



HMS Richards Divinity School Assessment Report Summary 2014-2015

Mission

The La Sierra University HMS Richards Divinity School, a theological school within the system of Seventh-day Adventist higher education, seeks to integrate believing, thinking, and acting through teaching, scholarship, dialogue, and service, preparing Christian leaders for effective ministries in the church, academy, and world in which we live.

Vision

We see ourselves as an open community of learning and service, conviction and hospitality, solidarity and diversity, where faith seeks both understanding and transformation.

Our vision is to be attentive to the calling of Jesus Christ to present truth, while not forgetting how God has led us in our past history, and ever listening and reaching out through the empowering of the Spirit to a changing church and world. We seek to form leaders who will be both effective and winsome spokespersons for the gospel, and capable of courageously standing for the right though the heavens fall. We seek collaborations with congregations and partner institutions where conversations can deepen our service in God's cause in the world.

Student Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) are not the same this year as in the past. As announced in last year's annual report, the Divinity School has entirely reorganized its SLOs in the way they are conceived and implemented, providing opportunity for assessing new sets of data on how the program is doing. While nothing is the same, the Divinity School hopes to see better and more consistent assessment of student performance because of the new structure.

In addition, the Divinity School has adopted a more focused set of program objectives as follows:

General Divinity School Learning Objectives: Individual Program student learning outcomes (SLOs) fall under the general rubric of the HMS Richards Divinity School concerns regarding assessment. The General Divinity School Learning Objectives are as follows:

Each of the following intentions apply at the level of learning appropriate to course and academic level competencies.

1. The Divinity School intends that students learn how to acquire **knowledge**.
2. The Divinity School intends that students learn what it means to **understand**.
3. The Divinity School intends that students learn how to evaluate information and arrive at appropriate **judgments**.
4. The Divinity School intends that students learn how to make responsible decisions and conform their **actions** to them.

Graduate Masters of Theological Studies (MTS) degree program outcomes

A first graduate theological degree in basic programs oriented towards general theological studies have as its purpose of providing understanding in theological disciplines. They include understanding for general knowledge of theology or for background in specific disciplines or even interdisciplinary studies. This degree is intended as the basis for further graduate study or for other educational purposes. Our curricula for this degree includes the essentials of a scholarly investigation of Scripture, tradition, and theology with specific skills developed in research methods, teaching skills and competence in specific theological

and religious disciplines. This degree begins theological study at the graduate level and may provide a concentration in a specific type of ministry expertise.

Students completing the Masters of Theological Studies (MTS degree program will:

1. Demonstrate an introductory graduate level knowledge and understanding of the Bible's content, structure, message, and interpretation in relation to its literary, theological, historical, cultural, and canonical backgrounds.
2. Show competence in biblical research and in using appropriate and relevant sources with a goal to applying biblical principles to modern life.
3. Outline and assess the major events, persons, and literature in the history of Christianity including the development of Seventh-day Adventists within the wider Christian traditions.
4. Articulate classic categories or issues in Seventh-day Adventist or in Christian theology in contrast to other major Christian and non-Christian traditions.
5. Identify and affirm spiritual growth as to one's calling, ministry giftedness, strengths and personal growth.
6. Articulate and practice personal and innovative church-based discipleship.

Graduate Masters of Divinity (MDiv) degree program outcomes

Studies in the Masters of Divinity degree program (MDiv) provide a structured opportunity to develop a thorough, discriminating understanding and personal appropriation of the heritage of the community of faith, its Scripture, traditions, doctrines, and practices in both its historical and contemporary expressions. The Masters of Divinity degree is designed to assist students in understanding the cultural realities and social settings within which religious communities live and carry out their missions. The program allows time for insights of cognate disciplines such as the social sciences, the natural sciences, philosophy, and the arts to help enable a knowledge and appreciation of the broader context of the religious tradition and practice, including cross-cultural and global aspects. In addition, it provides opportunities for formational experiences through which students may grow in those personal qualities essential for the practice of ministry. The outcomes are targeted in developing ministerial leaders in their particular communities in which they intend to work and to foster an awareness of the need for continuing education to better assist personal religious growth in the global community in general.

Students completing the Masters of Divinity degree program (MDiv) program will:

1. Exhibit an introductory graduate-level understanding of the content and major themes of Scripture, Christian doctrine, church history, pastoral ethics, and theological reflection in the practice of ministry.
2. Demonstrate an ability to read scriptural texts critically and apply understanding in areas of spiritual growth appropriate for ministry and pastoral leadership.
3. Demonstrate sufficient ability to conduct solid research with a goal of properly applying the Bible to modern life.
4. Affirm one's identity and calling to ministry and explore the assumptions and hermeneutics needed to engage the text in their own lives, their communities and the larger world.
5. Examine the Seventh-day Adventist religious tradition in relation to Scripture, theology, methods of liturgy, worship elements and congregational structures in light of a diversity of praxis.
6. Integrate competence in the disciplines and skills of ministry in effectively communicating and sharing the Gospel through relevant, contextual Christian ministry.

Summary

In 2014 the adoption of the overall learning objectives of the Divinity School assessment targeted a portion of these without focusing on the new program student learning objectives. The University Assessment Committee's review of 2014 commended the Divinity School for the following:

1. The development of new SLOs with a strong conceptual framework.
2. Computerizing the assessment process to make it more manageable.
3. Student learning, as evidenced by most students exceeding most of the benchmarks set by the School.
4. The recognition in your report of what next steps you need to take, such as developing new benchmarks for your SLOs.

Whereas all previous assessment endeavors were based on a small number of SLOs, a portion of which would be assessed each year representing around 20% of the total, all leading to a five-year review, the target for 2014 was to look at the general objectives and do assessment focusing on those as they make contribution to the objectives of the Divinity School. In the 2015-2017 academic years, program assessment will begin using those more focused program outcomes as recommended by the University Assessment Committee's 2014 report to the Divinity School.

This summary is of the 2014 academic year as we reconceived and rationalized its SLOs into one set of four. They are structured on the theoretical model of theologian Bernard Lonergan's illuminating articulation of four levels of cognitive consciousness (integrated levels of knowledge/knowing).

2013-2014 Assessment Focus

All four of the general Student Learning Objectives were assessed.

What method of assessment was used?

A new on-line survey was created as a major combined instrument for assessing student learning outcomes for all students in the Divinity School. We used features in the software (Survey Monkey) to be able to provide only the appropriate questions that were relevant to the student's specific program. While this worked well for this year's initial implementation, we intend to harness more advanced features next year that will allow us to improve the process as we move towards program assessments for the MTS and MDiv degrees.

We included elements from our previous assessment instruments, where appropriate, for two reasons: they were useful in themselves; and doing so helped to make possible some comparisons with previous years' results. These elements were:

- The National PEW Religion survey;
- the Seventh-day Adventist Knowledge test
- General religious knowledge survey
- Faith Maturity Scale (*Valuegenesis* Research on Faith, Values and Commitment)

We also developed completely new sections to address our revised SLOs. Then, in addition, we selected specific courses where grade assignments provided useful information for the assessing of student learning outcomes (particularly Finally, we used selected questions from the Graduate Student Questionnaire (GSQ) from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), as this provided the opportunity to compare ourselves with peer institutions on a national basis.

What were the outcomes of the assessment?

Note that for the purpose of this report, only the graduate student results are relevant. Also note that wherever helpful and appropriate, these results have been further delineated into graduate professional programs (M.Div.); and graduate academic programs (M.T.S. and M.A.).

What follows is a summary and aggregate of the results for each of the four SLOs.

SLO 1 --- Level 1. The Divinity School intends that students learn how to acquire knowledge.

• Students acquire relevant information.

1. *SDA Knowledge*: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 68% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 66% average.
2. *Religious Knowledge*: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 68% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 84% average.
3. *PEW National Survey*: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 83% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 83% average.
4. *Religious Vocabulary*: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 76% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 74% average.
5. *Biblical Knowledge*: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 80% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 74% average.
6. *Gen. Religion Survey*: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 64% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 70% average.
7. *Grades /Selected Courses*: Combined Graduate: 3.70 GPA

Overall averages: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 73% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 75% average.

SLO-2 --- Level 2. The Divinity School intends that students learn what it means to understand.

• Students demonstrate adequate understanding.

1. *On-Line Questionnaire*: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 50% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 47% average.
2. *Grades / Selected Courses*: Combined Graduate: 3.14 GPA

Overall averages: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 50% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 47% average.

SLO 3 --- Level 3. The Divinity School intends that students learn how to evaluate information and arrive at appropriate judgments.

• Students demonstrate critical reasoning.

1. *Personal/Social Ethics*: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 90% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 76% average.
2. *Judgment Scale*: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 89% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 75% average.
3. *Critical Reason Scale*: Combined Graduate: 78%

Overall averages: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 86% average.

Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 76% average.

SLO 4 --- Level 4. The Divinity School intends that students learn how to make responsible decisions and conform their actions to them.

• **Students act responsibly.**

1. Faith Maturity Scale: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 96.8% average (high faith maturity).
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 78.6% average (medium high faith maturity)
2. Religious Activity: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 91.4% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 82.8% average.
3. Personal Piety: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 60% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 63.6% average.
4. Activity Scale: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 47.5% average.
Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 78.1% average.

Overall averages: Graduate Professional (M.Div., etc) 73.9% average.

Graduate Academic (MTS., etc) 75.8%

Based on the outcomes of the assessment, how well is the program meeting its objectives?

In response to feedback from the Assessment Committee to a previous year's Annual Report, we set goals or benchmarks to be attained in most of our SLOs. Unfortunately, with our comprehensive revision of our SLOs, new goals and benchmarks will need to be developed, set and measured now that we have clarified our program student learning objectives beginning in 2015.

Only in a few cases can we still apply those benchmarks. One such case is the PEW Religious knowledge test, where we can compare our results against our own benchmarks, as well as with published national results: PEW religious knowledge test: Our graduate students (both professional & academic) scored 83% correct. The national average for those with some postgraduate training was 69%; and those with just an undergraduate degree scored 62%. By comparison, those with a high school diploma scored at 43%. We had set a benchmark of at least 80% for our graduate students. Thus, we surpassed our own high standard with this test. Lacking specific benchmarks for our new SLOs, our assessment will be more subjective for this first year of implementation.

SLO 1. Acquiring relevant knowledge. With scores of 73% and 75% (professional, academic) we believe we have evidence for saying that we are meeting our objectives with regard to the acquisition of relevant knowledge, a claim backed up by the high average GPA earned by students in the selected courses.

SLO 2. Demonstrating understanding. With total average scores of just 50% and 47% (professional, academic), this is our weakest result. We recognize how difficult it is to evaluate understanding, and this continues to be a challenge for evaluation.

SLO 3. Demonstrating critical reasoning. While our survey instrument needs more refining in this area, we feel positive with the average results, 86% and 76%, for our professional and academic students.

SLO 4. Learning to act responsibly. While difficult to assess and measure, we are pleased with the range and quality of data we were able to acquire for this SLO. Given that our questions concerning student activity were wide ranging and highly aspirational, we consider the results to range from adequate (professional 47.5%) to quite good (78.1%). These numbers need to be understood. They simply represent the range and level of student activity in spiritual, church related, civic, political, and social justice and altruistic areas of responsibility.

As our sample sizes increase, more accurate data will be relevant for an assessment summary in this area.

What changes are being planned for assessment?

The Divinity School Assessment Group will focus on looking closely at the assessment of the professional and academic programs outcomes along with continuing those aspects of evaluation which provide key benchmarks for improvement in all programs of the Divinity School.

Combining most of the assessment tools into a single comprehensive on-line survey of student learning outcomes has been a major improvement over working with separate and disparate assessment instruments. Continued evaluation and organization will be completed with both on-line and paper surveys to provide complete student involvement in all types of assessment.