who is responsible also for the orientation and the evaluation experiences of the student intern. One seminary provides a modest amount of money as a portion of the intern's stipend.

I believe that student work will be measurably strengthened when all of our seminaries provide internship opportunities.

CONTINUING EDUCATION: The Training Process Goes On

Continuing education has become one of the vital education-training concepts of our time. No longer does anyone consider his or her education "complete" or "finished." This open-ended striving

for competency appears to be an increasing emphasis in all of our church-related ministries, and well it may be so long as it is kept in proper perspective.

The seminaries offer many continuing education opportunities for Baptist Student Directors; and, predictably, additional offerings will be developed.

Formally, these include further work toward additional degrees and the up-grading of degrees previously earned. Seminary extension course offerings are making some of this study more readily available to a larger number of persons. Informal programs include on-campus study which finds the individual doing course work or independent research in keeping with felt needs and/or special interests. Guided reading and research are also available options. Short-term or mini-semester programs, occasional seminars, workshops, and conferences designed specifically for this area of ministry, are being offered or are on the drawing boards in several of the seminaries. There must be more and more cooperative thought, discussion, and effort between the seminaries and Baptist Student Union leadership to encourage and implement progress in this direction.

Certainly continuing education for this category of ministry is not the exclusive responsibility or province of the seminaries. Other teaching-training institutions and independent study programs are available; however, I am persuaded that we have yet to discover many of the rich resources of our six seminaries that can be made available for the enhancement of our work in the campus world and in the strengthening and deepening of our Christian lives.

WHOM ARE WE TRAINING—TO DO WHAT?

Knowing full well that seminary training at its best is not a cure-all or do-all and that it cannot "make" an effective Baptist Student Union director, I pray daily that young Baptists with adequate potential will respond if God calls them to the campus.

Needed in this work are morally sound, mentally able, personally gifted, emotionally healthy, deeply caring, and hard working persons. Is this asking too much? No! In fact, I would unapologetically ask for much more. These are but the basics of Christian character and personal essentials if these persons are qualified to serve God in the academic setting.

And, what will Baptists ask them to do? In a word: to lead college and university students in developing and sustaining the most effective Baptist Student Union program of witness, study, and ministry through which God can work in his redemptive actions throughout the campus.

As they function in their roles as BSU directors, they will witness, counsel, love, minister, organize, motivate, teach, train, and more. And, they will experience all of the personal and professional fulfillment that they are willing to receive from the Father.

Response

Dr. Howard's article on THE TRAINING OF THE CAMPUS MINISTER does a good job of spelling out and describing what is happening in one Seminary, and I assume it describes what is happening in others as far as course content, counseling, and service possibilities. However, I believe we need to be concerned with the approach to training as well as with what is being offered. It is at the point of *approach* to training the campus minister that I would like to address my remarks, and hopefully stir some dialogue and discussion.

This *approach* to the training is set forth and honestly admitted to by Dr. Howard on the first page of his article as he moves from the concept of a "campus minister" to that of "student director" and states, "I use these terms in this paper, therefore, on the basis of my philosophical persuasion." This approach to training says to me that it is assumed that there is one way to do campus ministry or student work and the seminary courses would seek to train a person to do it that way. This would be acceptable if campuses remained the same and they were all like Southland campuses. However, the truth

of the matter is that the campus is changing, and there are far more of them "out there" than there are in the Bible-belt south. Thus, if we are to train campus ministers who will be able to follow God's call to a campus "out there" and do a creditable job, then we must open up the area of training and let some fresh wind blow.

Training, I believe, starts long before a student arrives at the seminary. It starts out there in the church and on the campus, and we could greatly enhance all our training by changing the concept of campus ministry and BSU work to one that is recognized in our denomination as a viable, meaningful, and God called profession where a person could plant a life instead of it being a person who is "hired" to run a student center and do "student work."

I believe Dr. Howard is right on target when he speaks of the seminary equipping experience needing both theological and religious education. I am glad to hear that at least two of our seminaries are considering a combination degree that would provide this training. My plea is that they get out to the "grass roots" to get input on which courses to include

in that combination degree before it gets "set in concrete". Dr. Howard speaks of his disappointment when students ask him about BSU jobs only to discover that they have not been enrolled in any of the courses in the field. This lack of interest may speak to the course content and say that we need to discover what people are needing and wanting out there in the field and tailor some of the offerings to their needs instead of deciding "from the top" what training is needed.

The section on continuing education as a part of the training of the campus minister is well done and touches on the many facets of this area of training. I would join Dr. Howard in his appeal for "more and more cooperative thought, discussion,

and effort" in this area. It seems to me that the State Directors, National Student Ministries, and the Seminaries could take giant steps in this vital and needy area.

In closing, let me express my sincere appreciation and admiration for the work and influence of Dr. Howard in the area of student work in Texas, and to some extent across the Southern Baptist Convention. My appeal to him and other giants who might shape future training for campus ministers would be that theirs be the foundation that we build on, not the completed work.

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