

# Intercultural Contributions to Mission Education

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JUAN J. SARMIENTO

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The study of mission is a strong element in programs of study at both Seminario Evangelico de Teologia in Matanzas (SET) and the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (LPTS). Both institutions incorporate missiology, ecumenism, and global Christianity as significant areas of emphasis. That, in addition to the strong relationship between Presbyterians in Cuba and in the U.S. prepared the way for Jo-Ella Holman, Regional Liaison for the Caribbean with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), to begin conversations with both schools in 2013 about the possibility of a combined course characterized by intercultural and contextual approaches to teaching and learning for mission.<sup>1</sup>

The diverse participant composition of the course required significant changes in relation to the design of missiology courses. During the first course in 2015, 23 students made up the course, 13 from the US and 10 from Cuba.<sup>2</sup> The second iteration of the course in January 2017 had the participation of 32 students, 16 from the US and 16 from Cuba. Although the students have had similar levels of formal education,<sup>3</sup> the differences in their ecclesial and ministerial experiences - in addition to cultural and linguistic experiences- are quite significant.<sup>4</sup>

### **The course as part of recent trends in mission education**

The careful attention given to intercultural dynamics in this course is reflective of similar efforts towards mission formation considering the growing demographic diversity in the United States and greater involvement of non-western Christians for witness and service beyond their own contexts. As Dan Aleshire has noted, “cultural” has gradually become a predominant term used by institutions in the U.S and Canada to designate the type of programs that had formerly had words like “missions,” “mission,” or “missiology,” as part of their names. The table below

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1 Holman, Jo Ella (2015) ‘We Make the Road by Walking’: An Intercultural and Contextual Approach to Teaching and Learning for Mission. In Miguel Alvarez (Ed.), *The Reshaping of Mission in Latin America* /Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series. Volume 30 (p 221-234). Oxford, UK: Regnum Book International.

2 Holman, 227.

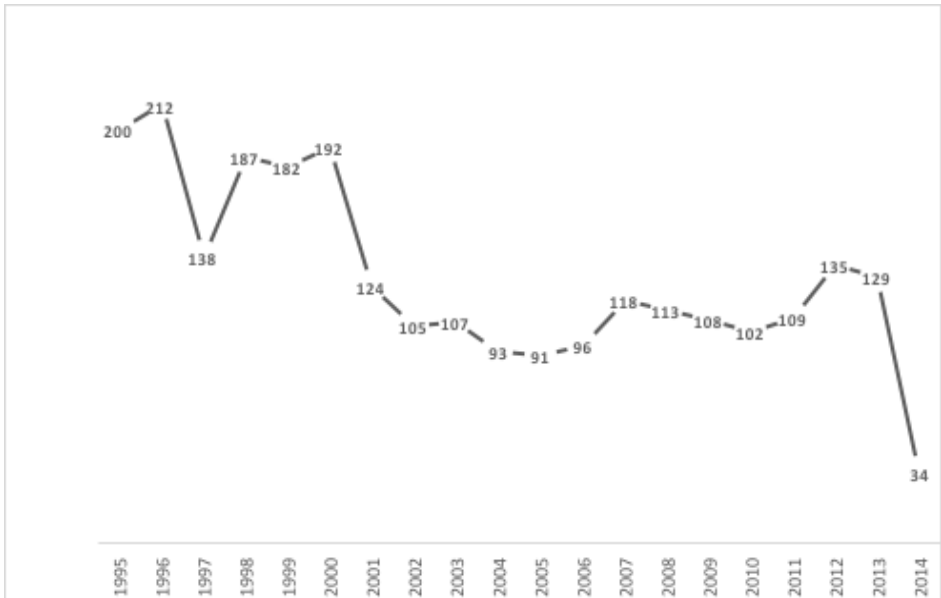
3 Except for a Doctor of Ministry student from the US seminary, all the others have been Master’s degree students in their second or final year of study. Students from SET have been a combination of fifth-year, Licenciatura students and recently graduated students.

4 LPTS students have come from Presbyterian, United Methodist, Baptist and Pentecostal backgrounds while among SET students were Presbyterians, Baptists, Anglicans, Quakers and Seventh Day Adventists.

represents both the growth of those programs (from 22 to 61) and the changes in the nomenclature in recent years.<sup>5</sup>

	1995	2005	2015	Notes
“Missions...”	N= 22	N=42	N=61	Declines by almost half
“Cultural...”	64%	55%	31%	Increases significantly
“World/Global”	27%	36%	46%	Slight increase
Other	5%	7%	10%	Increases

Similarly, the enrollment in Doctor of Missiology programs has significantly decreased during the same period.



5 Dan Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) presented this data during the plenary address for the 2015 gathering of the Association of Professors of Mission entitled “Naming and Numbering Education for Missions: Changing Patterns Among ATS Member Schools”. Although not previously published, he kindly forwarded it to me.

## Intercultural realities of theological education

Anticipating the moment when the white population is projected to be less than 50 percent of the total and as a way of supporting and assisting schools to prepare for that, The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) has undertaken “Preparing for 2040: Enhancing Capacity to Educate and Minister in a Multicultural World.”<sup>6</sup> To accomplish this, they are actively promoting the use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) among its member schools as a tool used to “build cultural competence” in schools and organizations in more than 40 countries in all continents.<sup>7</sup> Recent statistics released by the ATS indicate that in the last three decades the enrollment of students classified as other than Euromerican has increased from 10% to 41%.<sup>8</sup> The percentage of Latino students has doubled in the last 15 years and Asian enrollment currently represents 9 percent of the total. Along those lines, a recent campaign from Presbyterian World Mission called Training Leaders for Community Transformation, which promoted collaboration in leadership development efforts, identified inter-contextual concerns as a priority of most partnering programs in the 30 participant countries.<sup>9</sup>

## Intercultural considerations in the course

Following a “team teaching” approach, the professors for the course display the interculturality that the course seeks to promote. Ofelia Ortega, Daniel Montoya Rosales, Clara Luz Ajo, and Carlos Emilio Ham have delivered lectures in Spanish from SET, while Clifton Kirkpatrick and Jo Ella Holman have done it in English. In addition, other faculty from both SET and staff colleagues from Louisville Seminary have been brought in to share with students in areas of their competence.

Holman describes the collaborative design process of the course “as one in which each side contributed ideas for readings and exploration.”<sup>10</sup> The team

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6 Edwards Armstrong, Janice (2009) CORE: An Evolving Initiative. *Theological Education*. Volume 45, Number 1. pp 71-76.

7 Intercultural Development Inventory (2017) Retrieved from <https://idiinventory.com/>.

8 Meinzer, Chris and Smith Brown, Eliza (2017 March) New data reveal stable enrollment but shifting trends at ATS member schools. Retrieved from <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/new-data-reveal-stable-enrollment.pdf>. The percentage include international students.

9 Sarmiento, Juan. To the Ends of the Earth. *Mission Crossroads*. Spring 2016. P 4.

10 Holman, 227.

made sure that all the materials would not only be in both Spanish and English but several of their authors were from Latin America. Preparing for the five-day intensive experience of direct instruction and interaction played an important role in the course. In 2017, it included two days of orientation for the U.S. students co-facilitated by Dr. Carlos Emilio Ham, President of SET. In addition, a series of four sessions of Spanish conversation were offered to students in basic and intermediate levels of proficiency.

Communication during the gathering in Cuba was facilitated by professionally trained interpreters making use of excellent equipment provided to that end. A look at the evaluation forms for both the 2015 and the 2017 classes indicate that the intercultural, binational group of participants was an asset in their understanding of the practice (praxis) of mission. Here is a comment that illustrates the results:

*In some ways our experience as a diverse group was an example of the concepts we talked about. We had to work hard at communicating, crossing boundaries, and being in real relationship. We did not get there completely, but we were enriched by each other's ideas and presence.*

Other relevant responses in the evaluation can be summarized as follows:

Question	2015	2017
Did you feel that your perspective was heard?	21 "Yes" 1 "Sometimes," 1 "No"	28 "Yes" 1 no response 1 "As a white male I felt that I needed to hear the perspective of others"
Will you be able to use specific parts of the course that you will be able to use in your ministry in your local context?	23 "Yes"	30 "Yes"

Will you be able to use specific parts of the course in working with international partnerships or with people of other nationalities in your ministry?	22 “Yes” 1 “No”	29 “Yes” 1 “More or less”
If this course were offered again, would you recommend it to your friend	23 “Yes”	30 “Yes”

Students also indicated the most significant elements of the educational experience in the evaluations. In response to the question “What was your favorite part of this course?” the majority (53%) mentioned small groups, followed by site visits (31 %). In spite, or perhaps precisely because of the cultural differences, the time given to student interaction beyond the classroom seems to have provided the most enriching opportunities for students from both groups.