

# ACHIEVING ACCREDITATION

A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE FOR HIGHER ED  
ADMINISTRATORS

## Missionary Training

*Failure.* I was so depressed that I did not want to get out of bed.

My former ministry among Cambodian refugees had been successful. Seeing a greater need in a place where there were more refugees, I packed up my Toyota & moved to San Diego. For six months, I taught home Bible studies in a half dozen locations. On opening day, 143 people came to the church service. Over the next two & a half years the number dwindled to about 20. “Why had I decided to move to California!?!”

There were several reasons for my failure. One of the reasons is that although I had received a “good” theological education, this education had not equipped me for the ministry challenges I faced. A few years later I became academic dean of a Korean Bible College in the L.A. area. I also began a Ph.D. degree that focused on how to train missionaries more effectively. At this point my church-planting failure served me well.

### Academic Ministry Training

As I reflected on my church-planting experience, I realized that my theological education lacked many crucial learning objectives, & that the focus of the curriculum was in wrong places.

Furthermore, an uncritical adoption of traditional academic models means that theological education tends to lack effective methods for achieving the most important types of learning objectives.



I was not the only person that I observed to have been inadequately equipped. Neither am I the only one to have noticed that something is wrong with how schools equip people for ministry. Significant research has shown “education to have seemingly little clear impact on ministry competence” (Kayser 1994:446-447). Do schools mention that lack of impact in their PR literature? “Many are asking

of qualifications for ... ministry. (Savage 1972: 28).

Inadequacy of traditional academic training as the qualification for ministry arises from what we teach (i.e. learning objectives), & how we teach it (i.e. instructional methods). “Most formal theological training institutions are too inflexible to be able to provide the methodologies or the contexts to achieve all of the desired ministry outcomes” (Lewis 1998:3).

For such reasons, some have been cynical concerning the ability of traditional schools to be effective at training missionaries. A significant voice has even suggested that schools concentrate on training missiologists, while leaving the training of missionaries to less formal training programs. After writing a 500-page dissertation on *Learning Objectives & Instructional Methods for Competency-Based*

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today whether [a theological] degree is really a valid statement

*Missionary Training*, I have come to believe that schools can do

much to become more effective in training missionaries.

### **Missionary Learning Objectives: What Should We Teach?**

“Many seminaries have never undertaken an examination of the total needs of the ministry & thus established a comprehensive statement of objectives. They have been satisfied that a certain quorum of knowledge, adequately digested, will give the graduate a degree which in turn will give him status in the church community as a pastor, teacher, or evangelist (Savage 1972: 28-29).

**Significant finding: Essential competencies were missing from traditional missions degrees.**

To effectively train missionaries, we must be sure to examine the *total needs of missionary work* & thus establish a *comprehensive* statement of objectives. Jonathan Lewis, associate director of the Missions Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance, led such a comprehensive study among missionaries from Latin America. This example was followed by research projects in Africa, India, & East Asia. Building on this research, I sent 1,356 competency surveys to mission agencies & mission training programs around the world.

From my research, I developed a list of 104 competencies. These competencies can be used as a fairly comprehensive statement of learning objectives for missionary training. The competencies were organized into 15 training areas (see Table 1). How many of these training areas are included in your

school’s missions curriculum? Among the significant findings of my research was this: That essential competencies were missing from traditional missions degrees. While Training Areas 1 & 7-15 might be found in a typical missions curriculum (see TABLE 1), Training Areas 2-6 tend to receive little attention. It seems we major on ministry formation, and minor on character formation.

**TABLE 1: TRAINING AREAS**

1. Spirituality
2. Ethics & Character
3. Interpersonal Skills
4. Professional Relationship Management
5. Wholeness (Emotional & Psychological)
6. Practical Resources
7. Biblical/Theological Knowledge
8. Cultural Adaptation
9. Language Acquisition Skills
10. Contextualization
11. Communication (i.e. Preaching, Teaching, Creative Expression)
12. Discipleship
13. Cross-Cultural Leadership
14. Management/Administration
15. Outreach & Strategy

Even training areas that *are* included in a curriculum may not have proper focus. For example, training area 1 (i.e. Spirituality) may receive less attention than should be expected. In my M.Div. degree, I did have one class in spiritual formation. However, I had 6 classes in Biblical languages. My research does *not* confirm that Biblical languages are more important to ministry success than spiritual formation!

To better understand a comprehensive statement of learning objectives for

missionaries, I classified all competencies into at least one of the following three areas:

- Knowledge & Understanding
- Ministry Skills
- Character Qualities

This classification of objectives provides another clue to why missions programs are less effective than we desire. In academia, we major on Knowledge & Understanding, pay some attention to Ministry Skills, & have too small an impact on Character Qualities. The lists of qualifications for overseers (i.e. 1 Timothy 3:1 ff & Titus 1:7 ff) suggest the opposite sequence of priorities (i.e. Character Qualities, Ministry Skills, & Knowledge).

### **Instructional Methods: Beyond Lecture & Reading**

The traditional academic model is exceptional at imparting knowledge & understanding. To improve our ability to impart ministry skills & character qualities, instructors must do more than deliver lectures & assign homework.

Ethics are a standard part of a theological curriculum. But, a class in understanding an ethical system is merely an academic exercise. Building integrity & Christ-likeness would be the essential ministry competence that should be targeted. To impart character qualities, traditional academic methods are not sufficient.

Jesus was not a distant lecturer. He chose the 12 *to be with Him*. Jesus did not give the homework assignments expected in academia. Instead of research papers, He

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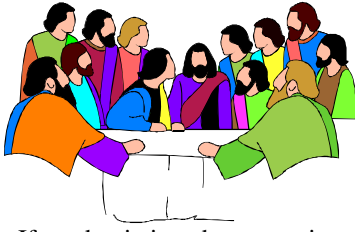
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gave ministry assignments. Instead of working alone at their desks, the disciples worked with each other, & even with their mentor. In that close relationship & side-by-side ministry, Jesus imparted the character & skills necessary for transforming average students into world-impacting giants.



If academia is to better equip students, more must be done than assign lectures, textbooks, research papers, & exams. Exceptional methods of imparting character qualities include use of relationships (e.g. students mentored by missionaries, being in a missions fellowship with mission-minded peers, spending significant time ministering or socializing with faculty), spiritual development (e.g. general spiritual formation as well as facilitating regular prayer for missions, studying what the Bible teaches about missions), & students promoting the values that they need to internalize (e.g. instead of spoon-feeding students a theology of missions, ask them to write & present devotions on mission topics). Exceptional methods of imparting ministry skills include simulations (e.g. games, role play), active grappling (e.g. case studies evaluating others), experiential learning activities (e.g. field trips, homestays in an ethnic community, regular attendance in an ethnic church, cross cultural housing or roommate

assignments), & work experience (e.g. field education, internships, co-oping – especially under a good mentor).

The AABC requires that students engage in 1 hour of ministry per week. This “Christian Service” requirement must be coordinated with the majors of juniors & seniors (i.e. missions majors would be expected to somehow serve missions). This is a good start, but frankly, 1 hour per week is not adequate for significant development of ministry skills.

I have been pleased to see how some of my clients have been implementing a field-education component into their mission training programs. In addition to the regular Christian Service requirement, World Mission University is preparing to require mission trips of every missions student. The KPCA Presbyterian Theological seminary requires 2 hours per week of student ministry for 4 semesters, & then 8 hours per week of field work for 2 semesters. All KPCA students must go on 1 mission trip, & missions students may go on 2. Joshua Springs Bible College (JSBC) requires students to engage in 11 hours per week of ministry. Also impressive is that JSBC requires faculty members to participate alongside students in their student ministry assignments.



To be effective in equipping missionaries, theological schools must be certain they have a

comprehensive set of learning objectives that reflect the true needs of missionary work. Merely copying what is done in other schools is sure to lead to important gaps in the curriculum. Schools must also widen the variety of instructional methods used so that ministry skills & character qualities will be imparted.

### Sample Curricula

Although I pride myself on being able to develop simple solutions to complex accreditation problems, I have some misgivings at giving too much of a paint-by-numbers answer to what should be in a missions curriculum. However, as an overly simplistic start, I will suggest courses for a 4-course concentration, a 7-course minor, & a 10-course major.

My assumption is that several training areas are addressed in the general studies requirement (e.g. interpersonal skills), or other areas of the curriculum (e.g. Biblical/Theological studies, evangelism, homiletics, etc.). Thus, I am only suggesting courses that relate to cross-cultural ministry. I am also assuming the curriculum has been designed to include significant field work, simulations, relationships, etc.

If a student could only take 4 to 7 missions classes before leaving for the field, I suggest the following:

#### TABLE 2: 12-CREDIT CONCENTRATION

- 1) Survey of missions history, theology, strategy, & anthropology (e.g. Perspectives on the World Mission Movement)
- 2) Principles of Language Acquisition
- 3) Cultural Adaptation &

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Contextualization (e.g. missionary anthropology, adapting to & ministering in other cultures)  
4) Cross-Cultural Church Planting

**TABLE 3: ADDITIONS FOR  
21-CREDIT MINOR**

- 1) Discipleship & Leadership Training
- 2) Church Growth (or Outreach Strategies)
- 3) Missionary Biographies: A study of Character Qualities & Strategies

If a student could take 10 classes before leaving for the field, I would suggest adding 3 missions electives to the major. Options abound. Consider:

- 1) Missionary Support (i.e. Support-Raising & Tent-Making)
- 2) Additional training in spiritual resources & spiritual warfare
- 3) Creative Communication & the Arts (including use of indigenous art forms)
- 4) Theology of Missions
- 5) Urban Missions
- 6) Understanding & Reaching \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g. Latin Americans, Japanese, Muslims)

To implement any of these programs effectively, it is essential to make sure missing training areas are covered in other parts of the curriculum (i.e. see training areas 1-6 & 14 in TABLE 1).

Do we graduate students without knowing whether they are competent to engage in the ministries for which we trained them? Do we even give degrees to students whom we know are not ready for leadership positions in churches? Do we send students to the mission field with the false assumption that they are ready to go? We are stewards of our

student's ministry ambitions. We tell them we will equip them for ministry. Do we really equip them? Are we guilty of false advertising?

***The Next Workshop***

Our next workshop will be October 5, 2004. We are considering topics related to accreditation, student recruitment, & fundraising. What would you be interested in? Please e-mail [dagron@onebox.com](mailto:dagron@onebox.com) with your suggestions.

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