Digital Media for Ministry Asset Mapping:
Preliminary findings from an exploratory study in theological education

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Poster Outline

I. Objectives of Project
   A. Connect theological educators active in equipping church leaders with practical
digital media competencies for use in ministry.
   B. Describe current curricular and instructional practice across a wide range of
innovative schools.
   C. Publicize resources and learning opportunities and explore potential for future
   collaboration between theological institutions.

II. Motivation for Project
   A. Social Factors
      1. Increases in social media use, broadband internet access, and mobile
device ownership have formed a “new social operating system” in the
United States and beyond (Rainie and Wellman, 2012).
      2. Trends of decreasing religious affiliation and denominational loyalty (e.g.,
Smith, et al., 2015) have increased in many faith organizations a renewed
commitment to robust and innovative outreach and religious formation.
   B. Situational Factors
      1. Although there is an organized network of digitally focused religious
studies scholars (Network for New Media, Religion and Digital Culture
Studies, 2010), no equivalent network exists among theological educators
   teaching digital literacy to ministry students.
      2. We have been involved in ongoing action research to develop
communities of practice in digital media for ministry (Kimball and Oliver,
2013). These efforts have produced a structured model for piloting hybrid
learning initiatives in congregations (e.g., Oliver, 2014b) and the
establishment of a digital ministry learning community (e.g., Oliver,
2014a). This projects seeks to connect learnings from and participants in
these initiatives with a wider circle of theological educators.

III. Theoretical Framework
   A. Asset-Based Community Development
      1. Experienced organizers believe communities are most effectively built in
bottom-up fashion and with emphasis on assets already existing rather
than deficits still to be overcome (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 5).
2. Our methodology was to develop relationships with potential collaborators (“assets”) through personal relationships and mutual resource sharing.

B. Situated Learning / Communities of Practice Theory
   1. Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002, p. 28) identify three components: 
      domain ("[k]nowing the boundaries and leading edge" of the discipline), 
      community ("social fabric of learning" built on "mutual respect and trust"), and practice ("set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that community members share").
   2. These components framed our interview protocol and guided our analysis.

IV. Methodology & Data
   A. Website Survey
      1. Procedural review of 266 Association of Theological Schools member websites performed by research assistant.
      2. Source data is public, drawn from published online sources.
      3. Browsing and searching queries identified 55 faculty members of interest at 46 institutions and 75 courses of interest at 56 institutions.
      4. Visualization and analysis is ongoing.
   B. Educator Interviews
      1. Semi-structured interviews of instructors at theological schools.
      2. Source data is private—interview transcripts coded, quoted, and summarized anonymously by research team.
      3. Analysis is ongoing; see V.A and V.C below for preliminary observations.
   C. Educator Symposium
      1. Semi-structured gathering of self-selected interview participants provided feedback on coding framework, preliminary conclusions, and strategies for moving forward as a community.

V. Results & Recommendations
   A. Clarifying the Domain: The major conclusion of our preliminary analysis indicates four distinctive areas of focus of interviewees: digital religion, digital theology, digital pedagogy, and digital ministry. We believe clarifying focus on digital ministry will be essential to efforts to convene a coherent community.
   B. Surveying the Potential Community: The number of faculty members interested in digital media for ministry and the number of relevant courses being taught were both much higher than we expected. We believe there may be a critical mass of potentially interested parties to convene a significant and impactful network.
   C. Organizing the Shared Practice: We have designed, published, and begun to populate our graphical directory of instructors, practitioners, organizations, publications, and learning opportunities to map this space (Oliver, 2016). Other plans for resource development and sharing among project participants.
Works Cited


