

## Report

### Drew University Theological School

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#### **A Cohering Vision: Curriculum, Community, Co-Curricular Initiatives**

After much collaborative discussion, discernment, and evaluation of the current state of theological education, those of us who lead, teach, and support Drew Theological School have launched on an ambitious course. Nearly 150 years after our founding, we envision a future as bright as the best eras in our past. I am pleased to share with you here the concrete steps we have taken— and are taking— to bring this future to light.

First, our efforts have been attentive to the history of Drew, in particular its Methodist roots, its long commitment to the Church and its ministries, and draw from this wellspring for inspiration and direction. Also, we have honored our progress to achieve denominational, ethnic, gender, and racial diversity in our faculty and student body. This rich diversity has become both a hallmark of Drew and an expansion of our wellspring. Forces beyond our campus—notably, that the reasons for pursuing a theological education and expected outcomes are shifting dramatically—further press the need for us to align our vision and its supporting systems with our communal reality.

Given this imperative, we are focused on the three “C’s” of our cohering vision: redesigning our curriculum, strengthening our community of learning, and deepening training through revived co-curricular initiatives. These three aspects of a Drew Theological School education will work together to enable us to empower creative thought and courageous action to advance justice, peace, and love of God, neighbor, and the earth—as well as uniquely position us to lead evolving expressions of Christianity.

#### **Designing distinct pathways from curriculum to vocation**

To remain meaningful and offer the greatest value to our students, each of the six degree paths that we offer must be as distinct as the ministry to which it leads. For example, our Master of Arts in Ministry program, which forms students for the broadest spectrum of theologically-informed advocacy and ministry, or our DMin program, which has become the “new” terminal vocational degree, must be custom rebuilt for current and emerging student needs and outcomes. This also holds true for our Master of Arts, Master of Sacred Theology, PhD, and, most critically, our Master of Divinity programs.

We have achieved our roadmap for curricular change through a period of intentional discernment, which included discussion with consultants, and with colleagues at peer institutions, who led a curricular formation retreats with our faculty; through the discernment and guidance of our faculty, and with the generous financial support of the Jesse Ball duPont Fund. Our next steps include a comprehensive analysis of pedagogical and technological trends in theological education, enrollment, and outcomes. Our redesigned curricular paths will be announced in the fall of 2017, concurrent with the 150th anniversary of the founding of Drew Theological School and the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

#### **Student experiences rooted in community**

Despite the increase in students pursuing their education through evening classes and online enrollment, we remain committed to the on-campus experience of community. This begins with a student-centered educational experience that better attends to the scheduling needs of our students, offers broader course content and availability, and more intentionally integrates vocational or career aspirations with coursework.

The success of these efforts are inextricably linked to scholarship support. Only by removing the financial barriers for students pursuing vocations can we hope to attract and retain the most promising students and free them to learn and grow in community. Related to tuition support is the need for more affordable and

1 modernized housing for those students who choose to live on campus. Together, scholarship support and  
2 housing relief will also unburden our students from unsustainable debt.

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4 **Fostering innovation in ministry and the work of spirit-filled justice**

5 To round out changes in our curriculum and on-campus learning experiences, we are also reviving co-curricular  
6 initiatives. The existing Center for Lifelong Learning will be recast as the new Center for Innovation and  
7 Leadership in Ministry and serve students, alumni, and others seeking to find creative and courageous  
8 approaches to revitalizing ministry. Here, programming will train pastoral leaders, in particular, for service in  
9 rapidly changing church environments, as well as position them to lead fearlessly and prophetically.

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11 Our second co-curricular center will be an expansion of the current Communities of Shalom. This initiative will  
12 focus on action, advocacy, and social justice work in both pastoral and lay environments. Projects will range  
13 from student interns supporting the work of A Future with Hope in our home state of New Jersey, advancing  
14 social justice in non-profit settings across the country and around the world, initiatives which seek to transform  
15 and end systemic poverty, expansion of our Partnership for Religion and Education in Prisons (PREP) program,  
16 and teaching residencies at Drew for prophetic leaders.

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18 **Success so far through our One and All Campaign**

19 As the 14th dean of Drew Theological School, I am deeply committed to continuing our long and distinguished  
20 legacy. To this end, our vision is innovative, forward-looking, and grounded in the practical needs of our  
21 students—we hope, too, that it is an inspiration to the various constituencies we serve. I fully subscribe to the  
22 inimitable words of Antonio Machado, that “we make the road by walking.” The road to this bright future we  
23 envision will be made by the dedication, determination, and generosity of those who love Drew and believe in  
24 its future.

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26 Our vision is coming to light, in part, because of the generosity of our many alumni-donors and friends. Our One  
27 and All fundraising campaign has raised more than \$12 million to date for the Theological School and has seed-  
28 funded many of our burgeoning efforts.

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30 Also, I encourage our alumni to embrace your power of influence to help grow philanthropic support for Drew  
31 Theological School. Many of our largest gifts have come from the influence of alumni, particularly pastors who  
32 serve in our church communities.

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34 Yes, the needs ahead are many, yet our hope is high for a bright future for Drew Theological School. The road is  
35 made by walking. Let’s walk it together.

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38 The Reverend Dr. Javier A. Viera  
39 Dean of the Theological School  
40 Professor of Pastoral Theology  
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