AUBURN STUDIES

IN WHOSE HANDS

A STUDY OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL TRUSTEES

BARBARA G. WHEELER / JUNE 2002

About this Issue

This issue of Auburn Studies focuses on seminary trustees—those who are entrusted with the life and governance of theological schools in the United States. Their demographic profile, their expertise in leadership, and their history of association with the school they currently serve are analyzed. In addition, the trustees provide a self-evaluation of their service on the board and indicate what they consider to be the most pressing concerns confronting their individual schools. The overall findings of this study raise some critical issues about the future governance of our seminaries.

Previous research at Auburn Center has provided a wealth of data on theological faculty and students, on the financial well-being of theological schools, and on the public character of seminaries. This report, the first to analyze the governance of seminaries, adds an important piece to the overall picture of theological education in America.

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Religion in North America is a vast enterprise. By some estimates there are as many as 300,000 Christian and Jewish congregations; thousands of religious agencies, denominational offices, and schools; plus a wide array of religiously focused for-profit businesses. And yet, almost all the advanced theological training for the leaders of these organizations takes place in a small number of theological institutions—about 250 Christian seminaries and divinity schools, plus a handful of rabbinical schools. How competently this small number of institutions is governed makes a real difference in the quality of religious life in North America and, because religion is so pervasive, in North American society as a whole.

This study focuses on the persons who govern theological schools, the members of their boards of directors or trustees. It is based on a survey that was sent from the Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Seminary to 4274 board members of 193 Christian theological schools in the fall of 2000.[1] Questionnaires were returned by 1611 respondents, for a return rate of 38 percent.

In addition to the questionnaire sent to individual trustees, a short survey was sent to school administrators, asking

questions about the structure and practices of the institution's board. Of 256 surveys distributed, 208 were returned, a rate of 81 percent.

Although theological school boards have been extensively studied, this is the first contemporary study that gathers self-evaluative data directly from theological school trustees. Some results of the Auburn surveys are compared in this report with data gathered by the Association of Governing Boards about trustees of public and independent colleges and about theological school trustees.[2] Aggregate data on trustee giving were supplied by the Association of Theological Schools.[3] *The Non-Profit Governance Index* was also used for comparative purposes.[4]

The first part of this report offers a description of theological school trustees, including their demographic profile, education, religious background and current religious affiliations, occupation, expertise, history of association with the school they currently serve, and evaluation of their service on the board. The second section poses some troubling questions about theological school trusteeship that arise from the data and concludes with recommendations for ways to insure that theological schools, pivotally important institutions for the shaping of religious life, will be in good hands in the future.

Who They Are: A Profile of Theological School Trustees

Theological school trustees are predominantly white, male, and over sixty years old. Most of these trustees are religious professionals, and all have strong religious ties; in many cases, they have a long history of association with seminaries. The charts on the opposite page offer a more detailed demographic portrait. The summary below highlights features of the charts and provides additional information from the Auburn survey and other studies.

1. GENDER (FIGURE 1)

Theological school trustees, like the trustees of colleges and universities, are almost three-quarters male, though mainline Protestant boards have a higher percentage of women (34 percent), and evangelicals a lower one (16 percent).

2. RACE (FIGURE 2)

Between 10 and 15 percent of theological trustees are non-white,[5] about the same proportion as college and university and other non-profit trustees. Boards of independent seminaries are more likely to have non-white members.

Figure 1: Gender of Trustees*

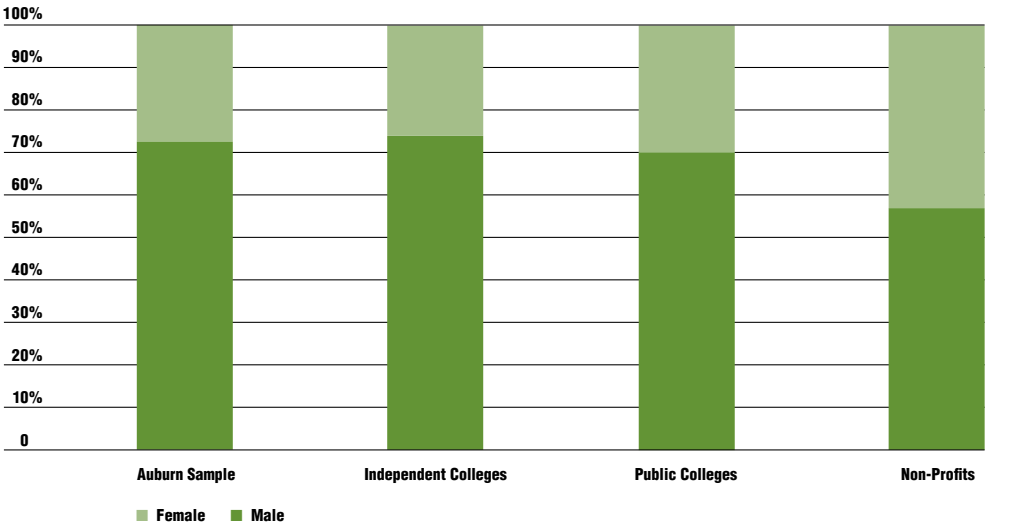
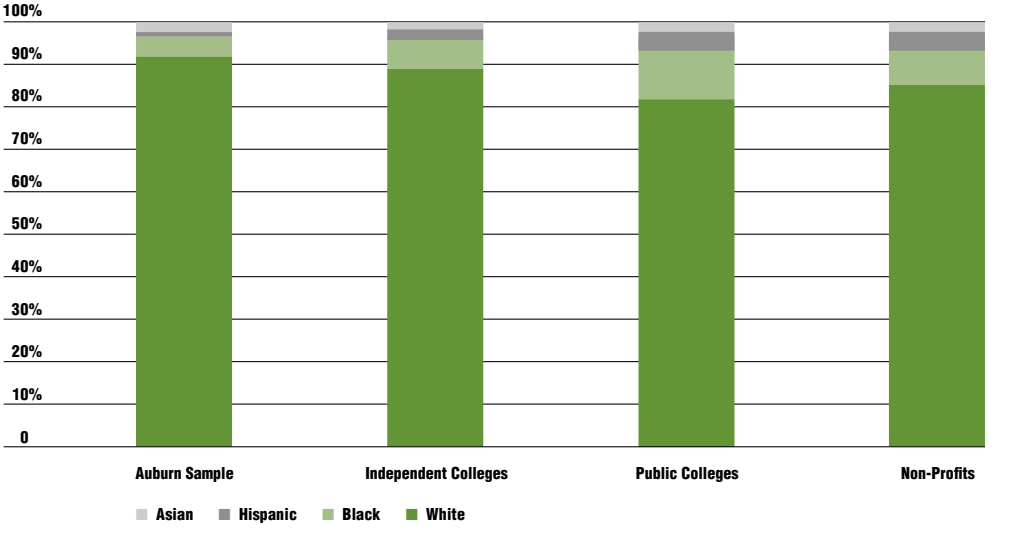


Figure 2: Race of Trustees*



* Independent and public college data is from 1997 AGB Publications No. 36 and 37, Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. Non-profit data is from *The Nonprofit Governance Index*, 2000, National Center for Nonprofit Boards and Stanford University Graduate School of Business.

Figure 3:
Age of Trustees by Decade

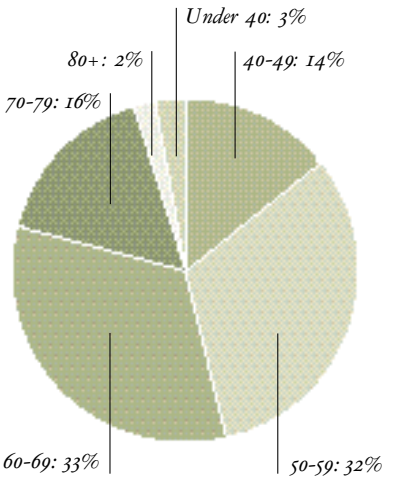
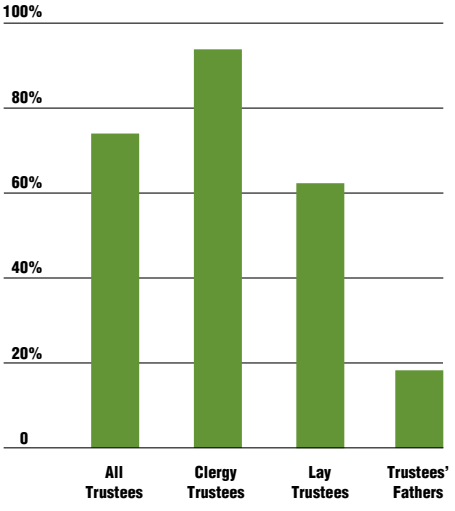


Figure 4:
Educational Background of Trustees
Percentage Holding a Graduate Degree



3. AGE (FIGURE 3)

Over half (52 percent) of theological trustees are over 60, in marked contrast to the trustees of public colleges (30 percent), independent colleges (36 percent) and non-profit boards (19 percent). One-quarter of theological trustees are over 67.

4. EDUCATION (FIGURE 4)

Theological trustees are highly educated. Three-quarters of all trustees have a graduate degree. The fact that 94 percent of the clergy have advanced education helps to raise the average, but lay trustees are well educated too: more than 60 percent have a graduate degree. All types of trustees are, on average, better educated than their parents.

5. SEMINARY ATTENDANCE (FIGURE 5)

Almost half of all theological trustees (47 percent) have been enrolled for a seminary degree. Almost one-third (30 percent) attended the institution that they now serve as a trustee, and an additional 14 percent have a family member who has done so. In other words, almost half of trustees have a personal or family tie to the school they serve.

6. SEMINARY GRADUATION (FIGURE 6)

More than one-third (42 percent) graduated from a theological school.

7. ORDINATION (FIGURE 7)

Most trustees who graduated from seminary are also ordained or licensed clergy (40 percent of the total number).

Figure 5: Seminary Attendance of Trustees

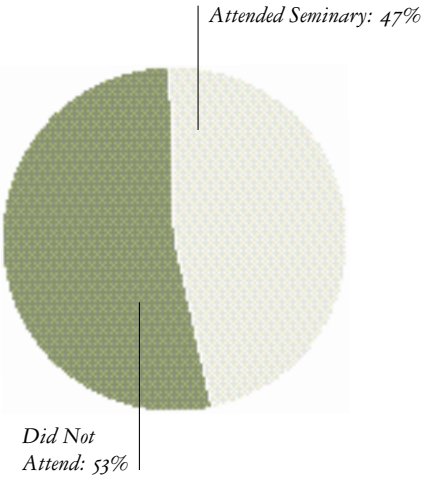


Figure 6: Seminary Graduation of Trustees

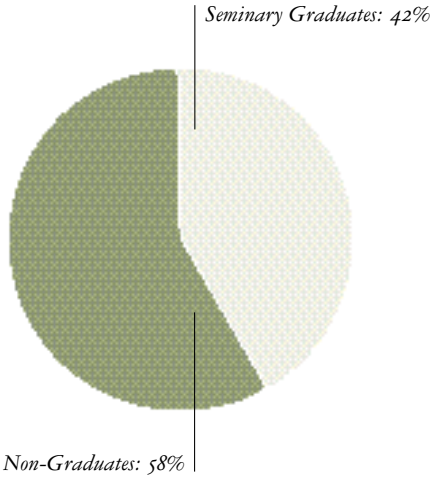


Figure 7: Ordination of Trustees

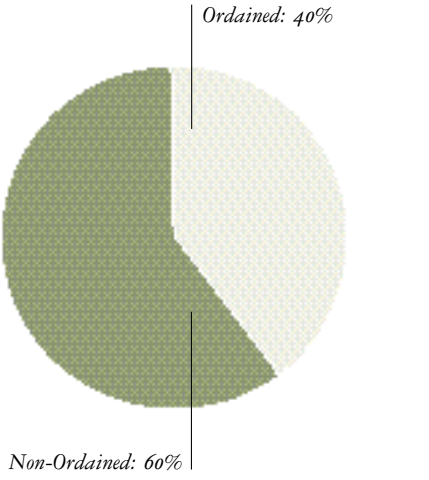


Figure 8: Type of Congressional Participation of Trustees

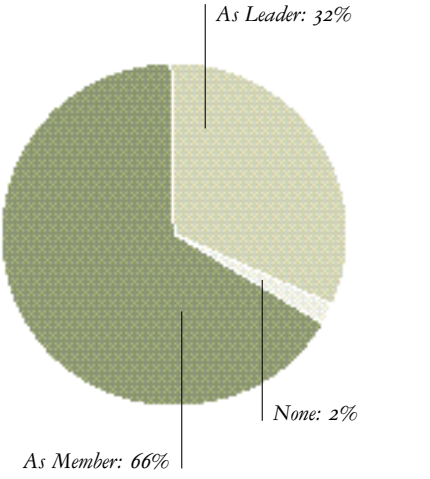
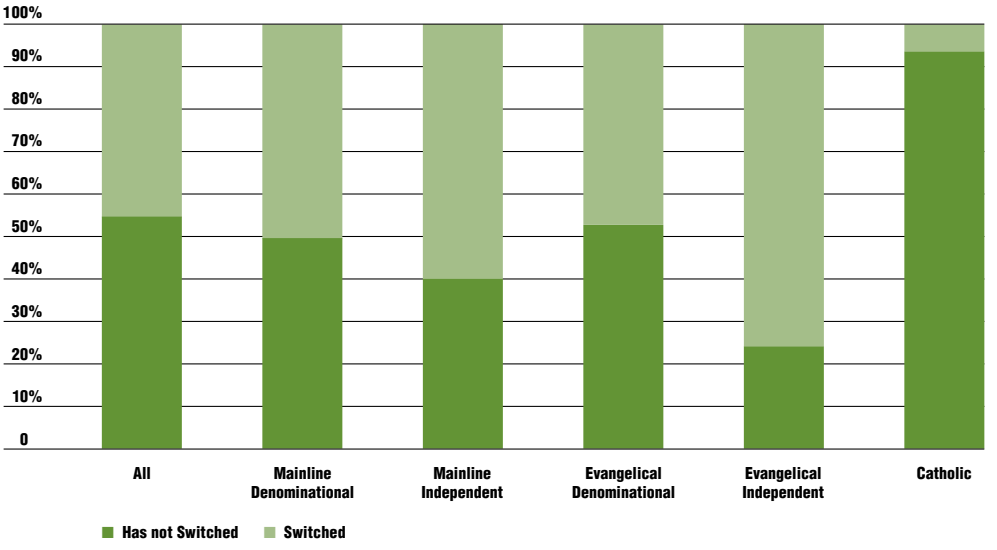


Figure 9: Trustees' Denominational Switching



8. CONGREGATIONAL PARTICIPATION (FIGURE 8) Almost all trustees (98 percent) say they are moderately or very active in the life of a local congregation. One-third are religious professionals: clergy, paid church staff or denominational leaders. The rest are church members.

9. SWITCHING (FIGURE 9)

Many seminary trustees have been members of more than one denomination or religious tradition, though the levels of religious switching vary greatly by religious tradition. Very few trustees of Roman Catholic seminaries (only 5 percent) have switched, but more than three-quarters (76 percent) of trustees of evangelical independent schools have done so.

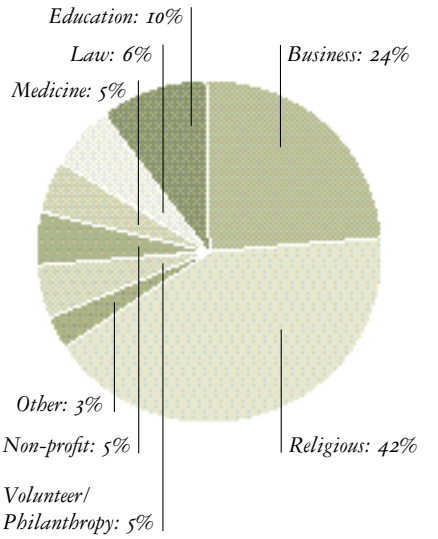
10. OCCUPATION (FIGURE 10)

The largest number of theological trustees are religious professionals (42 percent); one-quarter (24 percent) are in business; much smaller proportions are in education (other than theological education), law, medicine, non-profit or

The make-up of theological school boards is very different from those of other educational institutions and non-profits.

social service work, and philanthropic or volunteer work. The make-up of theological school boards is very different from those of other educational institutions and non-profits, which are much more likely to include leaders from business, non-religious professions and non-religious education. Clergy make up less than one percent of the boards of public colleges and universities and only 10 percent of the boards of independent colleges; they constitute more than 40 percent of theological school boards.

Figure 10: Occupations of Trustees

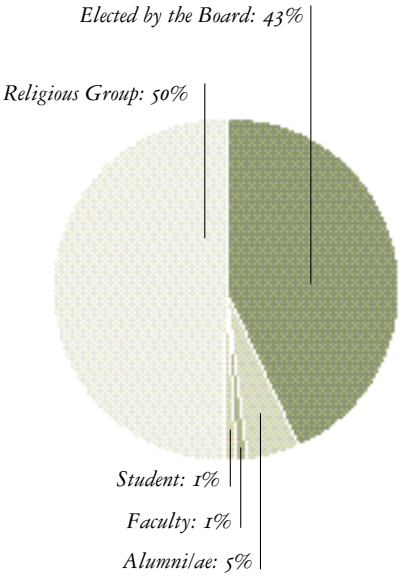


How and Why Trustees Are Appointed

Where do theological schools find their trustees? As the demographic profile sketched above suggests, about half of trustees are insiders—graduates of the school they serve or relatives of graduates. Members of this group have been associated with the schools they serve over the long-term: they had, on average, more than ten years of "significant" involvement before they joined the board. The other half of all trustees, those with no prior family ties to the school, shows a dramatically different pattern. Their average length of prior association is less than four years, and the majority of them—more than 50 percent—had no prior "significant" contact with the school. The average length of prior association for all trustees, about six-and-a-half years, is about the same for all religious traditions and types except mainline independent Protestant schools, whose trustees are much "newer," with just over four years' prior association.

Trustees come from near and far: about one quarter are neighbors of the school, living 20 miles away or less; half live within driving distance (125 miles or less); and one-quarter live more than 500 miles away and presumably fly to meetings. Catholic seminaries are more likely to draw their board members locally, as opposed to evangelical independent Protestant schools which recruit their members from the widest geographical area. Denominational seminaries, many of which are assigned a particular geographical territory,

Figure 11: Who Appoints/Elects Theological Trustees



fall between the two types in geographical spread.

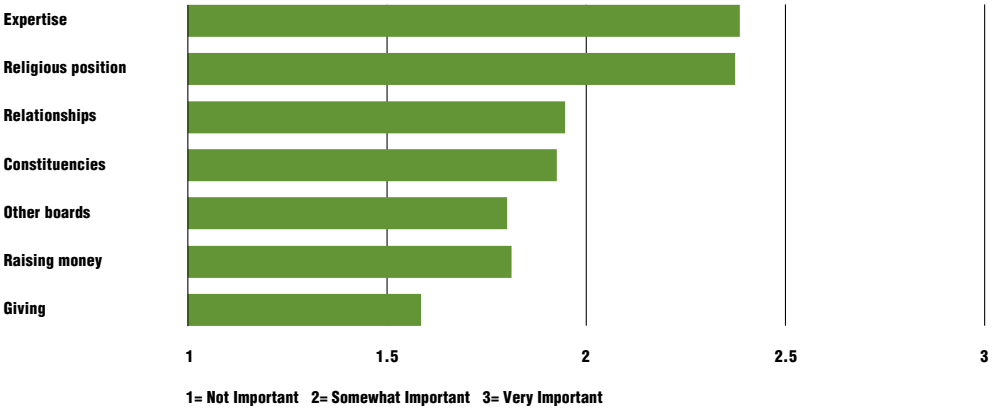
As Figure 11 shows, half of all board members are appointed or elected by a religious group that sponsors the school; an additional 7 percent are appointed or elected to represent the school's graduates, faculty or students; the remaining 43 percent are elected by the board itself. As Figure 18 shows (see Appendix A) there are significant variations in the manner of appointment in different religious traditions and types of schools. Boards of evangelical denominational seminaries are dominated by ecclesiastically appointed trustees (70 percent) and boards of independent seminaries have few or no church-appointed members, though some apparently have processes by which denominations suggest or nominate persons for board membership.

Most theological school trustees have some board experience on other boards; more than half serve on at least one other board in addition to the seminary board. Almost two-thirds serve on their local congregational board or council and over one-half serve on the board of a religious or non-religious non-profit organization.

What are theological institutions looking for as they seek board members? Almost equal numbers of trustees say they think the most important factor when they were selected was their expertise in church, ministry, denominational or theological matters (35 percent) or their knowledge of business or finance (29 percent). Smaller numbers think that they were selected chiefly because of their professional experience in education (12 percent) or fundraising (10 percent) or other areas such as law, government or international relations, etc.

As Figure 12 shows, almost as important in selection as expertise of any kind, trustees believe, was their position in a religious group. Also important, some think, were the relationships they already had with the schools' leaders or board members and their ability to help promote the school to particular constituencies and to assist in fundraising. Trustees believe the least important factor weighing in selection is the capacity to make a financial gift to the school. Indeed, only one percent of respondents to our survey said that the ability to make a personal financial gift was the most important factor in their selection.

Figure 12: Mean Importance of Factors in Selection



What Trustees Think of Their Schools and Their Board Service

Theological school trustees recognize that their institutions face major challenges, and there is remarkable unity across the range of school types about what those challenges are. As the table below shows, trustees of schools in all three traditions say that increasing the number of students is their institutions' highest goal (a realistic one, in light of the stagnant enrollment trends of the last decade), though a much higher percentage of trustees of Roman Catholic schools designate this the highest goal. Financial stability is almost as important for trustees of Protestant institutions, and preserving the school's theological tradition is just as important for evangelicals.

Most Important Institutional Goals as Identified by Trustees

Types of Schools	Mainline	Evangelical	Roman Catholic
Increasing the number of students	26%	21%	38%
Establishing financial security	22%	20%	16%
Other high-priority responses	11% Improving the quality of students	20% Maintaining the school's theological tradition	16% Increasing the school's public influence and visibility

Trustees' Views on Governance *(Mean score)*

The board has delegated sufficient authority to the CEO	3.83
The board and CEO have a productive relationship	3.77
There is a climate of mutual trust and support between the board and the CEO	3.75
The CEO relates well to outside constituencies	3.71

Trustees' Ratings of Board Operations

Meetings are enjoyable	3.64
Board works well as a group	3.61
Time at board meetings is well spent	3.49
Representation of constituency views on the board is adequate	3.30
Orientation to the school's history and tradition is adequate	2.88

(4=strongly agree; 3=somewhat agree; 2=somewhat disagree; 1=strongly disagree)

How well do board members think the governance system of their institution functions to meet these goals? In general, theological trustees give all features of the school and its board the highest marks. They almost unanimously agree with a long list of positive statements (average responses recorded below for a four point scale on which 4 is "strongly agree" and 3 is "somewhat agree"). The governance system seems to be in good balance.

Further, more than four out of five respondents say that the range of religious and theological views, the geographical representation, the pace of membership change and the clergy/lay balance on the board are adequate (those who did not agree also think that their boards are too large).

Theological trustees also disagree with almost all negative statements. They do not think that the board is dominated by its chair or executive committee, functions as a rubber stamp, or is too involved in administrative details. Meetings are not too short or too long; the CEO is not overly influenced by dominant board members; and the faculty is neither too liberal nor too conservative. Overall ratings of the board experience are, as all these subsidiary ratings clearly would predict, very high. Over 90 percent rate their experience good or excellent.

Indeed, the only factors on which boards do not receive full approval are adequate representation of racial, ethnic, gender and age diversity.

Perhaps because theological trustees are highly satisfied with their board

Overall, how would you rate your experience as a member of this board?	
Excellent	53.7%
Good	40.1%
Fair	5.7%
Poor	0.5%

service, some of them serve for extended periods. Half have served 5 or more years, one-third for 7 years or longer, and one-quarter for 9 years or more. The longest-serving board member has been in place for 42 years, and because very long terms are not unusual, the average length of service is 7.01 years, considerably longer than the median of 5 years. White men have served longer than other members. Evangelical independent schools hold on to their board members the longest (9.7 years is the average length of service on these boards), while Roman Catholic schools have the shortest-serving board members (5.5 years). (Averages for other school traditions and types are shown in Appendix A.)

Clouding and complicating the picture of high satisfaction, loyalty and long service outlined by responses to the Auburn survey is trustees' self-rating of their own performance. They give themselves only moderately high grades on a three-point scale, and some of the characteristics that theological schools may most acutely need, if our respondents are correct about school goals and needs, are rated the lowest. If, for instance, achieving fiscal stability is a chief goal, as trustees report, it should be cause for concern that trustees rate themselves low on fundraising and new board member selection.

Self-Rating of Board Performance *(Mean score)*

Selection of CEO	2.56
Financial decisions	2.47
Investments	2.47
Mission interpretation	2.45
Academic decisions	2.39
CEO evaluation	2.39
Church relations	2.32
Long-range planning	2.28
Evaluation of school in light of social trends	2.27
Interschool relations	2.25
New board member selection	2.18
Fundraising	2.16
Evaluation of school in comparison with others	2.16

(3=perform very well; 2=fairly well; 1=poorly)

Issues: Do Theological Schools Have the Trustees They Need?

The data that describe trustees, especially when compared with their self-assessment of performance, suggest two serious issues for seminary boards to consider.

REPLACEMENT

Theological schools should be concerned about where they will find the large number of new trustees they will need in the near future.

Trustees in all types of theological schools are a very senior group. (There are no significant differences in age among trustees of various theological school types analyzed in Appendix A.) Almost one in five (18 percent) is 70 or older. Only 2 percent are under 40, 6 percent under 45, and 16 percent under 50. Further, younger trustees are likely to be religiously appointed, and trustees in this category serve for significantly shorter periods of time than those who are elected by the board on which they serve. It is not clear, then, whether many of today's younger trustees will continue to serve in the future.

The advanced age of theological trustees means that many are retired from paid work. Assuming an average retirement age of 67,[6] 29 percent of theological trustees have reached retirement age. (This is about double the percentage for public colleges [15 percent], almost triple the percentage for private colleges [12 percent], and many times the number of retired trustees serving non-profit boards [4 percent].) Trustees who have retired from their lifetime occupation have certain advantages, including the wisdom gained from long experience and more time to spend on trusteeship; but there are drawbacks as well. Their current giving potential is often reduced, their network of contacts may not be as broad, and—most to the point—they will have to be replaced sooner.

Where will new trustees be found? It is not clear that traditional sources will produce as many trustees for seminaries as they did in the past. As previously mentioned, theological schools have traditionally found at least half of their board members in the school's own inner circle of graduates and graduates' relatives. Family tradition as well as school tradition play a part: more than one-third of all trustees, laity as well as clergy, have a clergy relative. Further research shows that family tradition plays a part in professional choice as well.[7] The percentages of theological school board members with clergy in their families is significantly higher than those for seminary students (38 percent for board members, 31 percent for seminary students), which suggests

Where will new trustees be found? It is not clear that traditional sources will produce as many trustees for seminaries as they did in the past.

that some families in which service to the church is a dominant theme are likely to form significant ties to seminaries that include board membership.

Studies of contemporary religion show that ascriptive religious ties are weakening. One-third of those living in the U.S. will switch denominations or religious traditions in their lifetime, and two-thirds of Protestants will do so. The children of current trustees are not likely to share their parents' religious commitments and interests to the same extent as current trustees share those of their parents. Some seminary leaders who reviewed the early findings of this study contend (though our survey cannot confirm) that social leaders are less likely to accept membership on seminary boards now than they did in the past, perhaps a sign of the increasing privatization of American religion.[8] These trends suggest that one pool of future theological trustees—those linked to the school by family and religious ties—is getting shallower, and those in it who are most desirable as trustees may be harder to interest in the role.

The other source of trustees is persons who do not have special ties to the school or the profession of ministry but who have experience, wealth or contacts that make them valuable assets to non-profit institutions. Seminaries are at a disadvantage in recruiting such persons because, as the comparative data cited above and shown below from colleges and other institutions demonstrate, other institutions have already signed on younger trustees. Less than half of theological school trustees are younger than 60, other institutions have much higher percentages of young trustees. Numbers of persons who would make desirable trustees are committed to institutions other than seminaries at a young age.

Trustees under 60

Auburn sample	49%
Public colleges	70%
Independent colleges	64%
Non-profit boards	81%

Given the large number of replacement trustees that theological schools will require and the difficulty trustees already report with new board member selection (one of the lowest-rated performance items), these developments deserve the concerted attention of all theological institutions.

COMPETENCE AND CAPACITY

Even more troubling is the question of whether theological boards have the perspective, motivation and capacity that their institutions most urgently require. The trustees' ranking of the most pressing needs of their institutions (increasing the number of students and establishing financial stability) correlates closely with the Auburn Center's conclusions in recent years about the major challenges facing theological schools: qualified students in adequate

numbers are increasingly difficult to find; and a majority of theological institutions are in a financially delicate condition. To address these matters, boards need members who have the perspective to evaluate the school against long-term trends and in comparison with others and to build the results into strategic plans. Schools also need a critical mass of board members who are oriented and motivated to promote the school, and are either willing to make significant gifts to it themselves or are able to find interested donors.

The self-ratings cited earlier suggest that the perspective, interest and will to promote the institution are in shorter supply among trustees than they should be. The higher self-rated competencies of board members include important functions, such as fiscal and personnel management and church relations. But planning, evaluation and institutional advancement are rated low. The picture that is formed, from these and other data on theological school boards, is that of a typical church or denominational board, which hires senior staff, approves the budget, and keeps an eye on issues of image and orthodoxy. Less prominent are some of the functions that non-profits generally, and higher education institutions in particular, most need from their boards: long-range planning and the willingness to give generously from personal wealth in order to build an institution for the future.

Data on giving are especially worrisome. Most financially pressed institutions depend on the operating and capital gifts of board members as the core of their support. During the last five years, theological schools relied on gifts for one-third (32 percent) of their revenues. Graduates and other individuals gave more than half of this amount, as Figure 13 shows. But in none of these years did trustees give more than about 10 percent of total gifts.

Giving by trustees, whatever the actual amounts, is a sign of their commitment to and zeal for the institution. Those who make it a priority to give money often give the school quality attention as well. Fewer than one in five theological trustees (18 percent) say that the theological school they serve as trustee is their highest priority in giving, and even more surprising, in

Figure 13: Sources of Gifts, 1996-2000, U.S. Theological Schools, All Purposes

Data source: The Association of Theological Schools

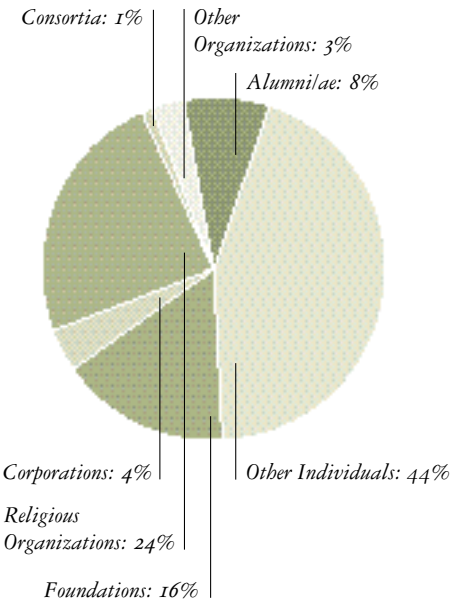
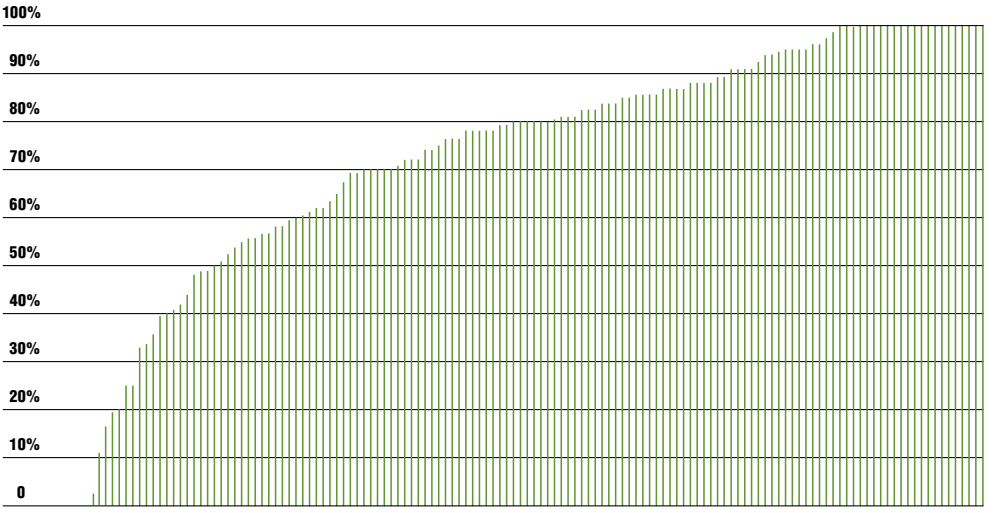


Figure 14: Percentage of Board Members Giving, Independent U.S. Theological Schools, 2000, by School.



Data source: The Association of Theological Schools

light of the average age of theological school trustees, only 32 percent have made provision for the school in their will. (Lay trustees are no more likely to have made a deferred arrangement than clergy.) Indeed, most theological schools have some board members who do not contribute at all. Despite the fact that full board participation in giving is universally acknowledged to be a cornerstone of a successful fundraising program, most theological schools fail the test: only 15 percent report that all board members made a contribution in the year 2000.[9] As Figure 14 illustrates dramatically, many institutions fell far short of the 100 percent giving mark.

What promotes or impedes the giving of theological school trustees? As might be expected, those whose net worth is greater give more, so the prevalence of clergy, whose earnings and net worth are relatively low, is likely to decrease the amount theological schools can expect to raise from their boards. Our data do not establish reasons for giving or not giving with certainty, but they do support the hypothesis that the culture of a board and its related religious movement have a good deal to do with the amounts board members give.

The fact that different types of schools have different patterns of giving seems to indicate this. Two groups of schools stand out from the others. Roman Catholic institutions appear to have low expectations for board giving. Their median board gift in 2001 was less than half the median gift of trustees of Protestant schools. Evangelical independent institutions, which have some of the strongest and most loyal boards

(they draw members from the widest geographical area, for instance, and for the longest periods of service), also have a median trustee gift almost twice as large as all other types of Protestant seminaries. Their trustees' largest gifts are also much larger than others, and the percentage who have made deferred arrangements for the seminaries they serve are higher. (See Figures 22-24 in Appendix A for charts on giving of trustees sub-divided by religious tradition and type of institution.) From these data we conclude that the expectations set and reinforced by boards are more likely than any other factor to determine the amount of money (and probably also time and interest) board members give. Unfortunately most theological school boards seem not to expect a high level of support from their board members.

Recommendations

What measures might make theological school boards stronger?

In recent years, foundations and associations have sponsored several programs to help theological school boards improve their performance. These programs have focused not only on board-functioning but also on understanding theological education issues in greater depth. *In Trust* magazine and other publications have provided on-going education for trustees and boards and remain an important source of information for those in the field.

It will take awareness and discipline, then, to strengthen boards and make them more useful to the institutions they serve.

Although these programs and publications are valuable, our findings suggest that such programs need to be augmented by much more concerted planning for the future of seminary boards and on regular monitoring of performance.

Currently, there is little external pressure on theological school boards to plan or monitor their work. The accreditation standards that pertain to them are very general. The Association of Theological Schools requires that boards "possess the qualifications appropriate to the task they will undertake…, reflect diversity of race, ethnicity, and gender," meet general standards of "loyalty" and be oriented to their responsibilities (ATS Standard 8.3.1.3); but many self-evaluations by theological institutions gloss over the board.[10] It will take awareness and discipline, then, to strengthen boards and make them more useful to the institutions they serve. We think that two measures are especially important:

1. THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL TRUSTEES MUST PLAN FOR THEIR OWN REPLACEMENT.

Because of the advanced age of their board members, theological schools will need to replace at least half their members in the next decade; and the high percentage that have mandatory rotation systems (81 percent, compared with 55 percent of private college/university boards and 24 percent of public university boards that have term limits) will have to replace even more than that. All boards should have a replacement plan that specifies where and how the school will search for new board members, that targets required skills and experience, that sets fundraising goals for which the board will be responsible and that anticipates how much board members will be expected to give or raise each year for the institution.

In light of these findings, it seems especially important that a board replacement plan attend to the matter of age distribution of board members. Theological schools should try to recruit younger board members than they currently do. As findings show, younger boards will not only pose less of a challenge for future replacements but will most likely develop stronger networks through broader contacts (most often a characteristic of younger members) [see p.13]. And younger people of talent and means should be invited to consider joining the boards of theological schools before their loyalties are completely absorbed by other organizations.

2. THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL BOARDS SHOULD FOCUS THEIR EFFORTS ON THE SCHOOLS' MOST PRESSING NEEDS.

Our data suggest that the greatest competencies of most theological school boards are in management and matters that have to do with ministry, church and denominational relations. Both are important areas, but theological boards, by their members' own accounts, often are not prepared to deal with even more acute needs of the school, especially the need to forge relations with the broader public and to find new support.

One way to balance the competency profile of the board is to recruit board members with qualifications in the areas of greatest need. Another is to set performance standards for all board members. We suggest that boards adopt standards such as these and then conduct an annual audit of how each board member and the board as a whole measure up against their standards:

■ *Every board member, in consultation with the president and other school leaders, should engage in activities that make the school more visible and better understood by a wide public.* The range and type of activities that can accomplish this are great. Board members can speak about the school in a variety of public settings, cultivate new friends privately, help organize/co-sponsor events in the institution's name and cooperate in recruitment efforts for students and faculty. Board members should file reports on their public relations activities and consult with the leadership of the board and the school about what kinds of public representation of the school are most needed.

Board members' efforts to get the word out about their institutions may

have, among other benefits, the effect of generating interest among potential board members. Board members' own public relations activities will be more effective if the school is, at the same time, offering some programs that serve a broad public. Our findings suggest that the old recruitment routes for board members are not working as well as they once did. Better communication with and service to the public may help to create much-needed new constituencies for the future.

■ *Board members should educate themselves about the context in which the school does its work.* The program of orientation for the board as a whole should give members some sense about where their institution is headed in relation to others, but board members should read, attend conferences, and visit other institutions in order better to understand the arena in which the school works and its competition and potential partnerships.

■ *Every board member should support the school financially and participate in its programs to raise funds from others.* In the last quarter century, spurred by financial necessity and the prodding of Lilly Endowment and other foundations, theological schools have built vigorous fund development programs. The results of this study strongly suggest that the missing link in many of these programs is board participation. EVEN SCHOOLS WHOSE BOARD MEMBERS ARE NOT SELECTED BECAUSE OF THEIR CAPACITY TO CONTRIBUTE FINANCIAL SUPPORT SHOULD INSIST THAT ALL THEIR BOARD MEMBERS MAKE AS LARGE AN ANNUAL GIFT TO THE SCHOOL AS THEY CAN AND INCLUDE THE INSTITUTION IN THEIR WILL OR OTHER DEFERRED-GIVING INSTRUMENT. Board members who have financial means should be asked to make the theological school they serve a priority in their giving. Many foundations and most individual donors will not consider major support of an institution unless there is evidence that its board supports it strongly. Theological schools are no exception and should ask and expect far more active and generous support from their boards than most of them now receive.

Theological schools play crucial roles. They shape the leadership of a vast array of institutions and in turn these institutions affect the whole society and the character and quality of public and community life. Trustees who guide these schools, insure that institutions are faithful to their basic purposes and are effective in their on-going work. Who governs these institutions—who holds their future and molds it—really matters. Boards have to do a much better job in the future of finding the trustees they need and setting them to accomplish the work that theological schools most urgently need.

Notes

1. The mailing list for this survey was provided by *In Trust* magazine, which is sent to the trustees of all but a small number of the member institutions of the Association of Theological Schools. Auburn surveys usually include rabbinical schools, but because the small number of trustees in all rabbinical schools combined would have made it impossible to preserve confidentiality in reporting results, they were not included in the present study.

2. Holly Madsen, *Composition of Governing Boards of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1997,* and *Composition of Governing Boards of Public Colleges and Universities, 1997* AGB Publications No. 36 and 37 (Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges); Merrill Schwartz, *Results of a National Survey of Theological School Board Characteristics, Policies and Practices, 1994,* AGB No. 23.

3. ATS Data Form ATS-D-1, *Development Survey of Private Gift Support for Theological Education.*

4. *The Nonprofit Governance Index,* National Center for Nonprofit Boards and Stanford University Graduate School of Business, 2000.

5. Our respondents are more than 90 percent white; but earlier data gathered from schools, which may be more accurate, indicate that the actual figure may be closer to 85 percent (Schwartz, 1994, AGB No. 23).

6. The Auburn survey did not ask respondents to indicate whether they are retired. A survey used as a basis for comparison did ask this question.

7. Barbara G. Wheeler, *Is There a Problem?: Theological Students and Religious Leadership for the Future,* Auburn Studies No. 8 (New York: Auburn Theological Seminary, 2001), 7.

8. Stephen Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivializes Religious Devotion* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Elizabeth Lynn and Barbara G. Wheeler, *Missing Connections: Public Perceptions of Theological Education and Religious Leadership,* Auburn Studies No. 6 (New York: Auburn Theological Seminary, 1999); *The National Commission on Civic Renewal, A Nation of Spectators: How Civic Disengagement Weakens America and What We Can Do About It* (College Park, Maryland: National Commission on Civic Renewal, University of Maryland, 1998).

9. "When you approach that foundation, you had better be prepared to answer an honest 'yes' to the question of whether or not every trustee has contributed in accordance with his or her respective means. Financial support is a *sine qua non* in the panoply of duties devolving on every trustee." Robert L. Lewis, *Effective Nonprofit Management: Essential Lessons for Executive Directors,* 2001 (Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers) 48.

10. Indeed, the Strategic Information Report, which was designed by the Auburn Center and is now distributed by the Association of Theological Schools, analyzes a wide range of an institution's strategically relevant data but never mentions the make-up or performance of boards.

Appendix A

This appendix contains data divided by the religious tradition and type of *school* that the trustee serves. Schools are first divided into Roman Catholic and Protestant categories. Protestant institutions are then further subdivided into those that self-identify as evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant and anabaptist Protestant ("Peace" church on these charts). The mainline and evangelical Protestant categories are divided again into subcategories that indicate the status of the school: "denominational" (formally affiliated with one or more religious bodies) and "independent." Orthodox theological schools are included in the "mainline denominational" category. (All Roman Catholic and anabaptist schools have formal denominational ties.) The result is the six categories shown on some of the charts.

The charts below (Figures 15-24) show some major differences in the trustee profiles and perspectives of different seminary types:

ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

(Labeled "Catholic" on the Figures)

- seem to place the least emphasis on building and maintaining boards and using them as a pivotal feature of their governance: they are more likely than other schools to have drawn their members locally and their members have served the shortest length of time [Figure 21]. They are much less likely than others to say that the board most influences decisions at the school (yet are more likely to say that the board chair or religious sponsor wields such influence) [Figure 20].

- rely less on their boards for financial support. They emphasize expertise and religious position when selecting board members [Figure 19] and have the lowest median giving [Figure 22].

- are twice as likely as trustees of Protestant schools to say that the school's highest goal is to increase the number of students.

MAINLINE AND EVANGELICAL DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS

(Labeled M/D and E/D on the Figures)

■ have boards that look remarkably alike, despite the theological differences between these two religious traditions. Boards at both kinds of institutions have higher percentages of clergy and religiously appointed members than other types [Figures 17 and 18], and although there are differences, they resemble each other in giving patterns, and seem to constitute themselves and function similarly in many other ways. The most notable difference is that mainline boards have higher percentages of women members than other types of seminaries [Figure 15].

MAINLINE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

(Labeled M/I on the Figures)

■ have boards that are the most diverse in gender [Figure 15] and race [Figure 16] though not in geographical distribution.

■ have board members who are more likely than others to say that financial stability is their school's highest goal and that fundraising ability was the most important factor in selection [Figure 19], but also to report mixed records of fund raising success. These board members give the same size mid-range gifts as boards of other types of schools and some larger gifts at the high end of the range [Figures 22 and 23], but are least likely of all types to have made deferred gifts to the schools they serve [Figure 24].

EVANGELICAL INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

(Labeled E/I on the Figures)

■ are aggressive in choosing their boards, seeking board members from the widest geographical area who can help to promote the institution nationally and find support for it.

■ seem to have succeeded in finding committed and supportive board members. Their highest goal is to strengthen the religious tradition the school serves. They have the longest-serving board members [Figure 21] and dramatically higher median and high-end gifts [Figures 22 and 23].

ANABAPTIST SCHOOLS

(Labeled "Peace" on the Figures)

■ are most likely to be religiously appointed and ordained and to be selected because of the religious position they occupy.

■ are least likely to be selected for fundraising or giving potential [Figure 19], but nevertheless (perhaps reflecting denominational cultures that emphasize tithing) give median gifts at the same level as mainline schools and evangelical denominational schools [Figure 22].

Figure 15: Gender of Trustee by Denominational Classification

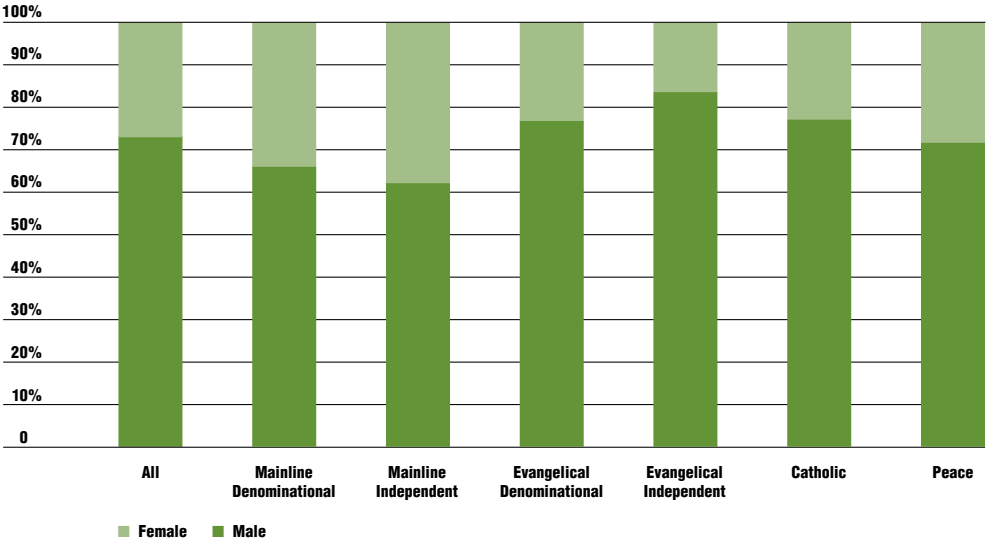


Figure 16: Race of Trustees by Denominational Classification

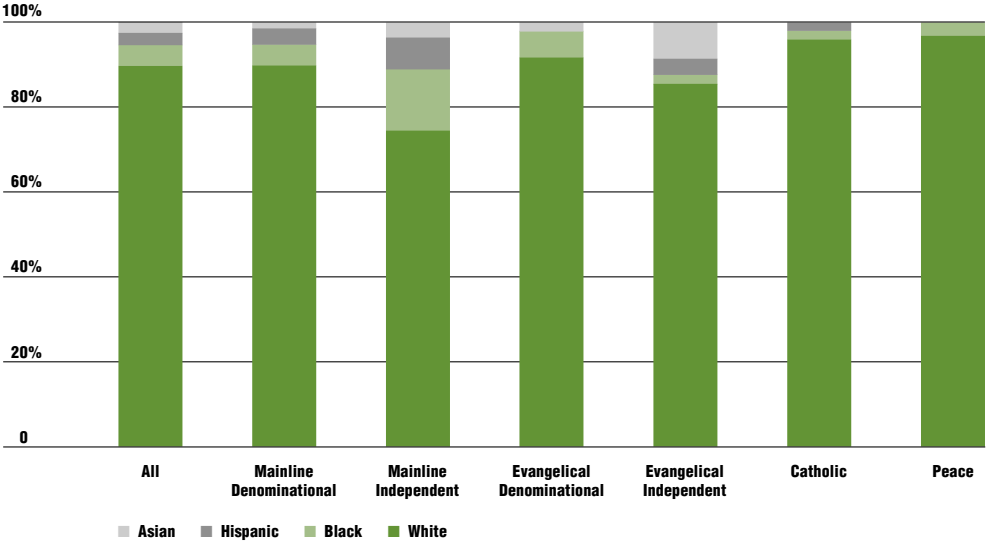


Figure 17: Ordination of Trustee by Denominational Classification

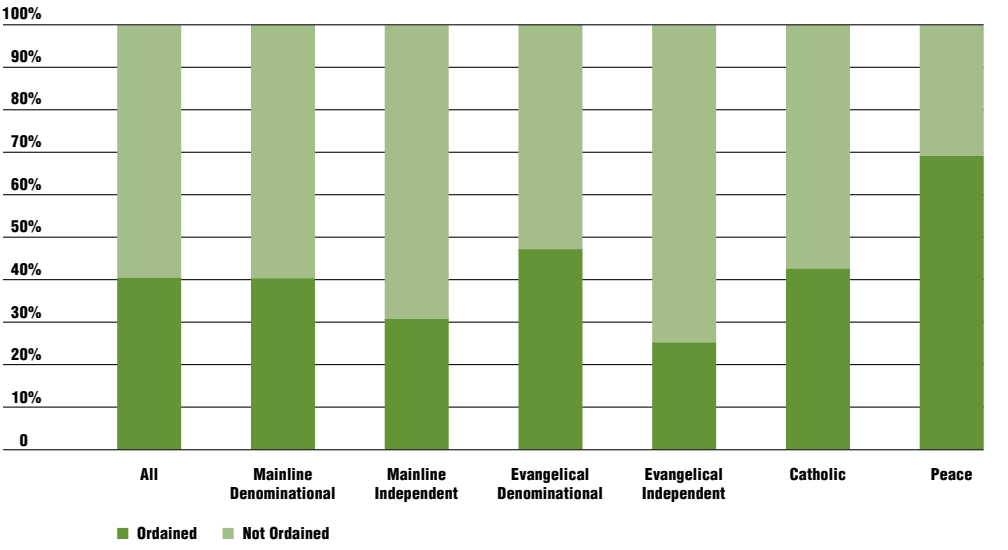


Figure 18: Percentage of Trustees Appointed to the Board by a Sponsoring Religious Group or Denomination, by Denominational Classification

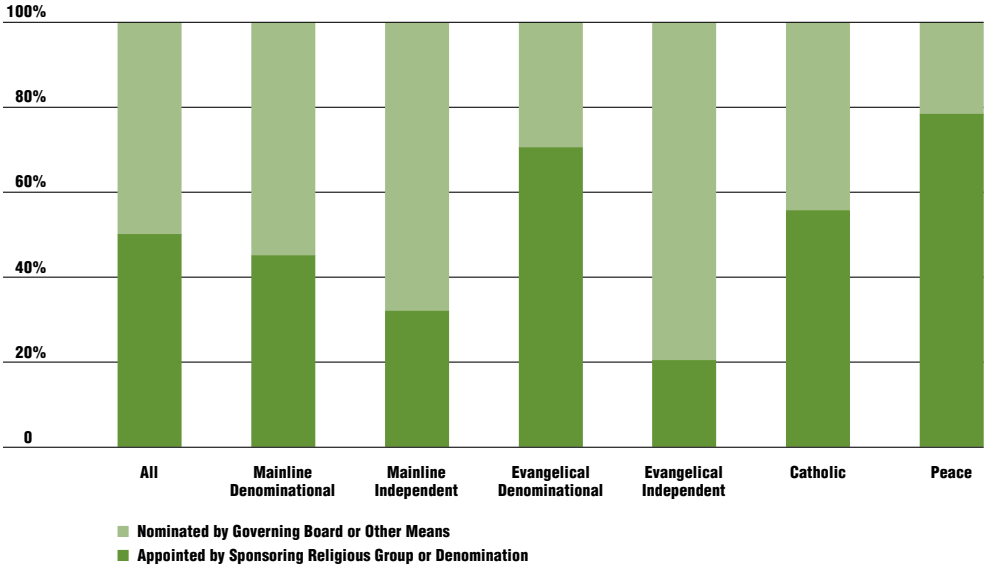


Figure 19: Trustees' Views of the Important Factors in Their Selection as Board Members, by Denominational Classification

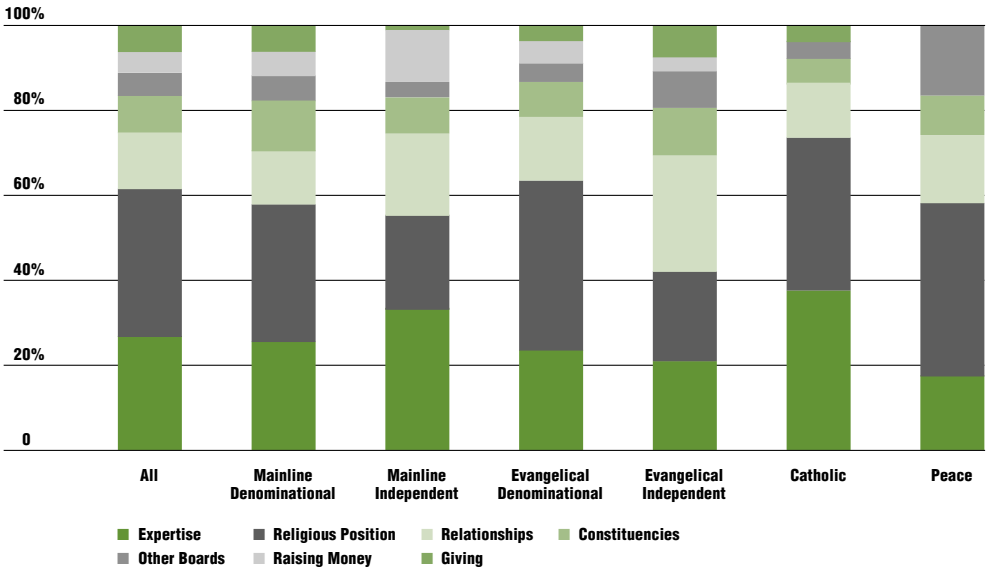


Figure 20: Who Most Influences Decisions Affecting the Future, by Denominational Classification

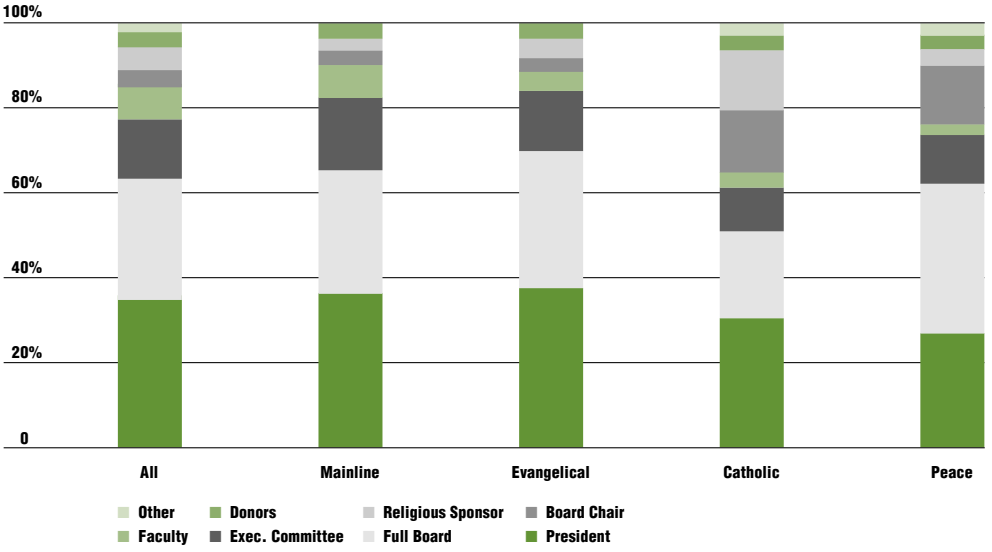


Figure 21: Trustees' Average Length of Service by Denominational Classification

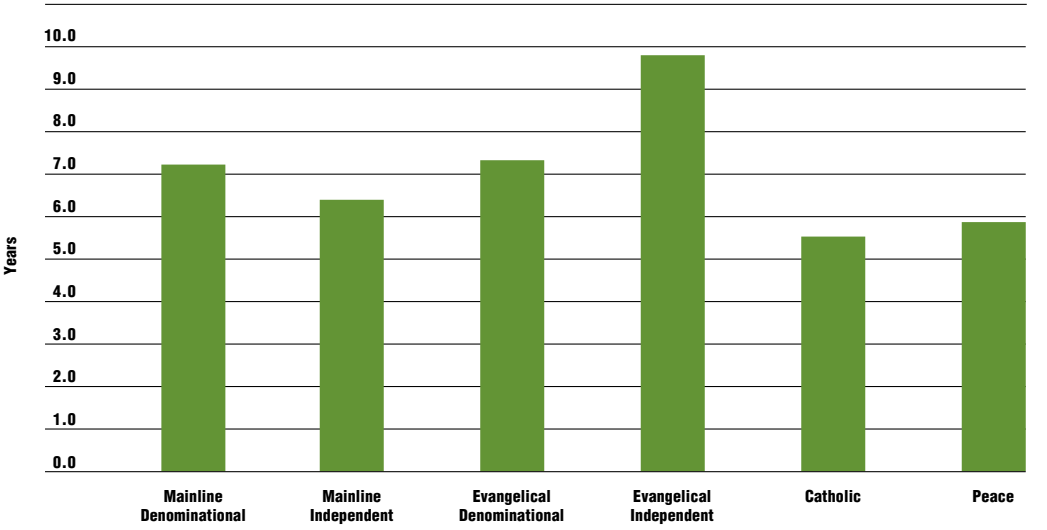


Figure 22: Median Board Member Gift Amount by Denominational Classification.

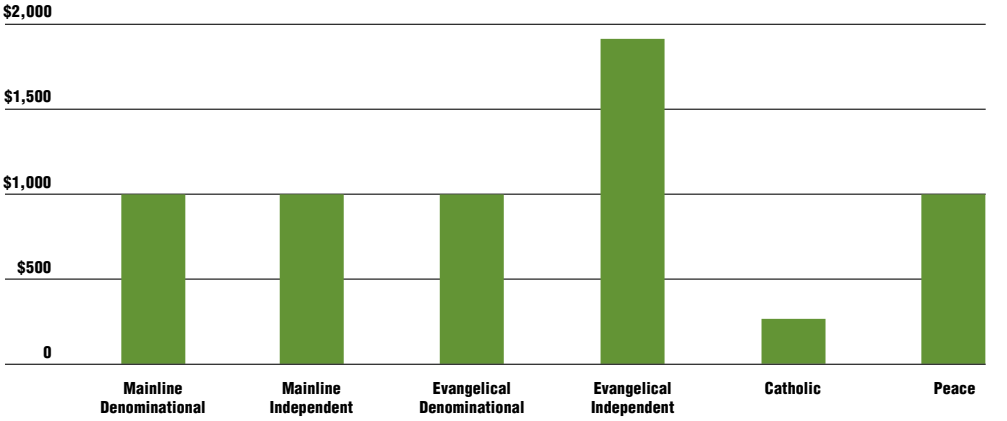


Figure 23: 90th Percentile Board Member Gift Amount by Denominational Classification

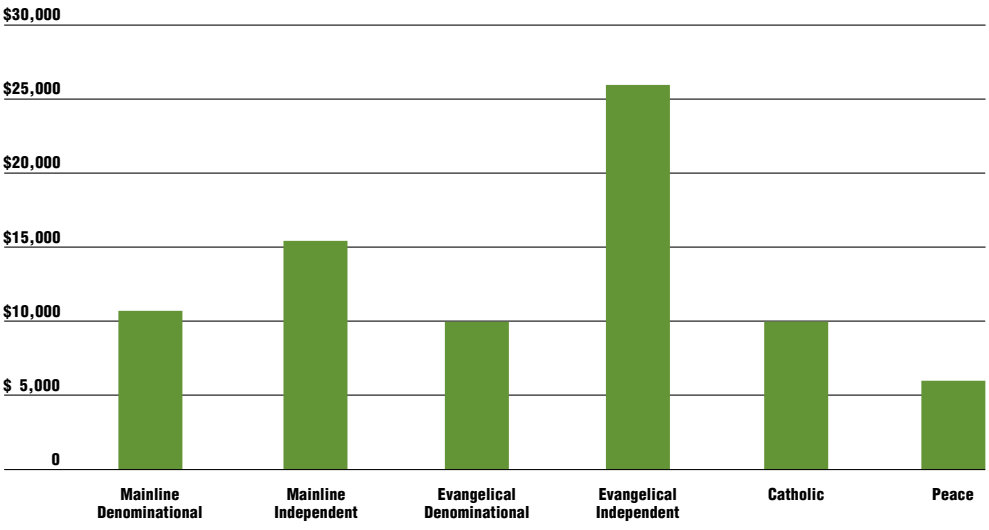
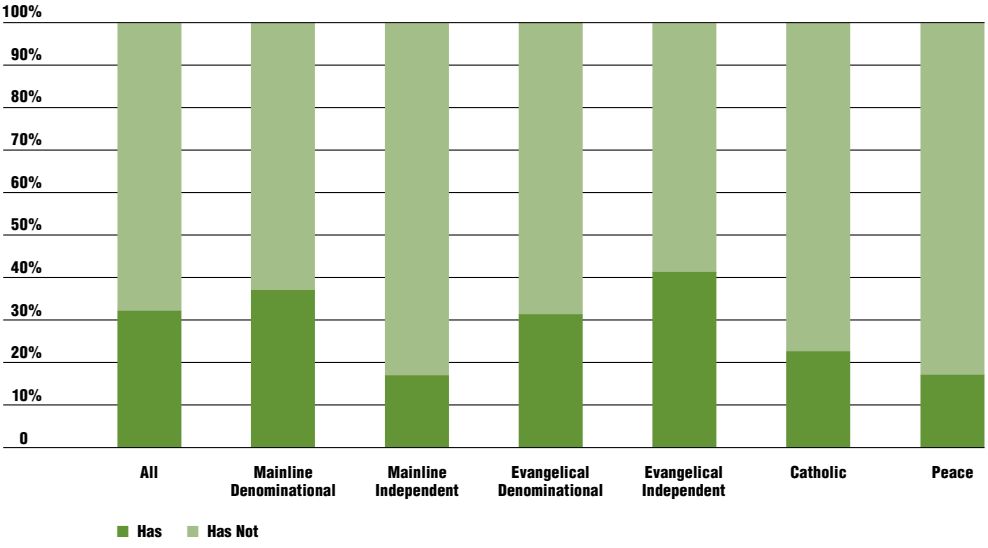


Figure 24: Percentage of Trustees Who Have Provided for the Seminary in Their Will, by Denominational Classification



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Auburn Seminary was founded in 1818 by the presbyteries of central New York State. Progressive theological ideas and ecumenical sensibilities guided Auburn's original work of preparing ministers for frontier churches and foreign missions. After the seminary relocated from Auburn, New York, to the campus of Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1939, Auburn ceased to grant degrees, but its commitment to progressive and ecumenical theological education remained firm.

As a free-standing seminary working in close cooperation with other institutions, Auburn found new forms for its educational mission: programs of serious, sustained theological education for laity and practicing clergy; a course of denominational studies for Presbyterians enrolled at Union; and research into the history, aims and purposes of theological education.

In 1991, building on its national reputation for research, Auburn established the Center for the Study of Theological Education to foster research on current issues on theological education, an enterprise that Auburn believes is critical to the well-being of religious communities and the world that they serve. Auburn Seminary also sponsors the Center for Church Life, to help strengthen the leadership of mainline churches, and the Center for Multifaith Education, to provide life-long learning for persons of diverse faith backgrounds.

Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education

Barbara G. Wheeler, Director
Sharon L. Miller, Associate Director
Anthony T. Ruger, Senior Research Fellow

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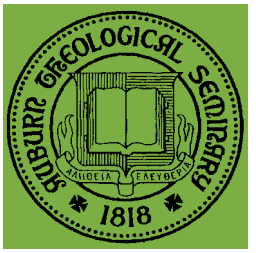

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