

Summary of Activities: SERVE grant for the Theology Student Union, 2014-15  
PI: Dr. Laura C. S. Holmes, Assistant Professor of New Testament  
Supervisor: Dr. Doug Strong, Dean of SOT

In 2014-15, our SERVE grant funded three events throughout the year, one each quarter. In the fall, the grant provided part of an honorarium for five panelists at a forum on Women in Ministry; in the winter, the grant provided the funding to rent Upper Gwinn for our Palmer Lecture lunch; and in spring, the grant funded our annual retreat. These three events were some of the highlights of the year, both for me and for our student leaders.

At the Women in Ministry forum in the fall, we hosted five panelists and asked them about their experiences with women in ministry and how they understood women to be called into full-time church ministry. Some of the panelists were ordained women and others were in positions that facilitate women's leadership in the church. Our panelists were:

Dr. Daniel Castelo, Associate Professor of Dogmatic and Constructive Theology, SOT, SPU  
Rev. Erika Haub, Associate Pastor, Shoreline Covenant Church  
Dr. Shannon Smythe, SPU Alumna, Adjunct professor, and author of *Women in Ministry: Questions and Answers in the Exploration of a Calling*  
Rev. Nancy Sugikawa, Associate Pastor, Lighthouse Christian Church  
Rev. Brian Wiele, Lead Pastor, River Ridge Covenant Church

Rev. Kelsey Rorem and Kierstin Brown (sophomore and TSU leader) co-moderated the event. The event was held in Arnett Lounge in order to facilitate attendance by students in the dorms. Over 100 students attended. One of the remarkable and encouraging changes from two years ago, when we hosted a similar event (with CBTE funds) in Otto Miller 109 was that about 20-25% of the attendees were male now, as opposed to 2-3% then. At the panel, we had students pose questions via text message using PollEverywhere, but we also followed up with students through conversations with SMCs, facilitated by two TSU leaders (Kierstin Brown and Gretchen Gelman, who were SMCs this year) and through cards asking students if they wanted to follow up on this discussion. We asked if they were interested in being invited to quarterly events, being part of a cadre small group, or being followed up with individually. About 13 students responded, all wanting to be part of quarterly events, about 7-8 wanting to be part of a cadre (led by Rev. Celeste Cranston, Director of CBTE, winter quarter 2015), and 3-4 wanting individual follow up (done by Kelsey Rorem and myself). We hosted two other quarterly events, though not with SERVE grant funds: one hosting a local pastor, Rev. Mary Peterson (Pastor of Children and Family Ministries at Highland Covenant Church), to hear her story, and inviting Dr. Priscilla Pope-Levison to give a lecture on gender and God-language (May 19, Emerson Lounge). Approximately 15 people attended the afternoon tea event with Rev. Peterson, and approximately 65 people attended the event with Dr. Pope-Levison. TSU's partnership with the CBTE, especially Rev. Kelsey Rorem, and support by SERVE grant funds for the forum, made all these events possible. The best results from the *series* of events this year was that we could follow up with students throughout the year and see how they felt supported and affirmed in their call to ministry (see retreat feedback for direct quotes from students).

Winter quarter, our Theologian-in-Residence, Dr. Steve Fowl, offered some thoughts at our lunch celebrating new majors and minors. He narrated his story to the students (history major at Wheaton who fell in love with classics and theology late in his college career). He also encouraged them in their vocational discernment, reminding them that they don't need to feel called to be either pastor or professor to benefit from their major in theology. He also gave specific advice for new majors and minors: take a variety of professors, think deeply about your classes, and seek to form a community in

your major. This was an uplifting event for all concerned, and TSU thanks the SERVE grant for providing the money for the room in which we hosted the event.

Lastly, the SERVE grant provided the funding for the TSU retreat. Rev. Kelsey Rorem, among the many things she did advancing discussions of women, calling, and ministry on campus this year, also agreed to be our retreat speaker. Kelsey and the TSU leaders decided on the theme of “Experiencing God in the Midst of Transition.” This theme really seemed to hit a target with students, and we had our largest attendance at the retreat in five years, at 23 people (21 students and 2 advisors). The leaders wanted a balance between structured lecture/discussion time about the theme, and free time. They also wanted Kelsey to lead worship on Sunday morning, including celebrating communion. We were able to do all of these things. The feedback we solicited was overwhelmingly positive. Of 16 feedback cards, 8 said they attended to get away from campus (but all but one added one of the following reasons/results to that get away); 11 said they came for the theme of “transitions;” 5 experienced a time of discernment, and 7 said they really benefited from bonding with other students. Two students specifically said that if the retreat had cost more than \$15, they would not have been able to attend, so the SERVE grant funding is essential for keeping this retreat experience affordable. There was no negative feedback.

A few student statements are worth excerpting:

“As a graduating senior...I am getting to transition into ‘real life’ and my real life calling is vocational ministry, probably in the church. This retreat helped me to step back from my own thoughts and discern where God is calling me, and to trust in his perfect plan.”

“The TSU retreat has been absolutely wonderful! I came to get away...the transitions theme, however, speaks into everything his year has been for me. Not only did I make new friends this weekend, but I’ve had my call to ministry reaffirmed, and have found peace as I prepare for graduation.”

“The TSU retreat has been the best retreat experience I have had at SPU. I was able to spend time with people that I did not know well and learn more about who they are, their passions, and even their struggles. It was a relaxed time of being with people who are not afraid of deep discussion. I was also able to engage in conversations about what I might want to do in the future, including learning more about teaching internationally.”

“Being so undecided in my major and changing it three times this year alone, this retreat has helped me explore my options, and simplify what direction I want to head in. This weekend has allowed me a time of reflection, a time of conversation with others who have been through similar things, and also a time of learning tactics of how to find God through these uncertainties.”

“To be thinking about God’s presence while experiencing change was so helpful as I thought about my call into ministry. I am experiencing [some] minor transitions and I’m so thankful I was given tools to face [them] with humbleness, hope, and courage.”

“This retreat gave me the space I needed to think honestly about all the upcoming transitions in my life and how God is calling me to be in them. Also, seeing Kelsey preaching and teaching and being in her element was a confirmation for me that God is also calling me as a woman to be a pastor and a preacher.”

We hope to capitalize on this success next year, and are grateful for the continued support of the SERVE grant program. These events are essential in helping our students understand their calling and vocation.