

Graduate Theological Union



INSTITUTIONAL PROPOSAL

**For Reaccreditation Review by
The Western Association of Schools and Colleges**

**Preparatory Review Fall, 2005
Educational Effectiveness Review Fall, 2006**

**October 13, 2003
Berkeley, California**

Graduate Theological Union Institutional Proposal

1. Statement of Institutional Context

Founded in 1962, the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. As a consortium of nine theological seminaries (American Baptist, Episcopal, Interdenominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, three Roman Catholic, and Unitarian Universalist), the GTU has two fundamental purposes:

- To nourish ecumenical and interfaith encounter and dialogue within and beyond the consortium;
- To share educational resources in an ecumenical and interfaith environment, preparing men and women for vocations of ministry and scholarship.

The GTU pursues its common consortial purposes in four principal ways:

- Offering common graduate academic programs in theological and religious studies, leading to the Ph.D, Th.D., and M.A. degrees.
- Maintaining a common library as a resource for all the professional and academic needs of the consortium.
- Entering into relationship with affiliated centers of religious and theological studies and with the University of California at Berkeley.
- Developing other programs and consortial services that will advance the fundamental purposes of the consortium.

The Graduate Theological Union is a complex organization. It is made up of member schools, an administrative structure for carrying out specified common commitments of the consortium, and a series of relationships with a number of affiliated centers and the University of California at Berkeley. The Union, which encompasses all these aspects, finds its unity in the participants' common understanding of and adherence to the perduring mission of the Graduate Theological Union.

In the consortium, member schools share their resources for professional ministry education as well as for the academic programs in the graduate school operated by the consortium. The Graduate Theological Union has substantial, living relationships with churches and faith communities through the formal ties and informal relations of the member schools.

The consortium has created an administrative structure that enables it to achieve some of its functions as a *common enterprise*, which has a corporate existence for carrying out legal responsibilities with external parties. It is the principal though not exclusive means through which the consortium carries out its commitments to a common library and graduate academic programs. It is also responsible for a variety of common educational programs that enhance the mission of the consortium, for common registration, and for other consortial administrative services. Through this *common enterprise* structure, a number of affiliated centers and the University of California at Berkeley participate in the consortium, adding richness and depth to the educational environment.

Since the last accreditation visit by WASC and the Association of Theological Schools in September-October 1996, the GTU has made some significant changes, many of them in response to the concerns raised by the visiting team and the Commissions of the two accrediting agencies. Most of these changes were reported to the WASC Commission in the report prepared for a Special Visit in March 1999 and in correspondence related to a Progress Report in March 2001. There has also been a complete turnover in executive staff positions since 1996, with the selection and installation of a new President in 2000 and new persons in the roles of Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Administration and Finance, Vice President for Advancement, and Library Director.

Perhaps the most significant action taken in direct response to the last accreditation review was the development and approval of a strategic plan entitled “Educating Theological Leaders for an Interreligious and Interdependent World”. This strategic plan, completed under the leadership of President James Donahue during his first year in office (2000-01), emphasized the consortial focus of the GTU and provides appropriate feedback mechanisms for revision and calibration. This plan identified strategic objectives in seven areas: academic program (including new initiatives in Jewish Studies, Asian and Pacific Rim theological education, and Islamic Studies), financial support, infrastructure support, library, facilities, technology, and fundraising. This strategic plan needs to be revised and updated in some details, but it still provides the basic outline for the GTU’s planning for the future.

Specific institutional changes made in response to the last accreditation review have addressed the Commission’s concerns about planning, administrative oversight of consortial relations, programmatic review, and the systematic evaluation of faculty. A consortial-wide Common Agreement ratified by the presidents and boards of the member schools and the GTU dealt with longstanding concerns about consortial governance by spelling out the procedures, roles, responsibilities, and division of authority of the various components of the GTU. A Consortial Faculty Hiring Agreement now coordinates planning for faculty development in the GTU rostered faculty as well as in the member schools. Periodic evaluation procedures for the review of core doctoral faculty have strengthened quality control and professional development. The new Faculty Council has

streamlined the structures for faculty governance. We have ratified and signed clarified agreements governing the common programs and practices between GTU and the graduate school of the University of California at Berkeley. A systematic review of the program units of the GTU in light of current strategic directions has resulted in the closing of some centers and the redirection of others, and a review of the affiliates is now underway. We have clarified the presentation of various processes and procedures in the GTU catalog and other publications. These actions, among others, are signs of strength that make this an appropriate time for the WASC accreditation review as we move into the next phases of ongoing planning and evaluation.

The context of the work of the GTU has changed, and continues to change, since 1996. The events of September 11, 2001 have provided stark reminders that theology and religion occupy a central role both in our civic culture and in the academic world. Those features that distinguish the GTU from its peers – its ecumenical and interreligious focus, its interdisciplinary commitments, its consortial structures and efficiencies, and its commitment to the training of scholars with an eye to the practical application of academic ideas, research and teaching – have positioned the GTU well for leadership in graduate theological education. The GTU’s leadership is reflected in the strength of its applicant pool, the high quality of its academic work manifested in the publications and engagements of its faculty and students, and the increasing attraction of the GTU to prospective board members and donors.

The challenges facing the GTU remain clear as well. Sustaining and growing a financial foundation that will support the future work of the consortium is the critical issue for realizing the successful future for the GTU. In addition, balancing the commitment to preserving the structural autonomy and denominational specificity of the GTU member schools while also developing a consortial-wide collective institutional entity will always require careful, imaginative and bold leadership and decision-making. Identifying and developing an increased donor base to support GTU-wide initiatives and programs will also continue to be a challenge that must be met in the future. Each of the member schools has been challenged to respond to the ongoing denominational issues and conflicts that stir up their constituencies, and GTU must exercise constant vigilance and creative navigation as it continually seeks to support the well being of the member schools as well as that of the common enterprise. The times create a context of both opportunity and challenge for the life of GTU.

2. Description of expected outcomes of the Accreditation Review Process.

We are committed to the following outcomes and plan to use the reaccreditation process to work toward these goals:

- Integrate and sustain processes of planning and decision making that will better support the consortium's commitment to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in a global context.
- Increase the "fitness for purpose" between the academic and vocational preparation of our students and the jobs they obtain after graduation.
- Achieve a greater degree of alignment between strategic priorities and the deployment of institutional resources (including finances, personnel, etc.).
- Strengthen the focus on student learning in the institutional processes and procedures of review, assessment, and evaluation.
- Integrate the principles and processes used in this accreditation review process within the institutional culture of the GTU and its various constituent groups.

3. Description of how representatives of the institution's constituencies were involved in the development and internal approval of the Proposal and how they will be involved subsequently in the review process.

The drafting of this Institutional Proposal was the responsibility of the GTU Executive Team (President James Donahue, Dean Arthur Holder, Vice President for Advancement Katherine Akos, Vice President for Administration and Finance Steve Argyris, Library Director Bonnie Hardwick, and Associate Dean for the Doctoral Program Maureen Maloney). In order to ensure the widest possible engagement from the diverse constituencies of the GTU, they decided to employ the "What Really Matters on Your Campus?" exercise they had used at a WASC workshop in January 2003. During the Spring semester of 2003, this exercise was used to solicit input about institutional priorities from numerous groups, including the Council of Presidents, the Council of Deans, the Faculty Council, the entire Core Doctoral Faculty, the GTU staff (both in departments and in a plenary session), students, and the GTU Board of Trustees.

On the basis of both written responses and notes taken in the various group discussions, the Executive Team developed an outline of proposed expected outcomes, capacity-related issues, and special educational effectiveness emphases that was reviewed in May, 2003 by the Council of Presidents, the Council of Deans, the Faculty Council, the Rostered and In-Residence Faculty, and the Academic Committee of the Board of Trustees. A full draft of the proposal was prepared over the summer and reviewed at the September meetings of the Faculty Council, the Rostered and In-Residence Faculty, the GTU staff, the Council of Presidents, the Council of Deans, and the Executive Committee of the GTU Board of Trustees. Also in September, the proposal was circulated by email

and posted on the GTU website for further comment by faculty, students, staff, and trustees. After incorporating a number of suggested modifications received from both group discussions and individual reviewers, the Executive Team is confident that the final draft presented here represents a broad consensus of the various constituencies in the consortium.

The consortial nature of the GTU necessitates relatively complex governance and program structures, all of which place considerable burdens on the schedules and workloads of the administration, faculty, and staff of the member schools. In order to minimize the additional burden presented by the reaccreditation review, we plan to utilize existing groups as much as possible in the further implementation of the review process. However, an Accreditation Steering Committee comprised primarily of faculty and administrative staff will be established to guide the review process. Additional subcommittees will be developed as needed, especially teams of faculty who will conduct the research-based inquiries for the Educational Effectiveness Review as described in section #6 below.

4. Description of how the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews will be staged and timed to meet institutional goals and to demonstrate the institution's fulfillment of the two Core Commitments (Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness)

The GTU wishes to continue our previous practice of having a joint accreditation review by WASC and the Association of Theological Schools. We propose to use the WASC format for both the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews, with active concurrent participation by ATS. Contingent upon approval by the staffs of WASC and ATS, we wish to follow current WASC guidelines for the presentation and submission of the Preparatory Review and Educational Effectiveness Review reports, with concordances to the ATS standards. The Preparatory Review is scheduled for Fall 2005, with the Educational Effectiveness review in Fall 2006.

5. For the Preparatory Review, a brief description of how the institution intends to present evidence to demonstrate compliance with Commission Standards including the proposed format of presentation and types of key indicators that will be included in the Institutional Portfolio.

For the Preparatory Review, the GTU will offer an Institutional Presentation with an Introduction, an Institutional Portfolio, a Concluding Essay, and an Appendix. The Institutional Portfolio will include a set of all WASC-prescribed exhibits and data

displays, together with data required by ATS visiting teams: detailed breakdowns of student body characteristics, enrollment and retention data, degrees granted, and detailed information on faculty, staff, resources (fiscal, physical, and information), and a set of standard statistics on educational operations.

Additional exhibits will include: stated student learning outcomes at both program and area levels; structures and processes for program, affiliate, and personnel reviews; protocols for the various areas of the doctoral program; copies of minutes of faculty meetings and trustee meetings for the last five years; copies of audits and management letters for the last three years; annual report forms; current institutional planning documents and systems for collecting data for analysis and decision making; sample course syllabi; current faculty curricula vitae and samples of faculty publications; samples of students' theses and dissertations; copies of promotional materials; trustee, faculty and employee handbooks; and academic program handbooks.

These exhibits will be arranged according to the four WASC Standards, with a reflective essay for each standard. A concordance to pertinent ATS standards will be provided. We plan to place the essays and many of the exhibits in a web-based portfolio.

Like many institutions of higher education, the GTU collects more data than it has been able to analyze effectively. The Coordinator of Institutional Research uses the Colleague database to maintain extensive records on admissions, course enrollment, student academic progress, faculty workload, and other academic data. The Vice President for Administration and Finance and his staff have developed detailed financial projections based on recent financial data and trends. The Financial Aid Office maintains a database that tracks student indebtedness and has instituted a debt management program in an effort to reduce the cohort default rate default rates over time. The Associate Dean's office has compiled a searchable database recording the titles and subject matter of comprehensive examinations and dissertations. We have also begun to compile more complete information about placement of our recent graduates.

Comparative data for our peer institutions is available from the annual *ATS Fact Book on Theological Education*, the *Strategic Information Report* compiled biennially by the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education, the *Survey of Earned Doctorates*, the 2003 survey of graduate programs in theology and religious studies conducted by the Council on Graduate Studies in Religion, and the forthcoming graduate department survey portion of the American Academy of Religion's *Census of Religion and Theology Programs*. In order to make better use of the abundant data available from all these sources, we need to identify a limited number of key indicators to record and analyze on a periodic basis for a variety of purposes.

A number of institutional capacity-related issues have already been identified during the early stages of the review process, and we anticipate that these are likely to be among the topics addressed in the Preparatory Review:

- Financial issues of various kinds, including:
 - Long-range fiscal stability of the GTU
 - Financial structures and budget of the GTU in relation to those of the member schools
 - Composition and capacity of the GTU Board of Trustees
 - Adequacy of financial aid for students
- Staff morale and retention
- Communication within the consortium, and beyond
- Library facilities
- Cooperative sharing of resources for consortial services
- Diversity (racial/ethnic, gender, and other) of students, faculty and staff
- Focus on student learning in personnel and program review processes

6. For the Educational Effectiveness Review, a brief description of the format to be used by the institution to engage issues of Educational Effectiveness, the special emphases being proposed in light of the format selected, the methods to be used to engage these issues, and the ways in which the institution will address issues of student learning.

The Educational Effectiveness Review will use the “Special Themes” model by carrying out rigorous research-based studies of four specific topics that have emerged during the early stages of the review process. In every case, inquiry is intended to lead to the formulation of action steps and the identification of measurable outcomes. All four of these topics directly engage issues of student learning. The questions we have formulated to guide our investigations are:

- *How effective are the academic programs of the GTU in preparing scholars and teachers of theology and religious studies for leadership in a pluralistic world of ecumenical, interreligious, and multicultural diversity?*

The GTU is justly proud of its ecumenical heritage and its increasingly interreligious and multicultural diversity. The member schools represent a variety of Protestant, Catholic, and Unitarian Universalist traditions, and we have program units and affiliates representing Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism. More recently, we have made a modest beginning in course offerings and conferences on Islamic Studies. In 2002-03, 18% of the students enrolled in the academic programs of the GTU were international students, and 13% were Americans who were people of color. A major initiative in Asian and Pacific Rim theological education is in the proposal stage as of the fall of 2003, with the promise of substantial financial support coming from an anonymous donor.

But does the presence of diverse religious traditions and culture really make a difference in the educational experience at the GTU? Surveys and focus groups indicate that our students appreciate the diversity that is here on campus, but we need to find out if they are learning how to be actively engaged as leaders in the pluralistic societies in which they will work after graduation. In order to do this, we will need to collect and analyze both initial placement data and additional information about our graduates' publications, teaching, and service in the academy, religious institutions, and social service agencies.

- *How effective is the GTU in stimulating and supporting interdisciplinary scholarship in the various areas of theology and religious studies?*

Under the leadership of former Dean Margaret Miles, the doctoral programs of the GTU were reconceptualized in 1998-99 with an increased emphasis on interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinary Studies has become a distinct area in the doctoral program serving those students (currently 13% of the total) whose interests are so centrally interdisciplinary that they need to develop critical language to articulate the shape, implications, and accountabilities of the interdisciplinary nature of their work. The doctoral program now affirms the move toward interdisciplinarity by providing students with the option to elect an "allied field." As has been true from the program's origin, all Ph.D. students are required to engage at least one university research discipline other than theology, usually by working with a faculty member from the University of California at Berkeley.

Here again, we need to collect and analyze data about the placement and activities of our recent graduates in order to determine if our commitment to interdisciplinarity is making a significant difference in their work. Do the institutions that employ our graduates value the interdisciplinary nature of their training? Are our current students

and graduates able to articulate both the distinctive character of their interdisciplinarity and the rationale for this approach to religious studies?

- *How effective is the GTU in providing our graduates with the commitment and skills they need in order to be a public voice for theology in relation to the great issues of our day?*

The GTU has a longstanding commitment to bringing the insights of religion and ethics to discussions of the public good. Historically, the most visible manifestations of this commitment have been in several of our program units and affiliates, notably the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS), the Center for Ethics and Social Policy (CESP), and the Center for Women and Religion (CWR). But these centers have been largely dependent on short-term grants from foundations, and this funding has proven to be unpredictable and in the current economic situation in short supply. As we enter the 2003-04 academic year, the GTU Board has decided to close CESP, and the future of CWR is uncertain.

There is currently widespread consortial concern that the GTU must find new ways of helping our students and faculty bring the fruits of their scholarship to bear on the critical issues facing religious institutions and society today, including the ecological crisis, war and peace, economic justice, and all forms of oppression based on race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and creed. As we begin to explore the possibilities for future programs and structures to enhance our graduates' ability to provide theology with a strong public voice, we will need to develop specific indicators of the kind of engaged scholarship we are seeking to promote.

- *How effective is the GTU in the professional development of our students through faculty mentoring and programs of teacher preparation?*

Each year for the last fifteen years, the Newhall Award program has provided fellowships for GTU doctoral students to work with members of the Core Doctoral Faculty on collaborative projects of research or teaching. Other teaching assistantships and adjunct teaching assignments are available through the member schools of the GTU or at the University of California, Berkeley, or other nearby colleges and universities. A Scholarship Listserv developed by the Financial Aid Office assists students by providing information about a wide range of financial aid opportunities, including some that involve support for research and teaching projects.

In addition, the Associate Dean's office regularly offers workshops on dissertation writing, job seeking, and the presenting of papers at academic conferences. The GTU Library's Center for Teaching and Learning provides training in the use of fundamental teaching technologies and instructional skills. A doctoral seminar on course design and syllabus construction has been offered annually for the past several

years. Faculty members provide professional guidance and support for students both in the course of academic advising and in the context of the doctoral program areas. A booklet listing student achievements (publications, awards, teaching assignments) is published annually. The Dean's office provides assistance with job placement by distributing announcements about position openings and sending out placement dossiers.

Until quite recently, these professional development activities were largely independent and lacking integration. With the 2003-04 academic year, the Associate Dean's office has designed a comprehensive Graduate Student Professional Development Curriculum with four distinct strands: international student support, doctoral program academic support, teaching skills training, and job placement support. As this new program is implemented and revised in light of experience, we will need to determine ways in which its outcomes can be assessed on a continuing basis.

7. Prescribed set of Basic Descriptive Data.

Attached.

8. List of all degree programs offered off-site or by distance learning.

None.

9. Institutional Stipulation Statement

- a. The GTU is using the review process to demonstrate its fulfillment of the two Core Commitments, and will engage in the process with seriousness. The data presented are accurate and fairly present the institution.
- b. The GTU has published and publicly available policies in force as identified by the Commission. Such policies will be available on request throughout the period of accreditation.
- c. The GTU will abide by procedures adopted by the Commission to meet United States Department of Education procedural requirements.
- d. The GTU will submit all regularly required data, and any data specifically requested by the Commission during the period of accreditation.

- e. The GTU does not currently have any off-campus programs or degree programs offered by distance learning. If any such programs are developed, the institution will ensure that they are approved by the WASC substantive change process.

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October 13, 2003