



ATFE

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**COMPETENCE: DEFINITIONS,
MEASUREMENT, NURTURE**

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Competence: Definitions, Measurement, Nurture

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Competence: Definitions

The question we are here engaging is whether it is possible to identify a set of “core competencies” which are essential to faithful ministry and which a student’s field education experience can reasonably be expected to engage, enhance, and assess. Most field education programs assume—in practice if not in theory—that it is possible to define such a core, though most field educators struggle to articulate it. A few widely-shared assumptions about competence are that it signifies observable behavior which can be named and described in such a way that a student can reflect on it and make changes where necessary, and that field educators can assist the student in such reflection and change and make some sort of concluding assessments of it.

Decisions about such “core competencies” are not made in isolation but within a whole web of relationships. Conversation partners include:

- The theological school—its traditions and present faculty.
- The field educators themselves—their own ministry paradigms.
- The denomination—its theological traditions and ordination procedures.
- The student’s placement or ministry site—its local expectations and needs.
- Mentor pastors—their strengths and vision for the church.
- The student’s own vision of her/his ministry.
- And running through all of these are theological priorities and ecclesiological commitments. An especially urgent theological aspect of this is this year’s consultation’s reflections on the crucial importance of ministry *context* in determining what ministry in a given location should be.

A major task of field educators is enabling a fruitful conversation among the various partners and dealing with inevitable tensions among them.

Competence: Nurture

The question of how field education experiences might enhance a student’s competencies for ministry involves decisions about the *nature* of such competencies. One way of framing the issue is to say that the student is first and foremost a person, that is, that there is a uniqueness and mystery at her/his core which no one has a right to enter. This self-understanding includes the emotional and spiritual identity of the person and her/his understanding of their relationship with God and *personal* sense of vocation. But then there is the public person and the characteristics that are determinative for this sphere, characteristics such as integrity, openness to growth and learning, appropriate humility and self-respect, courage, and many others. And finally, there are the skills which a person has or needs in order to satisfy the expectations of an ordained person. The workshop participants were in nearly unanimous agreement that while it is easiest to assess skills and nurture them in a student, it is much more important to engage issues around personal characteristics that shape one’s life in community. Such characteristics can be thought of under various rubrics:

- Professional or pastoral identity

- Emotional intelligence
- Christological or character virtues

Competence: Measurement

Given the general understanding of competence suggested above and the nature of competencies envisioned, can one articulate such competencies in a manner which allows for observation and assessment? As *one* attempt I have offered the assessment model used by the Intern Program at Perkins School of Theology. Assessment involves a written statement from the intern and oral assessment from the mentor pastor, lay teaching committee and intern faculty supervisor. Students are informed at the beginning of their internship that its successful completion will depend upon the intern faculty supervisor's assessment of evidence

- (1) "that the intern can *perform* the basic functions of a representative minister, at least at a beginning level of competence." This includes competence in the areas of
 - Ministry Contexts: Church and Community
 - Christian Worship
 - Social Action for Justice and Peace
 - Pastoral Care
 - Church Administration
 - Christian Education
 - Evangelism
 - Personal Nurture
- (2) "that the intern has *learned* about ministry, both in terms of the church and of herself/himself as a minister."
- (3) "that the intern has *personal characteristics* that will enable him/her to be a representative minister." This includes but is not limited to the intern's
 - Spirituality
 - Interpersonal relationships
 - Intrapersonal awareness
- (4) and "that the intern can relate what she/he is doing in ministry with her/his understanding of the Christian faith," in other words, *theological reflection*.

Obviously there is nothing sacred about this list of criteria and we, like all of you, remain engaged in the conversation for more adequate theoretical and practical articulations of our common purpose.