

Report on United Theological Seminary's Hybrid Course of Study Program February 2016

At the request of the leadership of the Methodist Theological School of Ohio (MTSO) and United Theological Seminary (UTS), and the Directors of the Regional Course of Study Schools, the Division of Ordained Ministry (DOM) has reviewed the Hybrid Course of Study (COS) program currently offered by United Theological Seminary in order to make a determination of its status. This review has taken into account the history of the program, conversation with the leadership of both seminaries, the Course of Study needs of the North Central Jurisdiction and the current trends affecting the Course of Study program.

Initial Grant Application and Grant Timeline

In 2008, United Theological Seminary presented the Division of Ordained Ministry with a grant application for the "Course of Study School of Ohio's Blended Course Offering Pilot Program." The application stated that this pilot program was to last two years, and although it was to be offered by UTS, it was a part of the Course of Study of Ohio (COSSO), and thus was designed in partnership and "full consultation" with the deans and presidents of MTSO and UTS as well as the then director of the COSSO. The amount requested was \$59,940 over a two-year period. Per the application, the goal of the pilot program was as follows:

"The two-year pilot program seeks to offer a new model of COS instruction that will achieve the following goals:

1. An educational experience that is equal to or better than the current two-weekend residential format.
2. And educational experience that is attuned to the current best-practices in Online student learning."

The Assistant General Secretary, Bob Kohler, approved the grant request for 2009-2010. Over that period of time, the grant was distributed in six disbursements, the final one in fall 2010. UTS provided a progress report for each disbursement; these reports reported the number of courses offered and students enrolled, and anecdotal positive feedback from instructors and students. It was GBHEM's position, and still is, that there is only one COS regional school in Ohio, and that is the COSSO. The COSSO worked to coordinate schedules, and reported the grades received from UTS.

Post-Grant Disbursement

Following the final grant disbursement in fall of 2010, UTS provided a report for the GBHEM Board of Directors meeting in September 2010. Neither MTSO nor the COSSO were involved with this report, nor was an independent evaluation done of the program. I can find no evidence that the DOM asked for a jointly-prepared final report or a final evaluation, or facilitated an opportunity for UTS to share any of the "best practices" that had been learned. This was probably due to the changes in the Assistant General Secretary position. There was also no determination regarding the status of the program going forward: now that the "pilot" program had concluded, what was to be done next? Receiving no direction from GBHEM, the UTS Hybrid program simply continued offering courses as it had been.

Between 2010 and 2014, there were several instances in which Wendy Deichmann, then president of UTS, approached GBHEM staff (Rena Yocom and Gwen Purushotham) requesting that the program offered by UTS be given the same treatment as a Regional COS School, such as the UTS director attending the Council of Directors and UTS receiving MEF funds. Rena reiterated that from the

perspective of GBHEM there is only one Regional COS school in Ohio, and that UTS needed to work directly with MTSO. Rena also explained that to add UTS to the MEF distribution for COS would, by default, declare UTS as a Regional School. Rena did discover that MTSO had been receiving credit for UTS' enrollment in their distribution. A conference call was held with the COSSO Director, Joon-Sik Park, and the Dean of MTSO, Jay Rundell. During this call, they agreed that GBHEM needed to call a meeting with the appropriate representatives from both schools to clarify the relationship between the two programs and schools. It was not possible for GBHEM staff to arrange this meeting before Rena retired.

In the August 2014 meeting of the Council of COS Regional Directors, Joon-Sik Park asked for clarification regarding the status of the UTS Hybrid COS program. There was unanimous support to maintain one Regional School in Ohio. Closing the UTS site was also discussed. Ultimately, the directors voted to ask the DOM to determine the status of the UTS hybrid program in relation to the COSSO: was it an extension or satellite? (Or something else?)

With Rena's retirement, no further action was taken by GBHEM until the fall of 2015, when Victoria Rebeck (in consultation with Myron Wingfield) met with representatives from both MTSO (Jay Rundell and Joon-Sik Park) and UTS (Wendy Deichmann and Mark Abbott.) From this meeting it became clear that UTS wishes its COS program to be treated and funded as an equal to the COSSO program. It also became clear that MTSO does not wish to add any satellite or extension schools to the COSSO.

Other Considerations

GBHEM and the DOM acknowledge that it erred in allowing the UTS COS Program, which was a pilot, to continue without clarification of what was to happen at the end of the pilot and whether or not the program would be eligible to continue. This has allowed confusion and frustration to build around the program. We have now done the work necessary to make such a determination. In addition to understanding the history and goals of the program, we have taken into account COS policies and the current needs of the Course of Study program in the North Central Jurisdiction and as a whole.

If at any point the COSSO--or any other Regional COS School-- desires to add a satellite or extension location, they must present a proposal to the Council of Directors and to the DOM for approval. This process was true in 2010 and is today. If the COSSO were to bring a proposal today to the Council of Directors for the UTS Hybrid COS program to be a satellite or extension, it would almost certainly be rejected. This would be for several reasons:

- There has not been an evaluation done as to the quality and effectiveness of the hybrid courses offered through UTS. The syllabi and faculty have not been reviewed on a site visit, nor are they regularly reviewed by the director of the COSSO. In addition, currently UTS does not adhere to COS policies (such as the requirement of pre-work and allowing only part-time pastors to enroll.)
- Although UTS publicizes its program as the only hybrid COS, that is not in fact true. It is the only seminary that offers *solely* hybrid COS courses, but many of the other Regional Schools currently offer hybrid COS courses, and the majority are in the process of developing more. Development of hybrid courses at these schools has proceeded more slowly because of the costs of developing hybrid courses—costs which these schools must bear themselves, as they did not receive grant money from GBHEM for hybrid course development.
- In 2014, the DOM did an extensive review of COS numbers which included tracking enrollment trends, COS Course offerings in each region, LLP numbers in each conference and jurisdiction, as well as other factors. The study compared the number of LLPs in the North Central Jurisdiction with the number of COS courses offered through its Regional COS and Extension Schools and

found that the North Central Jurisdiction is quite over-saturated with COS courses. There are simply more courses being offered than there are LLPs to take them. Thus, there is no need for another satellite or extension school in that region.

- The Hybrid COS program at UTS does, in fact, draw students away from other established COS programs in the region and even nationally. The vast majority of UTS COS students come from the surrounding conferences. This draws students away from established programs.

Conclusion: Action Steps

Based upon this thorough review, we conclude that the Hybrid COS at UTS was not properly evaluated and not properly continued, and that the initial goals of that program can be met through the Regional COS schools and their satellites and extensions. We acknowledge the amount of effort and time that UTS has put into its hybrid COS offerings, and appreciate that it has provided theological education for many licensed local pastors. However, the Pilot Program at UTS was not understood as a permanent program, but as an experiment. The pilot project has ended, and the Division of Ordained Ministry, the Regional Council of Directors and the COSSO do not find sufficient reason or need to allow the program to continue. We therefore conclude:

- The Hybrid COS Program offered at United Theological Seminary be discontinued by December 31, 2016. Courses taken in this format through UTS after this time will not receive COS credit.

We acknowledge that there is an increasing demand for COS courses (as well as other educational and training programs) to be offered in the hybrid format. These hybrid courses meet the needs of the growing number of part-time local pastors and pastors with particular scheduling needs. The United Methodist Seminaries and Regional Course of Study Schools are working to meet this demand. We therefore conclude:

- That the Regional Schools continue to develop their hybrid courses to meet the growing demand and need for such courses.
- That this development should involve consultation with the staff of the DOM, the Regional COS Directors, and representatives from Annual Conferences to determine the most effective distribution of course offerings.
- That the stipend disbursement to the Regional Schools should be revised to encourage the ongoing development of hybrid courses and other innovative formats for the theological education of local pastors.

Respectfully submitted,

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