

“On-Time Grants for On-Time Technology in the Classroom”

Richard N. Stewart

Associate Professor, Communications and Parish Administration

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

Director of Distance Education – Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries

Philadelphia, PA 19119

215-248-6378

rstewart@ltsp.edu

Abstract

In a review of the technological developments at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia and the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries, attention will be given to the four grants received by the Seminary which has facilitated the use of technology in the classroom. In almost each instance the institution had done sufficient pre-work to be in a position to receive the grant as an on-time facilitation of work that had been expected to take place. The grants moved the process at an accelerated pace.

The question can be raised as to whether the grants were targeted to facilitate the growth in the use of technology, or whether there was a chance relationship between the desires of the institution and the goals of the granting agency. The presentation will look at the motives, the process, and the results of our grants and their applications.

Background

The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia is one of eight seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America whose mission is to teach and prepare professional and lay leaders for the church. The church has divided these eight seminaries into three clusters: The Western Mission Cluster [Pacific Lutheran Seminary - Berkeley, and Luther Seminary - St. Paul]; Covenant Cluster [Wartburg Seminary - Dubuque, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Trinity Lutheran Seminary – Columbus]; and the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries [Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary – Columbia, SC, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, and Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia].

In 1994, I made a presentation at ASCUE, which highlighted the historical process by which the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia [LTSP] became computerized. The struggle of staff to keep up with a growing list of contributors led to the first purchase of a computer for the development office in 1984. The first grant came in 1985 from the Prosser Foundation to subsidize the purchase of computers by faculty. The grants provided \$500 for each faculty computer. You might remember them, IBM based computers with dual floppy 5-1/4 in drives, and of course monochrome monitors. With occasional institutional purchases for the faculty secretary and the admissions office, computerization seemed to stand still until 1989.

I wish that I could say that my arrival in 1989 was the cause for the change, but it really revolved around a gift received at the seminary from employees of the IBM Corporation. The seminary benefited from a matching grant from the IBM Corporation. The grant offered a one to one match for desktop PC's or a four to one match for institutions seeking a mini-computer. LTSP

found itself trying to make a decision about the risk of committing to a system administrator for a networked environment with a mini-computer or number of stand alone personal computers. I was way to new to risk placing the Administrators responsibility in my hands.

We knew that we were not operating in a solo vacuum. The eight other seminaries in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America were facing similar challenges for growth in technology, but few new resources to meet this growing need. Within the first year I wrote a grant proposal to the Lutheran Brotherhood [now Thrivent] seeking support for a student oriented computer laboratory. I also had plans for continuing education for church secretaries and office administrators at this beginning stage of church computerization. I was informed that they did not fund computers. I did not know about a common piece of information in the grant seeking process; know what your benefactor does fund.

As the church was concerned about the growth and use of technology in its eight seminaries, they called together those of us who had been identified as the technological leaders on our campuses. We gathered each summer to look at church wide expectations and our capability to meet those expectations. At the same time the church was studying the whole field of theological education and the task force gave an early glimpse of their 1993 findings, which encouraged the seminaries to use distance learning to create a curriculum which would meet the first year of studies for incoming students. This goal had no funding attached.

In a public relations piece from one of the sister seminaries, I learned that one of the seminaries, close to the headquarters, had received a grant from the Lutheran Brotherhood [now Thrivent] for student computer laboratories. Upon writing to see if they had changed their criteria, I was informed that my proposal was overly ambitious and that I did not limit the use of the computers to seminary students on campus. I learn a second lesson in the grant seeking process, talk to your benefactor about your needs and their giving patterns.

Then in 1993, after some mutual conversations, our national church office and three seminaries in the Midwest purchased video conference equipment and began to talk about the possibility of offering mutual courses to their three campuses. It became very apparent that there was a major difference in the funds available for experimentation among our sister seminaries. Our president in a casual conversation with an alumnus spoke of the plight of LTSP being economically able to keep up with three of the other seminaries.

This particular alumnus had access to an endowment and the congregation had a mandate to assist with theological education, and they were interested in educational offerings for the members of their congregations. With a significant interest in our progress, the church granted the seminary \$500,000 to fund a video conference classroom and fund the staff needed to address this addition and to maintain the equipment. The congregation did this for two seminaries in Pennsylvania and kept a like amount for the congregation to build a studio in their building so that they might be an off-site educational facility. So in 1996 I was informed that I had access to start designing a high tech, videoconference classroom.

The challenge was to develop a learning curve on a new technology in the midst of completing the tasks already the responsibility of a solo part-time Information Technology staff member

[me]. Though the leadership of the seminary was a supportive and enthusiastic supporter, no one had previously had any experience in using the equipment for educational delivery or even being a student in a distance learning environment. It became very apparent that we needed to do some significant homework to make good use of this gift to the seminary.

Having watched one of sister seminaries be an early implementer, I learned that a grantor could be found to support the study of how an educational delivery system could and would be used. Once again in conversation with Lutheran Brotherhood [now Thrivent], I noted that the seminaries were not playing on a level playing field, when it came to the benevolent resources of LB. I wanted to know how they could help the seminaries of the east coast develop their own version of educational modeling to meet the expectations of the church and the needs of the people we are called to serve.

By 1999 we had generated significant interest to receive a \$50,000 grant to explore how technology would be used to deliver educational offerings to the Eastern Regions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This grant generated a gathering of 125 participants to share the educational needs for professional leaders already serving churches and it highlighted the educational needs of lay persons in the church who seemed to crave in-depth educational offerings that were not available in their congregations. The benefactor, Lutheran Brotherhood [now Thrivent], was present and participating in the conversations. On-line discussions were held in the following areas prior to the event, to facilitate the conversations for the face to face gathering.

1. Needs assessment - What are the educational needs of the churches and staff of the Regions?
2. Product development - What information is being called for by constituents and what information is being developed by current faculty?
3. Coordination/Governance Issues - Who manages such an endeavor?
4. Financial Concerns - What is needed to develop a Business Plan and Marketing Plan? What investment is needed by other partners?
5. Technological issues - What technologies will be used to deliver educational material? What technologies do we currently have at our disposal? What future needs might need to be developed?

“On Time Grants”

The seminary found that writing grants was not a gift that came with any of our position descriptions. My own experience had been hit and miss, and the time and energy expended could easily thwart any enthusiasm to do special activities if the funding was not forth coming. A grants writer seemed to be the solution, but little did we know how little she would write. The faculty image was that we would give the grants writer and idea, she would find a foundation, write a grant and we would sit back and reap the benefits. Natalie Hand came to the seminary staff with a background of being a foundation staff person. She refocused our attention to the details that had earlier been many of my stumbling blocks.

Ms Hand did identify foundations for us and lead us to potential grants which we might not have noticed. Yet the initial ideas had to be developed by the staff persons involved. We had to be

clear about our expectations and our reasons for approaching a foundation. We also had to be clear about why our project was a good fit for the stated criteria for funding by this grantor. It's at this point that Ms Hand really started to work for us and with us. As a person who is not familiar with our personal research or special projects, she raised critical questions about our assumptions as we tended to write in the code of our disciplines. We had to be clear to an outsider who resided in our midst. She was an editor without mercy. Our clear passages of flowery prose came back with comments of being direct, concise, and to the point.

She also began to process our multiple ideas into corporate planning ideas that had broader institutional service and support. She kept various faculty and staff from overloading a foundation with multiple requests, or overloading multiple foundations with the same requests. Her advice of having a particular target began to show results.

I. The Lilly Endowment has had a major focus on religion with several competitive grants. In 1999 the Lilly Endowment Planning Grant of \$10,000 for "Informational Technology for Theological Teaching Project" was received. The writing of 9 drafts took six months, but the planning process involved a cross section of the faculty. The involvement of the early adopters could almost be guaranteed, but the inclusion of some of the resident skeptics in the planning process has had a dividend that has long term benefits. Our goal was to generate 60 per cent participation by our faculty at the end of the Lilly funding [we assumed that we would get the major grant of \$300,000]. As we near the end of the three year grant, we have 100 per cent participation by our current faculty.

II. In 2000, the Lilly Endowment awarded the seminary a \$300,000 grant for "Information Technology for Theological Teaching". The grant covered the cost of hiring support staff for educational technology and help desk. Faculty course development grants were offered for those interested in changing their pedagogical styles. Classrooms were updated with equipment and internet access. Though we only expected to experiment with wireless technology, we now find ourselves as a wireless campus. We have also made available for campus wide use the educational platform "Blackboard". For specialized uses we have access to SPSS software. Nearly every class has some form of technological enhancement.

III. Campus wide conversations about the use of technology obviously touched the Library. Our recently retired librarian had worked systematically for almost 2 decades to computerize our library records. As the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries began to look for ways that the three seminaries on the east coast could reduce the overall costs of maintaining needed catalogue offerings with resources that no longer could cover increasing costs, the cluster was able to secure in 2001 a grant from the Luce Foundation for "One Library in Three Locations". On July 1, 2002, the three libraries in Columbia South Carolina, Gettysburg, PA, and Philadelphia, PA, began operating with a common web based catalogue. While the information technology staffs were used as advisors, the bulk of the development fell to the library staffs. The current plan to use the mails and other couriers to deliver the single volume resources to the library desk where it has been requested has worked with few problems. The web based catalogue offers access to students and faculty from a wider variety of locations. We are still working on electronic resources and their access from outside the confines of the library.

IV. In 2002, Teagle Foundation awarded the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Theological Seminaries a grant for “Modeling a Seminary System in Multiple Locations”. The staff elements of this grant lay the foundation for a virtual portion of the administration of the three seminaries. Joint appointments are to take place in the following areas:

Dean of the Doctor of Ministry Program,

At present, the Doctor of Ministry Program is located and administered at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (LTSP) with students enrolled from all three schools. Students can take half of their courses plus do their project-thesis and have an advisory panel at any of the Cluster schools. The other half of their courses, plus two colloquia and candidacy papers must be done through LTSP. Administration is thus streamlined. At least 2 graduate courses per year are offered in a synchronous or asynchronous distance learning mode.

Director of the Diaconal Ministry Program,

In 1993 the ELCA established a new form of rostered ministry called Diaconal Ministry that involves two years of seminary preparation for a Master of Arts Degree. Diaconal ministers, like ordained ministers and associates in minister, are rostered with the ELCA, but their vocational focus is a serving ministry on the boundaries between Church and Society. At present, a Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation is located on and administered at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (LTSG) although it serves on behalf of the Eastern Cluster. The Director of the program is available to interpret diaconal ministry preparation for the whole church, and in consultation with the LTSG faculty, provide supervision for students enrolled in the M.A.M.S. program and for affiliate students as they progress through their academic programs at non-ELCA schools. Since this is a relatively new and unfamiliar roster, the interpretative task is particularly important.

To address the geographically dispersed pool of Diaconal Ministry Students, it is planned to put the seven core diaconal ministry courses on-line. This will allow Diaconal Ministry students from other schools and seminaries to fulfill requirements otherwise not accessible to them. Offering these courses in an asynchronous mode will extend the reach of theological education to those, whose work hours and geographic locations are incompatible with regular seminary course schedules.

Director of the Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta,

As part of a national Lutheran program, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (LTSS) and the Cluster have been supporting a special program for African American Lutheran students. The Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta (LTCA) is an extension of the eight seminaries of the ELCA and works with three Atlanta theological schools to offer courses in a diverse ecumenical environment and theological reflection on urban and cross-cultural issues. The three seminaries are Chandler School of Theology at Emory University, Columbia Theological Seminary, and the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) . Located on the ITC campus, the Lutheran Center in Atlanta provides an excellent, intentionally focused educational program for Lutheran seminarians, especially African-American candidates for ministry.

Director of Distance Education,

In November 1999 the Lutheran Brotherhood Foundation funded a conference for Lutheran institutions interested in distance education. The result has been that the Eastern Cluster has coordinated its efforts under the direction of a specialist in Distance Education at LTSP. To date most efforts have been focused on training faculty at the three Cluster seminaries in technologically enhanced education and in developing a network of providers and potential users of distance education in the Eastern United States.

By intentionally gathering the technology staff of the three seminaries, it will be possible to see how efforts could or should be coordinated. Collaborative building of the technological resources within our Cluster will have special benefits as we move toward One Library Under Three Roofs and other efforts of resource sharing. Any collaboration needs intentional leadership.

Joint Faculty Appointment in Bible and Homiletics,

Currently, both the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (LTSG) and The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (LTSP) are short one faculty member in the areas of Bible and Homiletics. In both cases, this has occurred because faculty members were offered prestigious positions at university divinity schools. Due to budget reasons, these positions have not been filled.

This is planned to be a model for Joint Faculty Appointments. This concept of shared faculty would further strengthen the development of the ECLS and lay the foundation for the concept of one seminary system in multiple locations with a common faculty. This appointment will change the autonomous culture of the three seminaries and will fundamentally change how faculty appointments are made. In other areas that are underserved by faculty, future appointments will be collaborative.

Director for Continuing Education and Lay Theological Education.

In response to the growing demand for localized theological education at great distances from the three seminaries but where there are cohorts of desperately needed candidates for ministry, the Eastern Cluster intends to establish a system of centers throughout the East to meet that need. In addition to our distance learning capabilities (including compressed video), it is our goal to devise a plan to provide both asynchronous and synchronous theological education for the proposed centers in large stable congregations in Miami, Charlotte, Atlanta, Washington D.C., Baltimore, Altoona, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Rochester, Schenectady, Allentown, New York City, New Haven, and Boston. These centers would support candidates in the Master of Divinity program, graduate programs, and participants in lay theological education. To build actual centers in these cities would be financially prohibitive. However, making use of technology, placing faculty in strategic locations, and utilizing the vast infrastructure of the congregations that support our three seminaries will provide education in a way that effectively manages both the costs and the time restraints of faculty and students.

In addition to the establishment of these centers, efforts will be made to utilize the seminaries, faculties, and other persons to plan and hold annual series of continuing education events sponsored by the Cluster. Events will be held on and off the campuses. Coordina-

tion with other institutions and networking will be encouraged, i.e., with colleges, clusters of congregations, teaching congregations, deployed education centers, synods, etc. Continuing education will include face-to-face events, computer-assisted education, and video-conferencing. All efforts will be made to have the programs be self-supporting, at least regarding programmatic costs.

Each of these positions is designed to create further opportunities for the use of technology in the teaching of theology and to be facilitated by the technology that the three seminaries have in place. In many ways the director distance learning also functions as the technology coordinator for the ECLS.

“On Time Technology”

Each time a grant has been put into place, we have structured a common committee to manage each of these grants. Members are taken from a larger pool of faculty and staff called the “Committee for Electronic Educational Development” [CEED]. The responsibility of this planning committee, CEED, is to raise the eternal question of “what next”. While all the participants are concerned about the implementation of specific grant proposals, [at the current time we have three technology related grants functioning simultaneously], the CEED committee is raising the questions about what needs to be done next to keep the campus at a level technological plane.

New Building - The Lutheran Theological Seminary has never had a specific building for classrooms. Space has been carved out of the chapel, the administration building, the basements of dormitories, and the library. We are currently at the design development stage for this building, which we have already declared to be a technologically rich educational environment. We budgeted \$15,000 to cover the initial expenses of a technology consultant to work with the architect and the project manager. The goal of the CEED committee is to not have one change order related to technology, and still build a building that has the flexibility to grow into a technologically rich future.

Laptop Campus – We struggle almost each month in our meetings about the wisdom of requiring laptop computers for our students. We have researched the implications for accessibility of technology in diverse populations. We have almost come to the conclusion that our part-time minority students may be more computer savvy than some of our more youthful day time students. Yet we worry about the implications of a firm final decision for our part-time students and the occasional auditing student.

Formation for the Church – The question is continually raised by the accrediting agency of the Association of Theological Schools about how formation takes place on the campus of the seminaries, and how formation is to be a part of any educational offering that uses distance learning. The LTSP’s written definition revolves around the chapel service and the life on campus. Any students at distance from the seminary miss out on the primary area identified for achieving the formation function.

What other visions are there? LTSP is currently looking for another visionary to look with us into our future to see not only where technology will lead us, but how will we use the technolo-

gies that may emerge. A technological futurist might describe what we are looking for, and we will keep looking.

The challenging part is the assignment that we have given to our grants writer. Her challenge is to be on the look out for new places to send grants that will help us with each of the above items. We know that we need to find some funds to help us in the planning process. We need to find other dreamers with whom we can interact and make designs for a future that is not static. When visions take form, then the task is to find others who want to assist us in placing our ideas into real time frames. Finally we need them to be in a timely fashion, so that we might be fallow for a short period of time to catch our collective technological breath, but we need to be challenged for forge ahead in spite of our small size. We have come to realize that our size is not the detriment that many envision when they are a part of a small campus. The Plan is to have no limitation on vision and implementation. Thereby there is no reason not to expect campus growth, more student enrollment and constituent excitement, and we will remain “On Time.”