

Global Survey on Theological Education 2011-2013

Summary of Main Findings

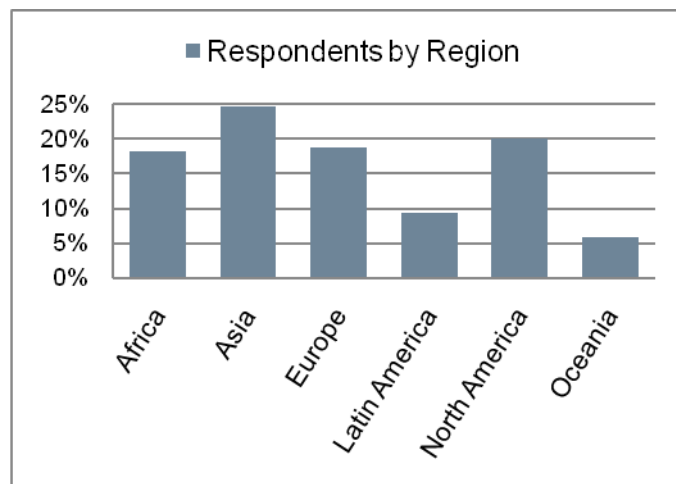
For WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, 30 Oct – 8 Nov 2013

The Global Survey on Theological Education was designed to gather data and perspectives on all forms of theological education from every Christian tradition in every part of the world. The Survey was launched in October 2011 (at the Global Christian Forum meeting in Indonesia) and concluded in June 2013. In this 21-month period, over 1,650 theological educators and other church leaders concerned with theological education and preparation for ministry responded to the Survey. The following pages contain a summary of the main findings.

Responses were received from all parts of the world and from nearly every Christian tradition. Information on the respondents along with links to the detailed results of the survey can be found on the last page of this report. The 70-question survey was available in Chinese, French, Korean, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Spanish as well as in English. The survey questions (in English) can be found [here](#).

The Global Survey was conducted as a joint research project by

- The Institute for Cross-Cultural Theological Education, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago
- Ecumenical Theological Education Program (ETE), World Council of Churches, Geneva
- The Center for the Study of Global Christianity (GSGC), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston.



Global Directory of Theological Education Institutions

One of the most significant outcomes of the Survey is the development of the **Global Directory of Theological Education Institutions**, an online database containing information on more than 7,000 seminaries, theological colleges and faculties, and other theological training institutions. The Directory is hosted by GlobeTheoLib and can be found at <http://www.globethics.net/web/gtl/directory>

The Global Survey gathered observations and recommendations from theological educators and other church leaders. The findings of the survey are based, for the most part, on the perceptions of the respondents rather than numerical or quantitative data.

Main Findings:

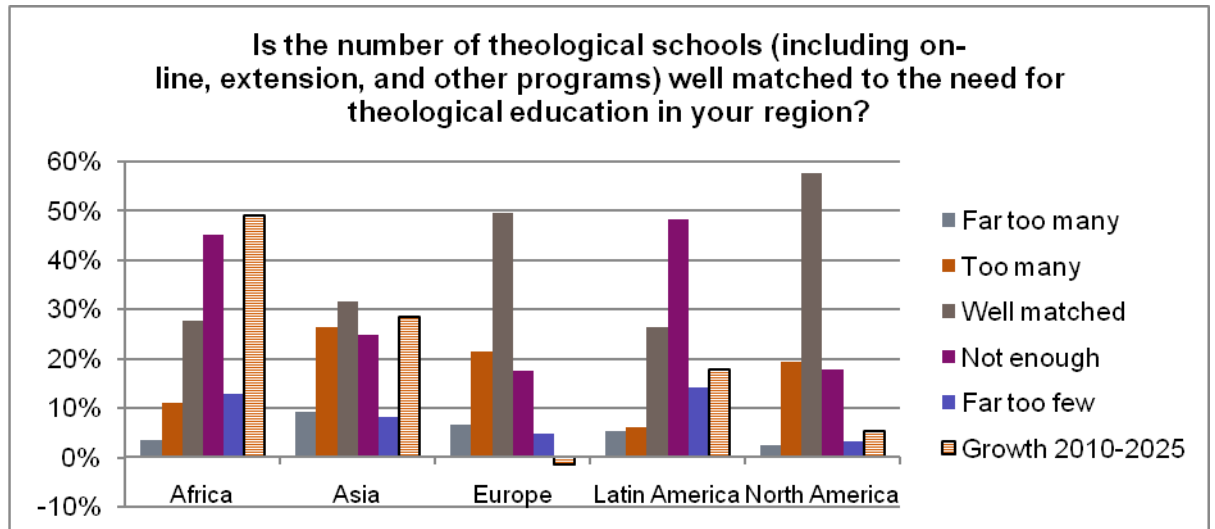
- 1. There are not enough theological schools in the regions of the world where Christianity is growing rapidly (Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia). In Europe and North America there is a much better match between the need for theological education and the number of institutions and programs.**

When asked, "Is the number of theological schools (including on-line, extension, and other programs) well matched to the need for theological education in your region?" 58% of the responses from Africa indicated that there are "not enough" or there are "far too few" schools. From Latin America, 62% responded in these categories. On the other hand, 57% of the respondents from North America indicated that the number of schools is "well matched" to the need and 21% indicated that there are "too many" or "far too many" schools. The response from Europe is similar, where 50% indicated "well matched" and 28% indicated "too many" or "far too many."

The response from Asia shows a remarkable balance across the sub-regions. The number of those who think there are

not enough schools is more than balanced by those who think there are too many. More information can be found [here](#).

The chart contains an additional (stripped) bar representing



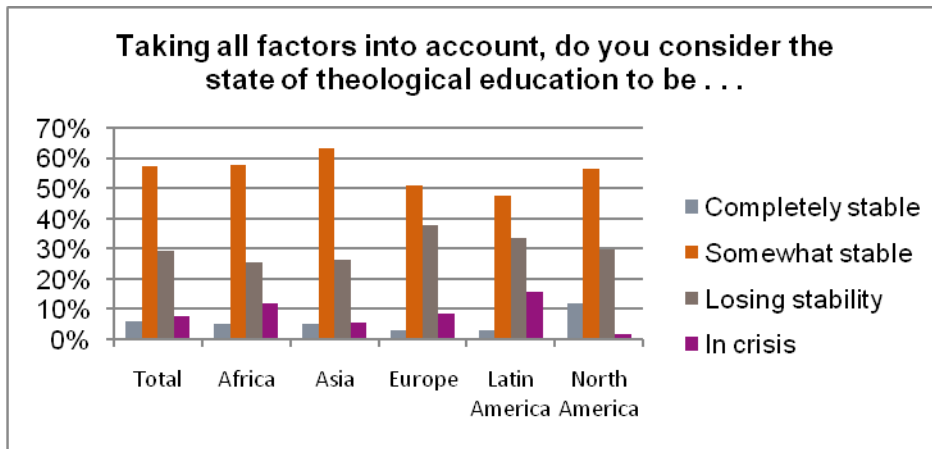
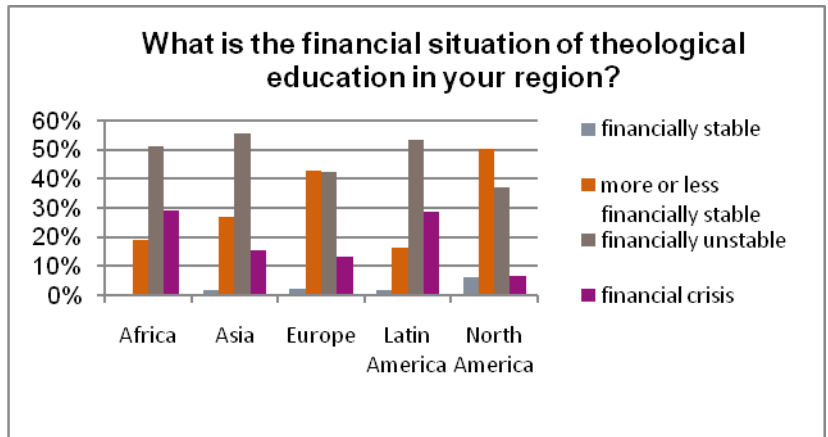
the projected growth (or lack of growth, as in Europe) in the number of Christians in each region—illustrating the relationship between growth and perception of the need for schools. (See the [CSGC report](#) for information on trends in the growth of Christianity.)

- 2. Theological education is financially unstable in many parts of the world. However, when all factors are taken into account, the majority in all parts of the world considers the state of theological education to be at least somewhat stable.**

In response to the question, "What is the financial situation of theological education in your region?" 47% of all respondents selected "financially unstable in many parts of the region" and another 16% selected "in financial crisis." The responses varied from region to region; it is only in North America that more respondents selected either "financially stable" or "more or less financially stable" than selected either "financially unstable" or "financial crisis."

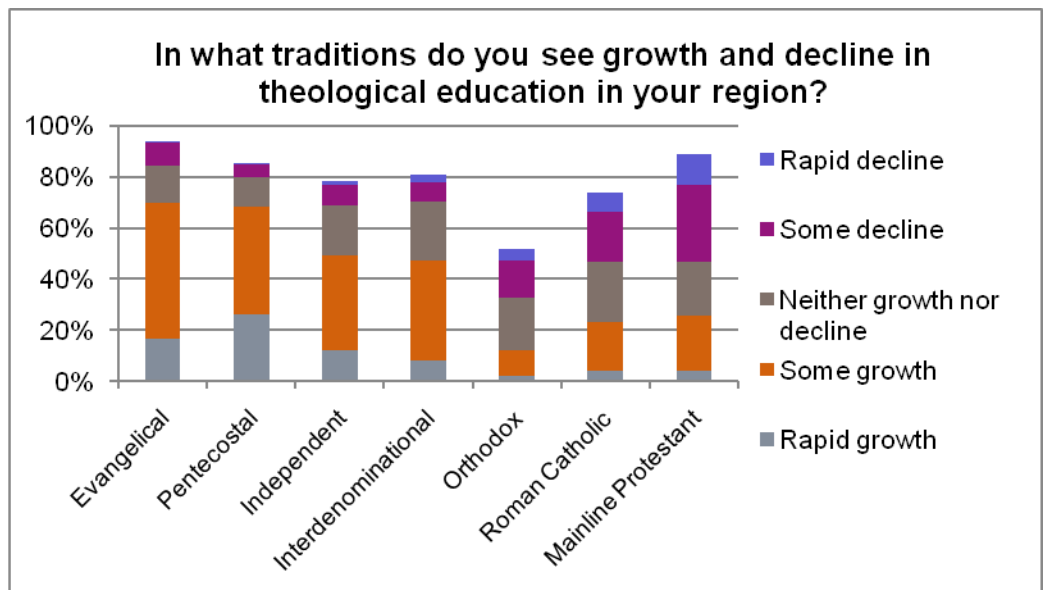
80% and 82% of the respondents from Africa and Latin America respectively selected "unstable" or "in financial crisis." The sense of financial instability and crisis is in striking contrast to the understanding named by 86% of all respondents that theological education is "most important" for the future of world Christianity and the mission of the church.

When asked to consider the state of theological education when all factors are taken into account, 63% of all respondents selected either “completely stable” or “somewhat stable” and at least 52% from every region selected one of these options. Note, however, that more respondents in Europe and Latin America selected “losing stability” or “in crisis” than in other regions. [More information.](#)



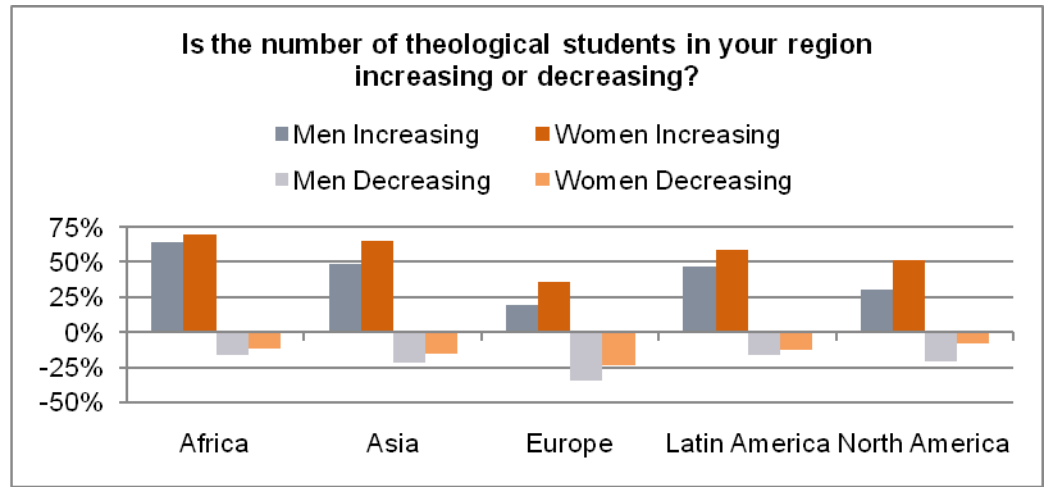
3. Growth is seen in Evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic theological education; decline is seen in mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions.

The most rapid growth is seen among Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions; 26% indicated “rapid growth,” another 42% indicated “some growth.” 70% of respondents indicated that Evangelical groups are growing—17% selected “rapid growth,” another 53% selected “some growth.” Independent and Interdenominational groups are perceived as growing by nearly half of all respondents. The most responses for “rapid decline” (12%) and “some decline” (30%) were selected for Mainline Protestant. Information on responses from the regions can be found [here.](#)



4. The number of women students is growing in every denomination and in every region.

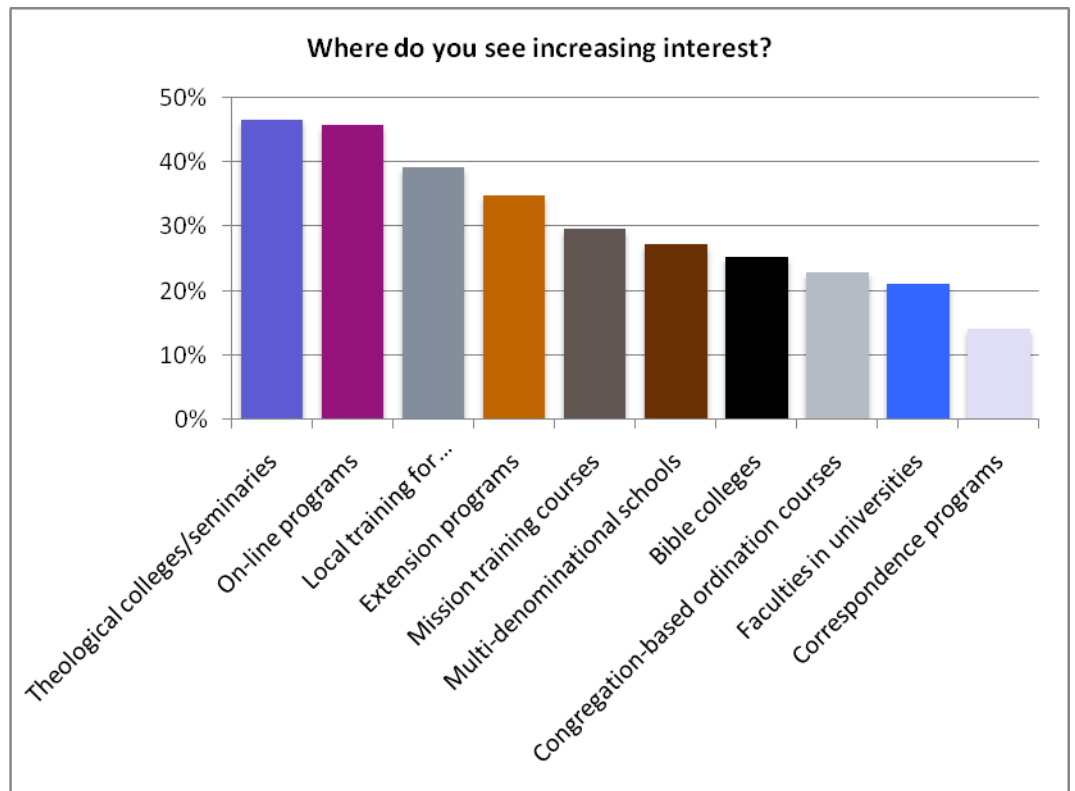
Responses indicate that the number of women students is growing faster than the number of men students—or declining slower than the number of men students. This response is consistent in all regions of the world and in every tradition. The perception in Europe is that the number of men students is decreasing faster than it is increasing (for a net loss)—the only region in the world where this is the case.



5. There is significant interest in online theological education in some parts of the world, but many theological educators consider traditional formats more appropriate.

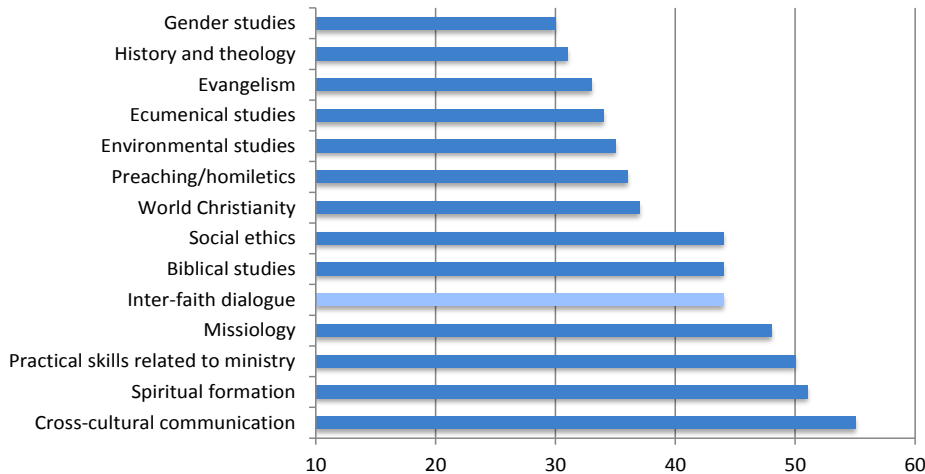
Online programs are seen to have essentially the same amount of interest as theological colleges or seminaries. However, the weight of interest in online education is found in North America where 76% of respondents selected “online,” while only 25% and 27% selected “online” in Africa and Asia respectively. 39% of the respondents in Europe selected “online.” Interest in university based theological education is located primarily in Africa and Europe, with the least interest in North America.

But when asked what formats are **most appropriate**, 70% of all respondents selected “residential college or seminary” while only 34% selected “online degree programs.” 37% selected “extension degree programs,” 30% selected “residential university,” and 25% selected “parish-based ordination courses.” [More information.](#)



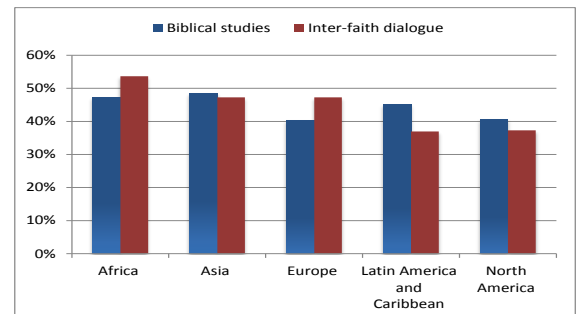
6. Cross-cultural communication and practical skills related to ministry are the subjects respondents would most like to see added or strengthened in theological education.

What programs or individual courses would you like to see added or strengthened in the theological education institutions and programs in your region?



Interest in specific courses and outcomes varies by region. For example, respondents indicated more interest in courses on Inter-faith dialogue than on Biblical Studies in Africa and Europe. There is more interest in gender studies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America than in Europe or North America. [More information.](#)

In response to a related question, "What do the churches in your region expect from theological institutions and programs," more (93%) selected "Preparation for church ministry" than any other option. This response is consistent across the regions, with a slight increase in Europe and North America. The second most selected response is "developing skills for communicating the Gospel" (72%); the third most selected were "spiritual formation" and "increasing Biblical knowledge" (both 70%). There was also consistency across the regions (and across the denominations and traditions!) in the indication that churches are more interested in increasing spiritual formation than in equipping for engagement with social issues. [More information.](#)



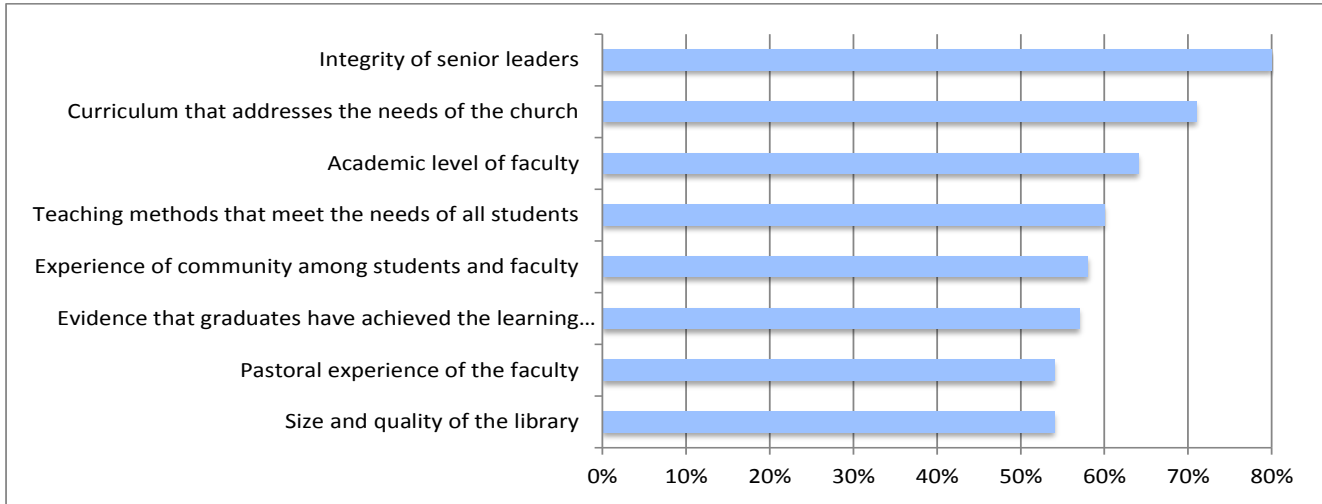
7. Experiential learning is a critical component in preparation for Christian ministry. Learning in the location of ministry (congregation and community) must be integrated with spiritual formation and academic programs.

The integration of practical learning with traditional academic studies, a curriculum that addresses the needs of the congregations served by graduates, and intentional connections between churches and seminaries are some of the issues identified in response to the question, "What are the most important elements in a program of preparation and/or formation for Christian ministry?" Experiential education was named consistently in the narrative responses as the basic requirement in preparation for ministry. The responses contained very few calls for increased academic rigor or more time in the traditional classroom; in fact, concern for the improvement of academic standards was notable by its relative absence.

Other elements named frequently as "most important" in preparation for ministry include Biblical understanding, spirituality, discipleship and mentoring, and partnerships with congregations.

8. The “integrity of senior leaders” is seen as the most important element in determining quality in theological education.

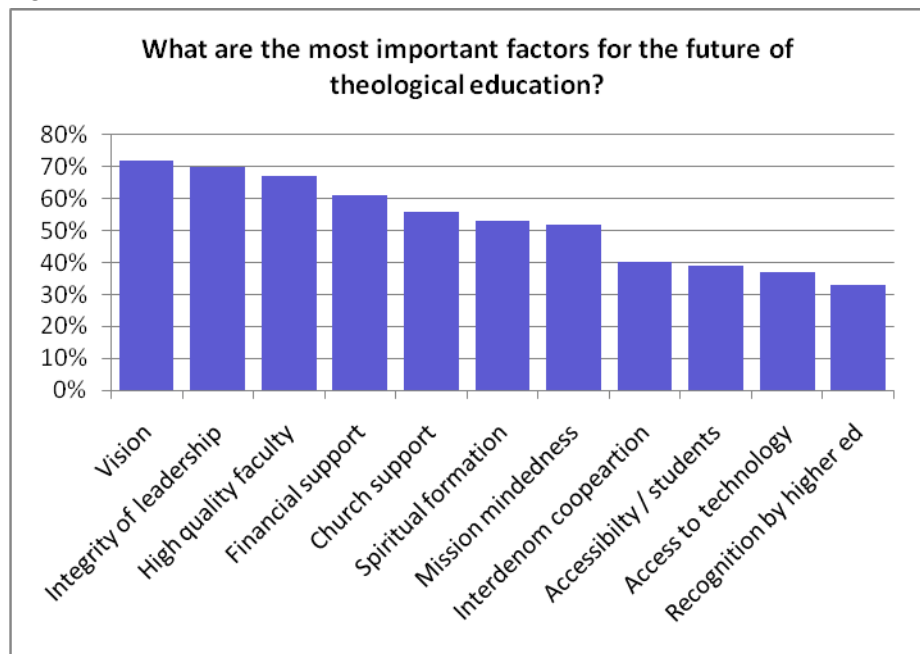
In response to the question, “How important is each of the following in determining quality in institutions of theological education?” 80% indicated “Integrity of senior leaders” as “most important”; an additional 17% selected “somewhat important.” The following chart lists the selections that received more “most important” votes than other options. [More information.](#)



9. Vision, collaboration, integrity of leadership, and relevance are named as the most important factors for the future of theological education.

When asked to select from a list, respondents identified “vision” and “integrity of leadership” as most important for the future of theological education. In the several hundred narrative responses,

ecumenical collaboration, relevance to the local community and needs for ministry, innovation, and faithfulness were named over and over, as was the need to be attentive to the changing reality of students. The following is a typical response: “The ability to understand the changing demands of the next generation of students. They don't want to be taught in a “modern” context (classrooms, lectures, paper tests, etc.). Teachers need to think “postmodern” - having students work collaboratively, team research projects, authoring digital media content etc. All the check boxes for this question are important, particularly to us as educators, but are they important to future students?”

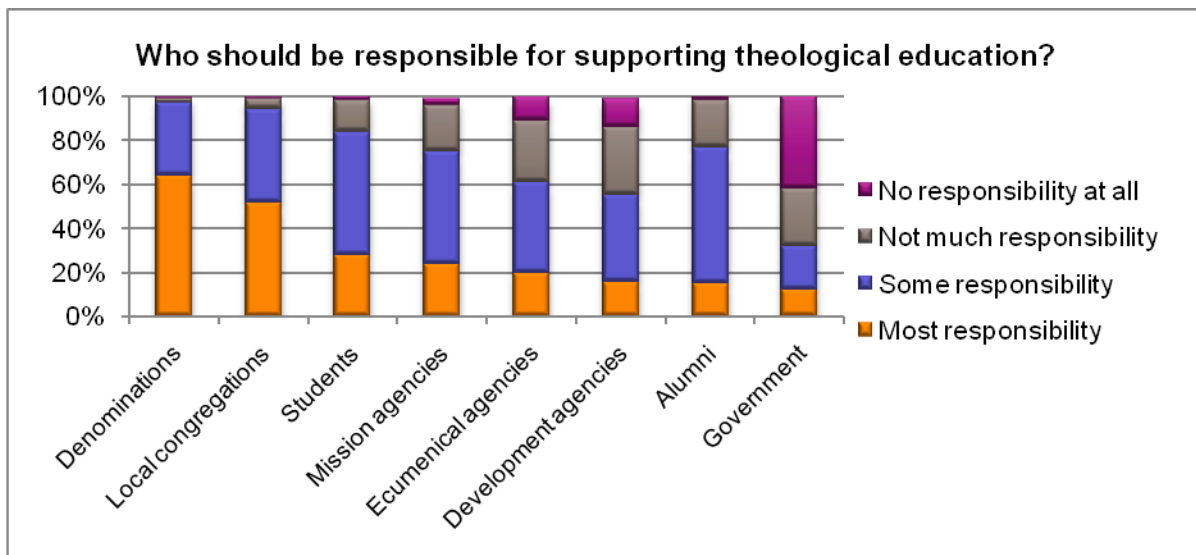


10. Innovation in theological education can be found in all parts of the world and in every denomination and tradition.

Here are a few examples—selected at random from many submitted.

- Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana
- City Seminary of New York, New York, USA
- Newbigin House of Studies, San Francisco, USA
- Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, UK
- St. Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya
- Seminario Teológico Nazareno Sudamericano, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS), Bangalore, India
- Theological College of Lanka, Pilimatalawa, Sri Lanka
- United Bible Training Centre for Women, Gujranwala, Pakistan

11. Denominations and local congregations are seen as having the most responsibility for funding theological education. [More information.](#)



12. The age of theological students varies by geographical region.

The predominate age of men students in Africa is in the 30-40 range; in all other regions the predominate age of both men and women students is in the 20-30 range, with the youngest in Asia, followed by Europe and North America. 68% of all respondents indicate that the average age of students has stayed the same over the past five years. 19% indicate that the average age has gone up; 13% indicate that the average age has gone down.

13. Regular institutional self-study and accreditation by regional bodies are seen as the most important aspects of on-going institutional improvement.

“On-going institutional self-study” was selected by 72% in response to the question, “What do you think is the best way to guarantee quality in theological education?” 65% selected “Accreditation by associations of theological schools,” 64% selected “periodic evaluation visits by peer theological educators,” and 40% selected “Accreditation by government or other higher education agencies.” [More information.](#)

14. Institutional capacity building and the provision of scholarships are seen as the primary roles for international bodies with regard to theological education.

In response to the question, “What role should regional and global bodies play in helping to secure the future of theological education?” the following were selected—listed here in priority order. [More information.](#)

1. Capacity building for institutions
2. Provide theological scholarships
3. Publication of theological books and other resources
4. Interdenominational networking
5. Work toward reducing dependency on external support
6. Lobby for support



15. Theological education is seen as “most important” for world Christianity.

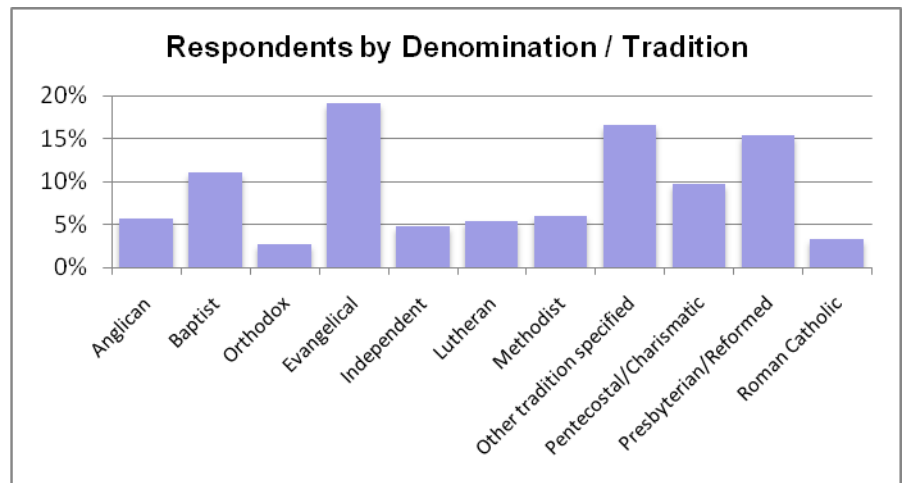
86% of all respondents indicated that theological education is “most important” for the future of world Christianity and the mission of the church. In addition, many see ecumenical and interdenominational cooperation as crucial for the future of theological education.

The term “theological education” is used in the Survey to refer to all forms of education and formation for ministry (both ordained and lay) and to the preparation for research and teaching in theology and religion. The term “region” is used to mean the area or context with which respondents are most familiar.

Responses were received from nearly every Christian denomination and tradition. The chart here represents only the main families; many specific groups were named by respondents and can be identified in the results.

A summary of the English language results for all questions is available [here](#); a spreadsheet of the numerical data for questions 5 – 25 (all languages), sorted by continent, sub-region, and denomination, is available [here](#). Narrative responses and raw data are available on request for specific research projects. Please feel free to contact any of us at the addresses below.

Details on many recent developments in theological education can be found in the series of Handbooks published by Regnum Books and WCC. Details can be found [here](#).



David Esterline
 Institute for Cross-Cultural
 Theological Education
 McCormick Theological Seminary,
 Chicago
desterline@mccormick.edu

Dietrich Werner
 Ecumenical Theological Education,
 World Council of Churches,
 Geneva
Dietrich.Werner@wcc-coe.org

Todd Johnson / Peter Crossing
 Center for the Study of Global
 Christianity, Gordon-Conwell
 Theological Seminary,
 Boston
tjohnson@gordonconwell.edu
petercrossing@globalchristianity.org