

Seattle Pacific Seminary
Report on Exit Interviews with Members of the Graduating Class of 2015
Dr. Richard B. Steele, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies
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During spring 2015, all nine students scheduled to graduate from Seattle Pacific Seminary on June 12, 2015—6 with MDiv degrees, 1 with an MA (CSc) and 1 with an MA (CSt)—participated in an exit interview. Here is a summary of the results:

Feedback on the SPS Program: Overall, our graduates feel very positive about their experience at SPS. They appreciate the integrated core curriculum and, as one put it, the “holistic preparation for ministry.” They are nearly unanimous in affirming the “Triple-A,” at least in theory, but they are almost equally unanimous in expressing misgivings about the way that it is executed. The Academy piece seems to be completely intact, or at least none of this year’s graduates complained that any of their courses lacked intellectual depth or scholarly rigor. But many observe that the Abbey component is heavily stressed in the first year, but falls off thereafter. Class meetings are not required in students’ second and subsequent years and abbey-specific assignments in post-core classes are spotty. As for Apostolate courses, the MDiv students seem to appreciate those courses that are heavily tilted toward Apostolate considerations, particularly when they are taking those courses at the same time as they are taking THEO 6940/41 Contextual Education. One student highlighted with appreciation the wide range of ministries to which students are exposed, and several expressed appreciation for the fact that many courses with a decidedly “academic” tilt nevertheless include graded assignments intended to foster practical ministry skills.

Feedback on SPS Personnel: Our graduates give SPS personnel score exceptionally high marks. They unanimously commend the professors for their excellence as teachers, for their availability as advisors, for their cordiality as persons, for their eagerness to know students’ names and personal situations, for their evident commitment to student learning and student success. Several expressed appreciation for the evident commitment of SOT faculty for the *church*, and for preparing seminarians to *serve* the church with solid theological grounding. The graduates were also unsparing in their praise of the Seminary administrators, giving them high marks for the abundance and clarity of their communication, for their rapid responses to inquiries, for their helpfulness in solving administrative snafus, etc.

Feedback on SPU Resources: Our graduates are very positive about the physical resources of the campus. They understand that ours is a small university, and that some of the things a larger school could supply, e.g., low-cost onsite housing for graduate students, are in low supply. One student commented on the fact that there is no University-owned chapel, although no one complained of problems with holding events at FFMC. One or two students said they disliked meeting in classrooms with small desks, though relatively few SPS classes actually meet in such rooms: most late afternoon and evening classes—and most of our classes meet at such times—are scheduled for “smart classrooms” or rooms with movable tables. Students especially appreciate the SPU Library, and when resources are not available on-site they have ready access to the UW, SU and Seattle municipal libraries, and can use the Orbis Cascade Alliance and Inter-Library Loan services. All were in agreement that our theological librarian, Steve Perisho, is exceptional, both in his overall command of theological literature and in his ability to secure with

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great promptness whatever students need by way of print or electronic research materials. Most, but not all, were satisfied with their faculty advisor. The sorest subject for our graduates is financing. They recognize that the SPS tuition is lower than that of other SPU graduate programs, but they worry about the high amount of tuition debt they are accruing, and they wish that financial aid were available after the first year. An SPS education may be “worth the price,” but the price is felt to be high, and the salaries our students expect to command may not be enough to allow them to pay off their loans in a timely manner.

Student Self-Assessment: Sticker shock aside, most of our graduates seem very satisfied by and grateful for the education—academic, professional, and personal/spiritual—they have received here. The majority insist that their religious outlook has been greatly broadened and deepened, that they leave SPS with a subtle and sophisticated theological “framework” for doing ministry and a wider-angle “lens” for seeing the world, and that they are less afraid of “taking risks and making mistakes” than they were when they started three or four years ago. Not all of them had equally happy experiences of “Christian community” during their time here, but several noted the great importance that personal relationships with faculty and other students—both within and beyond the first-year class meetings—have had on their formation as persons, as Christians and as theologians. One student commented, “Emotionally, [seminary] has been a stretching experience.” Another indicated that [he] “came with career and identity questions,” which have since been answered. Still another indicated that [he] came with many presuppositions about “how God works in the world,” which were promptly deconstructed in [his] first-year classes, but steadily “reconstructed” with the support of concerned faculty members and fellow students. This same student reports, with understandable pride, that [his] mentors have observed considerable growth and maturation in [him] over the past few years,