



Sex and the Seminary:

Preparing Ministers for
Sexual Health and Justice

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Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York

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Executive Summary

Religious leaders have the potential to change society's understanding of sexuality through the power of the pulpit, pastoral care of individuals and families, and their presence in the media, politics, and civil society. At a time when many denominations and faith communities are embroiled in sexuality issues, there is an urgent need for leaders who understand the connections between religion and sexuality.

Seminaries are not providing future religious leaders with sufficient opportunities for study, self-assessment, and ministerial formation in sexuality. They are also not providing seminarians with the skills they will need to minister to their congregants and communities, or to become effective advocates where sexuality issues are concerned.

Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice summarizes the findings of a survey by the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing and Union Theological Seminary. Thirty-six U.S. seminaries, representing a range of religious affiliations, institutional structures, geographic locations, and student populations, participated in this investigation of the sexuality education of religious professionals and clergy.

The survey measured participating seminaries according to the *Criteria for a Sexually Healthy and Responsible Seminary*, which was developed by a multifaith group of seminary educators, administrators, and sexuality educators. The survey explored how sexuality is addressed in the curriculum, policy, demographics, and advocacy of each seminary. None of the 36 institutions in this survey met 100% of the criteria; only ten met a majority of them. *Overall, the results point to an overwhelming need for improvement in the sexuality education provided to seminarians and the overall sexual health of the seminary.*

Among the survey's key findings:

Future clergy and other religious professionals can graduate without taking a sexuality course. More than nine in ten of the seminaries surveyed do not require full-semester sexuality and LGBT courses for graduation. Only one seminary requires a course in sexuality issues for religious professionals, and only two require an LGBT/queer studies course.

Courses focusing on sexuality-related issues are often absent from the curriculum. Most of the seminaries in the survey do not offer full-semester sexuality-related courses. Two-thirds do not have a course in sexuality issues for religious professionals. Three-quarters do not have an LGBT/queer studies course. Where courses exist, fewer than one in ten of the seminaries offer them every semester or every year. Only one in six seminaries requires a sexual ethics course.

Women and feminist studies courses are covered much more often than any other sexuality area. The seminaries surveyed are teaching three times as many full-semester courses in women/feminist studies as they are in sexuality issues for religious professionals or LGBT/queer studies. They offer almost three times as many majors, minors, and certificates in women and feminist studies as in sexuality or LGBT/queer studies. Introductory courses cover gender and women in religion two to four times more often than sexuality or LGBT/queer topics.

The coming generation of scholars is not teaching sexuality-related courses. Curricular offerings in sexuality are faculty driven—that is, the availability of courses depends on faculty members being willing to offer them. Most (94%) full-semester sexuality-related courses are

being taught either by faculty at the senior professor level or by adjunct professors and lecturers. Junior-level professors seeking tenure-track positions are generally not teaching sexuality-related courses.

There is a stained glass ceiling in seminaries. Two-thirds of the seminaries surveyed have fewer than 40% women faculty, administrative leaders, or board of trustees positions.

There is a need for full inclusion policies. More than half of the seminaries (66%) do not have policies for full inclusion of women. Half do not have policies for full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons (50%). Almost two-thirds do not have full inclusion policies for transgender persons (61%).

Despite these shortfalls, the survey also reveals areas where progress has been made:

- Eight in ten of the institutions surveyed offer learning opportunities (such as classes or workshops) in sexual harassment prevention. More than two-thirds require instruction in sexual harassment prevention for all ministry students, and more than one-third require it of all students. More than nine in ten have sexual harassment policies for faculty, staff, and student relationships.
- Twenty-five percent of seminaries have free-standing centers or programs dedicated to a sexuality-related issue. The existence of the centers results in increased course offerings, workshops, and learning opportunities in sexuality-related topics; faculty positions with a specialization in sexuality-related research; and often greater advocacy on sexuality-related issues.

- Three out of four schools report that members of faculty or senior administrative staff have published on or been featured in the media addressing a sexual justice issue. LGBT issues were the most likely concerns addressed.
- Students are creating their own opportunities for sexuality-related non-curricular experiences. Students were able to participate in events on sexual and reproductive justice at two-thirds of the seminaries, and many of the seminaries offer sexuality-related worship and student advocacy or support groups. Worship opportunities and student advocacy groups are the only categories where LGBT/queer issues are addressed equally to women and feminist studies topics.
- Sexuality issues are often addressed within a framework of intersecting social justice issues, such as economics, environmental issues, racial/ethnic diversity, and disability issues. The majority of faculty teaching sexuality issues for religious professionals or LGBT/queer studies courses and all of the sexuality-related centers address sexuality from racial, ethnic, and cross-cultural perspectives.

Institutional profiles were developed for each seminary based on how they met the criteria for a sexually healthy and responsible seminary. The profiles suggest that even the most committed seminaries could be doing more to prepare their students and promote the sexual well-being of their institutions.