

## Conclusion: Making Time for What Matters

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The data that our teams collected from across ATFE member schools will be of interest to all theological field educators as they reflect on the data in relationship to their school's program. In something akin to Patricia Killen's mid-range reflection, sometime after the completion of the study and the writing of articles, members of the Presbyterian/Reformed Theological Field Educators' Caucus met in retreat at Louisville Seminary to discuss the collection of articles and their implications.<sup>1</sup> Many differences that appear in the studies related to theological field education programs themselves can be traced to the tradition with which the school identifies, the curriculum design, the delivery platform of the curriculum, and the ethos of the various schools that participated in the studies. One item cannot: time.

The theme of "time" ran strongly through all of our research. Of the characteristics and practices that students felt most important in a supervisor/mentor, time was a consistent factor, either explicitly or implicitly—explicitly in "making and taking time for intentional supervision" and implicitly in such characteristics and practices as being a "good listener," "reflection, both theological and on the practice of ministry," being "experienced and knowledgeable," and "engaging in open discussion." This theme was well matched by responses from our supervisors/mentors, who noted both the duration of time necessary for students to learn hab-

its and ways of being and the key personal skills needed by supervisors/mentors that paralleled the students' observations: deep listening, building trust, being honest, willingness to be vulnerable, time management, and patience.

Relationships are crucial in theological field education and take time to build and to maintain; and reflection, which requires intentionality and time, lies at the core of these relationships and the learning that emerges from them. These characteristics, as named by both students and supervisors/mentors, were reflected in the predominant theories of supervision, which spoke variously of trust, habits, critical reflection, relationships, and the nature of the learning endeavor as a process.

It was therefore not surprising that time was also one of the greatest concerns of those who responded. Of the field educators or faculty who responded about training, thirty-one of forty-eight respondents lamented most the lack of time and the lack of commitment—and the lack of commitment was often tied to supervisors/mentors who did not make time to participate in training. Several field educators also acknowledged the constraints on their own time to either prepare or facilitate training or to participate in vital practices such as site visits.

Similarly, supervisors/mentors overwhelmingly named time the most challenging factor in their work with students. Many simply felt that they struggled to carve out time to do what they knew excellent supervision and mentoring required. These concerns were born out in the more quantitative data. According to respondents, "Training times vary from 1 hour to a half-day or a series of 90-minute sessions throughout the semester," and contact between the supervisor/mentor and the field education office ranged from a barebones initial orientation to regular and intense meetings. Meanwhile, a striking number of students reported meeting with their supervisors fewer than once a week, and many also reported meeting for less than an hour or even less than 30 minutes.

Naturally, a great amount of variance exists between different institutions (online, hybrid, in person; denominational or not; length of field placement, etc.). We should then expect variation in what is required both in terms of training and of the supervisor-student relationship. Nevertheless, if relationship and reflection lie at the core of the practice of supervision and both take time, it seems crucial that theological field education programs keep a close eye on their practices and, in our fast-paced

day and age, work on ways with their institutions, with the Association of Theological Schools, and with their supervisors/mentors and students to make time for what matters.

#### NOTES

- 1 Retreatants were Cathy Brall (Pittsburgh Seminary), Sung Hee Chang (Union Presbyterian Seminary-Charlotte), Jennifer Davis (Yale Divinity School), Matthew Floding (Duke Divinity School), Marcus Hong (Louisville Seminary), and Dorothee Tripodi (Union Presbyterian Seminary-Richmond).



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