



Dominican School of Philosophy & Theology  
at the Graduate Theological Union

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Office of the President

June 5, 2019,

Dear WSCUC Commission:

We are writing this letter to you on the recommendation of our WSCUC liaison, Lori Williams, Ph.D., after a consultation meeting with her on May 29, 2019. At our request, Dr. Williams met with us to review some concerns which were raised for us as we had time to reflect upon the written report prepared by the March 2019 site visit team.

To begin, we wish to thank the site visit team for their diligence throughout the review process, both in the Fall 2018 visit and during the onsite visit of March 5-7, 2019. All of the DSPT constituencies were pleased with the findings of the team, particularly how their recommendations aligned with conclusions from our own self-study, and of what we hope to achieve in the next few years. While the substance of team report posed no issues, we feel compelled to share with you a few specific concerns about the manner in which the information was presented in the report.

One issue in particular is of significant concern to us, namely the preoccupation of the team with the issue of what they described as “how some of the current controversies within and surrounding the Catholic Church have altered the landscape in which DSPT and the Western Dominican Province endeavor to recruit students (friars and lay students) and promote their vision for service and learning (CFR 4.7)” (Team Report, p. 40). During the site visit the team repeatedly asked how the School was dealing with these current controversies. In the meeting with me, I responded that we deal with this issue and with other moral issues in some of our classes in Moral Theology and Philosophical ethics. In a subsequent meeting with myself, the Academic Dean, and the CFO, it was reiterated to the team that these issues were addressed in specific courses, including two directly related to pastoral ministry, namely “Pastoral Counseling” and “Confessional Ministry.” In the Team’s meeting with the Regular Faculty, professors made specific mention of how they dealt with this issue. While the report makes a passing reference to these faculty comments, it makes no reference to the other specific information we offered. In contrast, the report claims that “the team had some concerns that DSPT’s perspective could too readily be myopic and not fully responsive to the full scope of macro and micro challenges in the Church.”

We found this statement to be both puzzling and shocking on two levels. First, it suggests an attitude of naivete and indifference both internally at DSPT and more broadly across the Western Dominican Province. In fact, every friar of our Province undergoes extensive and ongoing training by an external professional agency (Praesidium) which certifies our suitability of public ministry. Each diocese in the United States has additional training requirements, as well as requirements for letters of suitability that our Province must supply to the local bishop. This issue is constantly before us and on our minds and hearts.

At DSPT, the Pastoral Counseling course is taught by a lay woman who is a licensed counselor. She has been specifically instructed on the concerns around these issues and, as indicated in the course syllabus (which was available for review by the team), content addresses specific pastoral responsibilities related to this topic. In “Confessional Ministry,” seminarians role play with both a variety of “confessees”, some of whom are lay people, in order to gain experience in dealing with various issues concerning the contemporary environment of the Catholic Church. It is our opinion that these two courses along with the other courses mentioned in the report provide ample evidence that we are not myopic.

The second area of concern relates to the comment that DSPT is “not fully responsive to the full scope of micro and macro challenges.” While it seems that the team report is attempting to express concern that this Church crisis could negatively affect our recruiting, it also implies that DSPT should “do something about it,” i.e. be “more responsive,” particularly given the fact that these comments fall under the section heading “A Final Note on Strategic Planning.” The claim that DSPT has “a unique calling at this moment” is startling to us in that it suggests that the mission and strategic planning should somehow focus on this topic. In conversation amongst ourselves, as well as with colleagues across the GTU, there is a common reaction of confusion and concern over the rationale behind this recommendation. It seems unimaginable to us how a small seminary such as ours could possibly be more responsive to such a broad and intense issue.

Admitting the validity of the concern over any impact the crisis might have on recruitment and enrollment, in fact, lay enrollment at DSPT has increased during this period of time – even this past year during a time of renewed concern, and our Western Dominican Province has welcomed the largest group of Dominican brothers in about 25 years. Furthermore, it is evident from conversations with lay inquirers that they are investigating DSPT specifically because of its long-standing commitment to the tradition of the Catholic Church and its “reliability” as a center of rigorous study and learning. During the recruitment period, no inquirer has ever raised this issue to our knowledge. Rather, the interest is in the expertise of the faculty and the rigor of our academic programs. The report gives no mention that the team found evidence among current students that this crisis is having a negative impact on either their studies at DSPT or their confidence in the seminarians with us who will be future ministers in the Church. As a result of these reflections, we have become deeply concerned about the content of this paragraph on p. 40 of the report. It is our hope that the Commission would consider redacting this paragraph, or at least to edit it so that it makes clearer the reality at our School. Failing that, we would request that the Commission post a copy of this letter along with the team report at the WSCUC website.

Thank you for your considerations.

*Fr. Peter Rogers, O.P.*

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Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology.