



## **FINAL REPORT**

### **GREEN SEMINARY INITIATIVE**

#### **SURVEY PROJECT**

**9/14/12**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Green Seminary Initiative (GSI) promotes efforts by theological schools and seminaries to incorporate care for God’s creation into the identity and mission of the institution, such that it becomes a foundational part of the academic program and an integral part of the ethos of the institution. GSI is attempting to build a nationwide coalition of theological schools that engage faculty, staff, and students in infusing care of the earth into five aspects of theological education – academics, worship, buildings and grounds, community life and public ministry.

Through the insights and communications with approximately fifty seminaries in creating and managing the GSI website, GSI has learned that some seminaries are making great strides in integrating earth care into various aspects of theological education, while others lag behind. Pastors and faith leaders trained at many of these schools, therefore, receive little or no education on the theological imperative to protect the earth nor on the more practical skills needed to lead their congregations in stewarding God’s creation.

Now that the GSI website is up and running, GSI leadership expressed an interest in optimizing this resource in supporting theological institutions at various stages of incorporating earth care into theological education. To this end, with support from the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, the Green Seminary Initiative paid Beth Norcross, one of the co-founders of the GSI, to conduct personal interviews with a diverse sample of the 260 theological schools and seminaries in the United States, to learn about their progress and experience in incorporating care for the earth in theological education, and to determine how GSI can best promote, serve, and strengthen their efforts. The findings of the survey will guide GSI grant requests, staffing, program and policy decisions.

Since Beth has worked closely with the program since its inception, she was able to do the interviewing in a very fluid manner, combined with offering encouragement and advice. Good methodology and a questionnaire aimed at objectivity, as well as her professional experience, helped make sure the results were substantive.

This survey sought to determine the extent to which: (1) an institution's curriculum is already reflecting an understanding of the theological significance of creation, the importance of responding to today's pressing ecological challenges, and a call to caring of God's creation; (2) buildings and grounds are being constructed, operated and maintained in an ecological and sustainable manner; (3) creation is regularly engaged in worship; (3) community life and public advocacy, including food services, outreach and mission, reflect an appreciation and concern for creation; (4) key stakeholders -- staff, faculty, students, boards, alumni and funders -- are involved in integrating creation care into the ethos and operation of the seminary; and (5) GSI, through its website, conferences, and other initiatives, can assist and augment these efforts.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We first imported the Association of Theological Schools' list of the 260 theological schools in the U.S. We then sorted the list using the criteria below:

- Denominational affiliation
- Location
- Enrollment size

Working together with Drew Theological School's Dr. Laurel Kearns, a co-founder of GSI, we then put together a list of 27 institutions which provided a good cross-section of schools based on the above criteria. In addition, we used website presentation and our own personal knowledge of the schools to ensure that we had an adequate range of theological orientation (conservative to progressive) and included two schools which have majority African American populations. Included in the list of 27 schools were four schools requested by the duPont Fund -- Wake Forest, Yale, Notre Dame, University of the South and Southern Baptist.

Using personal knowledge and a review of the 27 school websites, we identified those individuals most involved with creation care efforts and sent out interview requests to those individuals. With follow-up emails and calls, we eventually heard from 19 schools. We were able to schedule and conduct 17 in-depth interviews based on those initial responses. All of the duPont schools were interviewed, with the exception of Southern Baptist, to which we made a number of inquiries. A full list of the schools interviewed is included in Attachment 1.

Beth conducted all of the 17 interviews, which varied from about 45 to 90 minutes. All interviewees were sent consent forms, and all but three have been returned. A project associate is continuing to pursue those although several attempts have already been made. All participants did verbally agree to allow themselves to be taped.

The questions were designed to elicit information on the current efforts at a particular seminary as well as specific ways in which the GSI could be most helpful to those efforts. Most of the questions were qualitative, with some requiring specific numerical responses.

Within the time allotted, as much information as possible was collected on the following:

- School
- Denomination
- Interviewee name
- Interviewee position at the school
- Interviewee role in creation care efforts and his/her motivation for involvement
- Had the interviewee heard of GSI before
- How the creation care program got started
- Summary of creation care program
- How integrated creation care is, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest, 5 the highest), into:
  - Mission of the school
  - Academics
  - Buildings and grounds
  - Worship
  - Community life
  - Public ministry
- Whether spirituality in nature is encouraged
- Major obstacles the school has encountered in developing the creation care program
- Opportunities the school has been able to take advantage of in developing the creation care program
- Whether/how GSI could be helpful in following areas:
  - Academics
  - Buildings and grounds
  - Worship
  - Community life
  - Public ministry
- Whether any of the following GSI efforts would be helpful:
  - Green Seminary Certification

- More information on science and ecological threats
- Grant money
- Encouraging institutional support at Association of Theological Schools (ATS), American Academy of Religion (AAR), Society of Biblical Literature (SBL)
- More information on other seminaries' efforts
- Information/encouragement from denominations
- Networking opportunities
- Other assistance GSI might offer that was not listed above
- Other comments/insights

Because of the thoroughness of the answers from many individuals, it was often difficult to get through all the questions in the allotted time. It should be recognized, too, that as it was appropriate, schools were encouraged to use the many resources on the GSI site and to add their individual school profiles to the site if they had not already done so. To date, six additional schools have added profiles, with others on the way, indicating that the outreach part of the survey was successful.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

### **Seminary Creation Care Programs**

#### **General Observations**

- **16 of those interviewed were faculty, (including 3 deans), 1 was an administrator (development), and 4 were students.** (Some schools had more than one interviewee.)
- **Most schools had heard of GSI.** 14 schools had heard of GSI, 2 had not, and 1 was unsure. Prior to the interviews, 4 schools had entered profiles on the GSI website.
- **Needs, challenges, opportunities, extent of greening efforts varied widely** from school to school. For example, some schools had successful building and grounds efforts with little in academics; others had numerous eco-oriented courses with little work on buildings and grounds.
- **Creation care is still an add-on at most schools,** not part of their mission. No school included in the survey had a well-developed, fully integrated creation care program.
- **Creation care programs seemed to develop around: 1) the passions, reach and skill set of a creation care champion(s) and 2) specific opportunities** (e.g. a new

building). At least 25% of the schools seemed to have no established program or green group per se, just ad hoc individual efforts.

- **The most critical factor in a successful program seemed to be having key individuals/champions (faculty, administration, board or students) who were consistently pushing/promoting.** The more clout the individuals had by virtue of position, tenure or otherwise, the more developed is the program.
- **The vast majority of the programs were faculty started**, with some student initiatives coming and going. Student initiatives are difficult to maintain because of the turnover of students year to year and competing ordination and education requirements.
- **A few successful programs (ITC, LTSP) were pushed by a key board member or president.**
- **Big differences exist between stand-alone schools and those affiliated with undergraduate institutions.** Those affiliated with universities seemed to have more successful programs, particularly in buildings and grounds, but there were notable exceptions (e.g. Columbia, LTSP and ITC all are stand-alone schools but have well developed programs). Undergraduate affiliation allowed structural support and impetus to seminary greening programs as well as the ability to take advantage of some economies of scale.
- **Size of enrollment seemed to play no particular role** in the success of the creation care efforts.
- **Some schools began their creation care efforts out of concern for social justice, while most had specific concerns for ecological challenges.**
- **Three successful programs had partnered with other schools in the university** (two with forestry schools, one with med school)
- **While a large majority of schools expressed an interest in spirituality in nature, only a few schools (despite proximity to natural areas) had engaged students or faculty in spiritual practice in nature;** worry over the danger of paganism, pantheism was expressed by a handful of participants.
- **Denominational support/encouragement is key to a few seminaries** (e.g. Lutherans, Presbyterians)

Self-scores on Creation Care programs (scored 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest)

- **Scores on the progress of individual creation care programs were very subjective and rankings were inconsistent from school to school.** For example, Yale, which has a well-developed program, ranked itself on average a 2.17, where other schools with less-developed programs or no program at all ranked themselves well into the 3's.
- **Most of the schools ranked themselves more or less in the middle with an average score of 2.78.**
- **Of the six categories surveyed (mission, academics, buildings and grounds, worship, community life and public ministry), schools feel they are doing best on buildings and grounds (average 3.46) and community life (food services, recycling, dorm life, etc. at 3.25).**
- **Ratings on mission, academics, worship and public ministry were clustered between 2.29 and 2.65.**

Obstacles to a more fully developed program specifically noted by 3 or more schools include:

- **Creation care is not part of the culture;** Earth care is still seen as extra, not part of the mission
- **Usually one or two individuals pushing/promoting, not institutionalized**
- **Confusion about priorities, strategy** or the task seems overwhelming
- **Suspicion towards environmentalism** as being too liberal or possibly pantheistic
- **Political nature of environmentalism**
- **The uncertain future of seminary education**
- **Old buildings that are energy inefficient** but costly to renovate
- **Faculty time constraints;** not part of their job description
- **Lack of faculty knowledge on how to integrate creation care** into his/her discipline while also meeting other course requirements
- **The independence and narrowness of faculty disciplines**

- **Competing student ordination requirements**
- **Student time constraints**

Opportunities one or more schools identified:

- **Undergrad institution promoting and providing resources**
- **Relationship with other schools in university** (School of Forestry, Medical School)
- **Passion/interest of key individuals**, mostly faculty, but including students and administration
- **Ties with social justice**
- **New green building** led to thinking about other programs opportunities
- **Denominational encouragement**, resources (Lutherans, Presbyterians)
- **Property study**
- **Service learning**
- **Earth Day**
- **Grants** – Luce, Templeton, Rockefeller
- **Pressure from the top** – Board, President
- **Relationship with GreenFaith**
- **Prominent faculty**
- **Corporate partnership**

## How can GSI be helpful?

### General Responses

- Regarding specific ways in which GSI can be helpful, **100% of the seminaries which answered the question identified:**
  - Helping find targeted grants
  - Networking opportunities for faculty, administrators and staff
- **There was also a great deal of enthusiasm for the following areas:**
  - Information on what other seminaries are doing (92%)
  - Green Seminary Certification program (88%)
  - Working with ATS to encourage schools to be more active (86%)
  - Assistance with academics (83%)
- Of the categories of assistance listed, there was the **least interest in GSI's working with the Society of Biblical Literature (7%)** and little interest in AAR as well.

### Targeted Grants

The ways suggested by at least one interviewee that GSI could offer grant assistance to the seminaries include:

- **Help in how to get grants**, identifying funders and programs, assistance in defining scope of grant, etc.
- **GSI becoming an intermediary for seminary creation care grants**, working with key funders to guide grants to particular schools and programs
- **Specific grant ideas** included those for:
  - Academics and faculty training (see below)
  - Student programs (see below)
  - Food service improvements
  - Community gardens
  - Worship renewal
  - Lectures
  - In person assistance – roving expert
  - Earth audits –full review of mission and all seminary program areas

### Academics and Faculty Training

Integrating creation care into academics was a key concept that permeated all aspects of virtually every interview. While online activities, such as webinars, would be helpful, most interviewees preferred face to face meetings.

Specific ideas suggested for ways in which GSI could provide help included:

- **A conference, perhaps regional, to encourage inter/intra-discipline conversation/guidance** on how to integrate earth care into specific disciplines and to curriculum overall
- **Two year post-doc** to examine ways in which curriculum could integrate earth care; could also look at other aspects of seminary life
- **Roving team of scholars** to give lectures, on-site counsel, teach a course
- **A standard curricular audit** to determine creation-friendliness of existing curriculum and offer suggestions for improvement
- **Faculty retreats** to discuss how to integrate creation care
- **Faculty spiritual retreats** to encourage spiritual practice in nature
- **New course syllabi (note: the GSI is already posting syllabi)**
- **Stipends for faculty** to attend key conferences or a mini-course on creation care

#### Student Programs

Ideas for GSI help with specific student programs included:

- **Stipends for conferences** or mini-course/retreat on creation care
- **Ideas/stipends for earthcare-oriented internships**
- **Practical advice on practice in ministry** or service learning placements
- **Student scholarships** to start green team
- **Student 3-day intensive retreat to learn about creation care**
- **Practical advice in helping students meet ordination requirements while learning about creation again**

#### Networking opportunities

Given that, generally, only a handful of individuals promote creation care at a specific school, there was quite a bit of interest in GSI's **providing regular networking opportunities**. Interest was around sharing ideas, challenges, opportunities, fellowship.

Students seemed more comfortable with online resources, such as webinars, Facebook groups, etc. Faculty generally preferred face-to-face interaction.

Other ideas for ways in which GSI could be helpful mentioned by at least one individual included:

- **Strategic assistance.** Often individuals have a great deal of information but are not clear on how to set priorities or how to gain traction given a school's many competing priorities.
- **On-call resource** to provide help as needed on all aspects of establishing an integrated creation care program at a given school
- **Monthly webinar** on a specific area of interest
- On the website, **encourage prayers** for a seminary each week

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The 17 interviews conducted showed a great diversity of challenges and opportunities for creation care programs in theological schools across the nation. Some were challenged by their traditions; others were offered encouragement by their traditions. Some had supportive undergraduate institutions that prompted action; others were small stand-alone schools desperate for resources. Many schools had key faculty in place driving the creation care programs. Others had a few active students who would soon graduate.

Given this breadth, the major challenge for the Green Seminary Initiative is to determine how it can most effectively focus its limited resources. The GSI needs to be strategic, rather than responsive and reactive. If it tries to be all things to all people, it runs the risk of watering down its programs and limiting its efficacy.

Despite the diversity of experience of the schools interviewed, needs did coalesce around a few key areas:

- Faculty training and academics
- Funding assistance
- Sharing information
- Networking
- On-the-ground support
- Student programs

Based on the interviews and firsthand knowledge of the GSI, Beth Norcross recommended the GSI develop the following priorities over the next 3-5 years:

- **Enhance the GSI website so that it is an accessible, attractive, up to date, go-to center for resources.**

The website provides the best way of providing information, motivation and encouragement to a wide array of theological schools to integrate creation care into their programs. It provides a great deal of information that can be helpful to theological schools as well as being the public face of the organization. Many of those interviewed either did not know about the site or requested information that already existed on the site. Specifically, Beth recommends that GSI do the following:

- **Market the website better.** Most schools are unaware of breadth of existing resources on site; many asked for resources that are already available.
- **Continue to update and the site, change pictures, add syllabi, articles, bibliography by subject area, and maintain existing info so it doesn't get stale.**
- **Add more information on strategies for getting through major challenges, e.g. funding, other school priorities, etc.**
- **Keep existing format but make it less wordy and more accessible and interactive.**
- **Add more fresh stories from seminaries.**
- **Keep an active email list and send out regular pointers, suggestions.**
- **Maintain an active list-serve so that participants can solicit assistance from others.**
- **Keep adding seminary profiles while encouraging others to keep theirs maintained and current.**
- **Add a FAQ section.**
- **Provide an online help center that is regularly maintained.**
- **Provide more consistent online networking opportunities, student-student, faculty-faculty and faculty-student-administration. Provide**

opportunities for online groups to form by denomination, region, etc. Set up chatrooms, enliven the Facebook group. Consider online mentors.

- **Have a regular monthly webinar on a specific topic**, related to strategy, one of the five program areas, grant-writing, etc.
- **Gather information on in-service learning opportunities for students**, as well as internships, practice in ministry placements by region.

- **Pursue Green Seminary Certification, but change the name.**

Often schools are overwhelmed with the task of creation care. Green Seminary certification allows schools to have a strategic, specific structure for integrating creation care into their mission and programs. It also gives assistance in carrying out that plan. In addition, the certification provides internal motivation as well as external recognition. The certification would be much more accessible to a wide range of schools if “green” were dropped in favor of something related to “creation.”

- **Encourage influential seminaries to bolster their creation care efforts and add their profiles to the website.**

GSI should identify 5 to 10 key schools that are influential within their denominationally, regionally or nationally and solicit relationships there. Encouraging and empowering these schools to have rich, integrated creation care efforts could have a ripple effect across other schools and lend credibility to the GSI program.

- **Establish key allies, particularly ATS and seminary presidents.**

Emerging from the interviews was a sense that key individuals in particular positions can be very helpful in promoting creation care efforts.

- **Encourage ATS engagement and support.** Almost every school interviewed suggested that ATS’s expressed interest in seminary creation care efforts would provide immediate impetus for engagement.
- **Engage with seminary presidents at their regularly meeting.** Look for key allies amongst presidents and key board members.

- **Set up regional faculty education conferences or mini-courses.**

Provide opportunities for greater faculty networking/education, particularly in similar discipline/region/denomination.

- **Assist schools in grant procurement.**

Become a grant facilitator and/or help seminaries to get grants or partner with others to provide. Specific grants would be tailored to individual needs. (See “How Can GSI Be Helpful: Targeted Grants” above.)

- **Build organizational capacity of the GSI through staffing and board development.**

The GSI has been largely conducted as a volunteer venture. If the GSI is to successfully develop the aforementioned programs, a great deal of work needs to be done in building organizational infrastructure. Specifically:

- **Develop fundraising strategy** to fund key programs identified above.
- **Hire fulltime Executive Director** to develop vision and strategy, coordinate program.
- **Utilize part-time graduate students for assistance.**
- **Expand and enhance steering committee to become a more engaged, working board.**
- **Meet quarterly with steering committee to solicit their input and involvement.**

**ATTACHMENT A  
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS INTERVIEWED**

<b>Seminary</b>	<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>Undergrad Affiliation</b>
Calvin Theological Seminary	Christian Reformed Church	North Central	273	Yes
Columbia Theological Seminary	Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	Southeast	387	No
Concordia Seminary (MO)	Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod	South Central	644	No
Duke University Divinity School	United Methodist Church	Southeast	628	Yes
Eastern Mennonite Seminary	Mennonite Church USA	Southeast	143	Yes
Fuller Theological Seminary	Interdenominational/Multidenominational	West	3708	No
Howard University School of Divinity	Nondenominational	Northeast	127	Yes
Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC)	Interdenominational/Multidenominational	Southeast	807	No
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (LTSP)	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	Northeast	332	No
Oblate School of Theology	Roman Catholic	South Central	135	No
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College	Jewish - Reconstructionist	Northeast	80	No
San Francisco Theological Seminary	Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	West	292	No
Sioux Falls Seminary	Baptist - North American Baptist Conference	North Central	149	No
University of Notre Dame School of Theology	Roman Catholic	North Central	215	Yes
University of the South School of Theology	Anglican - Episcopal Church	Southeast	132	Yes
Wake Forest University School of Divinity	Interdenominational/Multidenominational	Southeast	91	Yes
Yale University Divinity School	Interdenominational/Multidenominational	Northeast	362	Yes

