

# REPORT OF THE WASC SPECIAL VISIT TEAM

The Master's College and Seminary

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The team evaluated the institution under the WASC Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities. The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WASC website.

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## **SECTION 1. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

### **A. Description of the Institution and Visit**

The Master's College and Seminary began in 1927 as Los Angeles Baptist Theological Seminary and was initially accredited in 1975 as Los Angeles Baptist College. In 1985, Dr. John MacArthur, pastor of the Grace Community Church, was appointed President, and the institution was renamed The Master's College. The Master's Seminary (TMS) opened in 1986 as a unit of The Master's College and Seminary, and the substantive change received Commission approval in 1988. The College offers bachelor's degrees, teacher's certification, degree completion, and master's degrees; the Seminary enrolls students in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in theology, the Master of Divinity, the Doctor of Divinity, and a non-degree program in theology. There are currently nineteen full-time faculty members and 413 students enrolled in degree programs at TMS. TMS "has maintained its singular commitment to training men for a ministry of the Word" (*The Master's Seminary Special Visit Report, 2011, p. 7*).

The Master's College and Seminary is accredited as a single unit, and the Commission granted reaffirmation of accreditation to the institution following the 2009 Educational Effectiveness review and team report. However, the Commission also acted to schedule a Special Visit to TMS in Spring 2012 to address faculty scholarship, advancement in assessment and program review, strategic planning, and academic engagement with women's experiences and spiritual perspectives, stating that despite "important progress," these areas also "presented serious challenges" (*WASC Commission Action Letter, June 26, 2009, p. 2*).

### **B. The Institution's Special Visit Report: Quality of the Report and Supporting Evidence**

The Special Visit Report demonstrates substantial efforts made to address the concerns of the Commission report. According to the Report, work in preparation for the 2012 visit began within days of receiving the June 26, 2009 WASC Commission Action Letter. In responding to the Letter, a number of areas were identified for data collection, and as indicated in the Special Visit Report, particular attention was paid to a proper response to the “Educational Assessment and Program Review section” (p. 10). The Visiting Team found the quality of exhibits in this area particularly strong, and it appears that major efforts were devoted to systemic issues in preparation for the review. The Team found the Report to be a serious effort to document compliance with WASC expectations while not always directly responsive to the concerns raised by the WASC Commission Action Letter. For instance, the Commission expectation that TMS demonstrate “the advancement of the doctoral culture in the Seminary,” was not directly addressed in the Report and was therefore a subject of further investigation by the Team. The Team approached the visit in search of evidence that TMS had developed “a culture of engagement with the scholarly work and professional practices of others outside the Seminary, including publishing in respected peer-reviewed journals” (*WASC Commission Action Letter, 2009*, p. 3). Given the extensiveness of data exhibits, much of the work of the Team came in the form of verifying the impact of changes noted in the Special Visit Report and the degree of faculty commitment to sustaining the momentum described in the Report. While the Report affirms how the institution is meeting Commission expectations in areas of concern, the Team looked for deeper understanding of and commitment to the aims of the Standards beyond the compliance mode articulated in the Report. The Team also sought to determine the extent of faculty and administrative support for implementing the changes over time, and whether TMS understands and has internalized the expectations articulated by WASC teams and peers.

### **C. Description of the Team's Review Process**

In addition to *The Master's Seminary Special Visit Report* submitted on December 14, 2011, the Special Visit Team (SVT) reviewed the Master's College & Seminary accreditation history, the June 26, 2009 Action Letter from WASC, and the May 15, 2009 *Report of the WASC Visiting Team Educational Effectiveness Review*. These documents were reviewed, and an evaluation worksheet was completed by each Team member in preparation for a preliminary conference call on January 3, 2012.

In the month between the conference call and the visit to TMS, Team members also reviewed additional syllabi, circulated draft questions, and made adjustments to the visit schedule. The Team then met on February 8, in advance of the site visit. During this time, Team members identified areas of joint inquiry and agreed upon responsibilities for the interview sessions. The onsite interviews included sessions on Assessment and Program Review, Women's Experiences in the Curriculum, Faculty Scholarship, and Strategic Planning, and Team members met with Trustees, students, and women staff as well as faculty and senior administrators from both The Master's Seminary and The Master's College. The information available to the team also included messages to the WASC confidential email account.

## **SECTION 2. EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS**

From the outset of the visit, TMCS President John MacArthur affirmed the importance of WASC accreditation to the institution. In describing the history of TMS, President MacArthur emphasized his desire that TMS have "academic credibility as a peer institution," and that changes had been "forced by the high level of audit" required in the accreditation process. Despite occupying a predictable niche grounded in their doctrinal statement of 1927, TMS is

challenged, according to President MacArthur, “to be acceptable to people who don’t hold our theology.”

The President also referred to the challenges of being true to the doctrinal position of TMS while attaining and/or preserving credibility as an academic institution. The Team notes that this tension permeates TMS particularly, but not just, in the areas of breadth of curriculum and faculty scholarship reviewed by the Team. Although the Team does not aim to resolve conflicts between doctrinal approaches to education and the intellectual inquiry and engagement with the wider academic community expected in an institution of higher education (CFRs 2.1 and 2.2b), it was keenly aware of the need for vigilance to assure academic integrity and to combat the insularity noted in some of the Team observations below.

#### **A. Faculty Scholarship**

In their June 26, 2009 Action Letter, the Commission identified the need for TMS “to support and promote (peer reviewed) scholarship among its faculty and students” (p. 3). It continued, “The Commission will expect the Seminary to identify and support higher levels of scholarly expectations for faculty” (CFR 2.8, 2.9; p. 3). The previous visiting team noted that the Summary of Faculty Responsibilities in the TMS Faculty Handbook did not mention scholarship as such, nor was it mentioned in the qualifications for rank. TMS does not offer tenure. Since that visit, the expectation of scholarship has been given additional emphasis by adding a new section to the Faculty Handbook on “Professional and Scholarly Activities to be considered in Promotion Decisions,” and a heading of “Scholarship” to the index. The Special Visit Report catalogs ways in which Seminary faculty members regularly engage in scholarship, and describes support provided to encourage scholarship and publication. It is too early to judge the

effectiveness of these steps, given the gestation period of serious scholarship. Three-quarters of the full-time faculty have had work published since the 2009 visit.

Another important step toward increasing faculty commitment to scholarship is in hiring of new faculty with clear potential as scholars. The faculty is small and stable, so the number of hiring opportunities has been few, but additional opportunities are expected over the next few years. Two of the three most recent hires had published before they were hired to the regular faculty, which may be an indicator of likelihood of continued scholarly productivity.

The Seminary continues to depend heavily on its own journal, *The Master's Seminary Journal (MSJ)*, as the vehicle for publication of faculty scholarship persists. In the dozen years 2000 through 2011, 80% of the sixty journal articles published by the faculty were in *MSJ* and 95% of the 263 book reviews published were in *MSJ*. According to TMS faculty, the review process for the *MSJ* is such that some highly productive scholars on the faculty reported having their submissions rejected.

The Special Visit Report did not address the Commission's concern about this concentration of faculty publication and the self-referential nature of this scholarship. In fact, faculty members are particularly encouraged to participate in the annual Seminary lecture series, which is the primary source for papers for the fall issue of the journal. In discussion with the Team, TMS leadership and faculty members with a strong commitment to scholarship said that they see these policies as enabling the scholarly productivity of more faculty members and facilitating the transition to a culture in which other outlets for scholarship are the norm. They affirmed the importance of making the transition to more external, peer-reviewed publications and had some

creative ideas about how senior scholars can model behaviors for other faculty and encourage newer faculty members. In short, visible progress is small, but a way forward has been identified.

The Team also noted that, while the faculty as a whole includes an appropriate mix of sources of doctorates, the three most recent hires received their doctoral training at TMS. While each of the recent appointments may be excellent ones, the pattern raises again the issue of intellectual insularity and academic credibility. The Seminary would be wise to cast its net widely in recruiting new faculty, consistent with its doctrinal commitments, to ensure the intellectual diversity appropriate to an institution of higher education. (CFR 3.2)

## **B. Assessment and Program Review**

The 2009 Commission Action Letter, while affirming the progress in developing some learning outcomes and a data management system, identified a serious lack of familiarity “with the concepts of assessment and with the role that assessment plays in ensuring student achievement and supporting program and institutional improvement (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 4.4)” (p.2). This foundational problem led to the lack of a credible process for the “assessment of student learning and improvement of program review, which includes external reviewers and evidence of achievement of program learning outcomes” (p.2). As a result the Commission found that TMS did not meet the expectations of Standard 2.

In response, the Special Visit Report provides extensive documentation on the engagement of TMS faculty and administration in addressing these deficiencies (*The Master’s Seminary Special Visit Report, p. 11-43 and Attachments III.A. – 1-21*). Beginning with the appointment of a Director of Academic Assessment, TMS committed to a thorough program of training in support of assessment. The new Director of Academic Assessment attended the first WASC Assessment

Leadership Academy. This was followed by a series of workshops between 2009 and 2011 which included the faculty and administrators. TMS also established a repository of reference materials on assessment and created an *Annual Program-Level Assessment Report*, adapted from the model developed by *Phillips Graduate Institute* and recommended by Dr. Amy Driscoll in her consultations with TMS (*The Master's Seminary Special Visit Report*, p. 15-16, 32).

The task for the Team was to verify the extent of development and implementation of a robust system of learning assessment and effective program review, and, in particular, the breadth of faculty ownership in the process and the collection, analysis, and use of the findings toward the end of educational effectiveness as stated in CFRs 2.1-2.7, and 2.10. The Team recognized that, due to the institutional learning curve and need for an adequate and appropriate implementation period, there would not be sufficient data to evaluate a complete program review cycle. However, TMS provided sufficient evidence from their data collection and assessment process for the Team to determine that the system so clearly outlined in the Special Visit Report was in fact operative. Student Learning Outcomes, Divisional Learning Outcomes, and Program Learning Outcomes were developed for all courses and programs in the curriculum. Assessment rubrics were developed using evaluative criteria appropriate to each program, subject area, and course. At present the data collection and accessibility is greatly improved by the *Assessment Information Management System* developed by TMS.

An area of particular strength is the level of faculty involvement in the process of assessing student learning. In line with the very specific focus on the preparation of pastors for the ministries of churches, the faculty reviews the progress of every student, every semester as part of their candidacy program. This established review process, which focuses on the curricular and co-curricular elements of the programs, was expanded to include a review of student

portfolios. At the divisional level, the faculty has implemented a regular review of syllabi and course content to ensure both coverage of the discipline and the assurance of quality within the courses and programs. One more significant development is the use of random assessment of papers at the divisional level to assess the effectiveness of the grading rubrics and the level of student learning at the course and program level. Finally, capstone courses were established for each division to address the divisional and program learning outcomes.

An area of on-going concern for TMS is to develop benchmarks for assessing the degree programs in collaboration with other institutions. There are attempts underway to find other seminaries in Southern California that would participate in providing an external audit to the program. The Team encourages TMS in this approach with a view to having it fully implemented as part of their commitment to educational effectiveness.

The Team was impressed by the level of commitment of the faculty and administration to evidence-based assessment of learning outcomes in meeting WASC Standard 2. By establishing the *Annual Program-Level Assessment Report*, TMS has created a systemic culture of evidence capable of sustaining their commitment to educational effectiveness. Because implementation of these policies is recent, the program review cycles are not complete.

### **C. Strategic Planning**

The WASC Commission Action Letter identifies both scope and use of data as areas for review under “Strategic Planning.” The Team found that strategic planning has matured since the 2009 visit and an area in which considerable progress appears to have been made, as the Plan is more detailed than what was available on earlier visits. The “Strategic Plan 2012-2016,” drafted under the direction of the dean of the Seminary, now uses five-year plans with annual

review and is organized around the WASC Core Commitments of Capacity and Educational Effectiveness. The plan includes general descriptions of internal and external threats, and contingency plans for major emergencies: drops in enrollment, revenue, or endowment; unexpected faculty departure, or earthquake/fire (*TMS Special Visit Report* pp. 64-70). Strategic initiatives, both in Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, include responsible parties, time frames, connections to budget, and identification of potential evidence.

Although there is more coherence and cohesion among the plan elements and efforts to use student data, as the planning process is refined, attention should be given to incorporating assessment and program review data (CFR 4.4). The planning process will also benefit from greater inclusion of the voices of faculty, alumni, students, the Board and other constituencies, consistent with CFR 4.1. Involvement of the Board of Trustees in the planning process has been minimal and there were no clear answers about the role of the Board in holding TMS accountable for implementation.

Finally, the Team found the Strategic Plan to be largely operational, with a considerable emphasis on contingencies should budget targets prove unattainable. These “potential major emergencies” are important to consider; however, TMS might be better served by also including data external to the institution in determining future priorities. Evidence such as an environmental scan, benchmarking student performance against peers, when doing so becomes feasible, and aligning program goals with high impact educational practices are all ways that TMS might use data to strengthen its planning process and build its credibility as an academic institution. Given the lack of external evidence, the soundness of the Strategic Plan is difficult to assess.

#### **D. Academic Engagement with Women’s Experiences and Spiritual Perspectives**

In its 2009 letter, the Commission points to its “expectations for broadened academic engagement with women’s experiences and spiritual perspectives within the Seminary curricula” (p. 4). The TMS Report is candid about the difficulty this issue poses for them, as they try to be responsive to the concerns raised by WASC while remaining true to their doctrinal position that pastors and trainers of pastors are roles that can be filled only by men. The report also recognizes that the issue is two-fold: hearing both “the personal needs/interests of women in the pastoral context ... and the thoughts of women scholastically” (*The Master’s Seminary Special Visit Report, p. 80-81*).

The Special Visit Report describes a number of ways in which TMS has responded to the need for women’s perspectives with initiatives in curriculum, library collection and faculty development. Curriculum initiatives have been focused at the M.Div. level, since students in the other degree programs have either completed the M.Div. or have pastoral experience. The Special Visit Report lists eight required M.Div. courses, and additional elective opportunities at the M.Div. and Th.M. levels, that “include discussion of women’s issues” in class and/or opportunities to interact with them in an internship/field education setting, such as a pastor’s home or local church. None of the six internship or field education courses had clearly identified learning goals or course components addressing women’s perspectives, though students and faculty both said exposure is there. The generality of the SLOs in the syllabi for these courses and the absence of assessment strategies in this area made it difficult for an external observer to know what knowledge or skills are actually included. Student’s wives are encouraged to attend and participate in a required course on “The Pastor’s Home,” and faculty couples are part of the instructional resources in the course. The only course listed that is primarily academic, as opposed to pastoral, is a theology course which includes the study of scriptural passages that deal

with gender. As a result of the WASC letter, the instructor has added an assignment in which the students must write an article for a magazine targeted for men and another article for a magazine targeted for women on the same scripture. Texts and reading lists for the required courses include only a few women authors.

Among elective courses, two on pastoral counseling provide substantial exposure to women's issues and a theology course on New Testament gender passages requires students to include in their reading at least ten articles by feminist evangelical authors.

TMS has identified more than 2000 volumes in its library dealing with women's issues. In addition, the library subscribes to five journals dealing theologically with women's issues specifically. No data on usage of these resources is available, but a scan of bibliographies in ThD dissertations found some usage of women authors.

Since the 2009 visit, TMS has initiated a series of workshops for the faculty led by women members of the Bible Department of The Master's College. (Women are not excluded from The Master's College faculty, since it is not training pastors.) One workshop was on theological perspectives on the biblical roles of women, and another was on theological training for ministering to women, including issues women face in the church and at different stages of life, and recommendations for engaging with women's perspectives in the curriculum. Although the faculty participants and the women who led the workshops told Team members that the sessions were productive and valuable, none of the faculty could identify any curricular or other changes made as a result of the workshops. A third workshop took place recently on "The Needs of Married Women and Mothers," and a fourth workshop is scheduled. TMS identifies these workshops, as well as those in Educational Assessment taught by Dr. Amy Driscoll, as part of its

effort to ensure that faculty experience the voice and leadership of women given that all four sessions were taught by women.

The Commission Action Letter raises the topic of “scholarly and evidence-based perspectives on women’s experiences” under the heading of “Curriculum Breadth,” citing CFRs 1.5, 2.1, and 2.2 (p. 3). TMS has approached this largely as introducing “women’s issues” as topics in course syllabi and as training in the appropriate roles of women as wives and mothers. The Team appreciates these efforts while also calling attention to the deeper problem of academic engagement with women’s perspectives necessary for TMS to be an academically credible, doctoral-granting institution that purports to prepare its graduates to meet the needs of diverse congregations. The 1994 WASC Diversity Statement is instructive in its articulation of Educational Quality and Diversity relative to student learning: “A quality education helps students acquire the habit of critical analyses of data, assumptions and argument. It is therefore of educational value when students, through classroom instruction, study, and interaction with students and faculty of diverse backgrounds, learn to evaluate differing points of view.” Perhaps even more fundamentally, the WASC Diversity Statement speaks to the importance of preparing students for post-graduate responsibilities by enabling them “to grasp and respond constructively to persons, ideas, situations and challenges novel to his or her experience” (p. 3). Although male students cannot be expected to study alongside female seminarians at TMS, intentional interaction with scholarly and professional women should be part of the TMS education of its students. Such interaction would promote “appropriate linkages among scholarship, teaching, student learning and service” (CFR 2.9).

Overall, the Team notes that progress has been made in incorporating discussion of social and relational problems in the curriculum as they relate to women, and some attention has been

given to women as scholarly contributors. However, understanding of the “unique needs of women” continues to occur in a pastoral context and based on women’s roles in relation to men, most often as wives, prospective wives, or mothers. The inclusion of women’s perspectives in the curriculum is neither systematic nor integrated, and learning goals appropriate for graduate-level education have yet to be developed or assessed (CFR 1.5, 2.2b and 2.4).

### **SECTION 3. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Team was generally impressed with the accomplishments of TMS since 2009 and found ample evidence that TMS had responded seriously and diligently to the comments and recommendations of the WASC Commission Action Letter. The most important, single element of change identified by the Team was the high degree of community investment in addressing the concerns raised by the WASC Commission and likelihood that progress will continue. The Team also commends TMS on the impressive progress they have made toward implementation of a well-functioning process of assessment of student learning and program review. The Seminary is encouraged to continue to build on that progress.

#### **Recommendations**

The Team encourages TMS to continue its pursuit of academic credibility and meeting the expectations of WASC as representative of the academic community. Specifically:

1. TMS should ensure that the inclusion of women’s perspectives in the curriculum is systematic and integrated, with well-defined learning objectives that will enable assessment of learning (CFRs 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 2.9).

2. TMS should enact policies and/or rewards that will encourage faculty members to submit their scholarship for review and publication in scholarly journals outside *MJS* (CFRs 3.1, 3.4, 4.6).