

A Widening Place

Austin Seminary Strategic Plan 2022-2025

For 120 years, Austin Presbyterian Seminary has educated and equipped individuals for the ordained Christian ministry and other forms of Christian service and leadership; employed its resources in the service of the church; promoted and engaged in critical theological thought and research; engaged a range of voices and perspectives; and fostered a winsome and exemplary community of God's people. As a historical institution that seeks to continue this mission as it responds to rapidly shifting socio-cultural realities of today's world, Austin Seminary is mindful of the need to direct its institutional drive towards innovation. The 3 years strategic plan will continue to thrust the seminary forward to new levels of educational, communal, and organizational achievement. In moving forward toward that goal, Austin Seminary will remain grounded in its purpose and the tradition and history that forged our unique institutional character.

The strategic planning finds its inspiration in the prophetic imagination of our ancestors in faith who, facing cultural adversity and fragmentation like the one that challenges the sustainability of theological institutions today, maintained a hopeful vision of the future. In depicting this reality, the prophet Isaiah, challenged the faithful to *“widen the place of their tent, stretch forth the curtains of their habitations, lengthen their cords, and strengthen their stakes.”* (Isaiah 54:2). Compelled by the same prophetic invitation, Austin Seminary will invest in *“widening this place”* of ministerial formation by developing and executing strategic goals that will *“stretch the curtains”* to offer hospitality and promote equity for an increasingly diverse community, *“lengthen its cords”* by promoting growth, and *“strengthen the stakes”* by attending to and solidifying current organizational practices and community traditions.

This strategic plan has been guided by conversations with members of the staff, faculty, trustees, and students. All members of the community recognize our continued need to improve our services by investing in priorities that underlie all aspects of this plan. The strategic plan of Austin Seminary identifies a few key areas of focus for the next three years. Each strategic objective states a general goal. The targets for each objective indicate a quantifiable action which, if attained, moves the school towards the future envisioned in the strategic objective. When known, the text also states the estimated costs associated with the strategic objective. In establishing this plan, the institution expects to remain nimble and adaptive to respond to the needs of the community and the church in an ever-changing world. This living document establishes the basis for the next three years as Austin Seminary strives to *widen its place*.

Stretching the curtains to welcome all

Austin Seminary graduates will serve in ministry settings among people who hold a variety of social and political views, and who represent a wide array of economic, social, cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. The Seminary's master's degree graduates will have the skills and attitudes to be able to fulfill their calling effectively among persons who represent a diversity of cultural identities and positionings.

For this strategic period, the focus of this goal for *culturally responsive formation* will be the development of intercultural proficiencies through cultural competence and cultural humility training.

Strategic Objective 1: Form Interculturally Proficient Graduates

Target 1.1: Faculty will audit their bibliographies and syllabi to discover how they already address cultural competency. Due date: the dean's office will receive audits by December 15, 2022.

Target 1.2: Faculty will receive training on how better to teach cultural competency and humility in the context of our master's-degree curricula. Timeline: training will happen during the 2022-2023 academic year.

Target 1.3: The faculty will identify and implement ways to increase the teaching of cultural competency and humility in master's-level classes. This work will be integrated with the current review of the MDiv program. Due date: implementation will begin no later than the spring 2024 semester.

Target 1.4: The Seminary will increase funding for Elma Gunther Scholarships for International Study so that more students can afford to participate in in cross-cultural travel seminars.

Target 1.5: Considering that staff members are also part of the formative experience of students, seminary employees will participate in cultural competence and humility training. Training will commence in November 2022 and will continue with one training event yearly.

Costs for Strategic Objective 1

The costs for 1.1, 1.3 and 1.5 are essentially staff and faculty time. Training about cultural competency (1.2) would cost approximately \$10,000. The cost to increase funding for scholarships for international study (1.4) could be substantial, depending on how much money is desired to support this part of the strategic objective. After discussion, the LRP Committee chose not to identify a specific dollar goal for target 1.4. Based on estimates, the costs of implementing the four strategic objectives can be borne while maintaining a sustainable draw rate, which the Board of Trustees has set at 5%.

Lengthening the Cords to achieve institutional growth

As seen in the current honors, housing, degree structure, and funding arrangements, most students at the Seminary have been white and economically privileged. Institutional growth at Theological institutions will be defined in the immediate future by reaching out to a more diverse population of students. Austin Seminary will become an ethnically, culturally, linguistically diverse, and inclusive community in which all admitted students can flourish.

Strategic Objective 2: Increase Ethnic, Cultural, and Linguistic Diversity and Retention

Target 2.1 Assessment and Historical Evaluation of Students from the Global Majority

The enrollment management (EM) department, with the registrar, will produce an assessment of the last 15 years of recruitment/retention data (academic years 2007-2022) specifically examining:

- Recruitment numbers (intentional dollars/hours/visit) of students of the Global Majority.
- Comparative data for recruitment values against matriculation values of students of the Global Majority.
- Comparative data set examining graduation values against matriculation values of students of the Global Majority.

Due date: May 2023

Target 2.2 Funding Evaluation of the *De Puertas Abiertas* (DPA) Awards

- In the 2022 academic year an annual evaluation will be created to assess the generative properties of the DPA Scholarship and Fellowship on students of the Global Majority (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color) currently enrolled.
- Austin Seminary Retention Committee will develop and present the evaluation tool using both internal and external resources to ensure an adequate tool is developed and the appropriate timeline for use/reporting
- With the institution of the DPA Fellowships and Scholarships an annual assessment should be developed to note if the funding is appropriately increasing:
 - o Participation in merit pool by students of the Global Majority.
 - o Retention of candidates/students of the Global Majority.
 - o The needs of our students of the Global Majority being met.

Due date: May 2023

Target 2.3 Global Majority Alumni Evaluation

- The Enrollment Management and Student Affairs and Vocation (SAV) offices in concert with the Director of Alumni Relations will develop and issue, in the 2022-2023 academic year, a survey for all students of the Global Majority (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color) Alumni to assess:
 - o Degree application (how is it being used) and if there are major needs for changing learning objectives in the present settings.
 - o Assessment of the Seminary environment and their readiness to send students from their community to our institution.
 - o Current needs in churches that serve communities of color and how the degree can supplement those needs in the clergy serving there.
- The survey will be closed in the summer of 2023 and will be used in a multi-year sequence to ensure information stays up to date.

Due date: September 20, 2023

Target 2.4 Retention Committee Empowerment

As an already existing and effective tool in retention of all students, particularly students of color, the Retention Committee needs to be reinforced and better resourced to extend its capabilities.

- Funding for more tutoring and other support mechanisms
- Resources to address the pressing debt issue facing candidates of color in our community
- Adding support to HESD and other student-led initiatives that strengthen the beloved community and support emerging leaders.
- The authority to institute requirements for non-baccalaureate students to utilize resources available to all students in time management/academic tutorials/emotional support/spiritual guidance.

Costs for Strategic Objective 2

Targets 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 require staff time but no other costs. Costs to empower the retention committee (2.4) could be relatively modest (provide greater support for tutoring might cost a few thousand dollars) or more substantial (addressing debt for students of color).

Strengthening the Stakes to solidify, enhance, and improve current educational offerings and organizational practices

Much of the growth of the Christian church is taking place outside of historic Christendom. Austin Seminary already has relationships in some of these areas. The Seminary will enhance international partnerships with theological schools, especially those outside of Europe and North America.

Strategic Objective 3: Strengthen International Partnerships

Target 3.1: In its global partner program, the Seminary has existing relationships with four theological schools in Zambia, Malawi, the Philippines, and South Africa. In the next five years, the Seminary will expand these relationships to include an additional school in Latin America, the Caribbean, or the Asia-Pacific.

Target 3.2: The Seminary will explore the feasibility of Austin Seminary students spending a semester abroad at these partner schools.

Target 3.3: The Seminary will explore the feasibility of faculty exchanges between our school and these partner schools.

Target 3.4 The Seminary will explore the viability of programmatic partnerships with tribal nations within the United States.

Costs for Strategic Objective 3

Strategic Objective 3 envisions establishing another international partnership (2.1) and exploring the feasibility of other activities (3.2 and 3.3). Until the exploratory work is done, it is difficult to estimate the costs for this objective. Exploratory work will begin in the Spring of 2023 and a report and project plan submitted by Fall 2023.

Strategic Objective 4: Strengthen current organizational practices and infrastructure to position the Seminary for forward-looking change

The Seminary faces the retirement of long-term President Theodore J. Wardlaw in 2022 and the election of José R. Irizarry as our new president. The Board of Trustees of Austin Seminary and staff will ensure that there is sufficient communication and onboarding so that the work of the school and board go forward without disruption during this leadership change. This change of leadership presents the Trustees, the staff, and the Seminary community with an opportunity to evaluate current organizational infrastructure, policies, and institutional practices to facilitate the changes to be brought by a new leadership vision.

Target 4.1 A transition task force will plan appropriate recognition and celebration of President Wardlaw's tenure and retirement and will receive from President Wardlaw written report for

the Board on his tenure, lessons learned, and challenges opportunities facing the Seminary. The task force will also encourage President Wardlaw to provide private written reflections for his successor. This work will be completed by the Task force by November 2022.

Target 4.2 Seminary staff, in particular the Office of Institutional Advancement, shall work with the incoming President to plan for occasions for building relationships with supporters, congregations, and friends of the Seminary. This work will start immediately after taking office and will be ongoing with the first meetings with donors and Presbyteries scheduled in the Fall 2022.

Target 4.3 The transition task force will plan for a subset of the Board to meet with the new President very shortly after taking office so that the new President can have the opportunity early to consider the challenges and opportunities faced by the Seminary as well as the vision for the Seminary. The new President and the subset of the Board shall share with the Board as its February 2023 Retreat the results of those discussions and related ideas and plans for the future life of the seminary.

Target 4.4 The new president will meet with proper staff to assess current policies or lack thereof to achieve alignment of organizational practices to mission and institutional values. Policies and procedures that need adapting will be articulated and communicated accordingly. A set of reviewed policies, as well as implementation of new policies, will be completed by May 2023.

Target 4.5 The Board of Trustees will conduct a review of the bylaws to assess its current governance structure and how it facilitates the ongoing work of the Seminary as it positions itself for change that requires agility, diverse perspectives, and expertise. This work should be completed and approved by the Board by Spring 2024.

Costs for Strategic Objective 4

Incremental costs attributable to Strategic Objective 4 are non-recurring items expected to total less than \$1 million spread across fiscal years 2022, 2023, and 2024.