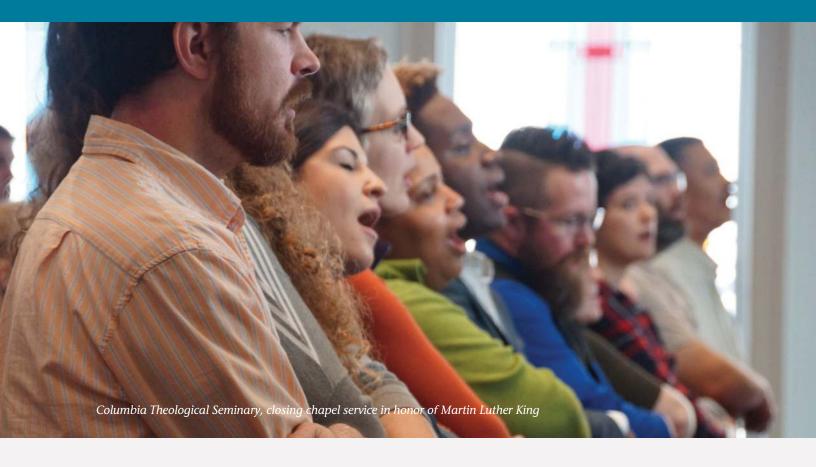# (Not) Being There

Online Distance Theological Education

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Auburn Studies No. 23 — Fall 2017

Columbia Theological Seminary, closing chapel service in honor of Martin Luther King

Auburn

Trouble the waters. Heal the world.

Executive Summary

"...where does education actually happen? It is clearly wherever the student lives, works, and learns, including in virtual spaces and through digitally mediated access to human and material resources."

This Auburn Studies report highlights the changing features of Online Distance Education (ODE) within theological schools. Distance education is not a new phenomenon, particularly within the broader field of higher education, and yet the "disruptive innovation" of the internet, as Clayton Christensen and others have argued, has only recently begun to change theological education.[1] While in some respects the impact of the internet is dramatic and new, many faith traditions have deep experience with the sort of mediated presence distinctive of ODE.

For many world religions, the embodied presence of their founders—Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha, and others—was brief. For most of the histories of these great traditions, "not being there" has been normative. Take, for example, the story of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to the disciples in the Gospel of John. All the disciples were there, save Thomas, who would not believe Jesus was truly alive without "being there" to see and touch Jesus. Lucky for him, a week later Jesus appeared to Thomas as well. But note what Jesus said: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have come to believe." This is the case for millions of believers today, whose experience of the holy is through a mediating presence, holy objects, or rituals, and perhaps, most profoundly, through scriptures understood as God's presence, voice, or word.

It is then not an unfamiliar world at all for people of faith to teach and learn at a distance, using mediated relationships to do so—even when the technology affording the connection is indeed new. While this report

outlines our research findings, we also hope to offer resources for thinking in creative and hopeful ways in a time of change. The report takes stock of a generation of change in theological education driven by what is often called the "digital revolution." We highlight three key findings:

FIRST, ODE IS GROWING RAPIDLY, PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF WHO TYPICALLY ATTENDS THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL. Over the past decade, enrollment at member schools of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) dropped by 11%; in the same period, online enrollment rose almost 200%. Broader cultural patterns regarding spirituality are surely at play as we see the democratizing force of the internet opening theological exploration to a much wider—and, it turns out, quite interested—audience. Given the success of ODE, many schools suddenly find themselves with too large and expensive a physical plant for the educational needs of previous years.

SECOND, ODE STUDENT OUTCOMES ARE EQUAL TO OR BETTER THAN THOSE OF TRADITIONAL RESIDENTIAL CLASSES. Many critics—even now—harbor doubts that anything but students and a professor in a room together can achieve the desired educational outcomes. Yet the evidence shows this is not true. ODE provokes pedagogical innovation, shifting the focus from teacher to learner, and the power of the contexts in which the student learns. For both faculty and students, it is powerful to take seriously the "real world" context where student learning and daily work dynamically interrogate one another. Ironically, we found, while ODE takes more time and effort, remarkably few resources are currently dedicated to training and supporting faculty as they learn this new medium.

THIRD, THE INTEGRATED REALITY OF DIGITAL LIFE IS QUICKLY MAKING THE OLD DIVIDE BETWEEN "TRADITIONAL" AND "ONLINE" CLASSES— AND HYBRID COURSES OR PROGRAMS, WHICH TOGGLE BETWEEN THE TWO—OBSOLETE. ODE creates an identity crisis for many schools that value highly the formative power of "being there" in classroom, chapel, and community life. Yet the question the disruption of the internet raises is "where" does education actually happen? It is clearly wherever the student lives, works, and learns, including in virtual spaces and through digitally mediated access to human and material resources. ●

Luther Seminary graduate

What's Inside

I. Introduction

I n *Being There,* a study of theological education in the United States carried out in the mid-1990s, authors Jackson W. Carroll, Barbara G. Wheeler, Daniel O. Aleshire, and Penny Long Marler report on a multi-year ethnographic study of two schools they call Mainline Theological Seminary and Evangelical Theological Seminary. At the heart of their study, they asked questions of culture and formation: "Just what affects the way students are formed by the educational process?"[2] Rather than highlight the formative impact of basic factors such as "curricula, faculty quality, governance and administrative structures, student quality or pedagogy," their in-depth study of two schools over a number of years allowed a careful look at "a broader but less visible influence on the formation of students: the impact of a school's culture in the educational process."[3]

> The internet is our twenty-first century's version of the printing press. It is, as Christensen argues, a great democratizing force between peoples, countries, and cultures, allowing instant acquisition of information about dog grooming, the depth of the Black Sea, or John Calvin's interpretation of Romans. It provides instant communications around the globe.

While their concern was to understand how students are formed for ministry leadership, theirs was no mere academic interest. They also harbored strong interest in "improving or reforming theological education" as well, and hoped by attending to a crucial but understudied factor— the role of culture in educational processes—they might find helpful leverage for such reform efforts.[4]

At the end of their study, while reluctant to make "definitive recommendations for educational practice," the authors do outline three key considerations educators "should take into account."[5] These three—the durability of culture; the centrality of faculty in the student experience; and the formative power of long, intense, and varied experiences—contribute to effective formation of faith leaders within the traditions each school represents. Important for the present study on ODE, Carroll et al. concluded by raising concerns as they scanned the horizon regarding changes in the field. In response to the acknowledged challenge of the high cost of intensive residential theological education, they noted that efforts at shifting models and practices of educational delivery were underway, including developing extension centers, offering accelerated programs, and increasing the use of technology for distance education. On the one hand, Carroll et al. acknowledged the need for innovation, especially to reduce costs. In the "shift away from campus space to 'virtual' space," they imagined potential cost savings as well as a potential to broaden access to theological education for a wider range of students.[6] Given their conclusions about the formative power of the culture of residential schools, they harbored great reservations about digital technologies that, in their view, cannot

> duplicate the intense and various experiences available to a student who physically attends a school. In summary, few of the new forms

and technologies seem to us to deliver the full benefits of actually being there, on location at school, in its buildings, with its various populations, for long enough periods of time to learn what the school has to teach: the ways of life and worldviews as well as information and technical skill.[7]

The authors did not wish to be Luddites; they were not opposed to technology. Further, were such new modes as ODE to find ways to duplicate or even improve what they showed residential theological education could do, their "concerns would dissipate." [8]

Remarkably, just three years later, in a major article reviewing the existing literature on distance education focused on the then-emerging use of the internet, Linda Cannell offers a major critique of *Being There,*

2016 Wabash faculty workshop
on teaching online.

one echoed in many discussions on culture, formation, and online theological education. The real issue, she writes, is "how distance education supports and allows for the sustainment of participants' real communities. Students are already in communities that formal education disrupts or ignores."[9] In the final analysis, she suggests, the question theological education must grapple with isn't so much "being there" as it is "being where?" She posits that with ODE, the focus shifts from

the culture of the schools (the focus in *Being There*) to the culture of the students, and therefore offers the possibility of attending to the influential power of local communities, with schools as adjuncts to, and partners with, that formation in community.

In the intervening two decades since *Being There* was published, the landscape looks remarkably different. Many traditional residential seminaries like those studied by Carroll et al. are struggling to maintain enrollment, and for those who are not, their growth is as likely to come from plunging into ODE as it is from recruitment of adequate numbers of residential students. The internet is, as Clayton Christensen so persuasively argued, a disruptive innovation, a democratizing force in society.[10] In his view, such disruption is a positive force that makes products and services more accessible and affordable, thereby making them available to a much larger population. As Christensen puts it, "a disruptive technology, online learning, is at work in higher education, allowing both for-profit and traditional institutions to rethink the entire traditional higher education model."[11]

It is not lost on us that this report appears in a year marking the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's public challenge to the Roman Catholic Church. Little did Luther know, when he nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, that the course of church history would be altered by this action. His famous theses may have been written by hand with ink and a quill pen, but they soon appeared in hundreds of broadsheets and booklets made possible by that era's disruptive innovation, the printing press. Luther and his colleagues and supporters knew how to maximize this new technology to disseminate his message. It was the printing press, perhaps more than the person of Luther that made possible the beginning of the Reformation.[12]

The internet is our twenty-first century's version of the printing press. It is, as Christensen argues, a great democratizing force between peoples, countries, and cultures, allowing instant acquisition of information about dog grooming, the depth of the Black Sea, or

John Calvin's interpretation of Romans, and it provides instant communications around the globe.

We stand in a time in history where we have seen the beginning of a revolution in communication technology. From the perspective of theological education, the first tentative steps in digital technology moved from desktop computers used for emails to laptops being used for slides and videos in class, and then online discussion boards and video conferencing across a virtual universe. With the mobile revolution and emerging virtual reality technologies, the fast-changing nature of digital technology necessitates an examination and sorting of its uses for ODE. We hope to offer just such a sorting. Drawing from a joint research project between the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion and the Auburn Theological Seminary's Center for the Study of Theological Education, this report offers a wide-ranging and substantial commentary on the state of online distance education within theological education.

Theological schools, rarely at the forefront of technology, are facing the promises and challenges of moving into the digital age. For some schools, it is a deeply held mission and matter of justice to offer theological education to anyone, no matter where they may live or what their life circumstances may be. Other schools, more pragmatically, hope that offering online degrees to an expanded market will boost their enrollment and stabilize their finances. Most schools, even those unsure of what to do by way of response, recognize that the future lies in this digital world and, in some sense, they ignore it at their peril. We hope this report offers schools help in thinking through the pedagogical issues, wherever they find themselves in this epochal cultural transformation.

Current use of technology in theological education include at least five modes, and while the following report attends to all of them, to some extent the focus is on asynchronous ODE, the substance of points four and five.

1) Personal use—most students have both a personal computer and a mobile device (tablet or smartphone) with internet connection, and many apps allow 24/7/365 connection to people and information.

2) Pedagogical use—many faculty are adept at using various technology, most particularly slideware (like PowerPoint or Keynote), in their classroom setting.

3) Many schools have online classroom or learning management systems (like Blackboard or Moodle) that incorporate "online" aspects in every class, regardless of its mode of delivery.

4) Many schools have significant experience with various modes of both hybrid courses and hybrid programs, all which assume some time in a face-to-face learning mode, with a significant portion of interaction in a distance (usually asynchronous) mode.

5) Many schools have significant experience with fully online courses and are now (since the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) agreed to exceptions to the residential requirement in 2012) offering fully online degree programs.

Before launching into the body of the report, we offer the reader a brief overview of data about the use of ODE in theological education, both over time and currently. With this broad sketch in mind, we then review over twenty years' worth of writing about online distance theological education to set the context for our discussion of the "whats, whys, and hows" of ODE.

At intervals throughout the report, we offer brief stories of four theological schools engaging ODE. Two of them, Bethel Seminary and Luther Seminary, were among the very earliest to experiment with online course offerings. Central Baptist Theological Seminary began offering online courses in the early 2000s, and now all its courses are offered both in person and online. Columbia Theological Seminary has been a hesitant late adapter to this new world. All of this, we hope, guides our search for wisdom about the complexity and promise of digital technologies in theological education. ●

TABLE 1

The Rapid Rise in Distance Education in Theological Education

1999   2 schools approved to offer MA degrees mostly (up to two-thirds) online.

2002   Mostly online MDiv degree approved at a limited number of schools

2007   70 schools begin offering online courses

2012   100 schools now offer online courses

ATS Standards revised for Comprehensive Distance Education (CDE)

- Residency requirements for the academic MA eliminated
- Residency requirements for the MDiv and professional MA reduced
- Exceptions to the residency requirements available upon petition

2013   First completely online MDiv and professional MA programs approved

2016   175 schools (two-thirds of total membership) offer online courses

141 schools approved to offer CDE

100+ degrees completely or almost fully online
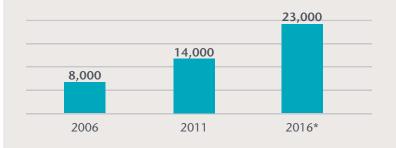
2 schools offer DMin degrees completely online

6 schools offer doctoral programs completely or almost fully online

Source: Tom Tanner, "Online Learning at ATS Schools," The Association of Theological Schools, 2017.

As **TABLE 1** shows, after a slow beginning, the number of ATS-accredited schools that offer online courses or degrees has mushroomed, particularly since 2012. With the Comprehensive Distance Education (CDE) policy, schools were now free to offer up to six different online courses. Furthermore, any school approved to offer CDE was then free to grant fully online academic MA degrees and up to two-thirds of a professional MA or MDiv degree online. In 2013, after some hesitation, ATS opened the door for member schools to apply for a fully online MDiv, and twenty-six schools have received this permission.[13] Many theological schools not currently offering online courses or degrees are contemplating doing so in the next five years.
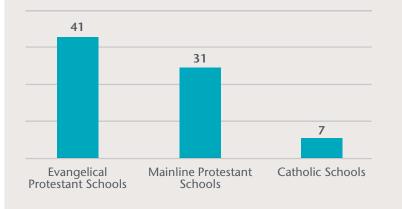
CHART 1

Students Taking at Least One Course Online in ATS Schools

		23,000
	14,000	
8,000		
2006	2011	2016*

*22 schools have at least 75% of students and 50 schools have at least 50% of students enrolled in an online course

CHART 2

ATS Schools Receiving Permission to Offer Six or More Online Courses Since 2009

41	31	7
Evangelical Protestant Schools	Mainline Protestant Schools	Catholic Schools

Enrollment in online courses and online degrees has risen rapidly, as seen in **CHART 1**. If recent trends continue, Tom Tanner commented, "a majority of ATS students may be enrolled online within a few years; one-third already are."[14]

Evangelical Protestant seminaries have led the way in online theological education, as seen in **CHART 2**. Since 2009, there have been forty-one evangelical schools that have received permission to offer at least six courses online, compared to thirty-one mainline Protestant and seven Roman Catholic schools. Although each school's journey toward online education is different, we can speculate the reasons for the early adopters. Many evangelical schools do not have the weight of history and tradition upon their shoulders, as do many mainline seminaries; thus perhaps they are more nimble and ready to adapt. Evangelical churches, with their emphasis on spreading the Gospel, have been more open to adopting new communication mediums. For example, evangelical churches have led in innovation in worship styles, music, and the use of technology in worship. So it is not surprising that many of their seminaries would also show this same Spirit-inspired effort at innovation in modes of teaching and learning.

Arch Wong, Professor of Practical Theology and Director of E-Learning at Ambrose Seminary at the 2016 Wabash faculty workshop on teaching online

Schools must continually iterate as technology changes. Often through trial and error, schools find out what works for their particular constituencies, their budget, and their sometimes limited expertise.

The slow adoption of online teaching among Catholic institutions is not surprising either, given the great weight they put on the spiritual and personal formation of clergy and the suspicion held by many that formation is difficult or impossible to do adequately online. Other schools (not just Catholic) and individuals also harbor deep reservations about how effectively online courses and programs can form and train clergy.

Some schools, because they are currently stable, may see no need to offer hybrid or online courses or degrees. Academic leaders at schools that offer online or hybrid courses often believe it is critical to the long-term strategy of their institution, while schools without online or distance courses or degrees tend to say that online education is not critical for their survival.[16] This division in opinions is also mirrored in the wider world of higher education.

For those schools that have ventured into these waters, it has often been a steep (and sometimes expensive) learning curve. Schools must continually iterate as technology changes. Some software and learning management systems are tried and then discarded as they prove not to meet the needs of students or faculty. Often through trial and error, schools find out what works for their particular constituencies, their budget, and their sometimes-limited expertise.

In the next sections, we offer a guide to key literature about ODE in theological education; some basic information on how distance education is being used in theological schools in North America; insight into what challenges remain; and suggestions, ideas, and encouragement from faculty experienced in teaching online. ●

II. Overview of Literature

I n preparation for this report, we gathered all articles on online distance education (ODE) from two key journals, the Wabash Center's *Teaching Theology & Religion* and the ATS's *Theological Education.* In addition, we reviewed a variety of chapters and books within the field of theological education and from higher education more broadly. The literature may be divided into four main categories: initial stock-taking, the stage of uncritical embrace or rejection, the turn to concern for appropriate resources and pedagogies, and finally a diversifying set of modes and models for the work. These categories, for the most, part follow a developmental chronology. To account for this, we reference articles according to how they fit the category regardless of their year of publication.

In our analysis, it seems true that these four categories are developmental. Whenever someone engages the online distance education conversation, their first forays seem to fit the developmental chronology regardless of the literature available or the year of publication. This dynamic is likely a feature of the pioneer generation of ODE. With time, the first generation— those who migrated from residential classrooms to online teaching—will cede their leadership to younger teachers who have only known digitally enhanced classrooms and ODE as normal facets of theological education. As is already in evidence, they enter the conversation and produce literature at an advanced position in the trajectory outlined below.

> The expectation of each student studying three hours outside of class for each hour in class means even the traditional residential classroom model includes substantial distance education.

A. Overviews

Before engaging the four categories of literature, however, there are a handful of articles or book chapters that provide a general entrée into the issues surrounding ODE, and it is fruitful to highlight those in advance.

First among these are two early articles in the theological education literature by Elizabeth Patterson and Linda Cannell. Patterson takes as her starting point the 1996 revision of the ATS accrediting standards to allow for "External Independent Study," inclusive of "computer and electronic communication as primary resources for instruction."[17] After helpfully rehearsing the history of distance education, she foreshadows much of the next decades of debate by raising, as her title has it, "The Questions for Distance Education." Among them is how to accomplish the "formational component that seems antithetical to education at a distance," and yet, she argues, little research has been done on the non-cognitive domain referred to by the term "formation." Further questions include how to shift a market-driven focus toward a focus on student learning, and how to encourage

research on teaching and learning—both on campus and in a variety of distance education scenarios.

Because theological education was a relative latecomer to ODE, Cannell's 1999 review of distance education summarizes key concerns echoed throughout the wider higher education literature on distance education over the prior twenty years. As a prelude, she emphasizes the relationship between the nineteenth-century experiments with extension studies, say with the Chautauqua Movement or the University of Chicago's Extension Division, as well as efforts in the so-called "land grant universities" in the United States. What "is truly unique about distance education," Cannell writes, "is the site of learning is transformed from a place to a process."[18] Cannell was writing just as personal computers were coming into common use and as the first commercial internet browser, Netscape, was released. She'd already heard the whoosh of fast-changing technologies. Dealing with this constant newness is a persistent headache for faculty and administrators alike. Yet, perhaps most profoundly, Cannell was one of the earliest to name the fundamental "shift from an instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm."[19] She spells out the consequences of this shift for faculties, support infrastructure, libraries, course design, and more.

In another excellent overview essay, Richard Nysse picks up on the key issues of Cannell's article: those related to distance education's emphasis on student learning.[20] He begins by pointing to the growing attention to assessment and outcomes, as measures of the shift from focus on the teacher to focus on the learner. In an astute observation, Nysse critiques the standard habit of using the residential classroom as the benchmark for assessment of teaching and learning. He notes that the expectation of each student studying three hours outside of class for each hour in class means even the traditional residential classroom model includes substantial "distance education."[21] After prodding readers to leave aside the myth of the charismatic teacher, he assesses a wide range of ODE practices useful for student learning, and the wider context of support such learning depends upon. His conclusion encourages experimenting with these changes in teaching and learning, without concern

for the perfect support, training, or mastery of new pedagogical methods. Rather, trusting change will continue apace, he calls out what many have said since: Jump into how "the internet affords us new ways to learn together."[22]

Brooke Istook, Fuller Seminary graduate

In large part, the initial foray into ODE for many theological schools emerged from a late-1990s grants program sponsored by the Lilly Endowment. Called the Information Technology for Theological Teaching program, these seventy-one grants sparked conversations and practical infrastructure investments that, over time, accelerated the move toward digital engagement in teaching and learning.

Louis Charles Willard, in his review of the Lilly program (and at a subsequent ATS conference with over one hundred schools represented), wondered aloud if theological education had reached a "tipping point" with regard to ODE.[23] Echoing the philosopher of technology Albert Borgmann, Willard argues that technology merits a place in the theological education process—not because it is there, but because it supports "the purposes of theological education."[24] Borgmann likewise argues that our "focal practices"— like cooking and eating meals, or like teaching and learning—make our lives good, and technology is good in so far as it supports these practices of the good life.[25]

In the next section, we highlight twenty years' worth of writing in *Theological Education* and *Teaching Theology & Religion,* with articles sorted into four developmental categories of the conversation about ODE, starting with early stock-taking regarding this new "virtual" era.

B. What's Going On?

Most of these articles focused on alerting readers to "what's going on" with technology and theological education and focused on a particular school's journey of "technology development." While perhaps helpful at the initial stages of technology's introduction, these sorts of articles had a short shelf life. More enduring, however, are the few that highlight, as Willard's does, how technology development aids pedagogy.

Richard Ascough, in one of the finest articles of this sort, applies a general claim ("good pedagogy requires an awareness of the opportunities and limitations of the mode of education") to the specifics of ODE.[26] In pursuing his claim in this instance, he outlines seven P's for consideration for those ready to explore this previously uncharted territory. A section on **parameters** surveys ODE's history and current shape, followed by **purposes**, unfolding, as a priority, a student-centered rationale for turning to online course delivery. With those preliminaries sorted out, Ascough turns to **planning** (course design) and **possibilities** (digital tools and platforms) before a brief but effective description of **pitfalls.** The final two sections take on, first, **prerequisites**, highlighting what faculty, students, and institutions need for success in ODE, and second, **predictions**, including that the internet is like Guttenberg's invention of the printing press—producing a social impact both durable and profound.

C. Feast or Famine

Once past the introduction to the "lay of the land" in online distance education, articles (and the opinions contained therein) tend to be effusive in their praise or condemnation of this innovation's potential for transforming teaching and learning. William G. Bowen, in *Higher Education in the Digital Age* (2013), offers a sophisticated engagement with these dynamics.[27]

Higher education should neither fall victim to ODE as a silver bullet to solve its fiscal challenges nor view ODE as a threat that will dumb down learning for students. Likewise, Scott Cormode's thoughtful piece, "Using Computers in Theological Education: Rules of Thumb," challenges the breathless reactions with a levelheaded exploration of "rules of thumb" for "enabling novices to make the best use of computer technology for theological learning."[28]

In a series of outstanding articles by Steve Delamarter, curious theological educators could find nearly all they need for a balanced and thoughtful guide through the thickets of ODE.[29] On the basis of a Wabash grant, in the first of the series, Delamarter draws on learning from a survey of forty-three seminaries to develop a typology of theological educators and technology.[30] In stage one, technology is basically put to use as a means to "supercharge" the classic mode of theological education (that he defines as a full-immersion, three-year, residential, lecture-based degree rooted in library research and writing).

Stage two transitions from (a) replicating classroom patterns in an electronically mediated environment to (b) the realization that this replicating mode ultimately does not work. Theological educators then turn to the question of developing pedagogically sound distance education courses and entire curricula.

In stage three, then, the pedagogical and programmatic innovations come back around to affect residential classes as well, sparking renewal of an institutional mission. It is sobering, however, to learn from Delamarter that only a few schools in 2004 had reached stage three, and none had been led there by the faculty. In fact, throughout his articles, faculty foot-dragging is a steady theme. Perhaps this will change as "digital natives" increasingly populate the theological faculties of the future. Regardless of the approach to change, however, the one guaranteed "ineffective strategy is to stick our heads in the sand and hope that it all goes away. This is simply not going to happen."[31] Indeed, it has not.

D. Resources and Pedagogies

Given the trajectory sketched by Delamarter, it is no surprise that, after a period of breathless critique or praise of this technological revolution, schools would settle into a period of figuring things out. Indeed, these articles are a testament to just how much must be figured out, again and again, school by school. Most of these articles are what we call the N=1 stories, describing how a particular faculty member converted a course to an online format. A classic in this genre, Lester Ruth tells of the journey from thinking his worship course could never be taught online to finding his whole approach to teaching transformed by the experience.[32] Sharp and Morris's article on moving their pastoral care course online is a recent example of a similar story.[33]

The internet is not a discrete thing that we must work with but, instead, is the way we are now living in an integrated digital world. It affects every part of our lives.

As a bow to this growing literature, the Wabash journal's teaching tips section, traditionally titled "In the Classroom," began featuring a parallel section titled "(Not) in the Classroom" (a feature that influenced the title of this report). Some of these articles may represent experiments that are more of a "novelty for novelty's sake" rather than an enduring innovation (e.g., Williamson's "Using Twitter to Teach Reader-oriented Biblical Interpretation").[34] Others, like a 2011 "Forum on Teaching Biblical Studies Online," allow the reader to listen in on an extended conversation about the promises and challenges five experienced faculty members have encountered, a rich, rewarding, and, ultimately, practical and helpful exchange.[35]

A few other fruitful articles rise to the fore in this area, including those focused on resources, social presence, the priority of the hybrid model, and the challenge of spiritual formation. We offer a brief word about each.

In an early excellent article on technology for empowering pedagogy, Litchfield names the potential for ODE to produce spaces of co-learning, shifting roles of students and of teachers.[36] Delamarter's clear, thorough article on strategic planning spells out the range of considerations required for a sustainable institutional commitment to ODE.[37] Two outstanding articles, by Mary Hinkle Shore and Richard Ascough, attend to the importance of practices of "social presence," meant to assure, as Shore puts it, "a professor or a student is perceived by the other as a 'real person' in mediated communication."[38]

The concern for social presence in ODE leads several authors to highlight the priority of the hybrid course that, while existing in many varieties, combines significant intensive face-to-face connection with a more extended time of teaching and learning asynchronously online. Beyond arguing for its superiority in faculty pedagogical development and student outcomes, they lay out basic aspects of a successful hybrid course or program.[39] And finally, as the Achilles' heel of ODE, spiritual formation has consistently been mentioned by critics as the limit of what can be mediated through technology. Yet three strong articles by van Driel, Eisselman, and Graham make thoughtful cases for how this is just not so, not least of which is because students in ODE tend to stay in their existing communities, which are, in and of themselves, deeply formative and become more intentionally so in relation to the reflective learning seminary provides.[40]

E. Diversifying Modes and Models

The fourth category of the ODE literature represents both the leading edge for most and the sweet spot for a few who have long worked in ODE, or those who have never known another way. A key to this category of literature is noticing that the internet is not a discrete thing that we must work with but instead is the way we are now living in an integrated digital world. It affects every part of our lives. And, to extend Delamarter's insight from his phase three of engaging technology in teaching and learning (where

he notes how all the pedagogical innovation emerging from ODE in turn affects residential classrooms), clearly the most forward-looking literature points to the ways traditional categories of "online" and "residential" classroom distinctions are blurring, and "hybrid" is neither one thing nor merely a form of ODE. As one jointly authored article, "Teaching the Millennial Generation in the Religious and Theological Studies Classroom," points out, this change will only accelerate, as the waves of students and faculty who do not know another world grow.

Students and faculty immersed in technology and social media are experimenting with all kinds of digital integration in the context of teaching and learning, in particular courses and in programs overall.[41] In a clever article titled "What Would Kant Tweet?" Mercer and Simpson argue that schools and faculties can now "create interactive immersive environments" in which collaborative learning—between students and faculty, as well as in student peer learning—is the norm.[42] In an important qualification to the benefits of such collaborative learning spaces, however, Portland Seminary professor Roger Nam points to the experiences of first-generation immigrants who often struggle with the immediate, and too often colloquial, nature of communication in ODE.[43]

Increasingly, the articles published in theological and religious studies journals are helpful, forward-looking, and practical guides to effective teaching and learning through ODE. For example, the January 2017 issue of Teaching Theology & Religion includes the article "Principles for Effective Asynchronous Online Instruction in Religious Studies." In the article, University of North Carolina Religious Studies professor Beverley McGuire recounts her first experience of teaching a religion course online while still a graduate student.[44] Born in 1976, the year Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak sold the first 50 Apple I personal computers, she has been teaching online since the very first formative years of her teaching career. Increasingly, the professorate will be populated by teachers like McGuire: those who have never known a world without computers and who have never known classroom teaching as an experience solely of "being there."

In some sense, then, this report comes at a fulcrum time, when the field is moving from elective participation in a few set models (so-called "residential," "hybrid," and "fully online" classes or programs) to a much more integrated range of digital

Columbia Theological Seminary students

realities used for teaching and learning on the levels of institution, faculty, and student. This sentiment is echoed in literature from higher education where, in a recent report titled "Evolving Learning for the New Digital Era," the editors of Inside Higher Ed note colleges and universities "are no longer taking their first steps into the use of digital tools for either in-person or online instruction [but] are mixing and matching the best of in-person and online instruction."[45]

We now turn to a discussion of this exciting, changing, and increasingly essential area of theological education, along the way taking stock of what works, what challenges arise, and what helpful advice can be gleaned from those coming along on the wave of this sea change in teaching and learning. ●

Bethel Seminary
of Bethel University

Bethel Seminary, founded in 1871 to train pastors for the Swedish Baptist immigrant community, was an early adopter of online education. Now one of the professional graduate programs of Bethel University, Bethel Seminary expanded from a small denominational seminary located in St. Paul, Minnesota, to include multi-site evening, weekend, and—crucially for this study—online options for its MDiv and other programs.

In 1994, Bethel was the first seminary in the USA to offer classes online and to offer—by an experimental exception from The ATS—a full hybrid-model online MDiv. Bethel pursued this initiative at the request of the university president who, at the time, wanted growth in all the graduate professional programs of the university.

Called the InMinistry program, its basic pattern includes on-campus intensive courses during winter and summer sessions, and fully online classes for fall and spring terms. Attentive to questions of spiritual formation from the start, the InMinistry program includes a robust contextual course with a site mentor who helps integrate learning in a local ministry context. Further, its adoption of a cohort model puts students in intentional learning communities over time as they progress through the same set of online and residential intensive courses.

Matt Putz, director of teaching and learning technology at Bethel University, describes the impact:

> The common assumption is that the student is relationally isolated, but actually people who have been through an appropriately structured distant education program will have had significant relational elements—with teachers, peer students, and, most importantly, in their local family, community, and church. That is the most important nexus of spiritual formation, and programs are derelict in their duty if they don't first acknowledge that,

Case Study

Bethel Seminary student

and second, intentionally help create connections through the program to reflectively engage that world.

Professor Jeannine Brown, professor of New Testament and director of online programs, concurs: "Sites for supervised ministry play a key role in formation, and faculty play a key role in connecting courses to the roles students play in the sites. How this interaction happens makes a huge difference in how formation happens."

Originally, Bethel held to a fifty-mile rule; that is, if students were in that radius, they had to obtain permission to take online classes. Brown notes this has changed: "Traditional (residential) students are increasingly taking online courses (and potentially whole programs) because of their life and work schedule. Students do more of the à la carte mode, blurring the distinction between 'online' and 'residential' students."

Again, through the leadership of the university president (a new president, not the one responsible for launching the move to online), along with a group comprising board members, faculty, and administrators, Bethel Seminary is responding to a recent move across the university toward having graduate professional programs available as fully online programs. The seminary is now committed to launching four fully online options for fall 2017. Says Brown,

> We've been doing hybrid for twenty-plus years—we were the early adopters, but only now are we moving to fully online programs, so we are actually late adopters for that work. For a while, we were hesitant to move fully online, because we saw students experiencing such rich community during on-campus intensives. As we are now turning to offer fully online programs, we desire to find new ways to build community with students who will have no residential component.

This transition moment for Bethel is a challenge for staff and faculty who, Putz says, echoing Brown, enjoy the face-to-face engagement afforded by the on-campus intensives. They are active participants in the process, having already experienced teaching courses online, and yet see both gains and losses in the change. ●

III. Whats, Whys, and Hows of Online Distance Education

A. Who Is Online?

In 2014, Lilly Endowment, recognizing the rapidly changing face of higher education in general and theological education in particular, gave a grant to the ATS to assess current and developing educational models and practices among ATS member schools, identify their most promising aspects, and assist member schools in implementing new and innovative models. The Educational Models Project included eighteen peer groups of institutions tasked with studying and mapping educational practices in different areas; among those groups were two that dealt specifically with distance education: Formation in Online Contexts and Educational Values of Online Education. Both groups have provided much-needed data and information on the practices and effectiveness of distance education, which will be referenced in this report as *ATS Peer Group findings*.

Two recent surveys of academic deans at ATS-accredited schools yielded a great deal of specific data on how theological schools use distance education. Early in 2016, Auburn surveyed deans (findings from this survey will be referred to as the *Auburn deans' survey or data*), and in December 2016, the ATS surveyed 141 academic deans of schools with comprehensive distance (findings from this survey will be referred to as the *ATS deans' survey or data)*.

The Auburn survey had a return rate of 30% (N=82), and the ATS survey had a return rate of 58% (N=81).

The Auburn deans' survey sample is heavily skewed toward schools that already offer online courses and/or degrees; the ATS survey intentionally targets only deans from these schools, so findings from neither survey can be said to represent the total membership of the ATS. They are, however, fairly representative of schools that offer comprehensive distance education. For further details on the ATS survey, see Tom Tanner's article, "Looking around at Our Present."[46]

The two surveys have little overlap in terms of content, as the ATS survey, for the most part, asked questions about educational and cost-effectiveness, student assessment, and benefits and challenges of online education. The Auburn survey focused more on types of courses offered online, who is taking and teaching online courses, and the adequacies of faculty training, technological, educational, and instructional design support.

As amply shown earlier in this report, ODE has permeated every corner of theological education. If schools are not yet offering courses, degrees, or certificate programs in various online formats, they are often discussing and debating how they should as an institution respond to the digital world.

Fuller Seminary

Online distance education has already become deeply embedded in the curriculum of many schools. Almost half the respondents to the Auburn survey (49%) indicated that some online courses they offer are required classes for one of their degrees (this does not preclude the course also being offered in a face-to-face context as well), and almost as many (44%) indicate that at least half their students take an online course over the time they are enrolled, many of them residential students who opt to take one or more classes online. On some campuses (see the case studies of Bethel, Luther, and Central Baptist seminaries), there is no longer a clear demarcation between online students and residential students, as students move back and forth between the two formats as their work and life commitments dictate. Evangelical schools (40% of the Auburn sample) and schools that were early adapters (49% of Auburn's respondents began offering online courses before 2008 and are referred to in this report as "early adapters") offer more online courses; more of these are required courses, not electives, and over half of their student body (57%) takes an online course while enrolled.
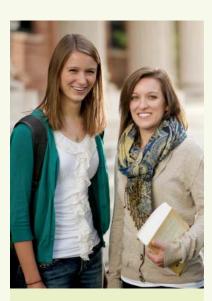
The Auburn survey found that a quarter of schools offer online courses in some language other than English, most often Spanish, followed by Korean and then Chinese.

A concern raised by some critics is that online courses would be assigned to adjuncts or instructors to teach, since it was assumed that regular full-time faculty would be slow to adapt or reticent to teach online. Happily, that appears not to be the case. The Auburn survey results parallel what our case studies show: Regular faculty teach most online courses. Sixty-two percent of schools offering online courses indicate that in the last two years, over three-quarters of their online courses were taught by regular faculty, not adjuncts or instructors. Half the schools also report that at least half their faculty members have taught an online course in the last two years.

While seemingly many schools have embraced online teaching in theological education, there appears to be a quarter to a third of schools in the Auburn sample that, having received permission to offer online courses or a degree, in fact offer few courses online. At these institutions, almost three-quarters of the deans (73%) report that less than a quarter of their students take online courses, and over half of the deans (59%) report that less than a quarter of their faculty teach an online course. The deans at these schools rate the adequacies of their technology and educational design support slightly lower than do deans at schools more heavily invested in online teaching; granted, these differences are not significant, so it does not appear these schools are lacking in resources. Most are newcomers to online teaching (46% offered their first ODE course after 2012), so they may be still in the development stage of moving online, or it may be that faculty and administration are still in discussion (and perhaps disagreement, as in the case study of Columbia Seminary) regarding the extent to which they will use online teaching in their institution. ●

Luther Seminary

Luther Seminary students

Luther Seminary is located in a quiet, tree-lined neighborhood in St. Paul, Minnesota. A historic center of upper Midwest Lutheranism, Luther has focused on training pastors for rural Midwest and West America. The largest of the Lutheran seminaries in the United States, and for a time, the largest in the world, Luther did not move to offer online courses in a moment of crisis. As Old Testament professor Dick Nysse recalls, its 1996 launch of an online course afforded access to rural students and was initially about demographics and mission, not growth or revenue. While faculty saw the pedagogical benefits early on, it was much harder to convince board members. Education professor Mary Hess noted, "There is a real problem with boards seeing only enrollment gains from adding online, rather than increasing accessibility to learning environments."

Interestingly, administration, board, and faculty began to embrace online teaching when they recognized that even a so-called face-to-face class assumes three hours of independent work outside the class for every hour in class. They saw an already existing "distance education" aspect present in their current practice. That made the step to rethinking the hour of face-to-face time easier. In this transition, Luther received one of the late-1990s Lilly-funded technology grants and sent faculty to the first Wabash/ University of Wisconsin online teaching seminars. Beginning with a core required course (Pentateuch) and a tenured faculty member (Nysse), Luther enrolled six students the first year, and tripled the enrollment number the second year, simply by word of mouth. Soon after, with ATS permission, Luther moved to offer six courses, and soon after that began developing an online Children, Youth, and Family MA, using a hybrid model, with two years online part time, and one year full time on campus.

Thinking through the program-level planning for the MA set out the template for developing and launching a five-year hybrid Distance Learning MDiv. However, distinct from the MA, the MDiv had fully online courses during fall and spring semesters, plus weeklong residential intensive courses in January and June. Faculty noted two positive changes, one for the faculty and one for students. Almost all students remain in their home congregation and context while pursuing their degree and this means, Nysse commented, that "The student's context in congregations

Case Study

Almost all students remain in their home congregation and context while pursuing their degree and this means, Nysse commented, "The student's context in congregations raises questions, it fires synapses which don't get fired in classrooms."

Luther Seminary students

raises questions, it fires synapses which don't get fired in classrooms." Eric Barreto, a New Testament professor, noticed that the students "ask questions about how they would make use of content." This adds a vitality and dynamism to the discussions often not as present in traditional classroom contexts.

However, the shift in the center of gravity from classroom to congregation changes the role and identity of the faculty. As Nysse puts it, "Online contexts for teaching and learning cuts back on the authority of the teacher"—seen as "the sage"—and instead invite the teacher to be a guide to student learning "by structuring the space for asking questions, for reflecting together." Barreto notes that some faculty members count this as a loss; part of that loss is faculty role and identity, a sense that "I need to be in the room, at the center, for learning to take place." Presence is central, Barreto argues, but it can be mediated in many ways.

The success of the distance learning degrees can present unexpected challenges. As a larger percentage of Luther's students are accessing programs via ODE, the seminary struggles to deal with aging buildings and excess property they now neither need nor can easily afford to maintain. As other schools have, Luther has pursued both rental and sale of excess property, and consolidated its operations.[47] ●
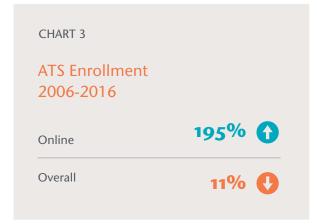
Central Baptist Seminary
synchronous class

B. Why Say Yes to ODE?

There are many reasons theological schools choose to offer courses or degrees in an online format; chief among them is the desire to attract new students. For schools that are heavily tuition driven, the pursuit and retention of students is a never-ending quest and, just as extension sites once held out the promise of expanding enrollment, online courses and degrees appear to be a boon for admissions officers. "Half our students wouldn't be here if we weren't online," commented Cameron Harder, professor of systematic theology at Luther Theological Seminary in Saskatchewan. For many seminaries that draw students from a wide and primarily rural geographic area, offering courses in a variety of online formats has become their lifeblood. On the ATS deans' survey, 81% of deans from schools that offer comprehensive distance education said one of the biggest benefits of online education is that it reaches more students.[48]

There is good reason for schools to be optimistic about the possibilities of increased enrollment through offering online courses and degrees. Overall, ATS enrollment declined by 11% over the last decade, while online enrollment grew by 195%.[49] During the last year, just over a third of schools (37%) offering the professional MA as a residential degree saw their enrollment grow, while more than half (51%) of schools offering that degree fully online grew in their enrollment.[50] Tom Tanner, ATS director of institutional evaluation and accreditation, noted, "The growth potential seems quite strong... Over the last five years, fewer than a third of schools (30%) without online students grew, while nearly half of schools (48%) with at least one hundred online students saw enrollment growth...To be sure, going online is no guarantee of enrollment growth, but it clearly seems to increase the odds."[51]

Just as important as attracting new students, retaining students in degree programs is crucial for all schools, and various models of online course delivery provide a flexibility that many students need and, indeed, sometimes demand. Schools have, for some time, offered courses in the evenings and weekends, or in intensive formats to accommodate commuter students, some of whom drive two or three hours to attend a ninety-minute class. Offering courses online is another way to meet students' needs. Some schools developed such options intentionally for students who live far from campus only to find that residential students were also eager to avail themselves of this option because of work conflicts or family needs. On some campuses, the majority of students enrolled in online classes

in fact live locally. On the ATS deans' survey, 99% of deans gave student flexibility as one of the top benefits of online education.[52]

Although attracting new students and retaining current ones are the primary reasons schools begin ODE, other issues also factor into their decision. Some faculty and seminary leaders feel keenly that offering

CHART 3

ATS Enrollment 2006-2016

Online	**195%** ⬆	
Overall	**11%** ⬇	

One-year Growth in Professional MA at ATS Schools

Online Programs	**51%** ⬆	
Residential Programs	**37%** ⬆	

Source: Tom Tanner, "Online Learning at ATS School," Association of Theological Schools, 2017.

theological education to a broader constituency is a justice issue. Many individuals living in North America don't have the financial means or the freedom to pack up and move to a seminary or divinity school. How many committed, talented individuals feel called to ministry and yet have, in years past, been stymied by where they live and their limited financial means? Clearly, online programs democratize theological education, much as the printing press democratized Luther's writings in sixteenth-century Germany. In the ATS deans' survey, 45% said that one of the biggest

benefits of online education is that it enhances the school's global outreach.[53]

There are a growing number of people in theological education who believe that training for ministry is more effective if students remain in their context (i.e., not uprooting them to move to a residential campus or to take classes in a traditional classroom). Two-thirds of deans on the ATS deans' survey said that online education helped students learn in their own context. There is no question that better integration between classes and the "real world" happens more quickly and more organically if students remain in their context. ODE has made this possible. Instead of dislocating students, who must come to the professor and classroom, the professor and classmates connect to their immediate work and ministry lives. One dean on the ATS deans' survey commented, "Because students in the online program learn in the ministry setting in which they will serve, we have had virtually no problems with graduates failing in their first congregation."[54]

Some schools also hope that online courses will be more cost-efficient for the school and thus more affordable for students. Theoretically, this appears to be true: If an online course attracts more students than an in-person course, then the cost per student is lower. Almost one-third of respondents (30%) to the ATS deans' survey had looked at the cost-effectiveness of their online courses or programs, and 46% said that a clear benefit of online education was helping to reduce the cost for students. A recent study by the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies, however, found that students in higher education often end up paying more for online courses because of the higher production costs. Frequently, fees are added to the tuition for technology, software, and learning management systems.[55]

Most deans who responded to the ATS deans' survey said their online offerings were very cost-effective, though "most cautioned that ODE should be looked at as a long-term investment, noting that initial (start-up) costs can be substantial and can take a few years to recover."[56] It is not clear if deans responding to the survey factored in faculty time and training, along with the cost of instructional design, software,

and technology, when estimating the cost of online programs. The savings may not be as great as one would hope. One clear benefit of ODE is that it is easier for schools to respond to fluctuations in online enrollment than it is to fluctuations in residential student enrollment. (See Central Baptist Seminary case study.)

Valerie Holly, New York Theological Seminary graduate

"There is sometimes a stampede mentality—something is going on and we've got to get on this. But I say to people, we've got time, let's do this well. Let's find a way that is congruent with your values."

Schools that have not yet begun offering ODE programs or degrees may feel left behind. As a professor at one school, which was still debating the pluses and minuses of going digital, remarked, "People argue about whether we should get on the train. The train has come and gone already, and they're still arguing!" Steve Delamarter, professor of Old Testament at George Fox University's Portland Seminary, has been teaching online since its infancy and frequently consults with schools about teaching online. He cautions against rushing to board the train: "There is sometimes a stampede mentality—something is going on and we've got to get on this. But I say to people, we've got time, let's do this well. Let's find a way that is congruent with your values."

Should a seminary or theological school move in the direction of ODE? It's a good question to ask, and only the school's board, administration, and faculty, listening to the school's constituency, can answer that question. The market is indeed becoming saturated, and schools with limited resources wonder how they can compete against well-established online programs. Market research will be required to see if an institution has a particular market niche it can fill, perhaps a specific program that is not being offered online elsewhere, or a population it can attract because of its religious tradition, denomination, or ethos. ●

Central Baptist Theological Seminary

Central Baptist synchronous class

Central Baptist Seminary's move to online teaching is set against the backdrop of an institutional crisis that nearly closed the school. In 2004, Dr. Molly T. Marshall, then-professor of theology and spiritual formation at Central, stepped up to take the helm of a sinking ship. Declining enrollment, financial problems, and deferred maintenance of over $20 million on an old campus made the future of Central virtually untenable. Crisis can bring opportunity, as old ways of doing things die and there is little to lose in doing things differently.

The school moved quickly to offer online courses and hybrid degrees in an attempt to survive, and twelve years later, it has not only survived—it has thrived, with enrollment increases of almost 200%, growth that is the envy of other seminaries.[57] The increase in enrollment cannot all be credited to offering courses online; the story of Central is both how it restructured its degrees and how it is using technology.

Central's curriculum revision focuses on embedded learning and a commitment to contextual ministry using technology-enhanced education. All classes offered in Kansas or at one of Central's four extension sites are offered online as well, and there is no differentiation between students who are present in person and students accessing the class via internet. Using Zoom Room's software, students at a distance are brought into the classroom, where they can see each other, share in classroom discussions, form breakout groups, or work together on projects. Students can choose whether to take a class in person or online, or can move between the two as their life or work schedule dictates. Faculty roles have had to change as they move from being the "sage on the stage" to being a mentor for students and the "guide on the side." Lectures are given via podcasts, which all students must access online.

Robert Johnson, provost and dean of the faculty at Central, commented, "We really don't think about where the student is located so much as what approach and learning activity, or milestone or goal, is needed,

Case Study

Professor David May, Biblical Interpretation class with both online and residential students

and what is going to be the best approach to achieving that? Synchronous or asynchronous? We can do both. What is local and what is remote is a matter of where you are." Offering classes in this way is also more scalable, Dean Johnson noted, allowing classes and courses to grow or shrink in enrollment without significantly affecting faculty hires.

Restructuring their curriculum and modes of delivery has allowed the school to expand its market and build a more diverse classroom. Students now have classmates from all over the country. Carm Yero, an MDiv senior living in Michigan, noted that in a current class she is taking, half the students are remote, with one hailing from Taiwan and another Korea. She herself has never been on campus but hopes to go in person to receive her degree.

To those who might think taking an online course is less work, Carm commented, "I think the impression is that it's online and can't be as much work as in class. But we do more work. We have readings to do and videos to watch between classes, but we also have a discussion board and we have to post a question or response every week, and then go back and respond to others. You may have class once a week, but you are in daily contact." ●

2016 Wabash faculty workshop on teaching online.

C. Challenges for ODE

Twenty percent of deans responding to the ATS deans' survey mentioned that "getting faculty acceptance" was a major challenge for online education at their institution. Faculty at some schools view online teaching with great distrust and apprehension. Other schools find faculty divided between those eager to board and those who are reluctant to set foot on the train. Their reasons vary from the practical ("I don't know how to do it") to the pedagogical ("How can I teach X to students who are not sitting in my classroom?") to personal ("I don't have time") to institutional ("We don't have the resources") to the social ("How can we form community if students aren't on campus?").

Many seminary students, and increasing numbers of new faculty, are "digital natives." They have grown up with technology and are comfortable with learning new platforms and operating in a digital, mobile world. Older faculty are "digital immigrants" (or digital holdouts, who are reluctant to even claim that title).[58] While they may be on Facebook, increasingly seen as the social media option for parents and grandparents, they have only a vague understanding of Twitter and they've never heard of GIFs or memes. They are comfortable with emails (who can survive in the profession without it?), use slideware for class presentations, and assign primary source materials that can only be found online, but they feel uneasy about the retooling required for teaching online.

1. How To Do It Well

How to teach online and how to do it well remain questions for many faculty and administrators. Over half the deans (56%) on the ATS deans' survey cited incorporating good instructional design to be one of the chief challenges of online education. This is not only a new form of delivery, but also it calls for a new pedagogy (think of how many centuries of education in the West has been based on teachers and students interacting face-to-face in a classroom setting), and we are still finding our way. One professor commented,

> The most significant barriers to the adoption of technology in the classroom are human factors, not technological or even financial considerations. To employ technology in the classroom with success, instructors must make a significant commitment to the effort. This requires two things: pedagogical reassessment and the willingness to invest the time and effort necessary to design and produce quality learning experiences for the students.

Recognizing the need for professional faculty development in this new medium, the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Religion and Theology began offering theological faculty classes in developing

and teaching online courses in 2005. Since then, 219 faculty from seminaries and religious studies departments have taken part in one or more of these courses. The American Academy of Religion, the scholarly society for most in this profession, has a membership of over nine thousand; thus Wabash training reaches only a small percentage of its potential audience. Many other programs teach faculty how to develop and teach online, so Wabash is but one player in an ever-widening field. The uniqueness of the Wabash program, however, is that it is specifically designed for faculty who teach in seminaries, theological and divinity schools, and religion departments in universities and colleges.

"The most significant barriers to the adoption of technology in the classroom are human factors, not technological or even financial considerations. To employ technology in the classroom with success, instructors must make a significant commitment to the effort."

For many faculty, and even some of those who took part in early Wabash courses (the course was redesigned recently to offer a more hands-on experience), teaching online still seems daunting. They may have more help at their disposal than they realize. Almost nine out of ten (87%) faculty who responded to the Auburn deans' survey report that their technology support is adequate or very adequate, with early adapters rating their support significantly higher than later adapters, which likely indicates that some of the bugs have been worked out in schools more experienced in teaching online. Over three-quarters of these faculty (78%) also say their school has adequate educational or instructional design support.[59] Faculty

who have taken the Wabash workshop give their schools equally high marks regarding resources.

One of the chief challenges that schools face, however, is faculty training (mentioned as a challenge by 60% of deans on the ATS deans' survey). Only a fifth (21%) of the deans on the Auburn deans' survey report they require faculty to take training in teaching online, and another 49% say they encourage faculty training. "Encourage" is not the same as "require," and it is worth noting that half the deans report that less than a quarter (21%) of their faculty who teach online have received formal training in ODE.

Many schools lean heavily on in-house training by their technology person or rely on faculty mentors and peers to help faculty in designing and teaching an online or hybrid course. Schools connected with universities and colleges often have access to a much wider array of support services through the larger institution. One faculty member, at a school resistant to teaching online, remarked, "The argument about not having the infrastructure is a smoke screen. It's passive resistance. When we offer voluntary workshops on teaching online, faculty don't show up."

2. Time Management

Time management is often a challenge for faculty who teach online courses, and they have good reason to be cautious regarding the amount of effort it takes to create a new ODE course or the time it takes to rework an existing course in an online format. It takes time to do it well, even for the most experienced faculty, and many faculty express anxiety about managing time.[60] Nine out of ten faculty who took the Wabash workshop on teaching online said the amount of *preparation time* to prepare a new virtual course took more time (30%) or far more time (61%) compared to a face-to-face class. Three out of four (75%) said the amount of time it took to *teach and assess* online students was more or far more than the time it took to teach and assess students in a traditional classroom. Those who had taught online for several years and those who had taught many different courses online were just as likely as those who were new to the medium to say that

online or hybrid courses took more time to prepare and teach than face-to-face classes took.

A few professors disagreed with this assessment. "Courses take far more time to set up, particularly if they are an asynchronous course," noted one professor. "It can take up to three times as long, but once it's fully bug free, it's less time. You have to leave lots of room at the front end, but once it's up and running, it's often less time. Even teaching online gets easier, but [online courses] are always more work than the old lecture/discussion courses."

Bethel Seminary students

In a classroom, a teacher can interact with a whole class at once, answering and asking questions, checking in on how students are doing in their reading, or clearing up issues. There are also a few minutes at the beginning and end of classes where a teacher might engage in a brief personal conversation with an individual student. "It feels different to do online teaching; it feels more like work to faculty members," Katherine Turpin, professor of practical theology and associate dean for curriculum and assessment at Iliff School of Theology remarked. "When students are in the classroom, and you are interacting with them, it feels like fun. Online, it can feel like your whole job is typing. Because of increased individual interaction with students in online teaching, a residential classroom of twenty-five students

is probably equivalent to teaching eighteen students online."

Daniel Ulrich, a New Testament professor at Bethany Theological Seminary who has been teaching online since 2002, commented, "My sense is that instructors, to develop and teach [online] well, need to invest considerably more time than [what one must invest in] a classroom course. I would estimate it takes 50% more time to teach online. You spend a lot of time responding to students online. How do you manage that demand? How can it become time efficient without sacrificing quality?" No one has cut this Gordian knot.

The additional time spent teaching an online course means time not spent on other responsibilities. One professor noted what was sacrificed: "It's cut down on research and writing and our connections with other theological colleges. Overall, we have accepted the cost, because it's important for recruitment and providing resources for ministers/pastors."

Faculty members are not the only ones who struggle with the time demands of teaching online. Students taking online courses for the first time may, in fact, not understand what is involved in an online course, what the demands will be, how they need to structure their time, etc. Students need to take initiative and be self-starters and self-disciplined. They also need to be able to navigate technology. Faculty feel limited in their ability to respond to the more technical issues that students sometimes face in online courses. Forty-one percent of the faculty who had taken the Wabash workshop said they are not confident in their ability to troubleshoot students' difficulties with the learning management system at their school.

3. Relationships and Community

Administration and faculty are often concerned with how to make online students part of a school's community. Many professors attended seminary when schools were for the most part residential, with the majority of students and faculty either living on-site or in close proximity to the school. Faculty cherish the seminary community and are worried that online

students, whom they rarely or never see in person, will miss out on an important component of the seminary experience.

Over a third of respondents to the ATS deans' survey (34%) cited "building relationships" as a challenge for their institution. Jean-Francois Racine, associate professor of New Testament at the Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University, offered a rebuttal to the assertion that relationships with online students differ from relationships with residential students: "They're the same. I am able to relate to both groups very easily. With online students, it's sometimes a challenge. You have to ask yourself, when is it time to get on the phone to talk? But for students in the classroom, you ask yourself, when is it time to tell a student to come and see me after class?"

> "What is distance about distance education? Some students are closer to you online than on campus. They might be interacting with the professor more online than those who see you in person."

Professor Turpin acknowledged some loss of formative influence over distance students at Iliff: "Once we began teaching online, we had less control over the formative environment of our students. They are in their own community and not as immersed in our community and culture as a school. We've had to wrestle with this more; they aren't getting the Iliff culture through the informal and implicit curriculum in the same way they used to."

"Personal relationships are more difficult," noted Tara Hornbacker, professor of ministry formation, missional leadership, and evangelism at Bethany Seminary, who has been teaching online for more than a decade. "It doesn't lend itself to people coming by your office, or to following you down the hall. There's a good part of seminary education that happens in private, face-to-

face [interactions]. Our students feel free when they see you in person. You're their professor and they want to talk with you and pray with you. The more intimate education moment that takes place with a residential student, that's missing." Even as she made this comment, though, she wondered, "There should be a way to do this online . . . maybe let students know that I'm in my office for the next two hours, if you want to telephone me."

2016 Wabash faculty workshop on teaching online.

Many seminary professors who have taught extensively online would offer a rebuttal to those who fear the loss of community. Some noted that on many campuses, most students do not live on campus; they commute in and arrive just before class begins and leave immediately afterward to get to work or to other commitments. A September 2017 blog post by Stephen Graham, ATS senior director of programs and services, noted that just over a quarter (27%) of today's students live on or adjacent to campus, while 47% are local commuters. "Nearly three-fourths of students across the Association are not ordinarily present on campus for the formation that can happen naturally through residency," he noted.[61]

In interviews with faculty who have experience teaching online, many profess that they know some of their online students better than they know the students sitting in their classrooms. One professor commented, "What is distance about distance education? Some students are closer to you online

than on campus. They might be interacting with the professor more online than those who see you in person."

A professor of evangelism and church growth questioned the notion of how we form community: "Faculty fear losing the myth of community, without realizing that this will enhance their relationships with students. Unless you immerse yourself in online media ([Facebook], Twitter, etc.), you don't get it. It's the myth of traditional education, that what happens in the classroom is what's important. We need to be out there in the world. It's the realities of the future and the world—it's a visual and digital world we're in." Another faculty commented, "It raises the question, what's embodied and what's contextual in theological education." Richard Nysse, professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, wrote in response to this concern: "My standard answer has been to agree that ministry is embodied, but then to assert that learning for ministry does not need to occur in front of my body. Why not give priority to learning in the context of the bodies present in the parish contexts? The primary social location of learners matters and perhaps teachers must 'travel' to the social location of learners."[62]

4. Student Formation

Closely related to the concern about preserving community is the question of student formation. Over half of the deans (51%) on the ATS deans' survey indicated that doing formation online was one of the challenges they faced. How do you ensure that your graduates are spiritually, psychologically, and socially healthy and able to perform the tasks and responsibilities entrusted to them as leaders of a congregation or parish? It's an ongoing debate. Some faculty who are committed to online teaching challenge the premise for this question, for it assumes faculty can accurately assess their residential students. "Online education is asked to prove itself far more often than face-to-face education," a professor noted. "Whether you are teaching professional skills, character formation, etc. the challenge is the same.

How do you quantify spiritual formation either in the classroom or online?"

Using the ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ), administered to 183 schools and over 6,200 graduates, one can compare learning and growth outcomes for students who did most of their degree online with graduates who did the majority of their degree on campus (i.e., traditional students). Results from the 2015–2016 GSQ are surprising. In the personal growth areas of "Strength of spiritual life," "Trust in God," and "Ability to live one's faith in daily life," online graduates rated themselves much higher than did the on-site graduates.

Despite these assurances, concerns about formation linger. A professor who has taught online for fifteen years acknowledged, "Spiritual formation is harder online—it's intimate and personal. Some people are over-sharers in an online format, and others are more reticent to personally share. Most people have learned where those lines are, but it's a social skill that has to be cultivated, and it's different online. It has to be negotiated in every class."

5. Outcomes and Assessment

Learning outcomes and course assessments can also be challenging for ODE. How does one accurately assess the learning of students not present in the classroom? Faculty who teach online often find they need to rethink and revise how they assess student learning in an online course. Faculty responding to the Wabash survey said they most often use peer-to-peer assessments and evaluate student participation and learning, as evidenced by online discussion boards. Many faculty, though, stayed with what was familiar: a research or integration paper (used by 82%), essay exam (used by 32%), or multiple-choice exam (used by 32%). Almost half the faculty respondents (46%) indicated they had ventured into using new formats for assessing, such as requiring digital projects. Online students working in parishes or ministries as a part of

their seminary's contextual education requirements are also evaluated by their supervising pastor or supervisor.

Faculty members—even those with some hesitancy about online teaching—acknowledge that in online courses, there is "no lurking in the corners" (i.e., students cannot hide if they have not completed an assignment). In an actual classroom, students can riff off of students who are eager to talk and thus hide the fact they have not yet done the reading. Students who are introverts often participate more in online discussions than they might in a more traditional classroom. They have time and space to think and are not always competing with more talkative students.

Ron Allchin, Fuller Seminary studio employee

Virtually all respondents to the ATS deans' survey said their school evaluates the effectiveness of their online courses/programs, and 40% have compared the educational effectiveness of their online programs to their on-site programs. Almost three-quarters (71%) indicated that the best way to describe those two results was "similar." On the 2015–2016 GSQ, students who took most of their classes online scored their skill level much higher than those who took the majority of their classes on campus in such key areas as "Ability to give spiritual direction" (+.30), "Ability to administer a parish" (+.29), "Ability to teach" (+.27), and "Ability to lead others" (+.20). They scored marginally lower in a few areas: "Ability to conduct worship/liturgy" (-.09), "Ability to work effectively

with men and women" (-.06), and "Ability in pastoral counseling" (-.05).

Tanner adds the caveat, "These GSQ results represent only one year and are only indirect measures of students' perceptions of themselves and may not reflect actual performance or behavior in these areas."[63] These are certainly students' self-perceptions, but one must note that both online students and on-site students are using the same metrics to measure their personal and professional growth—and online students score themselves higher.

Other oft-repeated benefits to online courses are that students' responses are more thoughtful and reflective in online discussions, and online students do a better job integrating what they learn with their work and ministry. Their experience provides a crucial teaching moment. "Online, they are dragging their community into the classroom," remarked one professor. "They do not have to ask, 'What's the point of learning X or Y?' It has a better connection to their lives and work. The depth of students' work in online courses may not be as good, but they have better integration." Another professor added, "You engage each particular student and what and how they think at a level and depth not possible in a classroom on campus."

If "bringing one's community into the classroom" is one of the benefits of online courses, it can also be a downside. Students are sometimes expected to devote as many hours to their work and ministry as they did before becoming students. All students struggle with juggling their personal lives, work lives, ministries, and classwork, but students who continue to live and work in their communities and take classes via the internet may find it particularly difficult to keep up with readings and assignments.

Research shows that there may be some reason to doubt if students enrolled in online courses are devoting as much time as they ought to their studies. (Of course, it may also be the case that students in face-to-face classes are not devoting as much time to studies as they may have in the past.) A recent survey of 1,500 past and present fully online college students by The Learning House, Inc. and Aslanian Market Research

indicates that many students are not spending as much time engaged in online class preparation and activities as would be expected of them if they were in a face-to-face classroom. Students enrolled in an eight-week (three-semester credit) course should spend sixteen or more hours per week in study time, but only 20% of students report spending this much time. Forty percent spent only five to ten hours a week on course activities and work.[64]

Despite the question of how much time students devote to their studies, there is evidence that ODE produces outcomes equal to the level of traditional classroom outcomes. Some would go so far as to say that their online students do better overall in a course than those in a traditional class.

> Despite the question of how much time students devote to their studies, there is evidence that ODE produces outcomes equal to the level of traditional classroom outcomes.

Besides assessing student learning in specific courses, most schools also evaluate the overall educational effectiveness of their online programs. Deans on the ATS deans' survey indicated that the five most common assessments are course evaluations by students (98%), course-embedded assignments with rubrics (79%), surveys of graduating students (73%), informal feedback from faculty (68%), and capstone projects (49%). Retention and graduation rates were also used by 58% of these schools.[65]

Tanner summarizes the findings: "Our recent past, and our present results, indicate online learning is becoming a proven pedagogy for theological schools... This educational model is proving to be effective, not just for many, but for most of our members schools."[66]

6. Redefining Roles

A final faculty caution toward online teaching is more personal in nature and gets at the core of how faculty members understand their role as *faculty*. At most higher-education institutions in North America, faculty have a great deal of autonomy, both in developing their courses and in teaching them. Online teaching can sometimes feel more transactional in nature and can change the way faculty perceive themselves. "Faculty have to be willing to examine and change their roles, their assumed power, their understanding of human behavior. I'm a facilitator," noted a professor, with some sadness.

Many professors we spoke with used the phrase "death of the sage" to describe their sense of losing power. Classroom lectures, the standard for classroom teaching for decades at many schools, literally provided a platform for faculty to hold forth on their subject and highlight their scholarship. With shifting patterns in the culture—especially toward the immediate and the visual—the power and effectiveness of the lecture ranks last on a list of effective techniques for learning. In any setting today, and especially for ODE, good teaching requires finesse, guiding students on their journey toward knowledge and wisdom. Clearly, part of the rub and the challenge of effective online courses are, as the literature shows, faculty having to dissect and recreate a beloved course in a whole new format.

Some faculty spoke frankly of their personal loss. "What bothered me was my sense that I didn't get my classroom fix. I'm more plodding and boring. I had trouble engaging," admitted a senior faculty member who is new to online teaching. The loss is real in this changing landscape, but so is a sense among many faculty members that this is an opportunity to examine the way they have taught in the past. Many are eager to learn, adapt, and grow into this new way of teaching and training religious leaders for service to the world. ●
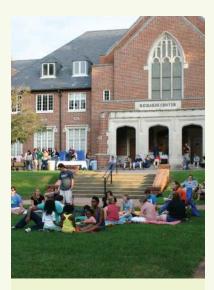
Columbia Theological Seminary

Greek class, Professor
Stan Saunders

About a third of theological schools have yet to dip their toes into online teaching, or they are making the first tentative steps into those waters. The large flagship schools have had little motivation to do so, as relatively steady enrollment and generous endowments often hold the pressures for innovation and change at arm's length. But sometimes even those schools that are in no way assured of their futures find difficulty embracing new technology and the changing pedagogies such technology requires. One such school, Columbia Theological Seminary (Decatur, Georgia), is, in fits and starts, testing the waters.

Columbia, a PC (USA) seminary, is a residential school, providing student and faculty housing on its lovely fifty-seven-acre campus. Community life is part of the ethos of the school, with chapel held four times a week, communion on Fridays, campus-wide weekly forums on topics of concern to the church, and a large refectory where the community can gather for lunch each day. It is not surprising, then, that one of the impediments to offering online courses is the feeling of some faculty that something precious will be lost when students and faculty are not together in the classroom. One faculty member remarked that there's something organic about the classroom: "it's tactile, spatial, and incarnational. Everyone has to be in the room for it to work." It's hard to imagine how this same sense can be achieved when a student's presence is mediated through a computer monitor.

Two other areas of concern to administration and faculty as they contemplate offering courses and possibly a degree online, are embedded in institutional history. Twelve years ago, Columbia decided, in addition to its weekday classes, to offer its MDiv program during evenings and weekends to reach a broader market. These classes were discontinued five years ago, in part because the wear and tear on faculty became "untenable." The takeaway for faculty from this experience is that before beginning a new initiative, it is critical to know what the costs will be, both financially and in terms of teaching loads and time commitments. Better

Columbia Theological Seminary opening picnic for the academic year

"There's something organic about the classroom, it's tactile, spatial, and incarnational. Everyone has to be in the room for it to work."

caution today than regret tomorrow. In addition, some believe if a new initiative like this is to succeed, there must be full faculty buy-in. On the issue of offering online courses or degrees at Columbia, some are eager to go forward, while others are not.

Questions about technology—its limitations and reliability—also loom large in faculty minds. How can certain courses be effectively taught online? Does the institution have the needed infrastructure and technology to provide adequate training and support to those learning how to teach in this new medium? The learning curve looms like a dark cloud over those who are digital immigrants and not digital natives.

A final pragmatic question Columbia faculty and administers ask: Is it too late to effectively enter what appears to be a saturated market? There are now dozens of theological schools in North America offering online courses and an online MDiv, or other masters' degrees. Many of these schools have been teaching online for ten or even twenty years. How can a school, with limited resources and experience, hope to compete against these pioneers? Unless data can be gathered that indicates probable success for such a costly (both in terms of time and expense) venture, why enter that arena? ●

Closing chapel service in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

D. How to Jumpstart ODE

T his is a time of shifting sands in theological education, and much about the future is beyond our sight (and perhaps imagination). It is no surprise, then, that boards, senior administrators, and faculty are cautious as they seek the way forward. Many have decided that online courses, degrees, and programs will be a part of their strategic plan. For those schools that are new to this arena or those who are contemplating moving in this direction, we offer these suggestions, drawn from our interviews with experienced faculty and consultants for ODE:

Bethel Seminary students

- Begin by taking seriously the concerns and fears of stakeholders, not by assuring them of success but rather by highlighting how other schools address these issues.

- The administration needs to be fully committed to online teaching and communicate that clearly to faculty. Trustees may urge their school to begin online degrees, with the hope this will boost enrollment, but unless it has full buy-in from the president and the academic dean, this initiative will languish in the side halls of the administration building.

- Some schools are hesitant to move to online teaching because they don't have full faculty buy-in. Don't hesitate—faculty will vary widely in their experience with technology (don't assume that young faculty are boosters and older faculty naysayers) and thus will have differing opinions about the challenges and rewards of teaching online. Start small by offering some online courses

Central Baptist Seminary synchronous class

taught by the faculty who are on board. Hopefully their success and testimony will win over more reluctant faculty.

- Get the buy-in of key senior faculty. Auburn research has shown that when a new initiative has the backing and support of influential senior faculty, it has a greater chance of success.[67] The reality is there are some faculty members who have more influence and hold greater respect among their colleagues. Get them on board.

- Sixty percent of the deans on the ATS survey indicated that training faculty to teach online was one of their top challenges to online teaching. Some schools now require (rather than just suggest) that faculty attend workshops or seminars on teaching online. Deans on the Auburn survey reported their faculty attending the Wabash Center workshops, Quality Matters, United Theological Seminary Online Teaching Certificate, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, among others. Some schools had training available through the university or college with which they were affiliated.

- One way to move reluctant faculty online is to encourage them to team-teach an online course with more experienced (or eager) faculty members. Many faculty who

have taken workshops or seminars in online teaching still welcome hands-on assistance when they are developing and teaching online courses for the first time.

- Recognize that *creating* an online or hybrid course takes significantly more time than planning a residential course. *Teaching* an online course for the first time is also more time-consuming. Many schools thus offer faculty a one-time bonus ($500–$1,000) or give them a reduced teaching load that semester/quarter. Some schools routinely consider online courses to be equal to 1.5 residential courses.

- Provide mentors for faculty new to online teaching. Having someone to call when you wonder how to respond to a student who is monopolizing an online discussion board or where to turn with a question about how to use software will allay many concerns.

- Show that you share the faculty concerns about the quality of teaching and effectiveness of student formation, and that you will work with them on these issues. Faculties sometimes feel they are the guardians of academic rigor and pastoral and spiritual formation.

- Start small. Encourage faculty to go paperless, post materials for their classes online, set up online discussion forums on Facebook, or use video conferencing for students who are unable to be present for a lecture. Learning and adopting new technology takes time; go slowly and move some of your materials online, but not the whole course. Experiment going online with courses that carry less risk than credit courses required for a degree. For instance, begin offering online courses for certificate programs or lifelong learning courses.

> "In higher education, we jumped into technology without developing the pedagogy first. We've come to the realization that technology is a delivery system, not a pedagogical method. Good pedagogy is the foundation upon which you develop a delivery system."

- There are often three stages taken by faculty who are new to online teaching, as mentioned earlier in the literature review. Steve Delamarter elaborated more fully in an interview:

  The **FIRST STAGE** is an instrumental view of technology. Often the professor is moving online a class that he/she has taught in a physical classroom. This may involve the taping of lectures for students to view later, or perhaps a live video feed of the classroom for those not present. Discussions may be posted in an online forum for students to respond to, and they are given a written exam or final paper for assessment of their learning. Online teaching is seen as a way of using technology to move your content online. Another professor illustrated this perspective, 'The first autos looked like a horse cart because that's what people knew. But now they are very different. We still have the horse cart mentality too often with online teaching.' You tend to teach the way you were taught.

  "The **SECOND STAGE** is often driven by the fact that Stage One didn't work well," Delamarter continued. "The institutions that persevered in developing ODE discovered that the way forward was through examining and changing

our pedagogy, and that drove us to reflect on pedagogy in a way we hadn't thought of before." Most faculty have a philosophy of teaching but not learning, and the question faced in the second stage is: How do you facilitate learning and community online? Stacy Williams-Duncan, Trotter Professor at Virginia Theological Seminary, commented, "In higher education, we jumped into technology without developing the pedagogy first. We've come to the realization that technology is a delivery system, not a pedagogical method. Good pedagogy is the foundation upon which you develop a delivery system."

And finally, one reaches **STAGE THREE:** "You come back to the face-to-face classroom," Delamarter noted, "and you can't teach the same way in the classroom after thinking deeply about teaching and learning online. It changes your perspective."

- Few of the graduate programs that prepare scholars for higher education include classes or workshops on pedagogy, or help future faculty think through how students learn. Many of those interviewed said that until they began teaching online, they had not thought about why they taught the way they did since their early days of teaching. "[Teaching online] will make you a better teacher—more thoughtful about pedagogy and more creative," one professor noted.

Cameron Harder illustrates how faculty discussions on pedagogy can inform how such a course is taught at Luther Seminary in Saskatchewan:

  We are increasingly working on integrative assignments. One of the things that has been really clear to me is that unless you grasp the passion of the student . . . they have so much

coming into their lives . . . the only way to ensure they remember stuff is if they are emotionally engaged. A lot of material we use online—strong video material, game playing—really helps to capture them. The fact that they are able to remain in their home parishes [rather than relocate to campus] means that there is an immediacy to what they learn. They blog about their readings (blogs are usually short and sweet, but deep), and then we go back and forth on threaded discussions, which helps to deepen their thinking."

- Make ODE part of the culture and mission of the school. Some schools have made it clear to all new faculty hires that they will be expected to teach courses online. Schools that include discussions about online pedagogies, hold seminars on how to use new technology, and discuss how to connect with students online create a culture of expectation where online teaching is the norm and need not be onerous or technically complicated. A final note for patience and wisdom from Steve Delamarter: "There is inevitably going to be chaos at the beginning of adopting a new technology and its effectiveness is going to be spotty. Theological education will continue to shake itself out in this new platform. Some will find distance education helps their bottom line, others will find it doesn't. The ones that survive and thrive come to an authentic integration between technology, pedagogy and theology. Others may find they have created a Frankenstein." ●

Bethel Seminary students

Schools that include discussions about online pedagogies, hold seminars on how to use new technology, and discuss how to connect with students online, create a culture of expectation where online teaching is the norm and need not be onerous or technically complicated.

IV. Conclusion

If the internet is the twenty-first century's version of the printing press, then the common vernacular for today's young adults is digital media, accessed through mobile devices.

Karin Craven and Nkiru Okafor from Nigeria, Luther Seminary Pastoral Care PhD graduates

We began this report by reflecting on the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther and the technological innovation of the printing press, which enabled the dissemination of his theological reflections throughout northern Europe. Luther believed that ordinary people should be able to interpret the scriptures for themselves, and to assist them in this endeavor, he translated the New Testament into German. Indiana University professor Richard Gunderman, writing in the online news site The Conversation, noted, "Prior to Luther, people from different regions of present-day Germany often experienced great difficulty understanding one another. Luther's Bible translation promoted a single German vernacular, helping to bring people together around a common tongue. Luther helped to provide one of the most effective arguments for universal literacy in the history of western civilization."[68]

If the internet is the twenty-first century's version of the printing press, then the common vernacular for today's young adults is digital media, accessed on the go through mobile devices. Recent studies show mobile access accounts for 70% of all digital media time, a remarkable shift given mobile devices were only invented just over a decade ago.[69] On our daily commute on the New York subway, nearly four out of five adults are listening to music or podcasts, watching movies, or playing games on their iPhones, or reading from their iPads and Kindles. There are always a few people reading actual books or magazines, but they are a distinct minority. Just twenty-five years ago, the ubiquity of entertainment and information on mobile devices could not have been imagined.

> The internet is a new delivery system for theological education, but much more than that, it has created and reinforced a new vernacular language emphasizing new modes of multi-sensory engagement and learning.

Columbia Theological Seminary students

As we saw with the authors of *Being There*, twenty-five years ago we could not have imagined how the internet would affect theological education. Theological school faculty have had to grapple with how best to engage new cohorts of students more comfortable with computers than books, more engaged with images and sound than the written word, and with attention spans geared to a YouTube video rather than a novel. The internet is a new delivery system for theological education, but much more than that, it has created and reinforced a new vernacular language emphasizing new modes of multi-sensory engagement and learning. The days are gone, we hope, when faculty thought an adequate online course meant merely reading a lecture in front of a camera.

The internet has necessitated new practices in teaching and learning as schools and faculties experiment with various pedagogies and access the experience of their students. There will certainly always be a need for some schools to train future theologians, historians, and scripture scholars, and more traditional models of the classroom, lecture, and exam endure. Schools have found, however, today's students are asking for more applied and contextual courses, and are drawn to course content produced and accessed digitally. If theological school students are to trouble the waters and heal the world, they must speak the media lingua franca of the twenty-first century communities in which they will lead.

We found, of course, some resistance to this sea change in theological education. Not all are ready to embrace the transition to ODE and its new digital frontiers, taught and well-fed as they were on face-to-face, print-based models of education. Other faculty members take delight in this new digital era as it pushes them to reexamine old paradigms and imagine new ways of learning wisdom. Often more traditional schools and faculties experience grief because habits of teaching and learning are tied to a sense of personal and communal identity. Turning toward courses and programs for students in ODE means classes and campuses become virtual. It is clear, however, that for many schools and faculties, even many who were initially reluctant, the world has changed. The era of glowing praise or dour resistance has given way to a creative new moment when widening interest in the role of religion and spirituality in everyday life matches the expansive access and creative pedagogies increasingly available through online courses and degrees. ●

Appendix

Sage Advice: How to Do It Well

From interviews and campus visits, we have compiled a list of suggestions and ideas of what has worked particularly well for various modes of online distance education courses.

TIME AND PRACTICE: Faculty who have taught online say it takes time and practice to get it right. "The more I did it," one professor commented, "the more satisfied I became." Another, who is new to online teaching, noted, "I'm eager to continue learning...it takes practice on the part of the professor. It will also take a deep awareness of the needs and desires of the students in my context."

SCHEDULES: Some schools have instituted a framework, scaffold, or weekly schedule for all their online courses. For instance, lectures or assignments must be posted by Friday, discussion board responses are always due by Wednesday, etc. The purpose of this structure is to help online students navigate the demands of online courses and lessen the learning curve as they move from one course to another. To some faculty, this can feel heavy-handed and an unwanted intrusion into their autonomy as a professor because it lessens the flexibility they have when designing a course. On the other hand, the framework can make it easier for professors designing an online course for the first time because it dispels some ambiguity.

DEFINING TERMS AND EXPECTATIONS: Schools have found it necessary to develop a common understanding or definition of what is an online course, how to conduct online discussions, how to schedule a week of online learning, how assessment will be done, etc.

AUDIENCE: Clearly identifying your audience will help determine what methods and learning systems are most appropriate and effective. "I am disappointed how most people in institutions are doing distance education," Robert Freeman, associate dean for the Master of Arts in Global Leadership at Fuller Seminary, commented. "They aren't thinking about the paradigm at all, just 'How can I put my course online?' The first thing we did in my program was to define who the course is for."

FORMING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY: Good online learning creates the vibrant "we"—it constructs an online community. Steve Delamarter noted, "The first thing we do with an online class is form community, and we do this by going on retreat and sharing our stories and finding common interests. The moment learners know their learning is embedded in a community and that they matter to the community, then they are integrated into the school. It's not about technology but about pedagogy and sociology." Even if a retreat or in-person gathering is not possible for a course or cohort, Delamarter added, "The first three weeks of an online course are helping students understand their roles, facilitating the processes, not focusing as intently on the content. After that, they learn the content."

BRINGING STUDENTS TO CAMPUS: The strongest cohorts seem to be those who have met in person early in their program or course. Seeing each other face-to-face, spending informal time together and with their professor, forges relationships that are sustained through their distance from each other. Fuller Seminary provides a directory of online students with their photos and sets up a virtual cafe where they can regularly interact informally with each other. Robert Freeman commented, "The high point (of each cohort) is still meeting them in person at the beginning of the program, and each student is given time to tell his/her

story. You might think that was wasting time, but it forms the community."

COHORTS: Cohort learning has lent itself very well to this new form of learning community, and many schools have found this to be the best way to structure online degrees. The students begin to know each other well, and the role of the professor changes as a result. Steve Delamarter noted, "A quality emerges and builds from semester to semester as the community organizes itself, and this leads to robustness in the classroom, and you can't compare it with a traditional classroom." Many students may not know anyone in their community who knows or understands the path they are on, and the community they form online with other students is a lifeline. Cohorts who stay with each other for an extended period of time (i.e., through a degree or certificate program) form the tightest bonds.

WORKING TOGETHER: Jean-Francois Racine, associate professor of New Testament at the Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University, regularly asks students to work together on projects for the class. "I will ask students to work together on a practical project (a YouTube video, for example). The delivery becomes as important as the product. Students may be all over the country and they can come together and produce a project."

VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS: Being virtual does not mean being disconnected. Over half (57%) of online students in a Learning House survey said that regular engagement with classmates and instructors was important to them. Over three-quarters (76%) said that they would like their instructors to have virtual office hours so they could engage with him/her outside of class time. [70]

HELPING STUDENTS CONNECT: Tara Hornbacker reported, "Every Sunday evening I post a fifteen-minute video in which I talk about what I saw students doing during the past week. I make a point of mentioning each person by name. They're able to see me and that helps them connect with me. It lets them know I'm aware of what they're doing but hopefully weans them away from the expectation that the professor will remark on every post."

LEARNING TO BE PRECISE: Tara Hornbacker noted, "[Teaching online] has made me a better teacher. I'm more explicit in my instruction in my syllabus and for every assignment. In an online world, if you are less than explicit, you won't get what you want. It has made me more disciplined in my planning for classes. I can't run off handouts fifteen minutes before class. You can't be sloppy. It has enriched my curiosity in teaching forms, philosophies of teaching that I'd forgotten from graduate school."

DECREASING COSTS FOR STUDENTS: Often, distance students have trouble accessing the documents, materials, or resources needed for advanced courses, or they find books are expensive to buy. Jean-Francois Racine has found a way to help students at the Jesuit School of Theology: "Sometime I'll put them into teams so each buys a different book and they send reviews, or summarize and discuss the findings with their classmates. You learn a lot by explaining to others what you've learned. This not only decreases costs for students, it also results in better learning as the student becomes the teacher or facilitator in discussions."

EMBODYING THE MATERIAL: Online courses lend themselves to using more online materials, whether that is other media and videos, or students working collaboratively on assignments. This changes the nature of students' work and helps them understand their work as public, not merely personal. For most faculty, the residential classroom is "their turf," and the walls are often solid. When faculty teach online, the lines are porous and contextual, and online students may paradoxically be more embodied and contextually situated than students in the residential classroom. Katherine Turpin, who teaches at Iliff, remarked, "All my notes are hyperlinked and I can pull in things from the internet, YouTube, etc. We can use a wide variety of things in class and it makes the long (ninety-minute) classes more manageable. That part is fun." Cameron Harder remarked that several faculty at Luther Seminary in Saskatchewan, after teaching online, now put more thought into how

class material is visually embodied in online courses and as well as on-site courses.

THOSE WHO ARE SOLD ON ONLINE TEACHING ARE ALWAYS TINKERING: Jean-Francois Racine, who spoke with great enthusiasm about teaching online, commented, "I follow a format and stick with it, but I find new ways to do things, so I have to revise the course. A short audio podcast might become a short video instead, and it looks so much better, and so I have to redo the whole course. Last year, I worked on sound, light, and the color of my slides—trying to be consistent across my courses. It looks so much better, so now I have to redo the whole thing. I'm always looking to hear about new ways to do things. How do other faculty design a course? What kind of assignments and discussions do they use with their students? That's what I'm eager to hear."

USING CASE STUDIES: Susan Fox, professor of supervised ministry at Union Presbyterian Seminary, explained how she effectively uses case studies with her online students:

> Students present a case study to their peers in a process that combines pre-class online reflection of the case, with additional discussion on the actual day of class. A week before class, the presenter posts the case study online, and two classmates post written reflections. All students are expected to have read the case and responded prior to class. The two responders are responsible to guide the class discussion. This process frees class discussion to begin at a more advanced level, enabling deeper reflection."

Jean-Francois Racine talked about how the immediacy of online classes helps create memorable case studies. "Since some of my online students are working as ministers, I ask them to give a case study they have experienced and ask them to reflect on these. Their context is very close to them, and it is graphic. I really use the diversity in the classroom. I have students from the Midwest, rural Oregon, Louisiana, etc., and it's interesting how one person can help another from

across the country. In the classroom, there's a loss of this immediacy."

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO DO ONLINE TEACHING WELL: The online teaching and learning process is usually facilitated by a team of people—technology people, content people, TAs, etc. Tara Hornbacker remarked, "I have an IT person I can call, who can help me with questions about teaching online. He's creative and brilliant and loves what he does. If you have a teaching assistant with whom you can talk, that's great as well. At Bethany, we have a faculty reflection and research meeting once a month. It is catch-up time, we can work on a syllabus, have a presentation on online teaching, be introduced to new online tools, etc. There's accompaniment all along the way." It's this accompaniment that is crucial for faculty because it reduces a great deal of uncertainty and stress as they learn how to teach online courses. ●

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Data Sources

The findings of this report rest upon data from five sources: first, a review of all articles published in the ATS journal, *Theological Education,* or the Wabash Center's *Teaching Theology & Religion* on the topic of online teaching or distance education in theological schools. This review lays out the questions and concerns of schools that offer online and distance education courses or degrees programs. As schools have gained more experience with online teaching, the literature shows greater clarity on the key issues to be addressed.

A second source of data was an Auburn online survey sent to all the deans of theological schools that are a part of the ATS (N=82). In this survey, we sought to learn exactly how schools were using distance education. Were schools using online courses only for electives, or were some of those courses now required in degree programs? What percentage of regular faculty were/are teaching online, or are adjuncts and instructors being used instead? What training and learning management software do schools provide for those who teach online? Results from this survey, always identified as the "Auburn deans' survey," reveal some surprising and positive findings as well as where schools face challenges.

Serendipitously, while Auburn research was underway, ATS convened a peer group to study the educational effectiveness of online learning and the role of spiritual formation in online contexts. As a part of its work, it too conducted a survey of academic deans of schools with comprehensive distance education. Results from that survey are presented throughout the report, and when findings from that survey are included in this report, they are clearly identified as the "ATS deans' survey."

Since 2005, the Wabash Center on Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion has offered courses and workshops for those teaching online and, as part of this project and with Wabash assistance,

we surveyed these alumni (N=77). From this third source of data, we learn the particular challenges of individuals in the field, including how they assess their online students, how much time it takes to teach an online course versus a course in the classroom, and how well the software and technology at their institution supports their online teaching. Executive Director Nadine Pence and Associate Director Paul Myhre assisted in the design of the overall project and the construction of both the Wabash alumni survey and the Auburn deans' survey.

A fourth source of data has been interviews with faculty who are teaching online. Quantitative data may provide overall information, but only conversations with individuals reveal the nuances that make it possible to understand a professor's struggle to learn new software and technology, or what it's like the first time you face a virtual class, or the challenge in assessing an online student's progress toward learning outcomes.

We round out our data collection with four case studies of seminaries. Three have embraced online teaching and offer online degrees; one is tentatively moving into the digital world. Bethel Seminary and Luther Seminary, both in St. Paul, Minnesota, were early adopters of online teaching. Bethel now offers a fully online MDiv as well as several other masters' programs, DMin, and certificate programs online. Luther Seminary offers several hybrid degrees. Central Baptist Seminary offers a fully online MDiv, and all the courses on its Kansas campus now include both in-class and online students. The fourth school, Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, offers a hybrid DMin but is only beginning to offer some elective masters'-level courses online. The faculty is struggling with the challenges of adopting distance education, and some have grave reservations about moving in this direction. ●

About the Authors, Funding and Support

About Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education

The Center for the Study of Theological Education offers research and consulting to strengthen the institutions that educate religious leaders. The Center studies a wide range of topics, including theological students and student debt, theological school faculty and their teaching, finances of theological schools, administrative leadership, educational programs, and the public role of theological schools. The Center serves all religious groups and is the only research institute devoted solely to theological education.

About Auburn

Auburn Theological Seminary is an institute for religious leadership that faces the challenges of our fragmented, complex, and violent time. We envision religion as a catalyst and resource for a new world—one in which differences are celebrated, abundance is shared, and people are hopeful, working for a future that is better than today. Auburn equips bold and resilient leaders—religious and secular, women and men—with the tools and resources they need for our multi-faith world. We provide them with education, research, support, and media savvy so they can bridge religious divides, build community, pursue justice, and heal the world.

Trouble the waters. Heal the world.