Handbook for Assessors

Kevin G. Smith

with contributions from
David B. Woods

South African Theological Seminary
2014

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: The Mission of SATS

If you are called to serve as an academic at SATS, then you are called to serve the mission of SATS. Since SATS is a ministry with a strong and clear sense of calling, it is imperative that you understand our mission so that you can contribute to what God is doing in and through the seminary.

We speak about our mission in two main ways. The first is in the language of 'restoring truth to the church'. The other is 'equipping the saints for ministry'. We understand both these dimensions of our mission within the framework of our three foundational pillars. In fact, both these dimensions of our mission are sufficiently nuanced that we need to clarify exactly what we understand by each.

Restoring truth to the church

When Dr Christopher Peppler was called to begin SATS, he felt that the mandate the Holy Spirit was giving him was to **restore truth to the church**. For many years, we did not speak much in public about this mandate. We realised that it could so easily be misunderstood. Who are we to claim that God has called us to restore truth to the church? We certainly would not be so arrogant as to view ourselves as the custodians of the truth, or to claim that we 'know it all'.

Nevertheless, much of our internal discussion and reflection has been guided by that mandate: *Restore truth to the church.* What

does it mean and how must we do it? Therefore, we shall now share how we presently understand this mandate.

What we do NOT mean

1) We are not seeking to teach a particular theological system as 'the truth'. From the outset, SATS has been non-denominational and broadly evangelical. We are a home for those who believe the Bible and the gospel. We do not teach Dispensationalism or Covenant Theology, to cite but two examples, as 'the true theology'. We do not champion Calvinism over and against Arminianism, or vice versa. We are not married to any particular eschatological view, as if one could say definitively that Premillennialism is 'the truth'. *We do not equate a theology with the truth. The various theological positions are human attempts to synthesise all that the Word of God teaches about a certain topic. We value such scholarly attempts to understand the teachings of Scripture, but we do not believe that any particular theology can lay claim to being the truth.*

2) We are not claiming to be the custodians of the truth. God alone is all-knowing. He is the source of all truth. We are truth-seekers, because we are God-seekers. When we grapple with God's calling to restore truth, we do not for one moment think that we have the truth, the church lacks the truth, so we need to give the truth to the church. This kind of thinking would be the height of arrogance, and is not at all the spirit in which talk about restoring truth to the church.

What we DO mean

We now turn to what we *do* mean by 'restore truth to the church'. We prefer to speak in terms of our present understanding of this mandate, since we are not sure that we fully understand it.

1) We hope to restore a passion to be truth-seekers. We are convinced that faithful ministry is grounded in sound theology, and conversely that sound theology gives birth to faithful ministry. With this in mind, we aim to inspire pastors and Christian leaders to become lifelong learners, men and women of God who value good theology. We seek to encourage our students to remain hungry for the Word, committed to in-depth study, and determined to do responsible theology in ministry.

2) We hope to correct the clearly erroneous beliefs and teachings that many well-meaning pastors and believers accept uncritically. By this we mean popular misconceptions, especially misinterpretations of Scripture that cannot be defended using sound hermeneutical principles.

> The third and final aspect of our understanding of the mandate to restore truth to the church is far and away the most important. Here it is:

3) We seek to restore an approach to life and ministry that is Bible-based, Christ-centred, and Spirit-led. Jesus Christ is *the Truth* (John 14:6); the Bible is the repository of God's revealed truth; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, who leads us into truth (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:12–15). This point is so critical that we shall

elaborate on it at length with an extract from Dr Kevin Smith's book, *Integrated Theology*. Smith wrote:

> [W]e need to restore a Christ-centred, Bible-based, and Spirit-led view of theology. What we need to restore to the church is wisdom—the ability to reflect and act in a Christ-centred, Bible-based, Spirit-led way, thus discerning God's will and responding in ways that are faithful to his nature and purposes. In short, we know God truly through the Son, the scriptures, and the Spirit. We need to restore to the church a proper understanding of this three-point plan for knowing God and doing his will.

Bible-based

Christ-centred

God
nature
will
purposes

Spirit-led
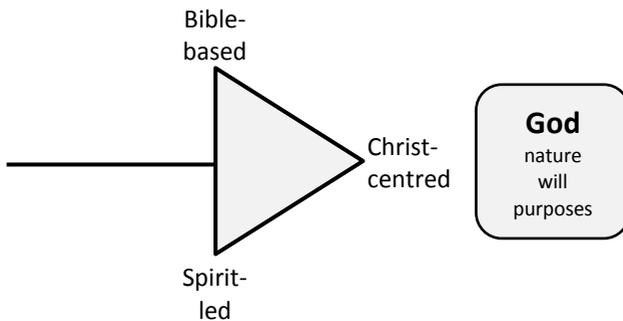
First, the Lord Jesus Christ is the embodiment of divine truth. Jesus could say, 'I am the truth' (John 14:6), and John could write, 'truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). Peppler fears that much theology and ministry is insufficiently centred on Christ. Our ability to discern God's will and act in ways that are faithful to him in complex situations will be greatly enhanced if we constantly keep in mind that we should speak and act in ways that: bring honour and glory to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, emulate and model what the Lord Jesus Christ might say or do in our situation, uphold the person and

work of the Lord Jesus Christ as central to all Christian life, doctrine, and ministry, and allow the nature of God as revealed in the life of Christ to help us to interpret God's word and discern his will. *We restore truth by pointing the people of God to the Son of God as a spiritual compass for finding the nature, will, and purposes of God, and acting in ways that please God.*

Second, the scriptures are the God-given, truthful, authoritative record and interpretation of God's revelation to his people. The Bible is 'the word of truth'; we need to restore to Christian leaders the ability to 'rightly handle' it (2 Tim. 2:15). In much theology and practice, the Bible is relegated to a minor role in the thinking of the church. In popular circles, the Bible is often not the real basis of action, even for those who say it is their only rule for faith and life. In theological circles, critical scholars often treat the Bible with such scepticism that it plays no authoritative role in shaping their beliefs. We restore truth by training the people of God to base their beliefs and actions on the teachings of scripture.

Third, the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth (John 16:13). He bears witness to Jesus Christ and illuminates the word of God to us. Through him we apprehend the written word and encounter the living Lord. He also empowers us to act in response to God's will. The role of the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide needs to be restored. On the one hand, many in the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition treat personal 'revelations' from the Spirit as the primary means of knowing God and his will. In practice, although usually not in doctrine, sound exegesis of scripture plays a secondary role. On the other hand, much evangelical theology has a reputation for being dry and sterile. The Spirit is paid lip service more than life-submission. What we

need is not the Spirit or the word, but the Spirit and the word—the Spirit in and through the word. We restore truth by prayerfully seeking the Spirit who glorifies God, witnesses to Christ, illuminates scripture, and encounters us.

The truth we need to restore is a Bible-based, Christ-centred, Spirit-led way of discerning God's nature, will, and purposes for his people. This triad represents an evangelical way of doing theology.[1]

Our original God-given mandate was to restore truth to the church. We believe God still wishes SATS to do so. We do not teach a particular theology as the truth, nor do we think we are the custodians of the truth. What we *do* mean is that Jesus Christ is the source of truth, the Bible is the repository of truth, and the Spirit is the illuminator of truth. We seek to restore to the church the passion and the power to understand God's nature, will, and purposes in a Bible-based, Christ-centred, Spirit-led way.

Equipping the saints for ministry

Before we changed our by-line to 'Bible-based, Christ-centred, Spirit-led', we used to have **'Equipping the Saints for Ministry'** as our by-line. We do not regret the change, because the present by-line better captures the essence of our theology. However, the previous by-line remains a core part of our mission. We could look at our core business from two different angles. If we look at our core business in terms if 'the *what'*, then **we teach theology**—Bible-based, Christ-centred, Spirit-led theology. But if we look at

---

[1] Kevin G. Smith, *Integrated Theology* (Johannesburg: SATS Press, 2013), 156.

our core business in terms of 'the *who'*, then **we teach people**—we teach the people of God to do the work of God.

We must not lose sight of the fact that we exist to serve God by equipping his people to do his work. Our Mission Statement reads:

> Our mission is to provide biblical, christocentric distance education and training to Christians, and leaders in particular, within their local church environment, to equip them to be Holy Spirit empowered members of God's household.

We could discuss each and every word of this statement, but for now we want to draw attention to the fact that our mission has a method and an objective. The method is teaching and training, and the goal is that the people we educate will be equipped for ministry in the church and the community.

We should draw attention to two biblical texts which provide the theological bedrock for this mission. The first key text is found in 2 Timothy.

> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16–17, NIV).

Paul clarifies something important. God gave us the Word of God so that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work. When we teach the Word of God, our purpose must be to equip the people of God. Paul draws attention to four things he does with the Word of God:

- *teaching* refers to **right beliefs**,
- *rebuking* refers to **wrong behaviours**,
- *correcting* refers to **wrong beliefs**, and
- *training* refers to **right behaviours**.

God inspired the Scriptures to tell His people what they should and should not believe and how they should and should not behave. This is all nice and neat, but teaching 'the Bible' was never Paul's driving passion. His passion was teaching 'the people'! He did not live for perfectly crafted messages; he laboured for permanently changed men.

We teach for changed lives. We base what we teach on the Word of God, but we are not satisfied with teaching content. We teach people, with the burning desire that they will be 'thoroughly equipped for every good work'.

Here is the other key text:

> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11–13).

Paul lays bare why God gives gifted teachers to the body of Christ. How eager was Paul to make his point? Note how he piles up phrases that all drive home essentially the same point:

1) to prepare God's people for works of service,

2) so that the body of Christ may be built up
3) until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God
4) and become mature,
5) attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ

What is the point? God gives teachers as gifts to the church to bring the saints to maturity in Christ and to equip them for ministry. The focus is once again on the impact of the teaching in the life of the learner. There is a dual focus on sanctification and service. The teaching should lead God's people to maturity, which is defined in terms of Christlikeness, and empower them for works of service. The beneficiary of the teaching is *the church*: the body of Christ edified through mature and equipped members.

I have laboured this point because it is ever so important. SATS' calling as a teaching ministry must be congruent with God's stated purposes for giving his Word and his teachers to the church. God gave his Word to equip his people for good works. He gives teachers to mature his people and equip them for service. As teachers, we are called to teach the Word of God so that his people might become like Jesus and his workers might serve like Jesus.

Why are we labouring this point? Because theologians and theological institutions have all too often been unfaithful to the biblical mandate for their existence. Some have been carried away by theologising, formulating fanciful theories and writing pointless papers. Others so exalt the Bible that they fall into the trap of 'biblio-idolatry'. Their love for the Bible is obvious, but

their love for the people less so. We need to keep God's priorities in place: we use his Word to equip his people for his work.

Questions for reflection

1. To what extent do you associate a particular 'theology' with 'the truth' (e.g. Calvinism; Dispensationalism)?
2. Do think that you are sufficiently tolerant and open-minded towards those who hold to different evangelical 'theologies' to fit into SATS' *broadly evangelical* approach? Why or why not?
3. How do you feel about SATS' dream to restore an approach to life and ministry that is Bible-based, Christ-centred, and Spirit-led?
4. What motivates you to teach theology? Is it just your love of Scripture and academia, or are you motivated by a passionate love for the church and the saints? If the latter, what evidence supports your claim?

Chapter 2: Prerequisites for Academics

Since this book is written for a specific audience, namely, those who feel called to serve as academics in a SATS degree programme, we need to be transparent about the requirements. The requirements come from two sources: (a) the national framework for higher education and (b) the nature and purpose of the seminary. The national framework establishes a baseline, the minimum criteria a person must meet to serve as a teacher in a tertiary programme. The nature and purpose of the seminary dictate that not everyone who meets the government's academic requirements would be a good fit for SATS. Our hope is that you would assess yourself in the light of the prerequisites discussed below, and make an informed decision about whether you fit well with the ethos of SATS.

Core values and distinctives

SATS is different from other academic institutions in some ways. If you are to serve on our academic team, you need to understand our distinctives and share our values.

1) SATS is a confessional seminary. Although SATS is *broadly evangelical*, we are still a confessional institution. In other words, we hold to some core convictions that are non-negotiable for all who partner with us in the work of Christ. If you are to represent the mission of SATS faithfully to its students, it is imperative that you understand our core convictions and, more importantly, that you share them as heartfelt convictions of your own.

2) SATS is a distance-education seminary. As a distance-education institution, SATS is significantly different to a residential seminary. If you are to serve in a distance seminary, you must understand some of the core philosophy and values of theological training via distance education. We shall share many of those in this book.

3) SATS is technology-dependent seminary. SATS is dependent on technology for the delivery of its distance education programmes. Expressed in different words, our entire transactional environment with our students is technology-driven. If you are to serve with us, you must feel *at home* in this technological world.

4) SATS is a higher-academic institution. As an accredited institution of higher learning, we must comply with the regulations that govern higher education in South Africa. We must also maintain academic standards that are nationally and internationally comparable. The quality of teaching-and-learning must be comparable to what it would be if students were registered for an equivalent qualification in the USA, Germany, or India. If you are to serve with us, you must *value* academic excellence and be committed to maintaining high academic standards, both in your own work and in the lives of the students you teach.

Prerequisites for academic staff

If you are to serve as an academic (facilitator, assessor, or supervisor) in a SATS academic programme, you need to comply with the following criteria:

1) You must be a committed believer in Jesus Christ, and your life must testify to your faith. SATS is *first a ministry*, and only second an academic institution. Our highest calling is to model and impart biblical Christian attitudes and values. All our faculty need to testify to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and live according to biblical values and teachings. Since we work in active partnership with churches, and feel called to serve the church, we also expect all our faculty to be committed, active members of a local church.

2) You must hold an accredited degree in theology that is one academic level above the courses that you teach. This means you can legally teach first- and second-year courses with a three-year BTh, third-year courses with a BTh Honours or a four-year BTh, and so on. In addition, the seminary will examine the academic record of those who apply to serve as academic staff, to satisfy itself that they have the requisite academic ability.

3) You must be able to speak and write in fluent and correct English (or French). The people who serve as academics must be able to communicate in correct and professional English. It cannot be taken for granted that just because you have completed degrees in English, you are able to write in good English. Correct English usage is a sign of professional competence at an institution that teaches in English.

4) You must understand and abide by the academic policies of SATS. Like any academic institution, SATS has its own set of policies and procedures for facilitation and assessment. You need to know what they are, and abide by them.

5) You need to come with a minimum level of technological proficiency. Since we are so technology-dependent, there are certain technological skills that you need to have *before* you begin serving as a SATS academic. We are not able to accept the responsibility for teaching our academics foundational IT skills.

6) You need to familiarise yourself with the MySats platform. MySats is the seminary's online Learner Management System (LMS), on which we host all our courses. You will engage with your students on MySats. Although you do not need to be an expert on the technology, you do need to know how to perform all the core functions of your work on MySats. We provide the necessary training.

7) You need to approach your SATS work as a ministry, and serve the students as you serve the Lord. We serve our students as serving the Lord. This means that you must provide quality student support, communicate with your students on the course forum, provide timeous and formative feedback on their assignments, and so on.

8) You must comply with the marking criteria and standards set by SATS. As a decentralised seminary with faculty from various academic backgrounds, one of our challenges is to ensure that all our assessors maintain a uniform standard in such matters as late

submissions, resubmissions, referencing standards, plagiarism detection, and marking turn-around times.

Faculty appointment

There are some procedures that the seminary needs to follow before a new academic member is released to serve as a facilitator or an assessor.

1) Before you can serve as a facilitator or assessor, you must be formally *appointed by the Principal* as an academic staff member.
2) Before you can serve as a facilitator or assessor, you must successfully *complete the assessor-training course*.
3) Your initial appointment as a facilitator or assessor will be for a *probation period of six months* under the supervision of a more senior academic.
4) All academic appointments are *renewed on an annual basis* with a clause that allows both parties to give notice of one calendar month.

Questions for reflection

1. Are you a committed disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ who agrees with the seminary's Statement of Faith?
2. Why do you believe that your theological knowledge and your English competence are good enough to teach in a degree programme?
3. To what extent do you believe that studying theology via distance education is as good as studying face to face, and

how would you respond to those who deny that it is an equal alternative?

4. Are you committed to the pursuit of academic excellence? What about your life gives evidence that you are committed to maintaining high academic standards?

5. Why would you consider serving with SATS as a ministry and not just as a job? How would this attitude be evident in your work?

Chapter 3: Foundational Principles

SATS has three foundational principles, summed up in our by-line as 'Bible-based, Christ-centred, Spirit-led'. These three principles constitute our core theological convictions. They are the basis of everything we do and teach at SATS. They saturate the way we think and the way we teach. We are not too concerned with what our students believe about the many peripheral debates that divide the church. We know these are important, and we try to expose our students to the major schools of thought. What we consider most important is that they learn to live and think in a Bible-based, Christ-centred, and Spirit-led paradigm. If we achieve this, we have succeeded. If we do not, we have failed. Simple as that!

Bible-based

Bible-based theology

Our view of the Bible. We hold to the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible. As a corollary, we hold the classical evangelical view on the inerrancy of Scripture: the Scriptures are fully truthful and trustworthy in all that they teach.

God revealed himself in Old Testament times through his words to his people and his works amongst them. The Holy Spirit then guided the authors of the Old Testament to record accurately and to interpret faithfully what we were to learn from God's words

and works. In New Testament times, God revealed himself most fully and finally through the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was 'God with us'. The Holy Spirit later inspired apostles to record faithfully and interpret accurately what we are to learn through the life and teaching of God the Son.

Our view of theology. Since the Bible, as the written Word of God, is the only fully truthful and fully trustworthy record and interpretation of God's revelation, Scripture must be the *locus* of our theology. In a book that defines our seminary's vision of theology, I wrote:

> The Bible is the Lord's inspired account and interpretation of his revelation to us. The Scriptures are the Word of God to the people of God. What the Bible says, God says. Everything that Scripture teaches (when correctly interpreted) is a true revelation from God, reliably conveying elements of his nature, will, and purposes. The faithful exegesis of Scripture is the basis for our theology. We must interpret each text correctly in its original context, without imposing a foreign meaning upon it. To the extent that we can correctly interpret every text of Scripture and synthesise the teachings of all the texts, we can know what God has revealed regarding a topic.[2]

Later I argue that our theology is, and must be, both *exegetical* and *canonical*. By exegetical, we mean that every text of Scripture is inspired by God, and faithfully reveals something about God's nature, will, and purposes. Therefore, our theology must be built on an in-depth study of individual texts of Scripture using sound

---

[2] Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 24.

exegetical methods. By canonical, we mean that the whole Bible is inspired by God, and a complete understanding of God's nature, will, and purposes on any topic must bring together the teachings of the entire canon.

Bible-based teaching

Bible-based facilitation. For SATS, *Bible-based* is much more than a catchy motto in our by-line. It is a passionate philosophy of life and ministry. We live by the teachings of Scripture. We live by the standards of Scripture. If we are to convey this as a core value to our students, it is imperative that we as academic staff model it. We must live our lives by the truth and authority of the Word of God. We must also model that we actively search the Scriptures to know God's nature, will, and purposes: that we take pains to ensure that our beliefs and practices are in accord with sound interpretations of Scripture. This core value should permeate the way we teach and facilitate.

What might this mean in terms of facilitation? It would mean that we engage with our students in theological discussion and debate, and we do so in a manner that shows our unwavering confidence in Scripture. Where can we do this? Perhaps the best place is on the Course Forum and the General Forum. It is imperative that SATS students observe their facilitators *engaging* in theological and ministerial discussions. If we are engaged, they will get to know us as fellow travellers on the path of understanding, as men and women actively searching God's Word so that we might know him, and live in ways that are faithful to his nature, will, and purposes.

Bible-based assessment. We are a non-denominational seminary; we like to describe ourselves as *broadly evangelical*. We have students and staff from the most conservative to the most charismatic, Calvinists and Arminians, Pretribulationists and Postmillennialists, and so on. What binds us together is a shared commitment to the authority of Scripture. We do not try to convert students to a particular view; instead, we want them to understand the major views and defend their convictions by means of a responsible exposition of Scripture.

We want our students' essays to demonstrate that they have engaged with the Word of God on their topic. This would mean that they have:

- searched the Scriptures thoroughly,
- identified the most important passages,
- interpreted the individual texts soundly, and
- synthesised the teachings of Scripture responsibly.

Here are some questions you might ask when assessing the way in which an assignment engages with the Scriptures:

- Is the perspective sound and comprehensive?
- Is there adequate evidence of biblical referencing?
- Is the interpretation of biblical texts in accordance with sound exegetical principles?
- Is the major content of the essay based on biblical evidence?

The quality and nature of a student's engagement with Scripture is one of the main aspects of content on which we should give formative feedback. We should comment about whether they have engaged sufficiently with the Word of God, whether they have identified the key texts (if they have missed some, we should point the verses out), whether they have interpreted the biblical texts soundly, and so on. Although we are not trying to convert students to a different view, we do want them to understand why fellow believers differ. Therefore, it is appropriate to point out how other viewpoints interpret the biblical evidence.

Christ-centred

Christ-centred theology

'Christ-centred' is the second element in our by-line. We consider ourselves a Christ-centred ministry. From our inception, *the lordship and centrality of Jesus Christ* has been one of our three foundational principles.

> We believe that Jesus Christ is God the Son and the full revelation of the Godhead to mankind. He is head of the church and Lord of our lives. As a result, we are to base our doctrine and practice on what he said and did.[3]

We have come to spell out what Christ-centred means in four key points:

---

[3] South African Theological Seminary, *Prospectus* (Johannesburg: SATS, 2007), 7.

1. In all we do, we seek to give due honour and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. The goal of the Christian life is to become like the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. The person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ is central to all Christian life, doctrine, and ministry.
4. The nature of God as revealed in the words and works of the Lord Jesus Christ is a lens for interpreting God's word and discerning his will.

We try to help students to become as Christ-centred as possible in all areas of their lives. We seek to bring to the forefront these four expressions of christocentricity at every opportunity.

The first three are familiar to most evangelicals. Jesus is the object of our worship; all that we say or do should point to him and glorify him. Jesus is the example we imitate. We strive to become as much like him in character and ministry as we can. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—the essence of the gospel—is the epicentre of the Christian faith. The grand metanarrative of salvation history finds its purpose and meaning in Christ, especially his humiliation and glorification. As a result, our preaching, teaching, counselling, leading, serving, and so on, should keep the gospel and its implications front and centre. These three foci are generally shared and understood by Christian leaders, yet we must not take them for granted in our training. We must teach and model them all the time.

The fourth point is less universal. We favour a Christ-centred hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture. Since there are many

different types of Christ-centred hermeneutic, we have tried to spell out our approach in two articles in *Conspectus*.[4] In essence, we see the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ as the most clear and complete revelation of the nature, will, and purposes of God. Therefore, it should hold a central (or at least prominent) place in the way we interpret Scripture and do theology. Peppler calls this hermeneutic the 'Christocentric Principle'. He defines it as follows:

> The Christocentric Principle … is a way of interpreting Scripture primarily from the perspective of what Jesus taught and modelled, and from what he revealed concerning the nature, character, values, principles, and priorities of the Godhead.[5]

Whether we are trying to interpret a biblical passage, resolve a doctrinal dilemma, solve an ethical problem, or formulate a ministry model, we pause to ask: 'How does the example and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ guide our thinking?' We do not intend this only in the narrow sense of reflecting only on WHAT he said and did; this would essentially limit our vision to the gospels. We intend WHY he said and did it and HOW the early church applied it to inform a correct and complete understanding of Christ's words and works. The 'why' is often answered by turning to the Old Testament to understand the metanarrative of God's mission. The 'how' is contained in Acts to Revelation, as

---

[4] Christopher L. Peppler, 'The Christocentric Principle: A Jesus-Centred Hermeneutic', *Conspectus* 13 (2012): 117–135. Kevin G. Smith, 'The Christocentric Principle: Promise, Pitfalls, and Proposal', *Conspectus* 13 (2012): 157–170.

[5] Peppler, 'The Christocentric Principle', 120.

those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus's life and death interpret and apply it. Our christocentric lens depends on a whole-Bible understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ, and must not be confused with a reduced canon in which the gospels are singularly significant—though we do give considerable attention to the gospels.

Our view of being Christ-centred does not in any way dishonour the fact that God is Triune. The Son is the member of the Trinity who came to dwell amongst us. In his face, we see the glory of the Godhead revealed. There is no competition within the Godhead, and we do not inadvertently detract from Father and the Spirit by saying that we are Christ-centred. Rather, we honour the Father and the Son and the Spirit by taking seriously the fact that the Son came to reveal the Triune God and to clarify the true meaning of the [Old Testament] Scriptures.

> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. … No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1:14, 18).
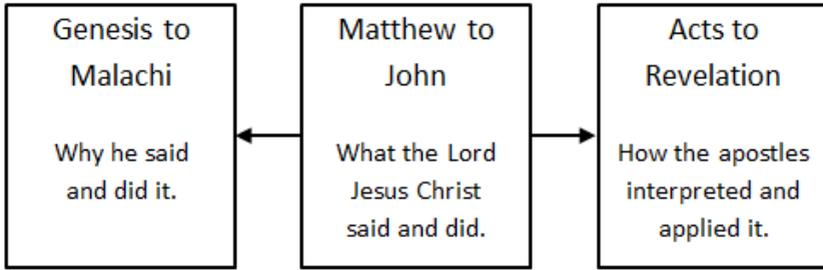
When we do our exegesis and our theology christocentrically, we do it in a manner consistent with the way the Triune God chose to reveal himself. We do not disregard or dishonour the Father and the Spirit; we honour Father, Son, and Spirit by seeking them through their self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

Our Christ-centred approach embraces the whole Bible and honours the entire Trinity.

Christ-centred teaching

What does all this mean for our teaching-and-learning methods and our assessment strategies? We strive to teach our students to *do theology*. Since our vision of theology is distinctly Christ-centred, we need to teach them to *do Christ-centred theology*. For us, it is almost a given that Christian theology is Christ-centred theology. When we speak about doing theology, we could not conceive of it being anything other than Christ-centred in nature. But there is a danger in leaving obvious things unstated: they may not be equally obvious to others. As someone quipped, 'The problem with common sense is that it is not too common.' Therefore, we seek to make our Christ-centred approach as explicit as possible. We seek to model it and regularly remind our students about it.

1) We teach the christocentric model and the christocentric principle. The *christocentric model* is a simple method of studying a theological topic. It begins by studying the gospels to see what Jesus said and did in relation to the topic, next examines the Old Testament to understand why he said and did it, and then examines the remainder of the New Testament to see how the early church interpreted and applied Jesus's teaching (see the figure below). This is not the only method we teach our students, but it is one that we encourage them to master and use.

Genesis to Malachi	Matthew to John	Acts to Revelation
Why he said and did it.	What the Lord Jesus Christ said and did.	How the apostles interpreted and applied it.

The *christocentric principle* asks how all we learn about God's nature, will, and purposes through the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ informs our interpretation of a text, theme, or topic. It asks, in essence, 'What would Jesus say or do?' Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of 'the nature, character, values, principles, and priorities of the Godhead.'[6] Sometimes Jesus spoke directly to a question, in which case we simply refer to his teaching. When Jesus did not address a question directly, we have to infer what he would likely have said or done based on all that we know about him.

How do we *teach* these things? For us, 'teach' takes a variety of forms. First, we repeatedly expose students to these tools in our course materials. Second, we set assignments that call for students to use the tools. Third, we do our own theology in a way that models the use of the tools; this applies to the courses, books, and articles we write. Fourth, we give feedback on assignments in which we allude to the christocentric model and principle.

---

[6] Peppler, 'The Christocentric Principle', 117–135.

2) We use the christocentric principle to challenge students' reflections. Imagine that you are grading a paper about 'spiritual warfare'. The paper requires the student to evaluate the practice of 'binding and loosing' demons in the heavenly realms. In his paper, the student makes a variety of arguments from scripture and experience to support his convictions regarding the topic, but neglects to reflect on how the ministry of Jesus might establish a paradigm relevant to warfare with satanic forces. As assessors, we would challenge the student to reflect on the example of Jesus. How does the manner in which Jesus confronted demonic forces inform our theological theories and ministerial practices with respect to binding and loosing demons? Whenever the life and teaching of Christ has relevance to the topic of an essay, we would not allow the student to neglect to consider its implications. In this way, we reinforce the christocentric nature of Christian theology.

It takes a concerted and conscientious effort to inculcate into students the conviction that Christian theology is Christ-centred theology. Our entire academic team needs to present a united front, teaching, explaining, and modelling this conviction at every opportunity.

Spirit-led

'Spirit-led' is the third element in our by-line. Our mission is to equip Christians, and leaders in particular, *to be Holy Spirit empowered members of God's household*. But what does that mean in practice for theology and for theological education?

Smith reflects on the role of the Holy Spirit in theological reflection and research:

> Any attempt to discern the will of God must depend fully on the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the author and illuminator of Scripture. He is the one who guides us into all truth. 'No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God' (1 Cor. 2:11–12). Only the Spirit of God can lead the people of God into the truth of God.

> We may say 'Amen', but what does it mean for the way we do theology? This is not a step in the process, but a disposition in the person. Only when we realise how fallen and finite we are, and how much we need the Spirit of God to lead us into a spiritual understanding of God's will, can we really do theology. Our best methods and models are worthless if we rely on them. We need to approach our task with humility and prayer, together with a genuine openness for the Spirit of God to direct our hearts and minds. In a sense, all theology is a dialogue with the Spirit—we direct our questions to him and ask him to direct our thoughts so that they align with his thoughts.[7]

Later in the same work, Smith writes:

> Authentic theology is Spirit-dependent. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide. He reveals the Father and the Son, and he guides us into all truth. He opens our minds to understand the deep things of God. He leads us into faithful responses to

---

[7] Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 29.

the Word of God. Without his presence and tutelage, we are blind guides. Our human minds and methods are necessary, but not sufficient. They must be yielded to God's Spirit in prayer, seeking his help to interpret and apply the word of truth correctly. We need the Spirit's guidance not only to discern the truth, but also to disseminate it. His power and wisdom need to permeate our dialogue, writing, teaching, and strategising. The difficulty with this particular aspect lies in its application. We readily realise that we need to depend on the Holy Spirit, but we cannot easily build that into a model for doing theology. We know that a believer who seeks God with flawed methods but an attentive ear to the voice of the Spirit is more likely to find God and know his will than is a theologian with perfect methods who trusts in his own training and wisdom (John 7:17). We hold these truths to be self-evident, but we cannot easily represent them in a model of theological reflection.[8]

While we recognise that making space for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our theology and training is difficult to define, we can offer some guidelines.

1) We need to teach students to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit. When it comes to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church, we recognise two equally dangerous extremes: *misuse* and *disuse*. On the one extreme, we have churches that misuse the gifts of the Holy Spirit, attributing to the Spirit manifestations and messages incompatible with the biblical definitions of the ministry of the Spirit. On the other extreme, we have churches that downplay the role of the Holy Spirit, sometimes out of fear

---

[8] Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 129.

over the abuses they have seen or experienced. Our desire is to discover the biblical balance! We want to embrace the authentic presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

If we are to achieve this goal, then we need to teach our students to understand the biblical portrait of the Spirit's ministry. We do this most substantially in our course about the Holy Spirit, but one major treatment in a curriculum is not sufficient. Truths sink deeply into people's hearts when they are continually reinforced. Therefore, we need to touch regularly on the work the Spirit, both in our course materials and in our marking comments. Helping our students to become Holy Spirit empowered members of God's household is part of our mission, not only in the course devoted to the Spirit's work. (Some students may not even take The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a course.)

2) We need to encourage students to depend upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. We all know that it is easy to study theology without seeking the Spirit's leading: to fall into the trap of depending solely on scholarly sources and human reasoning to solve the mysteries of life. This is a fatal mistake. The entire Christian life needs to be lived in the Spirit, in dependence upon His presence and power. We need to remind and encourage our students regularly to saturate their theological study with prayer and meditation, seeking the face of God. I think it was Martin Luther who famously said, 'He who has prayed well has studied well.' Luther lived this principle, customarily spending the first two hours of each day in prayer. However, when he was grappling deeply with an issue, he would rise an hour earlier to pray more.

3) We need to learn to depend upon the leading of the Holy Spirit ourselves. There is an old adage that 'more is caught than taught.' Bible teacher Bob Mumford used to ask, 'If you have mumps, but you tell people that you have measles, what will they catch from you?' If we tell our students that they need to depend on the Holy Spirit when studying the Scriptures and writing their assignments, but we do not do so ourselves when we study the Scriptures and mark their assignments, we are being hypocrites and we shall 'reproduce after our own kind'. If we are to model a genuine dependence on the Holy Spirit, we should be able to answer 'yes' to most of these questions.

- Do we pray for our students?
- Do we intentionally rely on the illumination of the Holy Spirit when we seek to understand God's nature, will, and purposes? (Or have we come to rely on our knowledge and training alone?)
- Do we ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and guidance to assess our students' work, and ask him to use us as his mouthpieces to form them into the image of Christ?
- Do we engage in theological discussions with an attitude of humility, honestly seeking the Holy Spirit's help to guide us into all truth?

4) We need to learn to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit ourselves. If we are to model biblical dependence on the authentic ministry of the Holy Spirit, and teach others to depend on his leading, then we need to be students of the Scriptures' teachings about his person and work. We need to guard our

hearts and our minds in this area, so that we do not fall into either extreme—misuse or disuse.

Questions for reflection

1. What does 'Bible-based theology' mean for SATS?
2. Would those who know you well describe you as 'passionately Bible-based'? Why or why not?
3. If you were to serve as an academic in the SATS team, in what practical ways would you live out the seminary's commitment to being Bible-based?
4. Prior to reading this chapter, would you have described yourself as 'Christ-centred'? If so, what exactly did that mean for your life, theology, and ministry?
5. To what extent do you agree with the approach to Christ-centred theology and teaching that characterises SATS? To what extent do you disagree?
6. If you were to serve as an academic in the SATS team, in what practical ways would you live out the seminary's commitment to being Christ-centred?
7. How do you understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the *theology* and *teaching*?
8. What practical things can you do to ensure that your theology and teaching are meaningfully Spirit-led?

Chapter 4: Philosophy of Ministry

Our mission is to provide Bible-based, Christ-centred 'distance education and training to Christians, and leaders in particular'. Our ministry is mediated via distance education. We did not haphazardly choose this method of training. We chose distance education because we believe it is an effective method of equipping Christians for ministry. We chose distance education because we believe there is a great need for the benefits of in-service training that a distance education seminary can offer. We have a clear and sound rationale for choosing distance education as our modus operandi. We also hold to a definite philosophy of ministry, that is, strong convictions about what makes distance education effective as a ministry strategy.

We can summarise our philosophy of ministry using four C's and four mottos.

- *Community*: 'taking the distance out of distance education'.
- *Church*: 'training for ministry in ministry'.
- *Context*: 'teaching theory practically and practice theoretically'
- *Caring*: 'servants of God who serve His people'.

We believe that each of these four is a key to effective training by distance education. The better we do them, the more effectively we restore truth to the church and equip the saints for ministry.

Let us unpack what each key means, and how you can help to make it a reality in your role as a SATS academic.

Community: 'taking the distance out of distance education'

Distance education is renowned for being difficult. The main cause of the difficulty is *the distance factor*. Students are like individual coals removed from the fire. Isolated, they lose their heat. Historically, theological training by means of distance education has been frowned upon by 'the establishment'. When all is said and done, there is basically one reason for the scepticism many theological educators express about distance education: spiritual formation can only take place life-on-life.

These criticisms were *more valid* ten or fifteen years ago than they are today. When technology was limited, 'distance education' was synonymous with 'correspondence training'. *Correspondence* is education mediated by the post, that is, snail mail. The institution posted materials to the students, who posted assignments back to the institution. I completed my bachelor's degree by correspondence. I did not know or interact with one person at the institution. I waited 3–5 months for assessment results, and then all I received was a grade—no personal feedback whatsoever. You might think, 'What a terrible experience!' But it wasn't! I experienced my studies as a transforming and empowering journey with God and his Word. What made the experience positive? First, **great content**—soundly biblical.

Second, **great context**—I was actively involved in a wonderful local church, which became my learning and serving community.

If my experience was so beneficial in an age of pure correspondence, how much more rich might it be today, when the advances in technology make it possible to take much of the distance out of distance education? This must be our goal. As a 21st century distance education seminary, we must do all in our power to take the distance out of distance education. And we can! Potentially, distance education has the best of both worlds. We can now replicate many of the advantages of contact training, while retaining the well-known advantages of distance education, such as better-designed courses, cost-efficient training, in-context learning, and so on.

So then, **how do we 'take the distance out of distance education'?** It is all about helping the students to *feel like part of a community of learning*. There are many practical things that we can do to make this a reality.

1) We should help our students to know that we are real people who love Jesus. Help your students to see you as a *real person*. There are some simple things you can do. First, you can *fill out your profile* on MySats. Upload a picture of yourself, preferably not one that looks like an ID photo; a photo with your family or doing something you enjoy is much more personal. Second, *give some biographical information* about yourself—and not just cold facts; include something about who you are. Third, you *may* wish to invite the students to engage with you in online forums outside of SATS. For example, if you have a blog or a personal website, tell

them about it. If you are willing to have students as friends or contacts on social networking sites, tell them about it. Fourth, *engage on the forums*. Our academics represent the wisdom and voice of SATS. We need to model how theology is done in the SATS community. The best place is on the forum, the General Forum and the Course Forums. Please participate so that the students can get to know you.

2) We must maintain an active presence on the course page. The adage 'out of sight, out of mind' applies to the role of the facilitator in an e-learning course. You need to log in to the course at least twice a week, and *make your presence known*. How? Use the Course Forum. If there are any student queries waiting, post your responses. If there aren't, share something—anything! Share an article, a devotional thought, a YouTube video—anything relevant to the course.

3) We must provide quick, helpful feedback on the students' assignments. Our response to students' assignments is arguably the most important point of contact that we have with them. Their experience of SATS is significantly shaped by the assessments we make. How we come across in our feedback either makes SATS a cold, impersonal processing machine, or a warm, friendly pastoral team. We need to be courteous, friendly, affirming, and so on—all while maintaining high academic standards.

4) We need to be as proactive as possible in identifying students and risk, and going the extra mile to secure a win-win result. There are some simple ways you can do this. You can send out a

forum post a week before a major deadline, reminding everyone that the due date is approaching and encouraging them to work on their assignment. You *should* check the list of submissions the day after the assignment is due, and follow up students who have not yet submitted. Remind them that there is still time to submit their assignment and pass the course. If you want to be even more proactive, a little time exploring the course log files will enable you to identify students who have not logged into the course or downloaded their study materials. This allows for an even earlier intervention.

Church: 'training for ministry in ministry'

The mission of SATS is to provide biblical, christocentric training to Christians, and leaders in particular, to empower them to be Holy Spirit empowered members of God's household. The context in which our students need to live and serve is 'God's household', **the church**. The founder of SATS, Dr Chris Peppler, chose distance education as the mode of delivery for SATS' programmes because he wanted to keep the local church front and centre. He was convinced that the local church is the best incubator of spiritual growth and health. We share this core conviction.

The models of leadership training that we see in the Bible, such as Jesus training the disciples and Paul raising up Timothy and Titus, favour an *apprenticeship model* of education. Students prepare **for ministry in ministry**. We realise that theological studies via distance education often fall far short of the kind of apprenticeship that Jesus and Paul modelled, but we believe that at its best distance education captures some valuable aspects of

their example. For one thing, **students learn while doing**. They are constantly reflecting and applying the course content in a real-life context. If they are blessed to have pastoral mentors in their local church, they gain the additional benefits of apprenticeship.

There is much to be said for keeping students in their ministry context, as opposed to taking them out of it for three or four years of seminary training. Although residential seminary training has some definite advantages, it is unavoidably an artificial environment, distinct from and different to 'the household of God' in which pastors lead and minister. The biggest drawback, in our opinion, is that it *separates theory from practice*. Students spend three or four years learning [mostly] theory, and then hope to return to their churches to put it into practice. By contrast, distance education *integrates theory and practice*. The students are constantly putting theory into practice—and asking questions that are raised by practical experiences. This constant interchange between theory and practice, between learning and doing, makes theology more meaningful and relevant. Therefore, it leads to lasting learning.

History shows that many seminary graduates do not return to their sending churches. There are a variety of reasons for this, but chief among them seems to be that the person and the church *grow apart*. As a result, when the person has completed three or four years of theological training, he is unable to re-integrate into the church (or denomination) that sent him. The problem is two-sided: the church may not receive the person or the person may not wish to return to the church. When the leader does his

theological training while serving in his church, the two do not easily grow apart; rather, *they grow together.*

If we are serious about equipping leaders to be Holy Spirit empowered members of God's household, and we truly desire *their church* to reap the fruit of their training, then there is a strong case for church-based theological training. In summary, here are a few of the benefits:

- The student learns while serving actively in a real ministry context.
- The student enters into dialogue with others in his church community.
- The student performs ministry-based assignments in the context of his church.
- The student learns theory and practice in a dynamic, integrated interaction.
- The student and the church grow together, and both benefit from the training.

Context: 'teaching theory practically and practice theoretically'

We strive to teach theory practically and practice theoretically. Good theory gives birth to sound practice, and good practice is grounded in sound theory. When we teach biblical and doctrinal subjects, we must explore the practical implications. Conversely, when we teach practical subjects, we must ground them in a faithful exposition of their biblical and theological foundations. In other words, there is an inextricable link between theory and

practice, between theology and ministry. We must integrate these at all times. One of the major faults of theological institutions in the past has been to separate them, teaching theory in the Bible and theology classes and practice in the ministry classes. Let us always teach theory practically and practice theoretically.

Challenging ministry assignments. In his doctoral dissertation, Bert Watson identifies *challenging work assignments* as one of the most important catalysts for developing leaders. He writes:

> The Center for Creative Leadership has ascertained that *a combination of challenging job assignments, developmental relationships, and well-designed coursework* or training has proven effective in developing leaders. Research on top leaders indicates that about seventy percent of learning comes from challenging job assignments (and all this entails), twenty percent from developmental relationships, and ten percent from coursework and training. ... Holistic, transformational leader development requires a multifaceted approach; and *it is the intentional integration of coursework, developmental relationships, and challenging work assignments that makes this learning combination so effective.*[9]

Watson seems to be saying that people need knowledge in order to grow, but knowledge only becomes lasting and transformative

---

[9] Elbert E. Watson, Toward Transformational Church-Based Leader Development: A Synthesis of Insights from Instructional Design, Adult Learning Theory, the New Testament, and Organizational Research (Ph.D. dissertation, South African Theological Seminary, 2013), 423.

when they have to do something challenging with it in the real world.

What, if anything, does this imply for SATS? We need to ensure that our courses, especially the assignments, require students to perform challenging, real-life ministry tasks in their local church and/or community. We excelled in this area in our early history, but in recent years we have subtly surrendered the practical in favour of more theoretical assignments, an error we are working to correct.

What kinds of tasks make for challenging ministry assignments? The possibilities are limited only by the limits on our creativity. Any assignment that forces a student to use something he has learned in a real-life ministry context would qualify, provided that he has to engage in three tasks: (a) preparation; (b) action; (c) reflection. To illustrate, let us assume that we are teaching about 'women in church leadership', a hot-potato topic at the moment. We have presented the theory by having students read articles from advocates of the complementarian and egalitarian schools of thought, and reflected on a number of key biblical texts. Now, what kind of practical assignment might we set? Here are two possibilities:

1. Prepare a 30-minute teaching in which you present the two major views on women in ministry. Present your teaching to a small group, such as a Bible study or cell group. Facilitate a 30-minute discussion based on the content you have presented. After the event, reflect prayerfully on the experience. Then write a 1000-word

essay in which you report the experience and reflect on the personal lessons you learned.

2. Set up a meeting with an elder in your church. Briefly explain what you have learned about the two major views on women in leadership, then spend 30 minutes exploring what your local church believes, why it holds that view, and whether you both believe that view is faithful to Scripture. Then write a 1000-word essay in which you report the experience and reflect on the personal lessons you learned.

These two examples illustrate two classic types of practical assignment. We can call the first a **teaching task**. The student is asked to teach the material to others (2 Tim. 2:2). To do so, he needs to review the theory thoroughly, repackage it into an orderly presentation, teach it in his own words, and prepare himself to answer questions. This is an effective way of crystalising the content. In addition, the student enters into dialogue in which he has to consider the views and arguments of others. The second is a **discussion task**, which has similar values to the teaching task. The student has to prepare himself for a discussion with an informed discussion partner. A third type would be a **ministry task**, probably not applicable to this particular example topic. In a ministry task, the student has to perform some ministry and reflect on the experience. For instance, he might have to lead an outreach, present the gospel to an unbeliever, plan a youth camp, and so on.

Action-reflection pedagogy. Dr Howard Hendricks famously said, '*Practice does not make perfect. Practice makes permanent.*

Evaluated practice makes for progress.' He is dead right. Practical assignments produce learning when they demand *critical reflection* on the ministry or action performed. Adopting this principle leads to a simply rhythm of action-reflection. We set students action tasks, in which they have to go and do something. After they have done it, they need to reflect on the experience, and draw out the lessons that have been learned in the process. We usually ask them to submit their reflections in writing, either as an assignment or as part of a forum discussion. The advantage of the forum option is that it allows the reflection to go deeper by enabling students to engage with others' experiences and reflections when completing the same task.

Assessing practical assignments. 'People do not do what you *expect*; they do what you *inspect*' (Proverb). This is true for education. We believe that practical, ministry-related assignments are powerful catalysts for stimulating learning and growth, but we still need to develop assessment mechanisms to maximise their effectiveness. At the same time, we need to ensure that we do not make the assessment process so onerous that it pushes the price of our training too high. In other words, we need *efficient yet effective* ways of assessing practical assignments.

We can optimise efficient effectiveness by including three levels of evaluation: (a) self-assessment; (b) supervisor-assessment; and (c) academic assessment. We certainly do learn when we engage in critical self-assessment. Our assessment methods, therefore, include elements that call for students to evaluate their own performance and learning. We can also harness the inputs of mentors and supervisors who know the students personally and

see them in action, which gives a level of authentic, real-life evaluation of their performances.

Caring: 'servants of God who serve his people'

Service delivery is a term that crops up in every management discussion at SATS. We see ourselves as a service-oriented ministry. We have both a business basis and a ministry motivation for holding service delivery as a core value. From a business point of view, our success and sustainability depends on servicing our students better than any other seminary. From a ministry point of view, research has established a correlation between service and learning—the faster we respond to students, the more they learn.

Neil Butcher argues that the core business of educational institutions is not so much *content* as it is *service*. Although we strive to provide our students with high-quality content, they could just as easily buy a good book on the same subject for a fraction of the price of enrolling in a course, and still have the content. Why do they pay so much more to enrol at our seminary? Two reasons. First, they want the degree. Second, they want the support. They pay for formal education because they want the guidance and input of the faculty. If we realise that we are in a service industry, it will impact the way we work.

Survival of the fastest. We live in a competitive society. The companies that serve their clients best flourish. Similarly, the seminaries that serve their students best survive. We strive to gain and maintain a name for being the seminary that:

- responds first and fastest,
- answers every email,
- returns every phone message,
- goes the extra mile to help students,
- turns around student submissions speedily,
- treats students as people not numbers,
- reflects the love of Christ for our students,
- and so on.

When a student applies to multiple institutions, we strive to be the first to respond. This is often enough to determine where the applicant enrols. He figures that the institution which cares enough to respond quickly is likely to provide him with the best overall experience. We often hear students testify that they enrolled at SATS because we were the first to respond to their enquiry.

When a student submits an assignment or a thesis chapter, we strive to give helpful feedback in good time. The faster students get feedback on their submissions, the more they learn from the feedback. We gain students through fast and friendly administrative services; we retain them through fast and friendly academic support. We hope to gain and maintain a name for being a seminary that turns assignments around quickly. Our academic staff are often praised for their fast and friendly feedback, but every now and then we lose a student because one of our academics did not serve him well. As an assessor, your role is crucial—for better or for worse.

Teaching for lifechange. The above discussion may sound very 'professional' and business-oriented, and indeed it is. We are both a ministry and a business, but we are first and foremost a ministry, and we do business so that we can do ministry. Our core business is changing lives, empowering believers for a Bible-based, Christ-centred, Spirit-led life and ministry. If we go out of business, we can no longer empower people. If we lose students through poor service, we lose the power to impact their lives for Christ.

Our highest priority is *teaching for lifechange*. Everything we do has the ultimate goal of helping our students to deepen their knowledge of the Scriptures, their relationship with the Son, and the ministry in the Spirit. What does that have to do with service delivery? Everything! Our input into students' thinking is most influential when our feedback is fast and friendly. The better we serve them, the more we shape them.

People matter. The point is closely related to the previous one. There is a saying, 'People don't care what you know until they know that you care.' We need to communicate not only professorial insight, but also pastoral concern for our students. Every student is a person, not just a number. And not just a person—God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works. God is the master Potter shaping his growth. We are the Potter's left hand, playing a supporting role alongside the Holy Spirit (right hand) in shaping the person's formation. We need to love our students, and speak to them as brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to be gracious, gentle, courteous, respectful, and so on in our dealings with them. We are God's servants mentoring

His children in their formative years. We need to treat them with the dignity we would show young princes or princesses.

Pastoral concern is a particular challenge for academics. Many gifted academics feel more comfortable in the library than amongst the living. We are great at explaining principles, but less so at encouraging people. Whereas the Lord commands us to 'speak the truth in love' (Eph. 4:15), we often just speak the truth. We do well to remember that '*grace* and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17), and we are commanded to 'grow in the *grace* and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Pet. 3:18). We need to work hard to 'let our speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt' (Col. 4:6).

If we value people, we realise that tone matters. It is not good enough to speak the truth; we must do it in love and with grace. We must ensure that the tone of our feedback lets students know that we want the best for them; we want to help them to learn and grow. We must give positive as well as negative feedback. When we give negative feedback, we need to do so with a gentle spirit that makes even the correction edifying.

Questions for Reflection

1. How is distance education different from correspondence training?
2. Are you able to give the time needed to go the extra mile to build a community of learning with your online students?

3. What practical steps do you intend to take to 'take the distance out of distance education' when you facilitate an online course?
4. How positive is your attitude towards local church as the agent of God's mission on earth? How active and constructive is your personal engagement with your local church?
5. What do you consider the best ways to teach theory practically and practice theoretically? If you were in charge of SATS' training, how would you make this goal a reality?
6. Considering the other responsibilities that demand your time and attention, how will you be able to maintain the standards of service delivery towards which SATS aspires?
7. If you were to formulate Ten Commandments for interacting with students in a way that shows them that 'people matter', what would your ten be? To what extent do you think you can apply them in your teaching at SATS?

Chapter 5: Assessment Methods

We now turn our attention to the assessment methods we use in the undergraduate programmes at SATS. This discussion is introductory, just enough to give you a general sense of the kinds of assessment we use and the rationale for using each kind.

Outcomes-based assessment

We work within the framework of *outcomes-based education* (OBE). The key idea is that the learning process begins with the end in mind. We first set the outcomes, formulated in terms of what the student will be able to do. The outcomes cover the three major domains: cognitive (knowledge and understanding), performative (skills), and affective (attitudes and values).
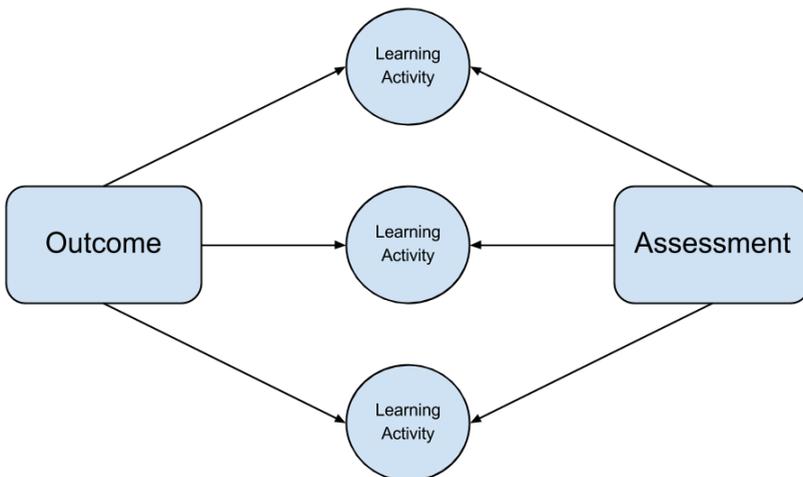
The idea is rather simple, and is driven by results. First, we decide what we want the student to learn and state it as an outcome. Second, we design learning activities through which the student can acquire and demonstrate mastery of the outcome. Third, we formulate assessment tasks through which we can measure the extent to which the student has achieved the outcome. Assessment is central. '*Students do not do what you expect; they do what you inspect*' (Proverb). Well-designed assessments measure the students' achievement of the learning outcomes. We can thus speak about outcomes-based assessment (OBA).

In OBE, the key criterion for assessment is that the assessment task must fit the learning outcome(s) it is designed to demonstrate or test. It is all about an appropriate demonstration of learning. This means, *inter alia*, that OBE is less married to formal examinations than are most other approaches to education. Exams should be used when they constitute the most appropriate way of assessing learning, but other assessment types should be preferred when they are more suitable. We shall speak more about examinations later.

Formative assessment

OBE distinguishes between formative and summative assessment, placing value on both methods. Formative assessment is intended to help the student to grow and improve, while summative assessment is intended to measure whether or not he has achieved the learning outcomes at a satisfactory level. We try to use both formative and summative assessment strategies.

The importance of formative feedback

For the most part, *formative assessment* takes the form of meaningful feedback on the student's submissions. We often hear students tell us that the only feedback they received on their assignments when studying elsewhere was something like, '73%. Well done!' scribbled on the cover page. There was no indication of what the student did wrong, or for that matter what she did right; no mention of what he needed to do to raise his grade to the next level; neither affirmation nor correction. Just giving a student a grade and a clichéd comment like 'good' or 'well done' is inadequate, and we hope SATS never does this to its students.

We should model our teaching on the example of Jesus with his disciples. His goal was not to have them pass a test of knowledge. He wanted to inspire faith, challenge wrong thinking, clear up misunderstandings about God or his Word, motivate holy living, equip for effective ministry, and so on. Can you imagine Jesus sending the twelve on a ministry assignment, and when they return writing up this feedback report?

Peter	84. Well done.
John	92. Excellent!
Andrew	53. Could do better.
Matthew	21. Better luck next time.

I imagine the debriefing sessions being much more constructive, designed to help each person become what God intended him to be. Can we be content with less?

The communication of formative feedback

The suggestions below assume that you are giving feedback on an essay assignment or a thesis chapter, though they could be adapted for other types of assessment.

1) Give both general and specific feedback. In the *general feedback*, you share your overall impressions of the work. The general feedback should indicate whether the work is worth a fail, pass, or distinction. It should indicate your major reasons for that judgement, and tell the student what she needed to do better to raise her grade to the next level. You can type your general feedback into the main feedback block in MySats. You can sometimes just put it into a general email. The superior option you can consider is to make a short audio or video presentation containing your feedback. This helps to personalise what you say.

Specific feedback refers to *comments or corrections* that apply only to particular aspects of the work. It might be a grammatical correction, a comment about the interpretation of a particular source or Scripture, an observation about the flow of the argument in a section of the essay, or just about anything else that does not apply to the whole work. Specific feedback is usually best placed in the text of the essay, with the part of the essay to which it applies clearly marked.

2) Strike a balance between affirming what is worthy and correcting what is wrong. Many assessors only tell students what they did wrong. Their comments are limited to correcting errors. We consider this a serious error. Who flourishes in a context of

continual criticism? Like children, students often feel vulnerable when they submit assignments. We need to affirm what is praiseworthy, even when the overall quality of the work is poor.

When you grade a weak assignment, one temptation is to point out *everything* the student did wrong in the hope that she will learn from the input and do better the next time. We consider this unwise. People have limited capacity to absorb input, especially correction. Learning is most effective in bite-sized chunks. Jesus understood this principle. On the eve of his death, He said to the disciples, 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now' (John 16:12). Even though Jesus was leaving, he realised the futility of a 'content-dump' approach to training. Trying to teach the disciples everything they still needed to learn would have produced cognitive overload, and in the end they would have learned nothing. We should copy the Master, and feed only what students can digest.

I once saw a cartoon in which a teacher is standing in front of a group of eight-year-old children. The teacher begins, 'Today we are going to learn everything about everything.' Can you imagine how *demotivating* that is to the students? So then, how much is enough? This is difficult to answer abstractly. Here are some general guidelines for giving feedback:

1) Always explain the rationale for the grade awarded. If you judge that the paper is worth 70 per cent, explain to the student why her paper is classified as a 'pass' rather than a 'distinction', and what she could have done to improve her grade meaningfully. Tell her what she would have needed to do better

to have raised her grade to the next level. We do not mean that you must say things like this:

> 'You lost two marks because you cited Brown incorrectly on page 6.'

We have in mind this kind of overarching feedback:

> Your paper is generally well written, and is worth a solid 70 per cent. It is evident that you have read the prescribed sources and have an adequate grasp of the major schools of thought on the topic. However, you have limited your engagement to the assigned readings and you have not engaged critically with them. To earn a distinction at third-year level, you need to engage more broadly and more critically with scholarship.

2) Give your overarching impressions of the work in a paragraph or two. This is closely related to the previous point, and in many cases amounts to the same thing. The crucial issue is that the student knows what your global assessment is; that is, what you think of the work as a whole. This feedback should help the student to understand how well she has done in relation to two factors: (a) the purpose of the essay in relation to the learning outcomes and (b) the quality of the essay in relationship to the academic level. Here are two examples of well-formulated overarching feedback.

Example 1: Feedback to a first-year student who scored 40 per cent for an exegetical paper.

Dear Jenny

Thank you for your exegetical paper on Ephesians 2:1–10. I can see that you have diligently studied the prescribed readings, but it seems that there remain some significant gaps in your understanding. Please see my comments in the body of your assignment, which point out three places where you have misunderstood the argument and message of the text. You also lost marks for failing to format your assignment according to the seminary's requirements, which are laid out in chapter 6 of *Academic Writing and Theological Research*. I realise that this is discouraging feedback, but if you had just mastered the technical requirements, you would have passed. Keep working hard and you will succeed in your studies.

Blessings,
Linda

Example 2: Feedback to a third-year student who scored 75 per cent for an assignment about pre-marital counselling.

Dear Bongani

Your assignment was written in a clear, simple and engaging style. I really enjoyed reading it. The referencing is good, and it is clear that you have read all of the required readings, and used some additional sources. You scored 75 instead of 80 per cent because you used too many lengthy quotations. At third-year level, you need to be *engaging* with your sources, not just *quoting* them. If you keep this in mind for future assignments, you are in line to score a distinction.

Well done,
Henry

If you notice that many students make similar mistakes, you can post **group feedback** using the course forum. This is a fast and efficient way of helping the whole group without needing to type the same thing to each student.

3) Try to give three complementary and three corrective comments in the text of each essay. If you make six constructive comments on each essay, you should be giving sufficient formative feedback. Where possible, try to strike a balance between affirmation and correction in your content comments. This is not always possible, but it is something towards which we should strive. You will have some outstanding students, on whose work there is nothing to correct or challenge. You will also grade essays so poor that you cannot commend anything.

Why do we recommend a 3+3 approach? Just as Jesus knew that he could not teach his disciples everything at once, so we know that formative feedback is most effective when received in digestible doses. If you try to teach your students everything there is to know about academic writing on each paper they write, you will so overwhelm them that they will probably take in nothing at all. But if you feed them helpful inputs a few at a time, they are likely to learn and grow.

Intensive marking of a small section of a student's work is another expression of the same philosophy. You might, for instance, choose one page in a ten-page essay and mark it meticulously, correcting grammatical errors, pointing out leaps of logic or flaws in the argument, and so on. You cannot realistically do this on every page of every student's work—and even if you could, it

would not be helpful since it would cause cognitive overload. But this kind of intensive correction of a small section can be a valuable means of feedback.

4) Use multi-media forms of feedback (optional). We mostly use text to give our feedback to students, but the world is changing. There is no reason why we cannot make a short voice recording of our feedback. This is particularly helpful when you have to give negative feedback, since it helps the student to hear the tone of voice—assuming that your tone is gentle and caring. We are also approaching the point in time when it is possible to record a short video with feedback. It might be a video of your speaking or it could be a screen capture with the student's work displayed for comment—the best is a combination of you and the work. These videos can be stored on YouTube and shared privately. Video is more personal than voice. More personal still is to have a live meeting, using VoIP technology. We need to consider the costs, in terms of time and bandwidth, of giving feedback in these more creative ways, but thoughtful use of these technologies certainly takes the distance out of distance education.

Types of assessments

From the perspective of outcomes-based education, the method of assessment must be suitable for the student to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcome(s). This attitude towards assessment tends to downplay the importance of written examinations and recognise the validity of alternate assessment strategies. For instance, a written examination would be an inadequate way to test whether a person should be awarded a

driver's licence; the way to assess whether a person can drive is by observing him drive. Driving a car is a motor skill, and motor skills are seldom adequately demonstrated by means of a written examination. For the most part, the outcomes in a theology programme fall into the cognitive domain, so examinations are one valid form of assessment. However, we not enthusiastic about written exams as the most reliable demonstration of student learning, and we tend to prefer alternative methods of assessment.

We make regular use of the following types of assessment:

1. **Essay assignments.** Essays are the most prominent form of assessment at SATS. They are a good indication of *academic skills*. They indicate whether students can research a topic, write a coherent paper, sustain an argument, reference sources, and so on. They allow students to grapple with divergent views, and then to state and defend their convictions.

2. **Multiple-choice quizzes.** We use multiple-choice quizzes to test students' completion and comprehension of required readings. Multiple-choice questions are an effective and efficient method of testing *knowledge* or *content*. Since they are graded by the computer, they do not require much labour on the part of a facilitator.

3. **Forum discussions.** We are convinced that *theology is dialogical*. This just means that theology is thinking and talking about God's nature, will, and purposes. We learn and grow when we discuss difficult aspects of life and ministry with other believers. Forum discussions usually

identify challenging aspects of the course material, ask students to formulate their theological response and then to interact with others' views. These are rich, interactive learning experiences.

4. **Practical assignments.** Practical assignments require students *to do something* in their church or community. We use teaching tasks, discussion tasks, and ministry tasks. Teaching tasks require students to teach the material to someone. Discussion tasks call for students to discuss the material with others. Ministry tasks ask students to perform some sort of practical ministry. Practical assignments are based on an **action-reflection** pedagogy. Students perform an action, and then reflect on it as a learning experience. They are required to submit some sort of evaluation, report, or reflection.

In an ideal world, each course at SATS would have all of these types of assessment. It would have quizzes to test knowledge, essays to test research and writing skills, quizzes to build a community of co-learners who reflect together, and practical assignments to translate theory into practice.

Rubric-based assessment

The greatest challenge we have faced with reference to assessment is getting consistency in the grading standards we apply. One reason lies in the diversity of faculty we have. In some educational contexts, the norm is to award higher grades than is customary in South Africa. This is particularly the case for American teachers. In the USA, the grades that students receive

tend to be about 10–20 per cent higher on average than is the case in South Africa. Thus assessors who are most familiar with the American system tend to award higher grades than SATS assessors who have trained in South Africa. Another reason is simply due to the personality of the assessor. By personality, some assessors are stricter and tend to award lower grades, while others are warmer and tend to award relatively higher grades. We have tried repeatedly to *train* our assessors so that they all mark similarly, but it is almost impossible to achieve consistent grades when one is working with a wide diversity of faculty.

Enter rubrics! Rubrics are a well-established way of maximising the consistency of grading in an educational institution. They effectively overcome the two challenges we have mentioned above. Two academics are much more likely to assess an essay similarly when the grading is rubric-based than when it is not. This is so because the assessor is not assigning a numerical value to the essay; he is selecting from a series of qualitative statements those which best describe the essay. Thus it matters little whether he is used to a pass mark of 50 per cent or 70 per cent. The choice of descriptors is also less influenced by the personality of the assessor than would be the case if a number has to be awarded.

How do rubrics work? Essentially, an essay is assessed according to a set number of criteria. For instance, in the example in Appendix C, the rubric has six criteria:

- Introduction and conclusion   10 per cent
- Content   40 per cent
- Development and argument   15 per cent

- Writing style   10 per cent
- Presentation   10 per cent
- Referencing   15 per cent

As you can see, each criterion is weighted. In the example, 'Content' counts for 40 per cent of the grade, while 'Presentation' counts for only 10 per cent. For each criterion, the assessor is given a series of statements indicating the extent to which the essay meets that criterion; the statements are called *scales*. The assessor is required to select the statement which best describes the essay. The assessor does not give the student a number; he just selects the most applicable statement. When the assessor has chosen the best statement for each criterion, the computer calculates the overall grade for the assignment using the formula programmed into the rubric.

Rubrics do not solve all grading problems, but they do provide an effective and efficient method of grading essays. We are in the process of introducing rubrics, so for the foreseeable future it is likely that *some* of the essays you grade will require you to work with a rubric. We intend to experiment with them, and then reassess the challenges and benefits.

Questions for reflection

1. What convictions do you hold regarding the role and importance of examinations as a method of assessment?
2. When you have graded papers in the past, to what extent have you given meaningful *formative* feedback?

3. How consistently do you explain the rationale for the grade you award and tell students what they need to do to raise their grade to the next level?
4. Please review three papers that you have graded in the past. How well do you think you balanced these two aspects of feedback?
   a. technical and content
   b. affirmation and correction
5. What do you think of the '3+3 approach'?
6. Does the thought of giving audio and/or video feedback sound like something that you would like to do in your SATS courses? If yes, what help would you need to get started?
7. What are your feelings about rubric-based marking? Would you be enthusiastic or reluctant to grade essays using a rubric? Explain.

Chapter 6: Dealing with Plagiarism[10]

Plagiarism is here to stay. We would hope that it would not be a problem in a theological seminary, but it is. In your role as an academic at SATS, you are going to encounter incidents of plagiarism in student papers. You can deal with minor cases yourself, but more serious cases must be referred to the Head of Department. This chapter contains our guidelines for dealing with incidents of plagiarism.

Definitions

plagiarism   We define plagiarism as 'the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results or words without giving appropriate credit.'[11]

citing   We use the verb 'cite' and the noun 'citation' when referring to in-text citations.

referencing   We use the verb 'reference' and the noun 'references' to denote a bibliographic entry. SATS requires students to provide a bibliography labelled 'Works Cited', in which a

---

[10] My colleague, David Woods, conducted the research and wrote the first draft of the document on which this chapter is based. Although I have made slight changes to the document, and I take full responsibility for any errors in it, David deserves the real credit for the chapter.

[11] This definition is quoted on various University websites in the United States, and is attributed to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy on Misconduct in Research.

student must reference all the works cited in the body of the paper.

Intentionality and severity

When dealing with an incident of plagiarism, the two crucial factors we have to weigh are the level of *intentionality* and the level of *severity*. The two are related, but they can be distinguished.

Intentionality

From an assessment and disciplinary point of view, *intentionality* is perhaps the most important issue. Once it is established that the student has used his sources without crediting them, the assessor must judge whether the offence was **intentional** or **accidental**. Intentional plagiarism constitutes academic dishonesty (an attempt to cheat), whereas accidental plagiarism constitutes academic inability or negligence. Dishonesty requires discipline, whereas inability requires instruction.

An important consideration in weighing intentionality is the distinction between 'copied verbatim' and 'copied and adapted'. When a student 'copies and adapts', he changes the words while retaining the sentence structure of the original, without giving credit. The adaptation could be a poor attempt to paraphrase or it could be a deliberate attempt to conceal plagiarism, especially if no citation is given.

Severity

Severity is a function of **the type** and **the extent** of the offence. Plagiarism takes many forms; some are innocent while others are insidious. Later in this chapter we provide a detailed categorisation of various forms or types of plagiarism, together with some guidelines as to the severity of each type. The extent refers to how much of the student's work was plagiarised. The more extensive the plagiarism, the more severe it is. Extent is *cumulative*. One large block of copied material indicates intentionality as much as numerous shorter sections. Severity itself is also cumulative. If there are multiple instances of plagiarism, varying in type, the offence might be severe even though no single instance is severe on its own.

The severity of the offence can be **mitigated** by (a) extenuating circumstances or (b) admission of guilt. When there is evidence of plagiarism, the student should be presented with the evidence and afforded an opportunity to explain his actions and confess his wrongdoing. At SATS, we view our students first and foremost as fellow believers in the household of God. The Lord Jesus Christ taught loving correction leading to repentance and restoration. This is always our primary objective when correcting a student who has plagiarised. By the same biblical ethic, however, we take firm action if, in the spite of convincing evidence, a student persists in denial of wrongdoing.

Four Levels of Plagiarism

We propose a 4-level plagiarism scale.

Level 1: accidental plagiarism

- This would be a minor infringement, possibly due to accident, ignorance, or carelessness.
- The facilitator should comment in the response file, and provide explanations and examples if necessary.
- The mark penalty for *accidental plagiarism* is 10 per cent.
- The incident is handled by the facilitator and no formal record is kept in the student file.

Level 2: isolated plagiarism

- This is a definite, culpable case of plagiarism, but limited to a few isolated instances.
- The facilitator should comment in the response file, and provide explanations and examples if necessary.
- The mark penalty for *isolated plagiarism* is 20 per cent.
- The incident is handled by the facilitator and formal note is made in the student file.

Level 3: significant plagiarism

- This is a case of deliberate plagiarism in part(s) but not all of the student's work. The student has clearly plagiarised a significant part of his work (20–50 per cent of the paper), while other parts were his own work.
- The facilitator should refer the case to the Head of Department, who should write a formal warning letter.
- The mark penalty for *significant plagiarism* is 50 per cent, making a pass impossible.

- The incident is handled by the Head of Department and a Formal Warning letter is issued and stored in the student file.

Level 4: pervasive plagiarism

- This is a case of deliberate and extensive plagiarism, exceeding 50 per cent of the submission.
- The facilitator should refer the case to the Head of Department, who should write a formal warning letter.
- The penalty for *pervasive plagiarism* is that the student fails the course.
- The incident is handled by the Head of Department and a Final Warning letter is issued and stored in the student file.

Types of Plagiarism

Plagiarism takes many different forms. Most of the forms listed below were taken from www.plagiarism.org, but we have described and categorised them to suit the needs and context of SATS. We have classified the offences into three categories:

1. **Technical offences that should not be treated as plagiarism.** Some of the items in this category are plagiarism by the technical definition of the term, but in practice are much more likely to indicate the student's academic limitations than his intent to cheat.
2. **Lesser offences that should be handled by the course facilitator.** Here we place instances of plagiarism that

seem to be intentional, but are not of such a nature or extent as to warrant high-level disciplinary action. They should be corrected by the course facilitator in his feedback.

3. **Greater offences that should be handled by the Head of Department.** Here we place the more severe cases of plagiarism that warrant formal disciplinary action by the Head of Department. The severity may reflect the extent of the plagiarism or the intentional nature of it.

The purpose of this classification is to provide guidance to academics when dealing with incidents of plagiarism. For instance, if an assessor encounters something in category 1, he should treat it as a content or technical deficiency rather than as a case of plagiarism proper. If the assessor believes the offence falls into category 3, he should refer it to the Head of Department for formal evaluation and action.

Category 1. Technical offences that should not be treated as plagiarism

The infringements listed here may *technically* fit the definition of plagiarism, but for the purposes of SATS' assessment practices they are treated as technical or content deficiencies. This is a general guideline. If the assessor deems the infringement to be both intentional and extensive, he may opt to treat it as plagiarism rather than just an academic writing deficiency.

The student cited and referenced, but did not use quotation marks. This is technically plagiarism, but it is invariably due to

ignorance or negligence rather than being a sinister attempt to cheat. The student needs guidance on paraphrasing or quoting sources. We treat this as a *technical deficiency*, making appropriate deductions and explanations.

The student included quotation marks and referenced in the bibliography, but did not include citations. This is not plagiarism; it is faulty referencing. The student needs guidance regarding how to credit the source properly in the body of the assignment. We treat this as a *technical deficiency*, making appropriate deductions and explanations.

The student simply assembled multiple sources without any original content (own contribution). This occurs when all or most of the student's paper consists of a patchwork quilt of quotes and paraphrases woven together, so that there is little or no evidence of the student's own thinking or understanding. This is not plagiarism,[12] because the sources are appropriately cited and referenced, but it is poor academic writing that generally fails to demonstrate the student's achievement of the learning outcomes. We treat this as a *content deficiency*, making appropriate deductions and explanations. (The assignment should not score a passing grade.)

---

[12] Most authorities actually say that this *is* plagiarism. The argument is that if you write a book in which you have little or no material that is your own, since you have essentially drawn the entire content from a handful of other books, even if you have credited your sources throughout, you have still in a sense stolen their work to create your own.

The student quoted large amounts of material correctly. This is similar to 'the student simply assembled multiple sources without any original content', but leaves room for some of the student's own reflections and contributions between the quotes. This is not plagiarism, but it is poor academic writing that generally fails to demonstrate the student's achievement of the learning outcomes. We treat this as a *content deficiency*, making appropriate deductions and explanations. (The assignment should not score a passing grade.)

The student plagiarised his own work (autoplagiarism). This is technically plagiarism, since it is proper to cite and reference materials drawn from one's own earlier writings. However, stealing from oneself is hardly a serious offence. We treat this as a *technical deficiency*, making appropriate deductions and explanations.

The student included citations without references. This is not plagiarism, since the student did credit his sources. It is a technical failing, usually indicating that the student does not properly understand the referencing system. It might also be due to the student running out of time. We treat this as a *technical deficiency*, making appropriate deductions and explanations.

The student included references without citations. This takes two forms: (a) The student provided a general bibliography, but did not interact with [some] of the sources in the paper, and (b) The student interacted with the sources listed in the bibliography, but failed to provide citations. These are both technically plagiarism, since the student is indicating that he drew content

from the sources referenced, but has failed to credit their specific ideas in the body of the assignment. However, in most cases this is more indicative of ignorance than malice. We treat this as a *content deficiency*, making appropriate deductions and explanations.

The student used a quote or a paraphrase in a way that misrepresents the original writer's message. A student may have overlooked the context of a statement in the source which modifies the meaning. For example, he may refer to the conclusion of a published survey but fail to mention that the survey was done in one country, not worldwide. This is not plagiarism. In most instances, it is an accidental misinterpretation or misuse of a source. We treat this as a *content deficiency*, making appropriate deductions and explanations.

Category 2. Lesser offences that should be handled by the course facilitator

The student used concepts without citations. This is technically plagiarism, since it is proper to credit borrowed ideas as well as exact words. This usually happens out of ignorance or by mistake, since we cannot reference every concept we use. The assessor needs to judge the severity of the case. The recommendations are as follows:

- If this represents a periodic pattern in the paper, in that the student sometimes credits the source of his ideas and sometimes neglects to do so, we treat it as a *technical*

deficiency, making appropriate deductions and explanations.

- If this represents a pervasive pattern throughout the paper, in that the student is directly dependent on identifiable sources, but seldom credits the sources, we treat it as a level 1 or 2 infringement.

The student copied small parts verbatim. This is clear and intentional plagiarism of very limited extent. The student is probably taking a chance under pressure, but the behaviour must be corrected. We treat this as a level 2 infringement and deduct 20 per cent.

The student copied and adapted small parts. The word 'adapted' means that the student made superficial changes to the words, grammar, or sentence structure to conceal his direct dependence on the source. This is clear and intentional plagiarism of very limited extent. The student is probably taking a chance under pressure, but the behaviour must be corrected. We treat this as a level 2 infringement and deduct 20 per cent.

Category 3. Greater offences that should be handled by the Head of Department

The student copied the majority of the paper verbatim. This is clear, intentional, and extensive plagiarism. The student has not contributed anything meaningful, and his intention to copy cannot be challenged. We treat this as a level 4 infringement; the student fails the course.

The student copied and adapted the majority of the paper. The word 'adapted' means that the student made superficial changes to the words, grammar, or sentence structure to conceal his direct dependence on the source. This is clear, intentional, and extensive plagiarism. The student has not contributed anything meaningful, and his intention to copy cannot be challenged. We treat this as a level 4 infringement; the student fails the course.

The student copied significant content verbatim. This is clear, intentional, and extensive plagiarism. The student's intention to copy cannot be challenged. However, this is mitigated by the fact that he also used other sources and included some original content. We treat this as a level 3 infringement and deduct 50 per cent.

The student copied and adapted significant parts. The word 'adapted' means that the student made superficial changes to the words, grammar, or sentence structure to conceal his direct dependence on the source. This is clear, intentional, and significant plagiarism. The student's intention to copy cannot be challenged. However, this is mitigated by the fact that he also used other sources and included some original content (his own contribution). We treat this as a level 3 infringement and deduct 50 per cent.

The student gave misleading citations or references (red herring plagiarism). This occurs when the student intentionally adds misleading citations and references to give the impression that he is engaging with scholarly sources. However, on investigation it emerges that the sources referenced are fictitious or erroneous.

The assessor must ensure that the student has not simply made a mistake. This is a sinister form of plagiarism, which we treat as a level 3 or 4 infringement depending on our judgement as to how sinister the offence is.

The student submitted someone else's paper. This can take two main forms: (a) The student stole someone else's paper and submitted it as his own, or (b) The student had someone else write the paper for him. In either case, *someone else wrote the paper.* This is a serious form of plagiarism, which we treat as a level 4 infringement; the student fails the course.

The student translated a paper written in another language (translation plagiarism). Translation plagiarism is one of the most sinister forms, because it is both highly intentional and difficult to identify. The assessor must weigh the level of intentionality and the extent of the plagiarism, and then decide what level infringement it is. In general, this is a serious form of plagiarism, which we treat as a level 3 or 4 infringement.

Procedures to follow

If you are assessing a student submission, and you encounter an infringement, this is how we suggest you deal with it.

- **Category 1 offences.** If you find an offence that seems to fall in category 1, 'Technical offences that should not be treated as plagiarism', please use it as a teaching opportunity. Draw the student's attention to the problem,

and apply the appropriate grade penalties, but do not treat it as a case of plagiarism proper.

- **Category 2 offences.** If you find an offence that seems to fall in category 2, 'Lesser offences that should be handled by the course facilitator', apply the appropriate grade penalty and explain to the student the reason for the penalty. You may wish to use extracts from this document as part of your feedback.

- **Category 3 offences.** If you find an offence that seems to fall in category 3, 'Greater offences that should be handled by the Head of Department', please refer it to the Head of the Postgraduate School if it is a PG student or to the Head of the Undergraduate School if it is a UG student, and copy the relevant Registrar. Do not return a graded paper to the student with an allegation of plagiarism until you have consulted with the Head of Department. In most cases, he will take over the case and advise you if there is anything else you need to do.

Dos and don'ts

- Do run the entire assignment through the Turnitin system (Tii).
- Do send the student the Tii Report as evidence.
- Do check with the Registrar whether the student has been warned for plagiarism in the past.
- Do give the student an opportunity to explain or confess (i.e. point out the similarity to source material, and ask the student to respond).

- Don't make accusations. Simply point out which part of the student's submission matches content from other sources, and ask for an explanation.
- Don't say where the student got the material. Just give one source that it matches. You don't know which site or source he got it from.
- Do apply the prescribed grade penalty *after* you have you have given the student a grade for the original content of the submission.

Remember: *Turnitin acts as a witness that presents evidence. It is not a judge that determines guilt. You have to weigh up the evidence it presents.*

Records of offences

Records of plagiarism warnings are stored on the Student Database. It is the responsibility of the relevant Registrar to make a note on the student profile. The assessor is responsible for informing the Registrar when dealing with any case of plagiarism (categories 2 or 3). The assessor can also consult with the Registrar to find out if a particular student has been warned for plagiarism in the past.

Tips for detecting plagiarism

If you are grading a paper that has not been scanned by Tii, here are some tell-tale signs that might indicate plagiarism:

- changes between straight quotes and smart quotes

- changes in font and formatting
- changes in the style of writing
- changes in the quality of the language usage
- in-text citations or footnotes that are not in the bibliography

Questions for reflection

1. If you have been teaching in higher education, how serious a problem has plagiarism proved to be?
2. If plagiarism has not emerged as a serious problem in your previous teaching experience, do you think it is because the students were honest or because you lacked the tools to recognise it?
3. If you have dealt with cases of plagiarism in the past, think about one or two examples. How might you have handled them differently if you were following SATS' procedures as outlined in this chapter?

Appendix A: General Technology Skills

All facilitators, assessors, and supervisors must have a minimum set of technological competencies to work within the SATS environment.

The foundational skills relate to general computer literacy. We are not in a position to train staff in this area, and must assume that they already know the basics. These are the skills we expect you to have when you begin serving at SATS.

1. You must be able to use email properly.
2. You must be able to use VoIP tools (e.g. Skype).
3. You must be able to manage electronic files, including:
    a. renaming files
    b. storing files (i.e. creating and changing directory or folder structures, and moving files within that structure)
    c. retrieving files
    d. downloading and uploading files
4. You must be able to use the Internet, at least having mastered basic web-user skills:
    a. entering a URL
    b. navigating between sites or pages
    c. capturing and submitting online forms
5. You need to be able to use a word processor, preferably Microsoft Word, at an intermediate level.
6. You need to be able to manage your own login and password information.

Appendix B: Feedback Checklist

This is a simple checklist for an assessor to gauge whether his feedback on a student's essay assignment is adequately *formative*.

The general feedback clearly explained the rationale for the final grade.	
The general feedback provided an overview of the relative strengths and weaknesses in the essay.	
The general feedback indicated how the student would need to improve to move to 'the next level'.	
The general feedback was offered in a friendly and caring tone that conveyed interest in the student.	
There is enough specific feedback to help the student improve, but not so much as to overwhelm him.	
There is a healthy balance between affirmation and correction in the specific feedback.	
There is an acceptable balance between 'technical' and 'content-related' comments in the specific feedback.	
The specific feedback was offered in a friendly and caring tone that conveyed interest in the student.	
The specific feedback was presented in a clear, correct, and professional manner (e.g. grammar, language, style).	

This checklist is a guideline for measuring the quality of formative feedback. It needs to be applied astutely instead of legalistically, taking the nature of the assignment into consideration.

Appendix C: Standard Rubric

The following *criteria* will be assessed when marking (grading) your assignments. The *weight* of each criterion indicates how much, as a percentage, it contributes toward your assignment mark. The *description* of each criterion provides an ideal case which would achieve full marks. You can use the rubric to assess the standard of your own work so that you can improve it before submitting it to SATS.

Criterion	Weight	Description
Introduction and Conclusion	10 %	The assignment contains a succinct and suitable introduction and conclusion. The introduction clearly introduces the key theme(s) and orients the reader to the significance and structure of the ensuing discussion. The conclusion synthesises the main points or arguments of the assignment, and summarises the findings and significance.
Content	40 %	The assignment demonstrates an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the topic. It reveals an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of major schools of thought, and engages constructively and critically with biblical texts and scholarly sources, as is appropriate for the nature of the assignment.

Criterion	Weight	Description
Development and argumentation	15 %	The assignment articulates a clear topic or thesis, is well organised and structured, and sustains a coherent and persuasive argument. The assignment provides relevant and sufficient facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, and examples to develop the topic. The assignment effectively uses linking devices to join the major sections together, clarifying the relationships between claims and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claims and counterclaims.
Writing style	10 %	The assignment uses a good writing style, including spelling, grammar, punctuation, word choice, sentence formation, paragraph structure and coherence. The writing is formal, not colloquial, and it clearly and concisely expresses the information to the reader. It is not repetitive, ambiguous, verbose or vague. In short, it is easy to read, even if the content is advanced.
Presentation	10 %	The assignment demonstrates complete mastery of the seminary's technical requirements for formatting an academic paper. This includes, amongst other factors, getting the font, line spacing, paper size, margin setting, page numbers, block quotations, and heading styles correct. It also involves naming the file as specified and including a cover page as instructed.

Criterion	Weight	Description
Referencing	15 %	The assignment demonstrates complete mastery of the seminary's technical requirements for referencing sources by means of in-text citations from the Bible and academic literature, and a list of works cited. Citations and bibliography entries are properly presented and formatted. Quotations and paraphrases are correctly presented and referenced.

The scales are the same for each criterion:

- Exceptional: complete mastery
- Skilled: good general grasp
- Proficient: partial comprehension
- Developing: flawed understanding
- Inadequate: almost no understanding