

### III. Issues

#### A. The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Programs: Selectivity, Level, Standards, Rigor and Content

#### Findings

The question we have been asked most frequently in the course of this study, has been whether Doctor of Ministry programs are, in general, programs of good quality.

In one sense, this question has been difficult even to address, much less to answer. Judgments of quality assume an agreed-upon standard by which the adequacy of programs in particular institutions can be measured. As demonstrated in the extensive discussion of program types, the D.Min. degree lacks such a standard. Programs in different institutions have different goals. In some cases, different program tracks within the same institution will have markedly different goals. There is no curriculum or body of content widely deemed appropriate for most programs. Structures and methods for teaching and learning vary greatly from program to program. There is a wide range in program size and in patterns of governance and program administration; and there is a whole range of other differences and diversities, as described in many sections of this report.

This variety of structures and practices is a sign of deep uncertainty about the nature of the degree. As we discuss elsewhere in greater detail, there is disagreement about the degree's purpose and constituency. A majority of most groups we surveyed (seminary faculty, and administrators, D.Min. students and graduates) believe that the degree should function as "a mark of distinction with selective admissions policies and rigorous standards for completion." But sizeable minorities of the students and graduates group, as well as majorities of the groups of non-D.Min. clergy and laity we surveyed, believe that the degree should be offered "to all clergy who want a structured program of continuing education." The ATS Standards do not settle this matter: They say that the degree should lead to "advanced competence," but they do not give a specific definition of this level of competence or make clear whether all clergy or only a more limited group may be capable of achieving it. Nor is it clear whether schools are expected to specify a standard of "advanced competence" to which all their students are held, or, rather, to define advanced competence for each student individually, as a step significantly beyond the level of competence he or she demonstrated upon entry to the program. A minority of those involved in the conduct of D.Min. programs interpret "advancement" as a relative matter, but those persons believe fervently, as one administrator wrote to us, that D.Min. students "should not be compared with others but...by...how much better is each after the D.Min. than she or he would be if left with M.Div. training alone." The difficulty of defining a standard for the D.Min. degree does not end with this difference over the meaning of "advanced com-

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petence." It is further the case that, however a particular school or program interprets advancement, the definition of the marks of such competence and the ways it can be demonstrated are quite vague. Lacking, then, agreed upon norms or definitions of the purpose of the degree, of its intended constituency, of the appropriate content, method, style, and structure of programs, and of the resources necessary to support a D.Min. program, it becomes exceedingly difficult to make judgments about whether particular programs are doing the job poorly or well. It simply is not clear what is the job that needs to be done.

It is possible, however, to discuss conditions for program quality. Presumably each program has its own standard, at least an implicit one, for educational effectiveness, even if there is no such shared standard among programs; and thus one can examine whether the program has built into it the features that are required to maintain that standard. These include a level of selectivity sufficient to ensure that those admitted to the program are capable of pursuing it; a level of required program work that is sufficiently advanced; rules, guidelines and arrangements that ensure quality in the conduct of programs; and adequate enforcement of those rules and guidelines. Throughout the foregoing description of D.Min. programs we have commented on many of these matters. This chapter summarizes some of those comments in order to explore whether the conditions for quality are met in the programs we have studied and to recommend how current policies and practices can be strengthened.

Selectivity in admissions and advancement to candidacy. The directors of D.Min. programs report that their programs are somewhat selective: The rejection rate is reported to be 17% in the recent past and almost 25% during the most recent year. At the same time, few claims are made that most D.Min. students are very able. As shown in Tables I and II, less than half of all faculty members, directors, chief executives, graduates and students believe that D.Min. students are persons of great ability.

Several other questions shed light on the issue of the quality of students. Faculty members were asked to compare their D.Min. students and their M.Div. students in several ways. With respect to academic ability, the majority (60%; see Faculty I 4b) describe D.Min. students as about the same as M.Div. students; most of the remaining faculty (36%) think that their D.Min. students are more able, academically, than their M.Div. students. Most clergypersons of great academic ability, we were told in interviews, would be more likely to pursue the Ph.D. than the D.Min. D.Min. students were characterized by one faculty member as "folks who've been out, are stale, have continuing education budgeted. They are neither low nor high achievers but in between." Another faculty member said that he is "happy with about half the students admitted, "who are, in his view, "capable of critical thinking and have sufficient background in academic theology and the practical issues of parish theology."

TABLE I      Level of Students' Ability, as Judged by:

	<u>Graduates</u>	<u>Students</u>
<u>Level</u>		
Great	45%	45%
Moderate	44	44
Limited	11	11

TABLE II      Perceptions of the Ability of Students in the D.Min.  
Program by Position of Respondent

	<u>Position</u>		
	<u>CEOs</u>	<u>Directors</u>	<u>Faculty</u>
<u>Perception of D.Min. Student Ability)</u>			
Very Able	31%	30%	16%
Moderately Able	41	58	39
Mixed in Ability	28	12	43
Generally Weak	0	0	2

Directors, who are almost always give highly positive estimations of the D.Min., are most likely (54%) to say that the quality of applicants to their programs is remaining about the same; 38%, however, believe that applicant quality is increasing. Directors of smaller programs are more likely to report an increase in quality than directors of larger programs. On the other hand, directors of the largest programs are most likely to rate their students as "very able." Thus the relationship of student quality to program size is ambiguous. Nor are there clear differences in perceptions of student quality by format or program philosophy type.

In our case studies and in evaluation reports sent to us, selectivity in admissions was a major issue. Though extension programs more frequently report that they struggle with this issue, because they are sometimes tempted to admit marginal students in order to form a colleague group of sufficient size, there is little evidence to suggest that pressures to admit students in order to form an adequately large program group are restricted to extension programs alone. Indeed, among the programs we visited most concern was expressed by administrators and faculty members in an institution whose D.Min. program is of the "independent specialized" type, a form in which D.Min. students participate with students in other programs, choosing from among the regularly scheduled course offerings of the school. As we shall explore more extensively in a section below on the future of the D.Min., higher standards in the selection of students at the point

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of admission is the single change that most seminary faculty members and administrators would like to see in the D.Min. programs in their own institutions. More than a third of all faculty members' comments could be grouped under this heading and, as our interviews had led us to suspect, such concern was slightly more likely to be expressed by those whose programs operate on an extension model. Clearly the quality of students is a matter of considerable concern in institutions that offer the D.Min. degree. The Standards do not reflect this concern. The most recent version eliminates earlier language that suggested that "previous high academic records" or "a capacity for excellence" be required for admission. One institution reported to us that an ATS visiting team criticized "elitism" in the institution's admissions policies (though another reported that its visiting team urged higher admissions standards). The matter of the constituency for the D.Min. and the selectivity of programs is a problem area: As earlier reported elsewhere, institutions' perceptions of themselves as selective (or not) do not correspond to their actual level of selectivity; institutions do not agree with each other about how selective admissions standards for the D. Min. should be; and it may well be that the majority of institutions is at odds with the egalitarian emphasis in the Standards.

Many facets of the problem of selectivity are widely recognized; we would add an additional consideration. Though the call for more selectivity in D.Min. admissions is almost universal, it is not always clear in what ways the programs are being asked to be more selective. Many respondents quoted in this section mentioned academic abilities specifically. Academic ability is of course important, since the D.Min. is a program in an academic framework, but we wonder whether a program designed to lead to advanced professional competence should not have additional criteria. Different religious traditions have different definitions and images of ministry, so it is difficult to specify exactly what qualities in addition to academic abilities, D.Min. applicants should present. It does, however, seem fair to ask each institution to specify those gifts, capacities and abilities that, in addition to academic competence, it is seeking in its D.Min. students.

Some institutions that are not selective at the point of admissions argue that the most important point of decision in D.Min. programs is not admission to the program but admission to candidacy. There is little evidence, however, that candidacy is a point of serious and consequential assessment in those institutions that have such a step; as noted in section II. B. 2. k, Candidacy, over one-third of all programs do not distinguish between admission and candidacy. There we argue that candidacy in its current form is for the most part meaningless and that one option is to eliminate it from the Standards. More likely to contribute to the improvement of program quality would be a move to require that all programs include a serious mid-point assessment before advancement to candidacy. Such an assessment might include qualifying examinations, special papers or other demonstrations that movement toward "advanced professional competence" has begun and

is likely to continue during the remainder of the program. Such an assessment should offer both students and the institution the realistic possibility of the student leaving the program because adequate progress has not been made and seems unlikely. If in the future D.Min.-granting institutions succeed in agreeing on more precise standards and requirements for the D.Min. degree, the mid-point assessment would have an additional benefit: It could be an the occasion for demonstrating that minimum standards, common to all programs, have been met. This proposed mid-point assessment does not solve a major problem enunciated by many faculty members: The difficulty of teaching students in early phases of the program who have remedial needs or who lack the capacity to do advanced work. Such problems must be faced at the point of admission to the program. But serious mid-point assessment would contribute to efforts to establish the integrity of the D.Min. degree, which is now too widely believed to be available to anyone who has the initiative to apply to a program and the fortitude to complete its various required activities.

The level and rigor of studies for the degree. The ATS Standards require that study for the D.Min. be demonstrably more advanced than study for the M.Div. degree. In the judgment of most faculty members, graduates and students, though, this is the case only about half the time. As Table III suggests, in an equal number of cases courses offered especially for D.Min. students are judged to be about equal in difficulty or less difficult than those offered primarily for M.Div. students.

TABLE III    Level of Difficulty of Courses Especially for D.Min. Students as Judged by:

	<u>Faculty</u>	<u>Graduates</u>	<u>Students</u>
More advanced and difficult than M.Div courses	51%	51%	45%
Same level of difficulty	42	38	45
Less difficulty	8	11	11

Somewhat surprisingly, the students and graduates make fewer claims for the high level of difficulty than do faculty members. The more usual pattern in our data is for faculty members to make the more stringent judgments about the quality and rigor of the degree. In our interviews, the comment that M.Div. and D.Min. course work are indistinguishable was made frequently. "The D.Min. is not more rigorous than a good M.Div.," one faculty member told us, echoing many others. Others argue that the courses are distinguishable, and that those offered for the D.Min. "demand a higher level of professional competence." The director just quoted was contradicted by a person present who had taken some D.Min. courses while completing an M.Div. degree. She could not, she said, "tell the difference in the expectations of the two degrees." Some directors argue that "level of difficulty" is the wrong phrase to use in distinguishing between the two

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degrees. They argue that the activities of the D.Min., which presupposes experience and practice, are simply not comparable to the courses and practical experience required for the M.Div. (See section II. E. 1 for a further discussion of this point.) Others suggest that the problem of level is created by too diverse a student body. Even though the instructor may have in mind what constitutes "advanced competence," the course may not be able to be pitched at that level because too many students are present who require a more elementary introduction. As this variety of views makes clear, the problem of the level of D.Min programs is complex. Confusion about the nature of the degree makes it difficult to specify exactly what constitutes "advanced" work. This confusion and other factors influence the level of work currently offered. We acknowledge these complexities; at the same time, we find it alarming that half of all participants in D.Min courses -- both teachers and students -- do not judge these courses as "advanced" over the level of M.Div. work. Quite evidently the goal of a degree program demonstrably more advanced than the M.Div. has not, in many programs, been reached.

An advanced course or program offering will be effective, of course, only if students are required to present work that is congruent with the level at which the course is offered. Is student work in D.Min. courses and other program offerings held to high standards? Evidently the required reading for courses is usually completed. Nearly two-thirds of graduates and students say that they always complete the required reading, and the remainder say that they usually do (see Graduates and Students III, I). Most of the information we gathered suggests that evaluation of work done in courses and other program offerings is not evaluated with much severity. Course examinations are very, very rare. Course failures are almost equally rare, as explored above in section II. B. 2. e, Courses. In one program we visited that organizes field extension groups, faculty members complained that grading standards were somewhat lower in the field: "There is not the same expectation out there that there is here on campus.... Candidates don't realize this because we require the same papers and reading, but there, quite frankly, may be some erosion in grading, because once you have created a community of faith like that, it is really difficult to say 'you flunked!'" The pressure to keep student members of extension groups enrolled in the program, so that the group does not decline in size to the point where it constitutes a financial drain on the program, was mentioned by several persons associated with programs that work in this style. At the same time, though, several directors of such programs pointed out that the weak student in an extension program has access to highly effective peer tutoring. It is also evident that a number of field extension groups do drop below the size at which they are financially productive. It is difficult, then, to argue that the problem of lack of rigorous grading is specific to extension programs. There is little evidence that D.Min. students in any kind of program are vigorously evaluated in courses or other program activities, with the notable exception, explored at length in section II. B. 2. m, Final Projects and Theses, of project proposal approval.

The consensus in our interviews, confirmed by our surveys, is, as one respondent put it, that for the persistent student "after all, the degree is not that hard to get." The speaker, a current D.Min. student, elaborated: "The demands of the program are by no means unreasonable. There is a lot of work to be done in a short time. But mostly I am ready for the work and able to do it." The speaker, a current student, does not, in other words, view his D.Min. program as a formidable challenge, and this was generally the view of students, graduates, faculty and directors. The ultimate measure of an advanced program is not, of course, how much difficulty and challenge it presents, but whether it succeeds in instigating its students to do advanced work and thereby achieve advanced competence. In the view of faculty, this effect is achieved for somewhat more than half of all students (58%; see Faculty III, 3); by comparison, 71% of directors (see Directors IV, 3) think that D.Min. students advance to a distinctly higher level of professional competence. Faculty in large programs are more likely to think that advanced competence has been achieved (faculty in large programs are more positive about the D.Min. overall) and faculty in campus-based intensive programs are also more likely to say they observe the achievement of advanced competence. Such programs are more likely than other forms to offer courses and seminars for D.Min. students alone, perhaps allowing the level of work and the standard for evaluation to be set higher. In the same vein, the programs least likely to be viewed by faculty and directors as leading to advanced professional competence are those that we have labeled "specialized/independent." These programs are the most likely to induce students to take courses with students in other programs and institutions. Here, apparently, faculty and directors feel that standard of advanced professional competence in ministry is least likely to be set and met.

Issues of quality in the thesis or project. The question of the quality of the D.Min. is raised most frequently and pointedly about the D.Min. thesis or project. As earlier recounted (section II. B. 2. m, Final Projects and Theses), 40% of all faculty respondents judge the overall quality of projects or theses as fair or poor (see Faculty II, 4). In addition (Faculty II, 23), almost half the faculty respondents judge that half or more of their students "have undue difficulty" in carrying out the thesis or project. About one quarter of all theses or project reports are returned for more than minor revisions, a sign of faculty discontent with the level and quality of many of the projects. In many programs, this discontent is evident from the beginning of the project phase: Directors of two-thirds of all programs report that project proposals are turned back frequently (Directors II, 18). There are some differences among program types. Students in those programs we call "extended M.Div. programs" feel less well prepared to undertake the major project, as do students in campus-based intensive programs. (There is a fairly high degree of overlap between these two categories: Each forms half of the other.) The "extended M.Div." form of the D.Min. is usually more diffuse in its requirements than are the "independent specialized" or "unique content and method" programs.

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Perhaps this accounts for students' uncertainty about their level of preparation for the project. Whether because extended M.Div. type programs are more rigorous, or because the projects produced in them are actually of lower quality, directors of such programs are more likely to report that projects or theses are returned for more than minor revisions. These are, however, the only evident links between particular program formats or types and evident quality of projects and theses, and even the differences cited are not dramatic. Though one might assume that students in "local/regional" programs and those in "independent/specialized" ones (overlapping categories) would have more sustained access to both libraries and faculty advisors, there is little evidence that such programs produce better projects. In a site visit to such a program, one of our researchers noted: "Though I did note in the projects a wider range of references and more use of original sources than one sees in the projects from other kinds of programs, the literary and conceptual quality of the work did not seem substantially better. This institution has not, by opening up its entire curriculum to D.Min. students, solved the problem of the role of research and other 'academic' operations in a program of advanced study for ministry; nor has it raised substantially the quality of academic effort that working pastors seem to produce."

Our reading of dozens of theses and project reports leads us to concur with the view of many seminary faculty members that overall the projects are of mediocre quality. Part of the problem is certainly located in the indistinctness of the definition of a D.Min. project, a vagueness as evident in the Standards as in the program descriptions from particular schools. In addition, the project reports from many institutions do not appear to be carefully copyread, which suggests that advisors are not strict in their requirements for typographical and grammatical accuracy. A general looseness seems to attend the project. After fairly rigorous review of the proposal, and before an almost as rigorous final committee review that causes one project in four to be sent back for major revisions, a high standard in the conceptualizing of the project, its conduct and its writing does not seem to be enforced. Nor, despite the common requirement of major revisions, are the final products as bound and placed on library shelves impressive either to us or to faculty members in the institutions that grant D.Min. degrees. Since the D.Min. project is the most public feature of the D.Min. student's work, we would guess that the perception of D.Min. programs as lacking in rigor will not change until the quality of projects noticeably improves. As we have noted elsewhere, this is a multifaceted problem. It is rooted in the difficulty of specifying what kind of research is appropriate to a degree like the D.Min., and what kinds of methods, topics and forms of reports are consonant with such research. Meanwhile, however, we would suggest that schools should at least discipline themselves to meet their own standards. Any institution whose D.Min. projects are judged as only "fair" or "poor" by a substantial proportion of its faculty (a condition we found to obtain in many institutions) should be hard at work to improve the quality of the projects by whatever means: Better preparation to undertake the project, better advisement and super-



vision, revision of the curriculum leading to the project, or greater selectivity in candidacy and admissions.

Structures, rules and their enforcement. Throughout this report we have been critical of the failure of Standards to require schools to set minimum standards for admission and program continuance and clear guidelines for completion of course work and rate of progress through various program phases. We have also been critical of institutions that adopt rules and policies in these areas and then fail to observe or enforce them. Further, we have objected to the considerable laxity we have found in arrangements for program administration, oversight and governance, and specifically to the widespread over-reliance on the D.Min. program director as both promoter and monitor of the program. We shall not rehearse here all of these criticisms but rather point to some representative ones.

We uncovered much evidence of lenience on the part of course instructors and program directors in the enforcement of deadlines. Interestingly, it is students and D.Min. graduates who most often complain that programs are too flexible in these matters. "The system is sufficiently relaxed," said one student, "to remove necessary incentives to get work completed." Added another: "They give you 'only eighteen months' to get your course 'holds' removed. They would be doing us a favor to give us only three months." Such complaints, that programs are "flexible, maybe too flexible," apply to both work to be completed for courses and time allotments for whole program phases. But even more alarming to us than the failure to enforce deadlines is the failure to state them in the first place. Many institutions said, in response to our requests for lists of students who had terminated enrollment in their programs, that it was hard for them to separate those who had "dropped out" from those who had simply "slowed down." This suggests a failure to set maximum periods of time for particular program phases and to review students' standing on a regular basis. We believe that the Standards should require the schools to state deadlines for the completion of work and program phases and, further, to show in their self-studies that these deadlines are enforced.

We have also observed that the academic operation of the D.Min. is somewhat looser and less formal than the operation of other seminary programs. In some cases, this may result from the fact that the D.Min. presents special issues and conditions. The use of adjunct teachers, for instance, may be far more common in the D.Min. program than in any other aspect of an institution's work. Thus a procedure for formal screening and approval of adjunct faculty may never have been developed, and this may account for the fact that in one-third of the institutions that use adjunct faculty, the D.Min. director alone gives final approval to their appointment (see Director X, 6a). In general, we believe, there should be broader committee or faculty concurrence in the appointment of a person who will represent the school, even temporarily, as a faculty member. Similarly, many schools that use adjunct teachers only in the D.Min. program may not have established procedures for the evaluation of the work of these adjuncts. Therefore

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it should not, perhaps, be surprising that the chief means of evaluating the work of such persons is written student evaluations, and that in about two-thirds of institutions adjunct faculty are evaluated only by students or not at all. Nonetheless we think that the practice of eliminating adjunct faculty from peer evaluation is unwise and should be ended. An amendment to the Standards requiring that the hiring and evaluation of adjunct faculty follow as closely as possible procedures for the hiring and evaluation of regular faculty seems warranted. Other arrangements for teaching and advisement deserve perusal as well. The fact, for instance, that rate of approval of project proposals is much higher in institutions where only the faculty advisor (rather than a broader committee) is required to give such approval should lead, we believe, to consideration of the roles that representatives of the whole faculty should play in evaluating the work of D.Min. students and the making of decisions about their standing or continuance in the program. In general, we believe, that the more thoroughly the whole range of faculty opinion and interest is represented in decisions about D.Min. curriculum, admissions, and evaluation of student work, the higher the standard likely to be set and maintained for the program as a whole.

The fact that many of the functions just cited are vested in a single D.Min. committee in many institutions should also be cause for concern. As we have argued elsewhere (section II. B. 2. p, Governance), the press of such decisions about student admissions and standing may obscure the critical major task of such a committee: To review, evaluate and develop policy for the D.Min. program overall. Higher standards for both policy and "operations" will, we believe, result from the assignment of decisions about student admissions and progress to committees that make such decisions for the school's other programs, and from clearing the calendar of the D.Min. committee or academic affairs committee in order to consider issues of curriculum and policy.

Finally, immediate attention must be paid to the problem of the role of the D.Min. director in many institutions. We have explored the problem at length in section II. B. 2. o, Administration. There we have stated emphatically that, in many programs, directors are put in an impossible position. They are expected, on the one hand, to recruit new students and to retain current students in order to keep enrollment levels high and, on the other, to act as monitors of standards for admissions and student progress. In addition they are burdened with numerous administrative and clerical tasks that the academic administrators in charge of other seminary programs usually can delegate to others. Perhaps no single feature of many D.Min. programs so seriously threatens the viability and integrity of the D.Min. as this uncomfortably complex and contradictory assignment given to the director. Such assignments are a sign, we believe, of ambivalence toward the D.Min. at least, and perhaps in some cases of a lack of institutional seriousness. We say more about this matter of seriousness in the concluding comments that follow.

Discussion

The reputation of the D.Min. is not high. Its public in both church and seminary seems to agree that in principle and in concept the D.Min. is a worthwhile undertaking. The general view is that it has salutary effects on those who complete the degree. Yet most observers believe that some programs are of poor quality, and a vocal minority believes that most programs are poor.

As noted earlier, extension programs and large programs attract the most criticism. Comments such as the following are found frequently on the questionnaires returned to us and in interview notes:

The D. Min. has developed a bad image due to off-campus quickie programs that stress skills rather than genuine learning. I do not believe it can be saved. Our D.Min. was, at its outset, a fine, demanding degree but [it] has been undermined by other institutions that give easy degrees with minimum on-campus time.

The creation of extraordinarily large Doctor of Ministry programs by means of developing extension centers has created in the world of higher education much comment and negative criticism. In my opinion much of this is deserved. It does not seem likely that a school that does not increase its faculty size and adds two, three or even four hundred students in Doctor Ministry programs can do this at a level that reflects serious study well supervised by its faculty.

In our view, there are some problems and issues of quality that pertain to these two types of programs. Heavy use of adjunct faculty, for instance, common in some large programs, presents special dangers to program uniformity and quality. (This issue was treated at length in section II. B. 2. j.) Directors and faculty members who work in extension programs themselves suggest that such programs face temptations to admit marginally qualified students in order to complete a field group and to compromise grading standards in the field. Overall, however, we have little evidence that large programs and extension programs per se deserve to be singled out as special threats to the integrity and quality of the D.Min. Adequate safeguards of program quality and discipline in the actual conduct of programs are not uniformly or heavily present in some program types and absent in others. The examples of shoddy program practices we collected are drawn from both large and small programs and from programs of all format types, and, similarly, examples of disciplined program conduct can be found in programs of all types. Thus the views cited above are both right and wrong: There are extension programs and large programs that are carelessly conducted, some in a few and some in many ways. But the same can be said (and should more frequently be acknowledged) with respect to other size and format types. Though much criticism of

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the quality of D.Min. programs is in our view well placed, it is a mistake to locate the problem in a few institutions and programs. We suspect that certain types of programs have attracted as much negative attention as they have for several reasons: They are more visible than other programs, and thus their flaws (which are real) are widely evident; theological education, like other graduate undertakings, has an ethos that favors the small and is suspicious of the large; and both kinds of programs have drawn students who, those involved with smaller programs believe, would otherwise have come to them. Extension programs in particular have created some competitive bitterness. (The president of one institution that sponsors a large extension program told us that he had been accused of "transporting cheap goods across state lines.") In our view, however, the tendency to pin most of the responsibility for poor program quality on a few programs obscures how widespread the problem of quality really is.

Nonetheless the problem of the negative public perception of certain types of programs is serious. The integrity of any degree is a matter of appearance as well as fact. A degree widely believed to be easily obtainable from a few weak programs loses some of its value and prestige in general. Thus it seems to us critical that standards for accrediting be developed that are specific enough to test the quality of large programs and extension programs as well as others. This is, of course, no small matter, since even the basic identity of the D.Min. degree is in question, and that matter must be settled before usable standards can be developed. Nonetheless, the public perception of poor program quality (as well as the much broader reality of it) must be dealt with, or the reputation of the degree will be permanently harmed. We return to this point in the section on the future of the D.Min.

The uneven quality of D. Min. programs is, we believe, a sign of a deeper problem. Despite the popularity of the D. Min. with administrators, faculty, students and others, there are many indications that the degree is not taken as seriously as the other activities of the theological school. Many of our data support this conclusion: Faculty members frequently express reservations about various program features -- the quality of students, rigor of admissions procedures, level and adequacy of student course work, quality of final projects -- but rarely take concerted action to change the aspects of program design, policy or implementation about which they have qualms. In many institutions, basic administrative resources are not put at the service of the D.Min. Financial aid is rarely available to D.Min. students. The D.Min. in most institutions receives neither the level of attention nor the amount of support given to the M.Div., other masters degrees and other doctorates the institution may grant. The relegation of the D.Min. to a second class of attention and support is understandable given its relative newness and the experimental quality of many programs at their inception. The degree has now been granted for over a decade, however, and if it is to attain a solidity of reputation it does not now have (and does not yet deserve), the marks of its newness and marginality must soon be removed. In this section we have listed some of the changes we think this will necessitate: Higher standards of

admissions; procedures for midpoint assessment (qualifying exams or similar demonstrations) before admission to candidacy; scrutiny of the level of course and other program activities to insure that most are indeed "advanced" beyond the M.Div. level; more rigorous evaluation of student work in courses; more formal procedures for appointment, orientation and hiring of adjunct faculty; more and better administrative resources for D.Min. programs and more clarity and reasonableness in the definition of directors' roles; and more evaluative attention from faculty directed toward the basic curriculum and policy issues the D. Min. presents. These changes would, we believe, be signs of a new and necessary seriousness about the D.Min. as one of the core activities of theological education. Unless such seriousness is manifested soon, the degree may become too shaky in reputation to survive. Therefore only institutions willing to do the work and shoulder the cost of the kind of regularization of the D.Min. suggested by these steps should continue to give the degree.

## Future

### III. Issues

#### B. The Future of the Doctor of Ministry Degree

#### Findings

In the foregoing sections we have reported many data that have implications for the future of the D.Min. degree. In the following section, we summarize these data, adding to them results from a questionnaire we sent to the chief executive officers of institutions that do not currently grant the D.Min. degree. After exploring likely future trends in the number and size of programs and in the shape and direction these programs will take, we list several issues as yet undecided which we believe will have influence on the D.Min. degree's future.

#### Trends in the Number of Programs and In Programs' Size

There is no evidence that any substantial number of the programs currently awarding the D.Min. degree have reason to believe they will not go on doing so in the foreseeable future. All but two program directors, and 92% and 97% of all faculty members and chief executive officers, respectively (see Directors XII, 4; Chief Executives IV, 4; and Faculty IV, 4), think that their institution will still be granting the degree five years from now. This judgment on the persistence of the degree in the institutions now granting it is as close as we came on any question to unanimity among the three seminary-based respondent groups. It does not, however, appear that a large number of institutions not currently granting the degree will be joining those who do and will continue to. Table I shows the results from our survey of chief executives of institutions that do not currently grant the degree.

TABLE I Likelihood of Offering the D.Min. Degree in the Next Five Years (Non.-D.Min. Seminaries)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
<u>Response</u>		
Already planning to	5	6%
Very likely	2	3
Somewhat likely	10	12
Unlikely	34	43
Definitely not	8	10
No response	<u>21</u>	<u>26</u>
	80	100

Only five institutions have already made definite plans to offer the degree; and only an additional two think it very likely that they will. If these seven institutions do establish programs and are joined by some of those who indicate that it is "somewhat likely" that they will do so, the pace of new program development in the next five years will largely match that in the most recent period, in which 12 new programs were instituted between 1980 and 1985. Half of all institutions not currently offering the degree say they are unlikely to offer it or will definitely not do so, and if those not responding to our survey are added in as unlikely, the total of institutions not likely to offer the degree swells to over 75% of the number not now offering it. Generally, the institutions likely to begin a program are in the denominational categories not currently well represented among D.Min.-granting institutions (Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Orthodox), or they are evangelical/conservative institutions. But a number of institutions in these categories, are also found in the "unlikely" categories. We predict that in the next decade an additional number of conservative/evangelical schools, and a small assortment of institutions from other categories (Roman Catholic, Canadian, predominantly Black, Episcopal) will join the company of D.Min.-granting schools. Mainline Protestant seminaries and interdenominational university divinity schools, if they do not already give the degree, are unlikely to begin doing so.

The reasons given by schools that think they may start a program are mixed. The reason most often emphasized is requests for a program from graduates and other constituencies. Institutions that are undecided most often cite constraints on their resources as the reason they have not heretofore established a program; a small group of these institutions have tried to establish a program but been restrained by ATS, which judged that faculty and other resources were inadequate. For all institutions not currently giving the degree, lack of sufficient faculty or financial support for the degree has been a major reason for deciding not to establish a program. In institutions that have more or less definitely decided not to give the degree, relationships with affiliate institutions that do grant the degree and a negative view of the value of the D.Min. are also prominent reasons, but secondary in most cases to resource constraints. One group of institutions reports that the decision not to offer the D.Min. was made on the grounds of priorities: These institutions offer or hope to offer a Ph.D. or Th.D., and believe that the D.Min. would drain necessary faculty time and administrative attention from such research doctoral programs.

As we have noted elsewhere, certain types of programs seem to hold more promise for the future than others. Directors of campus-based intensive programs and directors of programs in evangelical/conservative institutions are much more likely than other directors to predict that their programs will be larger in the next five years. In both cases, the predictions are based on recent experiences, for these program types have shown most growth in both applications and admissions.

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Though both the campus-based intensive format type and the evangelical denominational type are associated with recent growth and the prospect of future growth, the correlation between growth indicators and the evangelical denominational type is slightly stronger than the link between the campus-based intensive format and growth. To check directors' reports and decreases in admissions with more precision, we computed for each of the 72 programs for which data were available the average annual rate growth over the number of years the program had been in existence. Growth rate figures were based on total enrollment. They are not exactly comparable to the information we have on admissions, since the rate at which students move through programs affects total enrollment. Nonetheless, when the annualized growth rates of programs of various types are compared, the same patterns emerge as were evident in the data on admissions and new student enrollments: Campus-based intensive programs have grown at an annual rate of 17% a year (compared with 6.5% for local/regional programs and -5% for extension programs; the decrease in the size of extension programs reflects policy decisions in sponsoring schools). Evangelical programs have grown at nearly 17% a year, while the rate for mainline programs has been 9%.

Both the number and size of future programs are ultimately bounded, of course, by the total number of clergy interested in pursuing the D.Min. degree. Table II compares the levels of interest expressed by Presbyterian clergy and the clergy in our multi-denominational sample.

TABLE II Likelihood of Future D.Min. Enrollment

	<u>Presbyterian Clergy</u>	<u>Non-D.Min Clergy</u>
Certain to enroll	6%	4%
Likely	14	10
Somewhat likely	16	35
Not likely	38	41
Very unlikely	25	11

As earlier remarked, Presbyterian clergy have participated in D.Min. programs at a markedly higher rate than clergy of other denominations. It is reliably estimated, from our data and from others collected by the Presbyterian Church, that almost 20% of all Presbyterian clergy have either obtained a D.Min. degree or are currently enrolled in a D.Min. program. As Table II shows, Presbyterian clergy are more likely than the clergy in our multi-denominational sample to say that they are likely or certain to enroll in a D.Min. program in the future. They are also, however, more likely to say that they are unlikely or very unlikely to enroll in a program. This suggests to us that Presbyterian clergy may have been confronted with the choice of whether or not to enroll in a D.Min. program longer than most other clergy and thus have quite settled opinions about their interest. (It is also probable that



Presbyterian clergy are more likely to be interested in the D.Min. than clergy in many other denominations, since the degree seems to have "caught on" in a special way among Presbyterian clergy.) If all Presbyterian clergy enroll in D.Min. programs who say they are certain or likely to, approximately one-third of all Presbyterian clergy will have obtained the degree. (Fluctuations in this figure will be caused by retirements and new ordinations.) We assume that the Presbyterian figure is a kind of maximum or ceiling: Interest in the D.Min. in any denomination is unlikely to be greater than it has been among Presbyterians, where it has been substantially greater than in other denominations. We think it predictable, therefore, that no more than one-quarter of all clergy will in the foreseeable future enroll in D.Min. programs, and in some denominations the percentage may be much lower.

To some extent, we believe, the future size of D.Min. programs will be determined by faculty convictions about educational effectiveness. Or, perhaps more accurately, we think it unlikely that programs of particular types will grow if faculty members are convinced that they should not. When we asked a question along these lines, "For maximum educational effectiveness, should the D.Min. program in your institution be smaller, larger, or remain the same size?", faculty who teach in evangelical/conservative institutions, and those who teach in smaller programs were markedly more likely to suggest that the programs in their institution should be larger. No faculty associated with extension/colleague group programs thought that such a program should be larger, and those associated with local/regional programs and campus-based intensive ones were about equally likely to suggest that their programs should be larger in size. It should be noted that two categories (large programs and extension/colleague group programs) in which faculty members think that growth is not indicated are those most likely to win high faculty approval. This suggests to us that if even faculty so highly positive feel that there should be no growth in these program categories, it is probably to be expected that neither extension programs nor programs of any format type that are already large will seek or permit themselves to grow in the future.

### Trends in Program Shape and Direction

As we suggested above with respect to growth in program size, strong faculty opinions about particular features or dimensions of D.Min. programs are likely to be influential in the future. We asked faculty, chief executive officers and D.Min. directors what changes they would like to see in D.Min. programs in their own institutions, and we coded and tabulated the results of their written responses. Table III shows some of the results. By far the largest number of comments are those calling for more rigor and higher standards of quality for D.Min. programs. Of the 169 comments in this category almost half focus on issues of student selection; the others on various aspects of D.Min. programs, including evaluation of student work, standards for the project, length of the program, use of examinations

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and the like. The second largest number of comments call for more professional emphasis in D.Min. programs: More practical studies, more use of innovative teaching methods, more off-campus opportunities for students to study, and better integration between the practical and theoretical dimensions of the program. The number of comments calling specifically for more academic emphasis is relatively small, though a number of comments calling for more rigor probably could have as easily been placed in this category of comments calling for a more academic standard for the conduct of the degree. The expected and familiar difference between directors and faculty emerge: More academic emphasis on the faculty side, more professional emphasis from the directors. The assortment of opinion among these categories suggests, however, that though future changes in the D.Min. may very well take the path of more rigor and higher academic standards in programs, the professional emphasis and the variety of subject matter and teaching methods associated with it is also important, not only to program directors but also to faculty members, who are likely to have considerable influence in future program direction and design.

TABLE III. Changes Suggested by Faculty, Directors, and CEOS

	Leave Program <u>As Is</u>	More Rigor	More Academic Emph./ <u>Rigor</u>	More Profes. Emph./ <u>Rigor</u>	Better Adminis- <u>tion</u>	Eliminate Drastic- ally <u>Revise</u>
<u>Source of Comments</u>						
Faculty	7%	36%	10%	20%	5%	3%
CEOs	7	26	8	21	4	—
Directors	10	24	3	30	6	—
<u>Type</u>						
Ind./Specialized	9	34	6	20	6	2
Unique Content	3	29	21	22	8	2
Extended M.Div.	8	31	9	25	3	2
<u>Format Type</u>						
Local	8	32	7	24	4	3
Campus-based/Intensive	7	24	12	25	5	1
Extension	8	35	6	15	12	—
<u>Denominational Type</u>						
Mainline	9	34	8	20	4	2
Evangelical	4	30	11	27	6	2
Number of Comments	(42)	(167)	(46)	(118)	(25)	(12)

The only notable difference among program philosophy types with respect to views of desirable changes in the D.Min. is the especially

high percentage of comments from faculty and administrators who teach in the unique content and method type of program calling for more academic emphasis and higher academic standards. Since such programs often do not include as much treatment of the core subjects in the theological curriculum as do other program types, these calls for more academic emphasis are understandable. The differences among format types are few but interesting: The campus-based intensive form, by far the most popular with faculty and administrators as earlier reported, is less likely than the other forms to evoke calls for more rigor; the extension form is notably less likely to provoke comments suggesting a more professional emphasis, but more likely to elicit comments calling for improvements in administration. Denominational differences are not notable.

The following comments are representative, in tone and in the issues they raise, of the hundreds that were sorted and coded to compile the table above:

[There should be] greater selectivity in the admissions process, increased emphasis on traditional theological disciplines at both independent study and project levels, and increased willingness -- and better evaluative tools -- to dismiss persons admitted to candidacy but unable to complete requirements.

[There should be] development of quality programs through the selection process, more attention to basic competencies and skills, and more rigor in projects and independent studies (perhaps through better supervision).

[There should be] a candidacy-admission element at a specific point and a procedure for early recommendation that a student withdraw.

Aside from the continued needs (real and imagined) for more resources and outstanding students, I am generally satisfied with the theory informing our D.Min. program and reasonably satisfied with the overall quality of the students. There is always room for better students, but our expectations are probably too high. We certainly have had some graduates who have attained positions of significant leadership and who benefitted substantially from the program.

Either raise the standards for admission or refuse to grant the degree. I prefer the latter. Continuing education in professional ministry is absolutely necessary; other professions require it but do not grant degrees. I prefer that model -- ongoing continuing education for certification -- because I do not think the level of competency is doctoral.

Make it sufficiently rigorous that some people actually aren't able to be admitted, or actually aren't able to graduate, as would

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be the case with a respectable degree program anywhere, let alone a "doctorate."

[There should be] stronger Biblical, theological and sociological components, and more rigorous evaluation of projects and theses, by way of justifying the professional doctoral designation and also enhancing the professional level of ministerial functioning.

[There needs to be] more Biblical and theological study options available; more ethical issues dealt with; more learning from D.Min. students gathered to impact the M.Div. program structure. [There should also be] higher rigor in acceptance standards. The degree is cheapened in the long run if available to all applicants regardless of level of competence and there is no failure allowed. [That is a] great continuing education concept, but poor for a doctoral degree.

Money for faculty needs to be poured into the program. Stop trying to operate the program with vastly limited funds, courses and staff.

[There should be] more faithful attention to deadlines by both faculty and students, for papers, book lists, syllabi, etc. [There should also be] training of faculty and adjunct faculty for contextual supervision of students.

[There should be] better recruitment for extension clusters so as to avoid admissions compromises among the bottom 20% of cluster participants; and improved models and supervision of the project and writing thereupon.

[There should be] more faculty ownership. It was instituted as a "pilot" program with the promise of regular evaluation. We are keeping the promise by a thorough review. Faculty who have participated on a volunteer basis are more favorable than others, who tend to think it lacks academic quality.

More regularization of standards and expectations.

We expect to see ongoing change in programs in the direction suggested by these comments and summarized on Table III. Deeper involvement of the seminary's core faculty, more academic content and rigor, stricter standards for the initial selection and later evaluation of students' work, and at the same time the preservation of the "professional" focus in elements of D.Min. programs are all likely directions for program development.

### Factors and Issues that will Influence the Future of the D.Min.

In addition to the factors just sketched -- the size of the D.Min. "market," the likely growth of or decline of particular program types

and forms, directions for internal changes in the D.Min. urged by faculty members and administrators -- there are several issues having to do with the shape and impact of the D.Min. degree more broadly that will, we believe, affect the degree's future.

1. The diversity of program types and forms gathered under the rubric of the single degree will, we are convinced, undermine the D.Min. in the long run. We favor flexibility and variety in forms, but we do not believe that a single degree name is adequate to communicate four or more different conceptions of what constitutes advanced professional education for ministry. Without some agreement about what features and elements are central and essential to D.Min. education, and which may vary from program to program, we believe that the D.Min. will create confusion among its public and its potential clientele that will, in the long run, undercut its appeal and perhaps its existence. Schools now offering the degree must consult together until they have established a common rationale for the D.Min. degree, a definition of its basic purpose or direction, a specific statement of the standard of work expected, and some protocols that will cause D.Min. programs offered in different institutions to resemble each other in basic ways while offering as well the wide range of foci and emphases needed to match ministers' varied interests.

2. The future of the D.Min. degree also depends, in the long run, on improving its uncertain public reputation. As we have demonstrated, there is enormous good will toward the degree in principle and in concept, and the widespread view that seminaries should continue to give it, even among seminary faculty members, whom we did not expect to be so enthusiastic. At the same time that there is nearly unanimous approval for the granting of such a degree, however, it must be noted that almost everyone associated with the D.Min. believes that some institutions are conducting programs of poor quality; and many faculty members, although they approve their institution's own program in general, make negative judgments about many features of that program, from the quality of students and standards for selection to the adequacy of the final thesis or project report.

Thus the degree lacks lustre. Laity in Presbyterian churches, the denomination in which the degree has had the most airing, do not think the possession of a D.Min. should weigh at all heavily in pastoral selection or setting pastoral pay scales. Though the desire to get a better job and make more money is widely disdained as a motive for seeking a D.Min. degree, it is nevertheless the case that unless the degree takes on enough meaning to have some weight or influence when decisions are made about employment of clergy, it will not have succeeded as in fact being trusted as a mark of having achieved "advanced professional competence for ministry." There is, it seems to us, a close relationship among the actual rigor and integrity of a program, the public perception of and trust in the efficacy of the program, and the utility of the degree or certificate the program yields for decisions in the evaluation and employment of professionals. If medical board exams in specialty areas did not, for instance,

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generally signify an advanced level of competence, dependably enough so that some evaluative and hiring decisions can be based upon that certification, few physicians would seek board certification. By the same token, unless the D.Min. takes on the kind of power as a signifier of advanced competence that degrees and certificates from other advanced training programs yield, its future, we think, may be bleak. Therefore the vigorous upgrading of the degree standards and the re-evaluation of institutions that offer it by those new standards is essential for the degree's survival.

3. As noted much earlier in the section on the D.Min.'s history, the D.Min. degree lacks strong analogues. The most widely regarded professional doctoral degrees are those that are earned in a foundational program of preparation, such as the M.D. or the J.D. Also well trusted are professional doctoral programs that are second degrees but that have many features that resemble those of "academic" doctorates. In this category, increasingly, are found such degrees as the Ed.D. and the Psy.D. Though intended for practitioners more than researchers, the degrees are quite similar in structure to the Ph.D., the major difference often being the nature of the final project or dissertation. The Ed.D. has, as we earlier noted, in many institutions become indistinguishable from the same school's Ph.D. in education. The D.Min. is neither a foundational professional doctorate nor a second professional doctorate with many of the features of the Ph.D. degree. It attempts to chart a third course. We believe that it is appropriate to try to find this third way but that it is extremely difficult to do so in a context where few parallel programs exist in other professions. A degree gains its legitimacy, if it is new, partly by comparison with accepted degrees. The degrees that have looked most like the D.Min. -- the Doctor of Business Administration, for example -- have not had a bright career. The lack of analogues makes the task of communicating the purpose and utility of the D.Min. degree all the more difficult.

The combination of these factors -- lack of standardization among D.Min. programs, the uncertain reputation of some programs and many program element structures and standards, and the lack of comparable doctoral degrees that would help communicate to the public the purpose and meaning of the D.Min. -- suggests that the D.Min. degree faces a difficult struggle for acceptance and survival over the long term. Even though there is currently considerable good will toward the degree among educators, church officials, clergy and laity who have observed its effects on clergy morale, the persistence of the issues just outlined, along with the strong indications that the market for the degree is "leveling," lead us to make emphatic recommendations that the purposes of the degree be specified, that its content and expectations be standardized, and that changes required to insure adequate program quality be made immediately.