



## **Self-Study Report**

Prepared for the September 2019

Visit of the Association of Theological Schools

Commission on Accrediting

Starr King School for the Ministry

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## Introduction

When Starr King School for the Ministry began in 1904, it was a radical idea – one with no guarantee of success. The school's initial classes were held at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, welcoming not only North American Unitarians but also students of other faiths from around the world. Now, 115 years since our founding, Starr King has become one of the most progressive theological schools in North America – a school far larger and with a vision far more expansive than our founders could have dreamed. We were able to transform our founders' ambitious idea into reality only by taking risks. Our capacity to be at the forefront of change has always required us to evolve to meet the needs of the day.

When asked in a recent interview why it is important to help develop religious leaders, our President responded:

...the world needs more progressive, savvy, and ethical religious leaders in a way that we have never needed them before. We live in a world that is beset by extremist religion... And the only real counter to that is progressive, loving, embracing, inclusive religious leaders who understand the importance of community and of working together.

--The Reverend Rosemary Bray-McNatt

Starr King School for the Ministry's mission statement begins:

The mission of Starr King School for the Ministry is to educate people for Unitarian Universalist ministry and for progressive religious leadership in society.

Starr King School's distinctive educational approach is rooted in the Unitarian Universalist values of countering oppressions, cultivating multi-religious life and learning, and creating just and sustainable communities.

With our mission statement in our minds, and our President's words in our hearts, we begin our self-study report in readiness for our 2019 site visit. As a theological school, educating in a world blessed with resources of beauty, grace, resistance, and transformation and marked by intersecting forms of violence and injustice, we have made Educating to Counter Oppression our guiding principle, our primary ecclesial and historical context. We believe that formation must be rooted in educating the whole person in the service of love, compassion, and justice. The values in our mission statement are reflected in our School's Educating to Counter Oppression statement. As will be seen later in this chapter, our program goals, thresholds, and learning outcomes are all interrelated and form the core of our theological education model (see chart at the end of this introductory chapter).

In this brief introductory chapter, as suggested in the Self-Study Handbook's Chapter 2, we will include information about our history and interactions with the ATS Board of Commissioners since our last evaluation, including the most recent changes and developments. We will offer an overview of our preparatory process and committee structure (including our efforts to gain broad

participation). We will end the chapter by introducing readers to the heart of our school: “educating to counter oppression.”

## **The Process of our Self-Study**

Our self-study process began in the fall of 2017 with several presentations over a period of weeks to all stakeholders, and the formation of a steering committee and three subcommittees as suggested by ATS. The SKSM Assessment Coordinator (Dr. Devorah Greenstein) and the Dean of the Faculty/Chief Academic Officer(CAO) (Dr. Gabriella Lettini) have co-chaired the Self-Study process. Our intention for the steering committee was to include two faculty, two students—(President and Vice-President of the student body), two trustees (one of whom was also an alumna), two staff (CFO and Recruitment), two administrators (Dean of the Faculty/CAO and President). Three of the members were alumni. Members of the steering committee were members in each of the subcommittees.

As advised by ATS, three subcommittees were formed:

- Subcommittee 1, chaired by Dr. Chris Schelin (Dean of Students) to work on Standards 1,2,7,8
- Subcommittee 2, chaired by Megan Dowdell (Asst. Prof.) to work on Standards 3,4,5,6
- Subcommittee 3, chaired by Dr. Greenstein (Co-director) to work on Degree Program and Educational Standards.
- Resource group of key people who worked with people on multiple subcommittees.

We quickly entered into a work rhythm of weekly meetings. The two co-directors have been meeting weekly for the entire period of self-study. The three subcommittee chairs (one of whom is a co-director) met weekly during the time of data collection and draft writing periods. The subcommittee chairs remain “on call” to respond to details and issues that arise. Each chair worked with their subcommittees in whatever style they chose—some had weekly/monthly meetings, some parceled out individual sections, and/or used some combination of strategies.

## **Steering Committee**

Chris Schelin (Dean of Students), Rosemary Bray McNatt (President)  
Milan Havel (CFO 2016-2017)  
Mtuaswa Johnson (Student Body Vice-President, Fall 2017)  
Shane Snowdon (Trustee, 2017-2018)  
Megan Dowdell (Visiting Assistant Professor)  
Gabriella Lettini (Academic Dean)  
Carolyn Ash (Recruitment Director (2017-2018)  
Devorah Greenstein (Assessment Coordinator, Associate Professor)  
Ariel Aaronson-Eves (President of the Student Body)  
Elaine Gehrmann (Board of Trustees Alumni Representative)

## **Subcommittee 1 (Standards 1, 2, 7, 8)**

Chris Schelin – Dean of Students – Subcommittee Chair  
Rosemary Bray McNatt – President  
Milan Havel followed by Kelley Gibbs– VP of Finance

Jessica Cloud – VP of Advancement  
Owais Qureshi – Student Accounts Manager  
Fred Williamson – Facilities Director  
Sofia Betancourt – Assistant Professor  
J. Tyson Casey – Visiting assistant professor  
Ted Fetter – Chair, Board of Trustees  
Shane Snowdon (2017-2018)  
Karyn Marsh – Low-Residency Student

**Subcommittee 2 (Standards 3, 4, 5, 6)**

Megan Dowdell – Visiting Assistant Professor, Subcommittee Chair  
Gabriella Lettini – Co-Director ATS Self-Study – Dean of Faculty  
Carolyn Ash (2017-2018) Rain Jordan (2018-present) – VP of Recruitment  
Lindi Ramsden – Director of Emerging Programs  
Jeremiah Kalendae, Em Kianka, Matthew Waterman (Admissions)  
Michelle Favreault – Assistant Professor  
Jay Leach – Trustee  
Isabel Call – Student  
Amanda Weatherspoon – Alumna (minister in MD)  
Chris Long – Visiting Assistant Professor (asked to be excused)

**Subcommittee 3 (Educational and Degree Standards)**

Devorah Greenstein – ATS Coordinator – Subcommittee Chair  
Ariel Aaronson-Eves – Student Body President (2017-2018)  
Elaine Gehrmann – Trustee, Alumni Association Representative  
Meg Richardson – Assistant Professor, Acting Academic Dean  
Ashley Bacchi – Alumna/Adjunct Faculty  
Hugo Cordova Quero – Director of Online Education  
Chris Fry – Visiting Assistant Professor  
Alexa Fraser – Student  
Raphael Mills Warner – Student Body President (2017-2018)  
Taya Shere – Adjunct faculty

**Resource Group for all subcommittees**

Sonsiris Tamayo (2017-2018) Blyth Barnow (2018-2019) Tyson Casey (2019) – Registrar  
Shannon Eizenga – Coordinator of Academic Programs (2017-2019)  
Tera Klein – Adjunct Faculty  
Ghazala Anwar – Associate Professor (2017-2019)  
Jiwon Chung – Visiting Assistant Professor (2017-2019)  
Mtwaswa Johnson – VP Student Body (2017-2017)

The starting place was always to have as broad a base as possible working together. Faculty meetings and study times throughout the self-study were devoted to working through infrastructure strategies (an example of this is the development of final student course grading rubrics during this period). Staff meetings, student body meetings, executive team meetings—all

were places in which specific self-study-related issues were addressed and considered/changed/improved upon as part of our school's commitment to this work.

Readers of this report will see in these lists some of the multiple shifts in staff. As will be discussed later in the report, the high cost of living in the Bay Area makes it difficult for Starr King to retain staff. In the past five years, for example, there have been six assistants to the President, five CFOs, four registrars, and three admissions directors. Students' transient movement is apparent as well – students relocating all across the United States for internships and employment. The original committee members who are no longer working at SKSM were replaced on the subcommittees by newly hired staff who, as newcomers, are less familiar with SKSM processes and less aware of our history.

### **Compiling the Report**

A publicly accessible shared-folder was created, with separate subfolders for each subcommittee's work and for document/appendices compilation. The subcommittees' chairs met throughout the data collection and compilation period, and the two co-directors accessed and monitored the subcommittees' work overall. Written draft sections of Standards were on the shared-drive by summer/fall 2018, incomplete of course, as data were collected and sections were written. The first complete draft of the self-study report was compiled and refined during the fall, 2018 and a complete draft was distributed to the board early spring for discussion at the April 2, 2019 meeting. All stakeholder groups received the draft self-study report for review and feedback in early April 2019 with a deadline of April 12, 2019. As a result of this feedback, revisions were made and redundancies were minimized. At the time of this writing (May 12) a final revised draft was given to the President for review and then to the Board for review in time for their early June meeting.

Draft copies were made available as requested by the accreditation process. When submitting this report to ATS we will also make it available to our constituency and larger public. We have designed a process for reviewing and integrating the feedback received.

### **SKSM History of ATS Accreditation and Last Self-Study Report**

The SKSM M.Div. degree was first accredited by ATS in 1978, for a period of five years and "by virtue of participation in the GTU." After a second five-year accreditation, SKSM was granted a full ten-year accreditation three times: in 1988, 1998 and 2010. In 2005 SKSM was granted preliminary approval to offer a MA in Religious Leadership for Social Change (MASC), which was confirmed in 2009.

SKSM has received important affirming and critical feedback from ATS, which has allowed the school to enhance the quality of its education programs and to more fully meet its mission. Some recurring themes have emerged in all of the feedback received that are still relevant to our work today:

- The challenge to achieve financial sustainability;
- Long range financial and institutional planning;
- Equity in the financial packages offered to staff and faculty;



To provide continuity in our work we spent considerable time reviewing our last self-study in 2009, as well as the ATS response. In 2009, we began our self-study in the aftermath of deep school retrenchment. On page 1, our 2009 report tells us that

In spring 2005, the board declared financial exigency, and was forced to constrain the school's operations, reorganizing and reducing the size of the faculty and staff...

...and in 2009 we asked these deeply significant questions in our study of ourselves...

What would be the best path for the school's future following retrenchment? How could the School be faithful to its mission and vision and be sustainable, both financially and humanly? How should it respond to the challenges generated by its priority of counter-oppressive, anti-racist, multi-religious education? How should its educational programs be further refined, improved or redefined? <sup>1</sup>

Then in June 2017, after reports to ATS regarding our school's continued progress toward economic equilibrium, a Notation N8.b was imposed: "The institution's financial resources are not adequate for long-term institutional vitality and there is no credible plan to address this issue in a timely and effective manner."

The Board has been working continually on this issue. A working group consisting of two trustees and a Starr King staff member formed in 2016. Supported by an external consultant, the working group spearheaded a yearlong strategic planning process. Surveys were submitted to the school's constituencies and select interviews were conducted with students, faculty, staff, donors, and leaders in the UUA. Thirty individual interviews and five focus group sessions were conducted. A draft strategic plan was presented to the Board in April 2017. While not formally adopted at this time, the plan was affirmed in substance. The Board decided that in order to achieve the elements of the Practical Vision, their first priority must be to build a financial foundation sufficient to sustain the school.

At the November 2017 meeting, the Board reviewed the list of priorities in the statement of Practical Vision and agreed that a more cohesive statement, capable of informing and inspiring both internal and external constituencies, was needed. The Board chair asked a group of two trustees and a staff member to look at the vision statement, but other demands delayed their work. Their work resumed in the fall of 2018 and was presented to the November 2018 Board meeting. Organized around the four strategic directions in the long-range planning document (1. Refining What We Do; 2. Assessing and Supporting Roles and Leadership; 3. Building Capacity; 4. Creative Focus on Mission) and a draft synthesis of the vision statement, the report recommended that the whole Board revisit the overall plan including the vision statement.

During the November 2018 meeting, the Board's focus shifted to more forcefully address the financial sustainability of the school. What new business models could be developed that would both serve the mission and vision and be financially sustainable? [Three Board working groups](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Starr King self-study report 2009, page 1.

[were formed](#) to investigate different models, with reports offered at the April 2019 Board meeting. This additional strategic planning work is now underway.

As we write this ATS Self-Study report, we are preparing to take yet another risk, to transition into the next chapter of our school's history. As a result of those Board working groups, we are setting in motion a series of steps that will include changes in staff, tuition, and even the location of the school. Our 2019 ATS Self-Study presented here will describe in detail the ways we have answered the above questions over the last decade. We appreciate the opportunity to pause and reflect on where we have been as a theological school and point to where we are going.

As our predecessors have done, we are working with the Association of Theological Schools to find strategies to best continue fulfilling our mission and our vision. It will mean making hard choices and difficult changes that we hope will lead us to sustainability. In an April 2019 letter to faculty, staff, and students, the Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt, wrote:

Our capacity to be at the forefront of change has always required us to evolve to meet the needs of the day... After long and careful discernment by our Board of Trustees, we are beginning a series of steps designed to ensure a sustainable future for our beloved school...

We are at the very start of this process. There is much that we don't yet know, and there are many conversations still to be had. But we do know that these are the initial steps we must take to continue to prepare our students for the work of 21<sup>st</sup> century religious leadership...

We are hopeful about the changes that lie before us, and excited about the ways in which these changes will allow us to fulfill the mission that is at our core: to prepare counter-oppressive, justice-seeking, progressive religious leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In these ten years, despite fiscal exigencies and constraints, we graduated about 200 students. Among our Unitarian Universalist alumni, many of them serve at the highest levels of our denomination's leadership. Other graduates serve as chaplains, social change activists, spiritual directors, artists, interfaith ministers, and teachers in other progressive religious settings. We also suffered the loss of our beloved provost, Dr. Ibrahim Farajajé, from a massive heart attack in 2016. The "emergent model of theological education" – of which Dr. Farajajé was a key and visionary contributor, along with past president Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker – was described in our 2009 ATS Self-Study. Today it has become the innovative, evolving, and guiding model of theological education at Starr King known as Educating to Counter Oppression (ECO). We prepared this report rooted in deep gratitude for the leadership and service of everyone that brought us this far, and in particular for Rev. Dr. Parker and the late Dr. Farajajé.

### **ECO: Educating to Counter Oppressions**

In Starr King's self-identification and in our outward face to the world, special emphasis is given to enacting our educational philosophy. First stated in our mission statement, further described in

the statement prominently shown on our website, and discussed frequently with students, it is known as Educating to Counter Oppressions and Create Just and Sustainable Communities (ECO). Because ECO will be woven through our entire self-study report, we have taken the liberty to add here a brief preface about ECO and how it came to be. Our ECO statement can almost be said to serve as a *de facto* mission statement. Evaluations of practice and policy at all levels of the school, from departmental procedures to Board of Trustees considerations, reference the ECO statement and its principles as often as the briefer mission statement. The shared ethos of ECO continues to express the heart of the school's understanding of ministry and religious leadership. The ECO Statement was created in the 1990's and has been a guiding document since that time.

The ECO document is routinely shared with students, faculty and staff as a guiding document for the work done by the school. It is required reading in the ECO Core Intensive course, where one exercise asks the students to understand it in its historical context and discuss it in relation to contemporary challenges and new learning. Since its creation, ECO has been infused into the educational practices and culture of the school as a shared responsibility and vision, rather than as the work of one committee. ECO has also been a part of the school's ritual life. Most recently, the 2018 Convocation led by the President, Dean of the Faculty, Dean of Students, and Board members featured the ECO statement as a reading in the chapel service for the school community as part of opening and blessing the academic year.

In May 2018, the President of Starr King led the faculty in a lengthy study-time discussion about re-evaluating and updating our school's ECO philosophy. In the period during which we embraced our original ECO philosophy our school consisted of a year-round face-to-face community of formation. Our Spring 2018 semester, at the time of our discussion, marked the first time that more than half of our students were distance learners, studying online for most of the year and coming together for two intense residential semesters with weeklong full-day intensive courses, summer and winter, to spend a total of only a few weeks together in face-to-face community. This continuum of local high-residence ("high-res") commuter students who live in California, can drive to Berkeley, but who do not spend a lot of time on campus, and online low-residence ("low res") students from across the country will be a theme we return to throughout this self-study as we reconfigure ourselves to build our future.

Our conversation last year turned to questions that we care deeply about: first, how do we lean into a more nuanced and thorough engagement with this guiding vision throughout every aspect of the life of the school, for all of our students, regardless of whether they are in a well-resourced urban environment or live in isolated geographic areas? Second, how do we enhance Starr King's capacities to communicate the ECO vision to the broader public, and make it more financially accessible? We continue to engage these challenges.

### **Our ECO statement leads to our 4-Cs, to our thresholds, to our program learning outcomes**

Looking at the [ECO statement](#) one sees four numbered narrative sections. Each section aligns with one of ATS's four content areas. Around the time of the 2009 self-study process, the four sections of our ECO statement were given brief sobriquets that were mnemonically more useful. These four sections in our ECO statement became what we refer to as our "4-Cs."

The ECO statement has four sections:

1. To be what we want to see – (Religious heritage)
2. To shelter prophetic witness in the world – (Capacity for ministerial/public leadership)
3. To counter white supremacy – (Cultural context)
4. To work for the common good – (Personal and spiritual formation)

In the table below, we begin with excerpts from each of the ECO statement’s numbered sections. We follow with each of our corresponding “4-Cs” and the associated ATS content area. We then list the related thresholds (two thresholds per content area) and then the threshold-related MDiv and MASC learning outcomes.

### 1 . “*To be what we want to see.*”

We recognize that we teach by how we are. We seek to embody just and loving human community, in which people are free to be fully themselves, in which people engage one another in respectful, welcoming ways, and in which no one is rejected, silenced, or exploited because of gender, race, sexual orientation, age, class, or physical character...  
[\(read more\)](#)

#### **Cultivating multi-religious life and learning (ATS: Religious heritage)** **Thresholds: “Sacred Texts” and “Thea/ology”**

<b>MDiv learning outcomes. Graduates...</b>	<b>MASC learning outcomes. Graduates...</b>
...have studied written/oral sacred texts, interpretive methods, and cultural contexts	... are able to utilize sacred texts from different religious traditions in their historical and cultural context.
...are able to use written/oral sacred texts in faith or interfaith communities and/or other settings	...are able to apply sacred texts to contemporary social change issues.
...are able to articulate their own thea/ology and use thea/ological language in their ministry.	...are able to articulate their own theology, and integrate thea/ological language in their social change work
UU graduates understand and can critically engage in discussion of UU perspectives, values, and practices.	...value differing and conflicting thea/ological ideas from a cultural and interreligious perspective.

### 2. “*To shelter prophetic witness in the world.*”

We seek to embrace, support, and promote the religious leadership, vision, and wisdom of prophetic people of all genders, who bring to the human community experiences and knowledge that the dominant culture has ignored or silenced. We affirm that such knowledge is present among those often excluded from theological education and...  
[\(read more\)](#)

#### **Countering oppressions and embracing radical hospitality (ATS: Capacity for ministerial/public leadership)** **Thresholds: “Prophetic Witness & Work” and “History of Dissenting Traditions & Thea/ological Quest”**

<b>MDiv learning outcomes. Graduates...</b>	<b>MASC learning outcomes. Graduates...</b>
... studied intersectionally systemic oppressions, approaches to justice making, understand theological/ethical issues	...demonstrate understanding of theological and ethical issues and the practice of social transformation
...are able to speak and write on critical issues of our time in contextually sensitive manner	...have engaged critical issues of our time in contextually sensitive manner that promotes radical hospitality.
...understand own religious tradition in larger historical, cultural, social context and engage in interfaith dialogue	...understand own religious practices in historical context of religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, social dissent.
...demonstrate knowledge of faith foundations and historical movements for social justice and social change.	...demonstrate knowledge of the faith foundations of historical movements for social justice and transformation.

### 3. "To counter white supremacy."

We seek to resist the perpetuation of cultural and institutional patterns in which the wellbeing of 'whites' is assumed, often unconsciously or uncritically, to be of greater importance than the well-being of *all*; and in which the well-being of whites is achieved through ignoring, oppressing, or exploiting the lives of others... [\(read more\)](#)

#### Creating just and sustainable communities (ATS: Cultural context)

Thresholds: "Life in religious community/interfaith engagement" and "Educating for wholeness and liberation"

MDiv learning outcomes. Graduates...	MASC learning outcomes. Graduates...
...have demonstrated capacity to work collaboratively in interfaith/ecumenical settings and activities.	...have demonstrated capacity to work collaboratively in interfaith and secular communities ...
...are able to engage in the democratic process, sharing leadership/administrative duties.	...are able to address local and global problems of inequity, conflict, and injustice.
...are able to design and/or facilitate teaching and learning alert to cultural contexts, learning styles, and social locations.	...are able to design and/or facilitate teaching and learning alert to cultural contexts, learning styles, and social locations.
...have an understanding of the power of education to address injustice and foster wholeness, healing, liberation.	...have demonstrated the power of cultivating relationships in the development of wholeness, healing, and liberation

### 4. "To work for the common good."

We seek to advance liberation, healing, and the establishment of a just and sustainable society by enabling people to gain the knowledge, experience, skill, and religious understanding they need to address intersecting forms of violence in North America and around the world... [\(read more\)](#)

#### Calling forth wholeness, healing, and liberation (ATS: Personal & spiritual formation)

Thresholds: "Spiritual practice & care of the soul" and "Embodied wisdom & beauty"

MDiv learning outcomes. Graduates...	MASC learning outcomes. Graduates...
... have explored faith traditions' core spiritual practices how they foster spiritual growth care for self, others, and the earth	...have personally sustaining spiritual practices.
...have developed or deepened personally sustaining spiritual practices.	...can integrate their sustaining spiritual practices, personal growth, and pastoral care into social change work.
...are able to use arts and ritual in congregational, interfaith, community settings to foster wholeness, healing, liberation	...demonstrate an understanding of embodiment, relationality, and...
...understand importance of avoiding cultural appropriation and develop trauma informed practices in rituals	...understand the role of ritual and the arts in transformative social movements.



Faculty and students at Commencement May 2019

## Standard 1. Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation

### 1.1 Purpose

The mission statement of Starr King School for the Ministry was formally adopted by the Board of Trustees in April 2009:

The mission of Starr King School for the Ministry is to educate people for Unitarian Universalist ministry and for progressive religious leadership in society.

Starr King School's distinctive educational approach is rooted in the Unitarian Universalist values of countering oppressions, cultivating multi-religious life and learning, and creating just and sustainable communities.

Starr King School aims to educate the whole person in the service of love, compassion, and justice, through:

- Teaching by who we are and what we do
- Student-centered participatory learning
- Excellence and depth in religious studies
- Formation in the arts of religious leadership
- Service with congregations and communities
- Active membership in the Graduate Theological Union
- Deepening self-awareness and cultivating spiritual practice
- Striving to live in right relationship with self, others, and the earth

Starr King School for the Ministry is one of two denominational seminaries for the education of Unitarian Universalist ministers and chaplains. About two-thirds of our students are Unitarian Universalists, the balance are religiously progressive individuals who may or may not adhere to traditional doctrinal or cultural frameworks. Some are members of established religions, some identify themselves as interfaith or multi-religious, others call themselves “spiritual but not religious,” yet all are called to become religious/spiritual leaders, and all are held together by a commitment to shared liberatory values.

In our work we strive to embody what we hope to see in the world – a just, loving humanity and community in which people are free to be themselves fully and without fear; a community where no one is exiled, silenced or exploited because of gender, gender-expression, race, color, ethnic or national origin, religion, sexual/affectional orientation, age, class, physical character or disability.<sup>2</sup>

We have written about our “Educating to Counter Oppression” (ECO) philosophy in our introductory chapter and our ECO principles will form a recurring theme throughout our self-study report, beginning with this next section on our planning and evaluation.

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<sup>2</sup>From our website “Educating to Counter Oppressions and Create Just Communities”  
<https://www.sksm.edu/about/our-educational-philosophy/>



## 1.2 Planning and Evaluation

### Planning

#### **Current strategic planning work**

Under the direction of the Board of Trustees, the school has been in the process of developing a new strategic plan. As discussed in the Introductory chapter, The Board has been working on financial stability since before the 2017 Notation N8.b was imposed. Our school is in the process of exploring the ways in which we can maintain our ECO philosophy and the quality of our education in a sustainable way. In April, 2019, the SKSM Board Working Groups released an outline of the three working groups' missions. No conclusions have been reached as yet, but the planning discernment is in earnest, and progress is being made in all three areas.

#### *Group 1. Finances related to Building Alternatives*

The mission is to examine the possibilities of sale and lease of the Starr King property on LeConte... to assemble information on the possible sale of the land... to assemble cost estimates and income estimates.

#### *Group 2. Long-term Partnership with Educational Institution*

The mission is to examine options related to a partnership with another educational institution... [to] Work with President Rosemary Bray McNatt to identify possible partners and begin preliminary discussions to determine realistic potential within three to five years.

#### *Group 3. Continue Separate Identity as Theological School, with likely congregational partners*

The mission for this group is to study how the school could maintain itself sustainably and still keep a separate educational identity. What changes should be made to our business and educational models?

As our President writes in her April 2019 letter shared with all stakeholders, we are responding to our significant financial challenges "by examining several avenues meant to strengthen our ability to provide our cutting-edge theological education for future generations."

#### **"New Beginnings"**

In answer to our March 30, 2019 letter to the ATS Board of Commissioners, we received a response dated June 10, 2019 extending our deadline to resolve our financial notation N8.b.

The Board [of Commissioners] reviewed the brief report provided by Starr King requesting an extension for one year of the due date of the report and letter regarding the notation on finances, which the Board imposed June 2017. The request for an extension comes as the school announces a new strategic plan called "New Beginnings" which could positively impact their financial equilibrium... While the school is working diligently to make improvements to their financial challenges, more time is needed to develop the long-term viability of the school's plan.

Our Board President and our school's President want to make clear to ATS that our school understands this is not a time of "business as usual." We have made incremental changes in the past, and they have not been enough. We are committed to making a "significant transformation" to achieve financial sustainability. We are eager, as our school's President stated in her March 30 letter, for the wisdom that ATS might provide. We look forward to meeting with the team that will be doing the site visit and continuing to work closely with ATS during this coming year as we "make a transition that allows Starr King to retain its essential mission and transform itself in a way that ensures its stability."

## **Evaluation**

In some areas, an ongoing and documented assessment/evaluation loop is embedded into the fabric of our work. In other areas, we rely on what might be considered less-formal assessment/evaluation strategies. To live up to our mission statement, we are called to evaluate our programs, course offerings, and academic rigor. We are also called to evaluate the overall resource allocations, institutional structures, and interpersonal relationships that foster or inhibit the mission of supporting Unitarian Universalist ministry, engaging progressive multi-religious praxis, and building resilient, sustainable, counter-oppressive communities (including our own SKSM community).

## **Students**

We begin with our students, the core of our mission. As we were preparing to write our self-study, our new ATS liaison suggested that we spend time exploring the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. Among the featured case studies on the NILOA website, a July 2016 report stood out: "Alverno College: Lessons from an Assessment Pioneer<sup>3</sup>." It was gratifying to see how similar Alverno and SKSM assessment strategies are. The Alverno case study also offered valuable assessment-framing language to use in our report.

SKSM's unique eight thresholds and our Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) competencies (both described and discussed in Standard 3 and in Degree Program Standards) are woven into our curriculum from the start. Each course proposal and syllabus clearly lists the course's relevant thresholds and the UUA's competencies. With the thresholds and UUA competencies in mind, the Dean of Faculty, in collaboration with the faculty and the Curriculum Committee, selects the courses to be taught in the following academic year, balancing course offerings so that all the thresholds and UUA competencies are well-represented

Students are active partners and collaborators in assessment, from the feedback they receive about their performance in each course to the feedback they provide about each course's content and instructor. Our four ECO statement sections (expressed as our 4-C's), and especially our eight thresholds are deeply woven into students' formational experiences, from the welcoming worship service during orientation to the responsive readings at commencement. The bi-directional assessment, (instructor --> student; student --> instructor) helps create an atmosphere of mutuality, growth and commitment for both students and instructors. Faculty are seen as mentors, as future colleagues.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/AlvernoCaseStudy.pdf>



Achieving proficiency in thresholds and competencies serve as the primary markers of a student's vocational formation. By the time of graduation, SKSM students must demonstrate "proficiency" in all eight thresholds. This occurs in stages: (a) building from their initial first semester's threshold self-assessment, (b) to partial proficiency at the midpoint of their studies through a more in-depth threshold self-assessment and portfolio conference, and then (c) to proficiency in all thresholds as documented in their final threshold self-assessment and their petition to graduate in their final year of study.

At SKSM we evaluate our educational effectiveness by doing an annual review of our graduating class's academic and vocational competency, using students'

- Threshold-based overall academic assessments (faculty input, students' coursework, and their petitions to graduate)
- Insightful narrative data presented by the students in their Threshold self-assessments in their petitions to graduate during their final year of instruction.
- field-work, CPE, and internship evaluations (using specific areas that correlate with our thresholds)
- ordination exam outcomes (UUA's Ministerial Fellowship Committee interview, and Chaplaincy Institute's Interfaith ordination exam)
- threshold-based "satisfaction survey" administered to graduating students at the time of their program completion
- post-graduation employment (data collected six months after graduation and categorized using ATS's categories)

We recognize that individual students' strengths are not uniform. Therefore, Starr King's target is that there is an aggregate rating of at least 80 percent aggregate competency shown in each of the threshold areas—competence determined by completed course work, as well as important community-based experiences described by students in their petitions to graduate.

Starr King's assessment coordinator oversees data collection in collaboration with the Dean of Students, students' advisors, and all of our faculty working together. Results are reported to the Board of Trustees at their Spring meeting, and posted on the school's website.

SKSM students do not receive letter grades for their work unless they request them. We promote our Pass/Fail pedagogy that has been shown to support a deeper learning process than letter grades. Instead of letter grades on students' final grade reports "[Narrative Student Evaluation Form](#)" and reproduced—with an actual spring 2019 student example—in Degree Program Standards A), faculty use [rubrics](#) to assess the student's learning, and most importantly provide narrative feedback on students' threshold-based proficiencies as well as areas of concern. As will be mentioned in "Assessing Faculty," students also reflect on and assess each of their courses, first through an online (Survey Monkey) mid-semester course evaluation that helps instructors make useful "mid-course" corrections (see Documents Room for mid-semester form) and again at the end of the semester, when each student completes a "Course Evaluation Form" (see Documents Room for course evaluation form) and assesses each of their courses on several

criteria, including how they felt the course helped them gain proficiency in each of the areas addressed in our ECO statement (in shorthand, our 4-Cs).

Student assessment is ongoing and not limited to end-of-semester evaluations. Time is set aside at each month's faculty meeting to discuss any students having critical difficulty in their studies. Generally, advisors are in touch with their advisees monthly (see Advising Faculty Handbook in Appendix) so that small difficulties can be handled before they become large, and short and long-term planning is woven into the conversations between advisor and student. We anticipate that there will be significant changes to advising practices as we reconfigure our resources beginning in Summer 2019.

While our students take courses both at SKSM and other GTU schools, their formation is not limited to the space inside campus buildings. Students are encouraged to have praxis-learning experiences outside the classroom, too, and reflect on these with their advisors and other faculty. Such opportunities include immersion experiences of personal development and activism. SKSM/group immersion experiences are considered academic courses and are graded as any other academic course with assigned readings and written assignments. If the immersion experience is part of a surrounding course, it is graded in the context of the entire course. Individual immersion experiences taken for credit are assessed and graded by the student's academic advisor or other member of the faculty.

In our Educational Standard we discuss the nature of our relationship with The Chaplaincy Institute (ChI). ChI courses are graded by the Chi-SKSM adjunct faculty using an [adapted Narrative Student Evaluation Form](#) in Documents Room and [adapted rubric](#) supervised by our Director of Contextual Education. Community and parish internships are assessed by the on-site supervisors as is usually done with denominational internships and ACPE-approved CPE units. These are monitored/documented by our Director of Contextual Education using the written final evaluation reports submitted by the on-site supervisors.

For SKSM Master of Arts in Social Change (MASC) students, a three-credit final project is required. The project can take a variety of forms and is representative of the student's learning and creative work in the MASC program. Projects include research theses, public presentations, designing and implementing educational curricula, organizing local/national conferences and special events, multimedia artwork, writing a book, curating an art exhibit, and more. The project topic, proposal, and final draft are discussed and developed in consultation with the faculty. The final project often includes a community presentation. Projects are assessed by at least two faculty members, the director of the MASC program and the student's advisor. When the project is publicly presented, community feedback is also welcomed.

As part of our process of formation, SKSM students are encouraged to engage in an on-going process of self-reflection and self-assessment. We recognize that our students, as adult learners, bear multiple life roles in their lives. Many of our students are also partnered, wage earners, children of failing elderly parents, and/or parents themselves of dependent children. We want our students to go through formation understanding the importance of self-care and spiritual practice. This is especially important since we know that many of our students are trauma survivors.

Faculty has discussed strategies that reflect the need for “trauma informed” and “healing centered” teaching and learning. Part of our faculty’s responsibility has become ongoing assessment and monitoring of our students’ mental health. This includes bringing concerns to the student’s advisor and then to the table during monthly faculty meetings. Currently, there are Personal Growth and Learning grants available through the Dean of Students for students to utilize mental health and spiritual direction services. We strongly encourage every SKSM student to be in therapy and/or in spiritual direction during their time in seminary. At the same time, we recognize advising and available resources to support students in these ways are subject to change beginning in Summer 2019.

### **Faculty**

Starr King does not have a tenure system and most of our instructors work on an annual contract basis. The Dean of Faculty meets with faculty each spring prior to the renewal of contracts for an annual performance review. Faculty prepare and submit a [self-assessment document](#) in advance. During these meetings, the Dean engages faculty in a collegial and cooperative assessment of effectiveness, identifying areas of strength or improvement in course management, advising, committee work, research and scholarship and overall contribution to the life of the school.

Assessment of faculty also occurs throughout the academic year as students evaluate the management and delivery of a class via course evaluations at the mid-term and conclusion of each full-semester course (Fall and Spring semesters) or at the conclusion of our one-week intensive courses (Intersession and Summer intensive terms). The course evaluation forms, completed in an online survey format, ask students to rate the course in three areas: overall assessment, pedagogical aspects, and logistical aspects. The forms ask for narrative responses explicitly based on the language of our ECO statement (our 4-Cs). Evaluations are submitted to the Dean of Faculty and the curriculum committee for review and discussion. (See Course evaluation form, in Documents Room).

### **Staff**

Staff members report that they are in frequent conversation with their supervisors and receive constructive feedback, but annual performance reviews are rare. The President considers staff evaluation a part of her ongoing work with the Executive Team; that is, she provides consistent review of team members in both bi-monthly team meetings as well as bi-monthly individual meetings with team members. The more traditional annual performance review held between a supervisor and each member of their team has not been part of the president’s practice thus far. She believes that a year is too long to wait for team members to know how their work at the school is progressing, and prefers to speak with them throughout the year.

Three years ago we experienced the death of our beloved Provost, Dr. Ibrahim Farajajé. Then, in the fall of 2018 we were shocked by the unexpected sudden death of our President’s beloved executive assistant and director of operations, Sarah Ebster. After temporary hires, we have just recently found a permanent staff replacement to work at the side of the President.

The school has experienced significant staff turnover in the past five years. An informal count shows that in the past five years, 32 employees (staff and faculty) have left (five had been hired knowing they were not permanent in addition to the two aforementioned deaths). We recognize

that our staff's salaries are not high enough to be sustainable in the Bay Area job market. Many staff live in more affordable outlying areas and face long daily commutes.

As we have grown and shifted our priorities, newly hired employees have frequently filled positions that were adaptive expansions or re-combinations of duties that belonged to prior staff roles. This flexibility in Starr King staffing has allowed the school to hire the right person for the immediate job. However, it has also fostered shifting work-roles and unclear job responsibilities. We have learned that staff teams help strengthen the staff's work, focus, and consistency, despite changing staff membership. Here are two examples:

***Education Team*** (convened in 2016)

After the sudden death of our beloved provost in 2016, his role was integrated into the work of the Dean of Faculty, who was appointed as Chief Academic Officer (CAO). For the last three years, the Dean of Faculty/CAO has convened weekly meetings of all staff involved in supporting the educational ministry of the school: the coordinator of academic programs and assistant to the Dean of Faculty/CAO, the registrar, the Director of Contextual Education/Dean of Students, the Associate Dean of Faculty (established in the fall of 2018) and the Director of Online Education.

These weekly meetings help us to trouble-shoot issues as a team, evaluate regularly the quality and efficiency of our work and practices, and engage in long range planning. Occasionally, the team is joined by other staff members to work on specific issues or tasks, such as student accounts or recruitment. Currently, all members of the team have either a Master's degree or a Doctorate in theology which allows for a deep integration of pedagogical and administrative concerns.

***Admissions-Recruitment-Communications (ARC)*** (formed in 2015)

The ARC was formed to assess the practices and processes by which SKSM cultivates relationships with individuals in its target constituencies. The intended outcomes have been to determine the factors that lead persons from an initial casual contact with the institution (e.g., visiting the SKSM table at the annual Unitarian Universalist General Assembly) to making financial gifts and/or enrolling at Starr King, and finally to becoming volunteers and advocates for the school. Starr King's two principal revenue sources are individual donors and tuition payments, both heavily reliant on successful marketing.

ARC conducts a monthly data review, which includes date-over-date fundraising numbers, website engagement and traffic sourcing (e.g, Facebook, Google searches), social media participation, email response rates, and admissions pipeline figures. The ARC team assesses why shifts in web traffic have occurred, discusses how to improve visibility on social media, and determines action steps to be taken. ARC also coordinates communications strategies, serves as the locus of preparations for the school's participation in the annual June UU General Assembly, and regularly reviews SKSM outreach and recruitment efforts.

**Administration**

The Executive Team consists of the Dean of Faculty/CAO, Vice President of Advancement, Vice President of Recruitment, Vice President of Finance and Administration, Dean of Students, Associate Dean of Faculty and the Director of Partnerships & Emerging Programs. These are the

administrative staff who report directly to the President (as can be seen on the organizational chart in the Appendix). The evaluation practice within this group of administrative staff is regular one-on-one meetings between the President and individual Executive Team members rather than an annual performance review. Four of the six people on the Executive Team supervise others and utilize similar informal interactions with their individual staff, with the exception of the Dean of Faculty/CAO, who conducts formal, written annual performance reviews (discussed above and in Standard 5).

### **President and Board of Trustees**

The President's upcoming performance review was discussed during the April 2019 Board of Trustees meeting. The Board agreed that the President's performance review will be done by October, 2019. A working group was created at the April meeting to design the methodology for the President's performance review. The Board also decided that an evaluation of the Board will need to be done this year as well, and a working group was assigned to design this methodology. Neither the current President nor the current Board have previously been evaluated. Trustees agreed that after this first evaluation, the President's and the Board's evaluations will be done on alternate years.

### **Community**

Leadership, sometimes including student body leadership, has on occasion taken a proactive role in conducting formal and informal evaluations of the school's effectiveness in fulfilling its stated mission, particularly as the structure of the academic program has related to the broader context of students' lives and the resources they have available to successfully navigate a robust graduate degree program. Task-forces, working-groups, and teams that focus on specific topics are a part of our ongoing Starr King assessment work. The following are some examples of how this happens:

#### ***Mental Health Task Force*** (convened during the 2017-2018 academic year)

A Mental Health Taskforce, student-led and including two faculty members (both psychologists) surveyed the student body, reported their findings to faculty and administration, and wrote a comprehensive report: [\*Mental Health Task Force Report & Recommendations\*](#) in April 2018. The school's Executive Team has begun to evaluate the recommendations and initiate changes to the academic program and broader institutional support for the students. Ongoing efforts include: a) a proposal to incorporate spiritual formation groups into the degree requirements, b) re-activating a designated student aid fund for therapy, spiritual direction, and other personal support modalities, and c) improvements to the Student Handbook and school website to provide more mental health resources for students.

#### ***2018 Housing Team*** (formed at the April 2018 Board of Trustees meeting)

During the 2017-2018 academic year, other GTU schools began downsizing their housing facilities and/or raising rental prices, resulting in the imminent dislocation of several students and a reduced housing stock for their future peers. Working together, students and faculty submitted a housing needs survey to the student body in May. While students initially expressed high demand for housing in the survey results, almost all eventually found their own accommodations without institutional support. Students are resourceful and the Bay Area, although very expensive, does have minimally acceptable housing. Incoming students, no longer feeling the

personal loss of dormitory housing, seem to have adjusted. Some home rental and commuter lodging space has been utilized, and the school will maintain contact with these potential housing sources.

***“Low-Res” Task Force*** (launched in 2016) ***became Community Life Task Force*** (in 2018)

There has been a significant shift from a “high residency” to “low residency” student body as SKSM has expanded its innovative distance learning program and gone beyond its traditional “brick and mortar” model of theological education. In 2016, the SKSM Executive Team launched a *Low Residency Task Force* to assess the needs of low-residency students and explore ways of engaging them more fully in the life of the school.

Low-residency students now constitute the majority of the student body. The binary designations of “high-residency” and “low residency,” however, elide the experience of “medium-residency” or “commuter” students who live within a few hours drive (or an Amtrak ride or even an airplane flight). Their presence in the brick-and-mortar SKSM community fails to neatly fit within either the low or high residence categories. As a result, SKSM is now using a “residency spectrum” to identify where and how students are doing the bulk of their learning in any given semester or year.

Acknowledging these shifting residency patterns, in 2018 a revised charge for a *Community Life Task Force* was presented to the Executive Team. This more comprehensive task force is responsible for identifying strategies to strengthen the sense of community for *all* SKSM students wherever they fall along the newly-conceived “residency spectrum.” The new task force has received approval from the Executive Team and is currently undertaking an initial year of study, with its findings to be presented to the Executive Team in the spring of 2020. See Charge to [Community Life Task Force](#).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Standard 1.2.3 tells us that “A comprehensive evaluation process is the primary resource an institution uses to determine the extent to which it is accomplishing its purpose.” ATS informs us that “the various institutional and education evaluation procedures shall be analyzed, coordinated, and employed in comprehensive institutional planning.” As we have examined our planning and evaluation systems it has become clear that we have more work to do to meet this ATS mandate.

It is recommended that:

- the Executive Team adopt a protocol of annual review, in which departments identify how institutional policies and practices under their purview are fulfilling the school’s mission and adhering to accreditation standards set by ATS, and make short and long term plans for the future.
- future work should be done to more carefully delineate departmental boundaries and supervisory relationships, and regular staff evaluation should be promptly restored.
- the Board recognizes the need to implement regular and comprehensive self-evaluation procedures so that the time lost earlier (two years of incomplete strategic planning work) will not be repeated.



## **Standard 2. Institutional Integrity**

### **2.1 Standards of Accreditation**

Starr King has been accredited by the Association for Theological Schools since 1978. Both of the two most recent self-studies and site visits, conducted in 1998 and 2009, resulted in ten-year re-accreditation renewals. Accreditation remains “by virtue of participation in the Graduate Theological Union,” whose common library serves all the member schools and whose cross-registration system assures the full complement of course offerings and academic subjects needed for our school’s degree programs. Starr King endeavors to maintain practices and policies in keeping with the standards set by ATS, and has been diligent in providing reports, consulting with ATS representatives, attending ATS conferences, and bringing ATS standards to bear in conversations among students, staff, faculty, and board about best practices for fulfilling SKSM’s mission to provide students a rigorous and ECO-framed education.

### **2.2 Compliance with Laws and Regulations**

Starr King is compliant with all local, state, and federal regulations concerning its operations, with one exception. By way of example, the school provides annual reporting of crime statistics as required by the Clery Act. Additionally, as mandated by California law, all entering students and newly-hired faculty and staff complete sexual harassment and assault prevention training. Employees renew this training at two-year intervals. In 2018-2019, SKSM inaugurated a new online training program created by EverFi, an educational technology solutions company.

The one compliance exception is our State Authorization for Online and Distance Education. We are not authorized to teach in each of the individual states where SKSM has students. One comment is appropriate regarding State Authorization for Online and Distance Education. Our attorney has given us this statement:

California is the only state that declines to allow its schools to take advantage of SARA, the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, that would allow us to use one authorization process for all other states. SKSM attorney Mike Vartain has advised SKSM that in recent months, the federal government issued a delay until at least July 1, 2020, of the requirement that institutions of higher education obtain approvals from each state in which it has any distance education students. Thus, there is presently no federal requirement that we obtain any state approvals for online distance education students. One may come into effect on July 1, 2020 and if so, we will comply; if not, we will not need to do so. (Vartain’s email is included with our Targeted Issues Checklist)

### **2.3 Accurate Published Material**

Starr King regularly updates its published materials in order to convey accurate information to the school’s constituencies and the general public. The school website ([www.sksm.edu](http://www.sksm.edu)) serves as the “front porch” of the institution and has the primary purpose of showcasing SKSM to the general public. Secondly, the website is a resource for students to access course descriptions, course schedules and syllabi, and obtain required student forms for adjustments in their degree

programs. The website is regularly updated, with primary responsibility for revisions shared by the Communications Officer and the Coordinator of Academic Programs. The website undergoes periodic design reviews. The most recent one was undertaken in Fall 2018 with a focus on enhancing the website's purpose as a recruitment tool.

The school publishes annual faculty and student handbooks. Substantial reviews and revisions are made over the summer and are directed by the Dean of Faculty/CAO, implemented by the school's Education Team, and enhanced by the input of other staff and departments as needed. The handbooks detail institutional policies, practices, and guidelines, and identify all charges and fees. Digital copies of the handbooks are emailed to faculty and students and placed on the website, while spiral-bound print copies of the current handbook are presented to entering students. The student handbook is lightly revised over the winter to convey the most accurate information to the spring cohort of matriculating students. In its handbooks and on its forms, Starr King is fully committed to gender-inclusive language, as the school recognizes the multiplicity of identities that exist beyond the traditional Euro-centric male-female binary.

## **2.4 Ethical and Equitable Policies**

Starr King strives to relate to its constituents according to the principles in its ECO commitment. Policies and practices are shaped, reviewed, and amended not simply to protect the healthy functioning of the school but to increase equitable access, counter historical oppressions, and foster a more just and empowering environment. The school has a fair, stepped policy of tuition refund listed in the Student Handbook. The school does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sex/gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, or religious/areligious belief. The school does recruit and hire Unitarian Universalists as a significant share of its faculty and staff, but no position is closed to non-UUs. The school has a clearly-outlined grievance process for faculty, staff, and students.

## **2.5 Awareness of Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Diversity**

SKSM is proud of its twenty-year history of educating to counter oppressions and build just and sustainable communities (ECO). In 1998 the school established this formal educational model with the understanding that we teach by how we are. We seek to embody just and loving human community, in which people are free to be fully themselves, in which people engage one another in respectful, welcoming ways, and in which no one is rejected, silenced, or exploited because of gender, race, sexual orientation, age, class, or physical character. At SKSM we intentionally and pro-actively support the religious leadership of people of color, of euro-american women, and of transgender and queer people of all colors because of the importance of the witness of their experience and the gift of their religious insight. We seek to advance liberation, healing, and the establishment of a just and sustainable society by enabling people to gain the knowledge, experience, skill, and religious understanding they need to address intersecting forms of violence in North America and around the world.

While not yet reaching our visionary goals, our faculty and staff exhibit racial and cultural diversity that exceeds the demographic profile of the United States and of our central, historic denominational affiliation - Unitarian Universalism. Starr King is also proud to have faculty



representation and members of the student body from a variety of religious traditions whose other socioeconomic identities can at times prevent their own more orthodox institutions from fully supporting their leadership and spiritual formation. At Starr King eight out of twenty faculty and staff, or 40 percent, are members of the global majority (meaning they are not Euro-American). The President (also a member of the core faculty) and the Vice President of Academic Enrollment and Student Services are African-American women. Another member of the core faculty is Afro-Latina, meaning that 50 percent of our core faculty are from the global majority. The percentage of students who are Euro-American or White is approximately 75 percent, which matches recent data on the Unitarian Universalist Association while exceeding the demographic profile of national population. This diversity is not always celebrated in the wider community, as exemplified by racist backlash when, in 2014, the school called our current President, Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt, one of the first women of color to serve as President of a seminary in the United States.

Our curriculum and pedagogical practices offered by faculty cover the spectrum of our ECO commitments. Our goal is to have every course engage our ECO commitments in some way. The diversity of social location and professional experience inform differentiated approaches to ECO work across our courses, so that each faculty member brings their own unique style to this work. Some courses are explicit in their approach to ECO as it relates to racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. These include Winter/intersession intensives such as “A TheoEthics: #Black Lives Matter” and “Multi-religious Core Intensive,” the latter of which joins the “ECO Core Intensive” in providing strong foundations in navigating and living into our ECO commitments. Other courses focus on applications of ECO to the work that our students will conduct in their careers. Some examples include “Intro to Preaching in a Cross Cultural Context” and “Power & Movements: Approaches to Collective Liberation.” Starr King also maintains a strong commitment to teaching full semester courses centering the voices of those too often pushed to the margins of theological education. Some examples include “Womanism and Earth Justice,” “Quran: Feminist Readings,” and “Queering Ecclesiology and Rites.” All of the above courses include a majority of readings and resources that are not from the dominant, especially white-male, culture -- and many of the resources included also bridge between academic and community-based understandings of the corresponding topics. These are just a small sampling of course offerings at Starr King, and highlight both the explicit and nuanced ways in which we are learning and leading into our ECO commitments. This both increases awareness of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, while also providing opportunities to act and lead to support the continued cultivation of diversity in all its forms.

We understand that our ECO commitments require additional support and attention to the needs of students with historically marginalized identities. In response to calls for greater support from gender non-conforming and transgender students, SKSM established a “Trans support team” in 2016 to discuss how best to support our growing population of students who are gender diverse. Transgender support is being folded into the newly formed “Team ECO.” SKSM has a faculty member dedicated to support students of color through regular community and individual meetings. Our most recent Symposium incorporated a students of color retreat. This strong emphasis on student support, in addition to our emphasis on student-centered learning, is central to our ECO commitments. Yet there remains work to be done in many areas.

In spring 2018, a student created a video documenting her concerns as a black woman in the academy that is still strongly impacted by the legacies of white supremacy. Her call for greater engagement with these realities strengthened an already emergent process of revitalization of SKSM's ECO commitments through a reimagined orientation experience, and increased anti-racism training for incoming students, faculty, staff, and our board of trustees. Our faculty is engaged in a facilitated process to strengthen our ECO offerings through course work, student advising, and their own research and pedagogies. This work parallels similar efforts emerging in Unitarian Universalism as a whole.

## **2.6 Promote Participation and Leadership of Women**

Universalists, Unitarians, and Unitarian Universalists have a tradition of supporting women's ministry that dates to the second half of the nineteenth century. Universalists were among the first to ordain women: a prominent example is Olympia Brown, ordained in 1863. Ministers who are women<sup>4</sup> have been in the majority in the Unitarian Universalist Association since the late 1990s. Starr King is committed to supporting and preparing women seminarians for religious leadership and female-identified students have represented two-thirds or more of the student population during every major academic term in the five-year period of 2013-2018. Because our knowledge of gender is not limited to a male/female binary, since Spring 2018, we have begun to ask entering students for their preferred personal pronouns, and using this as a rough measure, we can say that:

24 of the 40 SKSM students who entered in most recent three semesters use "she/her" pronouns  
9 of the 40 SKSM students who entered in these three semesters use "he/him" pronouns  
3 of the 40 SKSM students who entered in these three semesters use "they/them" pronouns  
4 of the 40 SKSM students who entered in these three semesters did not disclose any pronouns

Twenty-three out of 35 staff (70 percent) are women, as are 15 out of 19 faculty (80 percent).<sup>5</sup> The President, the Dean of Faculty, and two of the three Vice-Presidents are women. Three of the four core faculty are women. The current president, Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt, succeeded Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker to become the second female president of SKSM. Dr. Parker had been appointed as president in 1989 as the first woman seminary President in US history.

In alignment with our ECO commitments, coursework at Starr King continues to prioritize participation, scholarship, and leadership of women, while also addressing diversity across gender complexities. These intersections include readings and resources from different identities and social locations that are regularly marginalized in academic scholarship. Moving beyond one-dimensional approaches to issues of gender, many of our courses integrate diverse voices to emphasize the complexity of equity and justice within the contexts and conditions of power and domination. Specific courses that focus on women-identified work as ways to have larger conversations on power and intersectionality include "#Black Lives Matter Theoethics," "Mujerista and Latina Feminist TheoEthics," "Beyonce' and African Spirit Justice," and "Womanism and Earth Justice." The integration and promotion of women's leadership in our courses is not limited to these few examples. The divine feminine appears in many forms

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<sup>4</sup> We use the word "women" to refer to individuals who use "she/her" pronouns and know themselves to be female.

<sup>5</sup> Figures overlap because persons with staff and faculty positions have been counted inclusively in both data sets.

throughout various curricula at the school. As with all our courses, our ECO commitments are woven into each course offering, as the courses reflect both our pedagogical commitments as well as the majority of the school's community itself.

As with many justice issues, there remains work to be done, but SKSM tries to be a “safe enough,” affirming, and empowering center of learning for people of all sexual and gender identities. We say “safe enough” as we recognize not only our growing edges and different opinions in many matters, but also the fact that in a systemically unjust world it would be unrealistic to expect perfect moral purity or complete safety in our institution. While we commit and train ourselves not to perpetuate micro and macroaggression, we acknowledge that at times they still take place: our ECO commitment then pushes us to us to engage and transform the harm done.

Above and beyond the inclusion of women in the historically male-dominated domain of theological education, the school embraces people who are transgender, queer, intersex, and otherwise nonconforming to the classical gender binary. Various habits and simple practices are reflective of this stance. These include inviting everybody to identify their pronouns during new student orientation and on name tags; the adoption of transgender bathroom signage; and the commemoration of Transgender Day of Remembrance with a school chapel service.

### **Compliance with Federal Guidelines for Financial Assistance**

Starr King complies with all guidelines pertaining to federal student financial assistance. The school contracts with [FA Solutions](#) to provide expert financial aid servicing that adheres to regulations.

### **Public Statement of Transfer Credit Policy**

SKSM's stated policy on [reviewing and accepting transfer credits](#) is publicly available on the website (<https://www.sksm.edu/admissions/transfer-policies/>) and in the Student Handbook. Prospective and entering students are also informed by the Admissions Director about the policy as they are inquiring about or applying to SKSM. Standard 6 discusses this topic as well.

### **Policies for Use of Instructional Technology**

Many of our faculty adhere to the [Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association's social media and online ministry guidelines](#). These serve us well as faculty. Our Director of Online Education has created an online faculty forum to discuss online issues and best practices, and the Starr King Course Template contains some information about these. The Faculty Handbook also addresses some of these issues, including aspects like appropriate use of humor (understanding that is culturally bound). However, despite being a decade into its multi-locational educational model, Starr King currently lacks formal, written institutional policies regarding the appropriate and ethical use of technology, online learning platforms, and social media.

It is recommended that:

- the school review and revise its Employee Handbook, which has not been updated since 2014, owing to turnover in human resources personnel
- SKSM develop a set of policies regarding appropriate conduct for faculty and students on social media, Moodle, and other platforms, as deemed necessary

## **Standard 3. The Theological Curriculum: Learning, Teaching, and Research**

### **3.1 Goals of the Theological Curriculum**

Starr King puts its commitment to Educate to Counter Oppression and Build Just and Sustainable Communities at the center of its educational mission. As mentioned in the Introduction, the four program goals (4-Cs) of our theological curriculum are: (1) Calling forth wholeness, healing, and liberation; (2) Cultivating multi-religious life and learning; (3) Countering oppressions and embracing radical hospitality; and (4) Creating just and sustainable communities.

#### **Educational Practices**

To live into its educational vision, Starr King School emphasizes student-centered, holistic learning that cultivates habits for successful ministry and effective religious leadership through intensive individual advising, personalized educational planning, and relational-constructive learning. We have two or three required courses (depending on the degree program) and then students work with their advisors to create individualized programs of study.

Efforts to ensure the quality of Starr King's education begin in incoming students' orientation. We discuss the specifics of being a resident or an on-line student, the number of hours of study required for each three-credit course (we share the estimate of 135 hours of work for a three-credit course). We talk about finding the new rhythm required to add graduate school to an already seemingly-full personal and work life. We also talk about mental health issues and about formation as core to the seminary experience when a student is in their home community instead of on-campus. We have been trying various models of small cohort groups, not having great success yet at keeping groups ongoing though. The faculty is wrestling with various models – thinking perhaps of giving credit, thinking of making it mandatory, thinking of setting up clergy to facilitate ongoing spiritual direction small-groups. We constantly assess how we are doing and make adjustments, try changes, then re-assess and make adjustments again.

The personal advisor-student relationship anchors the educational process. Each student is assigned a primary advisor who meets regularly with the student during the academic terms, offers counsel to the advisee in planning of their course of study and working through various educational processes. Advisors also guide students through the preparation of degree-related milestones, including the student's threshold self-assessments, their mid-degree portfolio conference, any other denominational/vocational requirements, as well as their petition to graduate.

The planning process adapts to a student's individual gifts, challenges, culture, context, religious tradition(s), communities of accountability, and vocational calling. With the support of the advisor and resources of Starr King, the GTU, and the broader community, students make use of diverse modes of teaching and learning and integrate their studies with their learning from life experience and community involvement. Our school offers many activities and experiences to enable students to achieve the goals of the curriculum in multiple modes of teaching and learning. The requirements and design of the MASC and MDiv programs are described under the Degree Program Standards section of this report.

## Thresholds

At Starr King School for the Ministry, our overall goal is to prepare students for religious leadership, within a multi-religious and counter-oppressive context. We have eight identified “thresholds” that fit within the 4-Cs and correspond to the traditional disciplines and fields of religious study at the Graduate Theological Union. Students in the MDiv and MASC degrees must achieve competency in each of these threshold areas. MA degree requirements are set independently by the GTU and will be discussed separately.

Study is grounded in our 4-Cs and within them, in our eight threshold areas, which correspond to the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary to enter the various vocational offices of religious leadership and ministry.

The eight threshold areas are:

- 1) Life in Religious Community and Interfaith Engagement
- 2) Prophetic Witness and Work
- 3) Sacred Text and Interpretation
- 4) History of Dissenting Traditions and the Thea/ological Quest
- 5) Spiritual Practice and the Care of the Soul
- 6) Thea/ology in Culture and Context
- 7) Educating for Wholeness and Liberation
- 8) Embodied Wisdom and Beauty

The thresholds are explained in our [Student Handbook](#). In their first year, students conduct a Threshold Review with their advisor to identify areas where they already have some experience and those that will require more of their attention. In their second year, students work with their advisor as they write an in-depth Threshold Self-Assessment that reflects their work to date in each of the threshold areas. This assessment becomes an essential part of their Portfolio Conference and Packet. In their final year, students prepare a Final Threshold Self-Assessment – again in conversation with their advisor – as part of their Petition to Graduate.

## Portals

In 2016-2017, the faculty worked together on a stage-related “Portal” model that describes the educational processes common to all Starr King degree students as they journey through graduate theological education. The stage-related Portals are discussed at length in the [Student Handbook](#). We have made this a part of our advising structure although still in its formative stage, not all advisors use the descriptive terms in yet. But there is agreement about its value, looking at the stages of a student’s time at the school, students develop and engage with their personalized educational plan, cultivate a relationship with and seek different forms of support from their advisor, and grow or change in response to their learning. These stages of experience are supported by the “portals,” three sets of stage-related issues and tasks, which faculty advisors have in mind and transmit to students in their planning. While the thresholds point toward the breadth and depth of work that is expected of a student, the portals help the student and their advisor explore how, when, and where to best do that work. The portals offer advisors a shared structure upon which to build their tailored conversations with each advisee and assess a student’s progress in reaching key educational goals.

### 3.2.1 Learning

Learning at Starr King reflects our mission and reflects the goals of our total curriculum. Each course contains graduate school level critical skills and knowledge acquisition. We refer to our learning as “relational-constructive” and because of the nature of our school, this mode of learning happens in an anti-oppressive, multi-religious environment. Starr King provides learning that is appropriate to post-baccalaureate theological education. The school’s activities and programs of study offer students constructive, relational forms of learning to fulfill its curricular goals.

Relational learning cultivates right relationship with self, with others, with communities of accountability, and with the sacred “ground of all relating” which is understood and honored in many ways in diverse religious traditions and spiritual practices. We ask students to be members of a whole-school community—human community, spiritual community, intellectual community, and pastoral community. This means participating fully in the community and worship life of the school, from planning a special event to shaping school policy and practice through representation on faculty-student committees and on the board of trustees.

Constructive learning respects that students have knowledge, experience, and agency to bring to the learning process. Internalized and systemic oppressions are countered by constructive learning which calls forth the presence and full engagement of students as creators rather than empty vessels or passive recipients of knowledge. Intentionality, self-awareness, and attention to social location are involved. Constructive learning cultivates human capacities and ethical virtues that empower courageous, engaged religious leadership; it is a way of teaching and learning that brings compassion and justice to the world.

Relational/constructive learning represents an evolution of progressive educational practices that are deeply rooted in Starr King’s history. Unitarian and Universalist religious leaders in the 19th century pioneered revolutionary innovations in education to “call forth and direct aright all the powers of the soul” (William Ellery Channing). Their approach made education both a spiritual practice and an impulse for social change, igniting movements for women’s rights, workers’ rights, indigenous people’s rights, the abolition of slavery, ecological conservation, non-violence and resistance to war, and openness to the wisdom of all the world’s religious traditions. Relational/constructive learning calls forth empowered and engaged spiritual leaders, rooted in love and committed to justice. In addition to the liberal Unitarian Universalist traditions, SKSM educational philosophy in the last thirty years has been deeply influenced by different forms of Christian liberation theologies, brought to the school by several members of the core faculty.

Working within a counter-oppressive and multi-religious framework, Starr King students and faculty continually consider the relationships and intersections of religions, the arts, race, class, gender, embodiment, ecologies, cultural representations, sexualities, spiritual practices, justice and peace issues, technologies, climate disruption, and global economic realities. In the preparation of religious leaders for the 21st century, none of these can be treated as peripheral or “add on” considerations, because all of these issues are integral to the realities, beauty, and complexity of human life, understood as a relational whole.

Starr King courses are participatory. Respectful discourse among students and between students and faculty is the essential element of every course, regardless of whether it occurs in-person, over Zoom, or asynchronously in an online discussion forum. Course evaluations completed by students at the end of each course (and in the middle for semester-long courses) are designed to engage the students in discourse about their learning in the class.

### **Community Activism and Ritual Life**

Learning is not limited to our formal coursework. In the words of our late Provost, Dr. Ibrahim Farajajé, “Multi-religious education calls all of us beyond the borders of the school house and into engagement with the world in liberatory ways which allow for greater wholeness and greater global justice.” Thus, ours is an engaged scholarship, as signified by offerings such as our Symposia. To be a counter-oppressive, multireligious theological learning community, we have to think critically, collaboratively, and constructively. We sometimes use the word *scholartivism*, coined by Dr. Farajajé to describe the integration of scholarship, art, and activism that guides our learning.

Living fully into our institutional identity as both a Unitarian Universalist seminary and a school for multi-religious leaders has led to strong practices by which students articulate their own theologies in ongoing engagement with diverse ideas and methods. Every MDiv student takes the multi-religious core intensive course. Unitarian Universalist students take the courses they need for the UU Ministerial Fellowship Committee – UU-based polity, history, theology, administration, youth ministry, etc. Having access to courses in other GTU member schools and centers, our students are encouraged to engage with others’ theologies and ideas. It is not unusual for a Starr King student to have taken courses from Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish teachers as well as of course from Christian teachers as part of their formation. MASC students integrate theology, spiritual practice, and professional development in response to their particular interests, emphasizing not only theological knowledge, but also practical experience in community organizing, media relations, non-profit management, political action and social service ministry.

Starr King includes several forms of instruction that will be discussed in detail in Educational Standard chapter. Starr King welcomes Unitarian Universalists, Muslims, Buddhists, Wiccans, Jews, Christians, Hindus, Religious Humanists, practitioners of Indigenous Spiritual traditions, Quakers, spiritual seekers, and people with multiple religious belongings and hybrid religious identities. We consider our students to be adult learners and their complex identities and life experiences that they bring provide fertile ground for using instructional settings and methods that are so much richer because of the student body’s diversity of life experience.

### **3.2.2 Teaching**

Mutual learning, respect and engagement are key values embedded in the educational practices of the school. This environment is created through the relationships between faculty and students in teaching. Starr King classes are small, seminar-style with a maximum generally set at 24 students, most often smaller than that. The close relationship between a student and their advisor also supports an environment of mutual learning, respect, and engagement.



Courses are a central place of interaction between an instructor and their students, whether the course is in a campus classroom or at the US/Mexican border. We discuss in Educational Standards the diverse modalities available to Starr King students: asynchronous and synchronous online classes; immersion classes that take place off campus; our version of hybrid classes – semester long with high-res students physically in the classroom and low-res students using Zoom to participate from afar; semester-long three-hour seminars; weekend classes; five-day intensive classes.



Any of these modalities—all of these modalities—offer “a central place of interaction between teachers and learners.” However, the ways in which instructors arrange their work and structure their class of course depend on the class format and the class content. There is time for lecture, although in an asynchronous online class lectures are video-recorded or text-based. There is time for discussion. There is often time for ritual, and often time for the students to work individually or together in small groups. There is always theological conversation, made even more interesting by our students’ diverse faith traditions.

Starr King encourages teaching faculty to be involved in assessment. “Faculty Study Time” is a two and a half hour meeting on the fourth Tuesday of every month during the academic year. This mandatory set-aside time is intended for training, continuing education, in depth pedagogical discussion and sharing of faculty scholarship. Faculty study time brings faculty together, apart from regular monthly faculty “business” meetings, to interact with one another and work on specific issues that emerge from assessment and reflection.

### **Teaching, learning, and technology**

We are sensitive to the breadth of students’ comfort/discomfort with the technology we rely on for our teaching. Our current students range in age from 24 to 71. Many students come to us as experienced professionals, turning to religious leadership training as a second or third career. Faculty makes no assumptions that every student will be conversant with the latest technology. As part of the application process we make sure that candidates know the level of technology they will need to be able to thrive at school.



Our new student information system has made things a lot easier. A student information system aids advisors, administrators and students (especially those in low-residence status) in tailoring an educational plan over the course of the degree program; these systems also can provide school leadership with school-wide data from which to evaluate and assess quality of learning across students. In 2017-2018 we transitioned from a decades-old GTU-shared student information system to a new system, Populi, managed at Starr King. Students began using Populi exclusively to select and register for courses as well as to see transcript actions in June 2018.

Moodle, as discussed previously, is our online education platform and it is well-supported both by our Director of Online Education and by the library's Moodle Director. Zoom is an everyday resource for us. Classrooms are Zoom-equipped with a large flat screen on the wall, computer set up, stationary and movable microphones, and cameras that enable meetings and classes with both on-campus and on-line participation. It has become part of our culture to rely on Zoom. Hybrid classes (some students on-campus, some students on-the-Zoom-screen with a "tech" person present to make sure things are working) are an everyday part of Starr King's educational model.

Faculty members work closely with the GTU librarians. Reference librarians are delighted to work one-on-one with students in person or phone, live chat, or by email (more about this relationship in Standard 4). There is a direct live link on every Moodle course's side-bar between a student and reference librarian. Online teaching is Moodle-based and there is training available for new instructors who are just being introduced and trained in Moodle. There is support for individual instructors and instructor teams focused on curriculum design, new pedagogical tools (e.g. Voice Thread and direct Zoom links). The library offered Zotero training for all Starr King faculty – live and by Zoom – and provides Zotero training for students as well.

### **Curriculum development**

New courses are proposed to the academic dean and reviewed by the curriculum committee. The curriculum committee has created guidelines and charts that allow for review of how the course offerings match the needs of the degrees across the eight Thresholds, and how fulfill the [competencies required by the UU Ministerial Fellowship Committee \(MFC\)](#).

### **SKSM Thresholds align with UU Ministerial Fellowship Committee Competencies**

<b>SKSM Thresholds</b>	<b>MFC Competency</b>	<b>MFC Coursework requirements</b>
1. Life in Religious Community and Interfaith Engagement	FIVE: Administration SEVEN: Leads the Faith Into the Future	Church Administration, Non-profit Management and Leadership, Stewardship / Fundraising; World Religions
2. Prophetic Witness and Work	FOUR: Social Justice in the Public Square	Religious Ethics, Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression/Multiculturalism
3. Sacred Text and Interpretation	THREE: Spiritual Development for Self and Others	Hebrew & Christian Scriptures, Multireligious Spiritual Practice (optional)
4. History of Dissenting Traditions and the Thea/ological Quest	SIX: Serves the Larger UU Faith	UU History, UU Polity, History of Christianity

5. Spiritual Practice and the Care of the Soul	TWO: Pastoral Care and Presence	Pastoral Care and Counseling, Sexual Misconduct Prevention, Professional Boundaries and Ethics, 1 CPE unit
6. Thea/ology in Culture and Context	ONE: Worship and Rites of Passage	Liberal and / or Liberation Theologies
7. Educating for Wholeness and Liberation	THREE: Spiritual Development for Self and Others	Religious Education Theory, Method, and Practice
8. Embodied Wisdom and Beauty	ONE: Worship and Rites of Passage	Preaching, Worship Arts

There is always thought about areas of new knowledge that the school wants to bring into the curriculum, for example any of the powerful emerging ECO work happening in the world that we want to bring into our classrooms, such as “[Ministry in Times of Disaster](#)” and “[Trauma-informed Ritual](#)” both new and being taught in Spring 2019.

Syllabi for new courses are created by instructors, but often with collegial conversations and sharing of ideas. The Office of the Dean has prepared a syllabus template in collaboration with the faculty. Depending on the discipline, a librarian may or may not be involved. Advanced students are often brought into conversation when an instructor is creating a new course – perhaps looking at a draft syllabus or potential texts/reading. Many of our UU instructors are national leaders, and any new course relating to UU formation would be created with denomination consultation and collaboration. The academic dean and the curriculum committee is committed to the context of our entire curriculum, rooted in ECO and our mission, rooted in preparing our UU students for carrying our faith tradition into the future.

As the dean of a member school of the Graduate Theological Union, the SKSM dean is involved in reviewing and discussing all GTU course offerings with the deans of the other schools. The planning for courses happens in the Fall (for the next academic year), while several rounds of review take place in the Spring. The deans look for replications, for areas that need strengthening and for places of possible collaboration. Three years ago, the GTU deans supported the creation of the position of Director of Digital Learning and Lecturer in Theology and Educational Technology, a full-time position that has provided first rate support and training to all faculty through group courses and individual work. SKSM also continues to employ a Director of Online Education, who constantly oversees the quality of online teaching.

With about 2/3 of our student body on a UU ordination track, we are constantly attentive to whether the quality of our teaching is, in fact, preparing students successfully. The Unitarian Universalist Association has two ecclesial committees that monitor institutions purporting to prepare seminarians for UU ministry. The [Panel on Theological Education](#), (POTE) with which our President consults, is a governance committee that monitors institutions’ performance and provides funding for UU seminaries contingent on satisfactory institutional performance. The [Ministerial Fellowship Committee](#) (MFC) has jurisdiction over all phases of ministerial credentialing. Candidates for ministerial fellowship are interviewed (our ordination exam) by the Committee before fellowship is granted. We have been told by the MFC that our graduates consistently achieve above average ranking on their interviews. Our graduates are also consistently over-represented in national UUA leadership.

SKSM's mission is also to educate progressive and radical spiritually grounded activists and multireligious leaders. Our faculty includes seasoned activists and community organizers who serve as "Professor of the Practice" for our MASC students (and our MDiv students as well) bringing their experience in the world into the classroom. Our ability to fulfill our students' needs is enhanced by our membership in the Graduate Theological Union, as our students can cross-register and take courses within the member schools, and the affiliated institutes, such the Center for Jewish Studies, the Center for Islamic Studies and the Center for Dharma Studies. Additionally, our students can take a course each term at UC Berkeley. MASC students find this opportunity particularly helpful, as they can take specialized courses in their area of interest (e.g. African American Studies, Education, Environmental Justice, etc.).

### **3.2.3 Research**

SKSM Faculty is committed to theological scholarship that is deeply informed by our ECO and multireligious mission. As such, we value the knowledges that have been traditional underrepresented or silenced within the academy, we challenge colonial and patriarchal constructions of canons, we engage with issues intersectionally and value interdisciplinarity. We also challenge the boundaries of what has been traditionally defined as "academic" in the western academy. Our late provost used to define himself as a "scholaractivist," and considered his publications, video-making, ritual-crafting, poetry and online blogging as different expressions of his scholarship that could reach different audiences. As SKSM has aimed to train students that bridge the traditional barriers between the classrooms and the spiritual and activist communities, it has tried to support and retain faculty that could model this ability to translate languages and knowledges between different audiences, and to show the relevance of their scholarship to the worlds of spiritual and activist communities. Additionally, SKSM asks its faculty to embrace transformative pedagogies that can make the classroom experience congruent with the content of the material that is studied, so that our ECO commitment is alive not only in the reading and content of a course, but in the very practices and experiences in the course. This requires a very high level of constant integration between subject matters and the practices of teaching. We do not believe that teaching should be secondary or less valuable than producing scholarship; they should be deeply integrated and inform each other. As an example, in recent years, SKSM faculty as articulated a deep commitment to deepen their ability to use trauma-informed practices in the classroom, as our courses deal so closely with the many different facets of historical, personal and collective trauma.

Some of the work of our faculty within the American Academy of Religion can exemplify this point. Our current dean of faculty was a founding member and a long-time co-chair of the Transformative Scholarship and Pedagogies Unit, that put a special focus on the kinds of practices needed to truly teach in anti-oppressive ways. The dean is now a co-chair of the Moral Injury and Recovery in Religion, Society and Culture Unit, a group that was funded as a response to her work on moral injury in war with Dr. Nakashima Brock, and that now attracts both academic and practitioners from different disciplines, addressing different forms of moral injury and paths to healing. Another faculty member was long-time co-chair of the Religion and Disability Studies Unit and a founding member of AAR's Status of People with Disabilities in the Profession Committee.

Starr King faculty is encouraged to serve as GTU Consortial and Core Doctoral Faculty, supporting the doctoral program and the academic life of the GTU. Both Consortial and Core Faculty attend monthly area meetings, where both doctoral students and faculty are invited to present and discuss their work. The Core Doctoral Faculty meets bimonthly and addresses the quality and integrity of the doctoral program in the different areas, highlights faculty publications and regularly reviews faculty's academic standing. Academic scholarship at the GTU is also supported by regular presentations by Visiting Scholars and invited guests, academic symposia and conferences organized by member schools and affiliated centers.

Starr King cosponsors with Harvard Divinity School an annual panel discussion of UU Scholars at the annual AAR conference. This has become an important moment of exchange and creative work for UU scholars. Additionally, our faculty members participate in our Unitarian Universalist [Collegium](#) (our denomination's annual scholarly meeting where we share our research and study with UU colleagues). Another space where SKSM faculty both mentors UU scholars and also engages with new theological voices is the biannual (previously annual) Emerging Scholars' meeting for UU doctoral theological students and junior scholars, started in 2011 and hosted at UU-related theological schools.

At SKSM we strive to celebrate the different scholarly engagements of our faculty. The Academic Dean routinely shares faculty members' achievements in research and scholarship with the Board of Trustees and the SKSM community. Our faculty study times are also moments to share, celebrate and discuss new and ongoing work. Faculty members are deeply involved in independent research in their own fields of inquiry, which they bring to the classroom. Instructors, acting on their independent research, update and change course syllabi every time they offer an ongoing course. SKSM also values and supports the scholarship of its Research Scholars. In 2017 and 2018 SKSM has received a generous grant from the Arcus Foundation to support the work of world-renowned Islamic feminist scholar Dr. Amina Wadud and one research assistant. Her research focused on sexual diversity in the Qu'ran. Dr. Wadud is now writing a book based on her research.

### **3.3 Characteristics of Theological Scholarship**

Those of us who teach in theological schools know the ways in which students' courses—the lectures, discussions, and readings—cross-fertilize each other in students' minds, weaving together disparate strands of critical thinking and opening rich thought and reflection. It is one of the magical parts of formation that we instructors witness and foster. The many contexts in which scholarship at SKSM occurs add opportunities for this. All teaching and learning is premised on mutual respect among students, instructors and communities, wherever the course is happening.

Some students become teachers during their studies at Starr King. Collaboration and communication extend beyond the school's walls. Our students' final projects are sometimes workshop plans, websites, or religious education curricula that they bring to their congregations or communities. Some of our students submit proposals for [Hilda Mason Teaching Fellowships](#)--awarded to selected Starr King students for faculty-student collaborative teaching, for community teaching, and for student-taught courses. SKSM faculty serving as GTU core doctoral faculty also mentor and supervise doctoral students teaching through the [Newhall Fellowship](#). Our most recent

Newhall Fellow taught a Winter 2019 intensive class: A [Theoethics: #Black Lives Matter Movement](#).

We deeply believe that ministerial formation is enhanced by students' and faculty's active engagement with global issues. We work to offer opportunities for students to engage in praxis that supports our school's mission and our values.

["Classrooms as wide as the world"](#) is how we think about

the ways in which Starr King immerses itself in the wider community of the church and society. SKSM students' immersion learning opportunities are flexible and

organic, characteristics that reflect our student-centered pedagogy. Our students, faculty, ordained clergy working in collaboration (as described in Standard 1) have, for example, done immigration work at the US/Mexico border, have visited California families burned-out by forest fires, have gone to Standing Rock with ordained clergy, have walked in pilgrimages.



Freedom of inquiry is at the core of our pedagogy. As addressed in Standard 5, "A free and responsible search for truth and meaning" and "the right of conscience" are two of the UU foundational principles. SKSM is only one of two UU denominational schools in North-America, and it strives to embrace these principles in all aspects of its educational mission. As the SKSM Faculty Handbook states:

From its beginning, the historical principles of the school have involved "complete mental freedom in religion, rather than bondage to creeds or confessions, the unrestricted use of reason in religion rather than reliance upon external authority or past tradition, generous tolerance of differing religious views and usages rather than insistence upon uniformity in doctrine, worship or polity." (Wilbur)

Starr King policies and practices strive to create an environment where freedom of inquiry and expression are fostered and where engaged critical discussion is seen as not threatening but conducive to personal and collective growth. This is evident in the religious and theological diversity of our faculty, and students, that far exceed the ones present in the other member schools of the GTU.

The handbook section 3.3.1 of our current Faculty Handbook addresses faculty academic freedom, and asks faculty to foster the same freedom in their classroom, "as members of a learned profession... free from institutional censorship or discipline... aware of the special responsibilities placed upon them." A review of these freedoms and responsibilities is shown as they appear in the



Faculty Handbook (one of the appendices). Faculty annual reviews, faculty searches and board level change of ranks reviews are informed by the same values and practices.

Starr King engages with multiple religious traditions, academic centers and organizations, grassroots activist communities and NGOs, as well as broad constituencies and publics. These relationships take several forms and inform the theological scholarship of the school. SKSM faculty and administration include religious and spiritual leaders of different faith traditions. They connect the multi-religious life of the school with the lives and struggles of their communities. Most of us are involved with outside denominational, ecumenical, and interfaith, partners. Some partners, such as the [Kairos Center](#) (formerly known as [Poverty Initiative](#)) at [Union Theological Seminary](#) are known to all Starr King students because for many years, every semester our students in the ECO required course study material produced by and meet with Poverty Scholars and activists. Students are invited to continue the connections with the umbrella movement of the Poor People Human Rights Campaign or with local chapters doing poverty scholarship and activism in their area. One of the founders of the Poverty Initiative is Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, a co-chair of the Poor People's Human Right Campaign with Rev. William Barber. Similarly, every semester, during their ECO required course, the whole class spends a day with the [Faithful Fools Street Ministry](#) in San Francisco. Many students continue their relationship with them in field work and internships. These are examples of the way that our school—faculty and administration—exercise our responsibility to educate our students about the role of religion in the public sphere.

We have said elsewhere that classrooms are as wide as the world. Our theological teaching, learning, and research bring this message to everything that we do at Starr King. We invite our students to learn outside of our school building, and we invite others to come to our school building to study. Every year, since 1994, we have invited a [Balazs Scholar](#), an international Unitarian minister for an academic year of study at Starr King. Our [Unitarian Universalist 7<sup>th</sup> Principle](#) tells us that we must have respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. We have deep global awareness and appreciation of our global interconnectedness and interdependence. This section of our self-report, in which we have written about our curriculum, our learning, teaching, research, and ethics is held in our belief in this interdependent web.

It is recommended that:

- portals become a more frequently used framework with students, as early as admission, orientation, and initial academic planning
- SKSM increase partnerships with UU College for Social Justice and the UU Justice Ministry of California for shared curricular opportunities
- faculty and staff training continue in trauma-informed teaching strategies, and courses be offered that address trauma for all students entering into professional religious leadership.
- all threshold self-assessments (initial, portfolio-review, petition to graduate) become part of students' electronic Populi records rather than being placed as paper copies in the students' folders.

## Educational Standard

### ES.1 Degree programs and nomenclature

Starr King School for the Ministry offers three first-level theological degrees and uses ATS's standard nomenclature for each of them. We offer:

- Master of Divinity (MDiv.)
- Master of Arts in Social Change (MASC)
- Master of Arts (MA)

Although there is some natural overlap, each of our degree programs has clear distinctions that will be discussed in the Degree Standard section. Each program has specific program outcomes, with students' courses and field work aligned, within each distinct degree program, and with individual students' specific academic and formational needs.

- ES.1.2 Basic Programs oriented toward ministerial leadership (See Degree Standard A and B) MDiv and MASC directly following Educational Standard
- ES.1.3 Basic programs oriented toward general theological studies (See Degree Standard D) M.A. directly following Educational Standard
- ES.1.6 Degree Program Standards will directly follow this Educational Standard chapter.

### Thresholds

Starr King has a deep, ongoing commitment in fulfilling the educational model outlined in the mission statement and looked at more closely in Standard 3. This Educational Standard chapter will continue the story that begins with another threshold -- this responsive reading on the sidewalk outside our school, as the new entering students holding lit votive candles cross the school's physical threshold, accompanied by the faculty and student body singing the Rumi poem adapted in a hymn by a Starr King alumna *Come, Come, Whoever You Are* – holding in our hearts our school's mission to “educate people for Unitarian Universalist ministry and for progressive religious leadership in society.” Our responsive reading (led by our President) at the threshold as we welcome new students:

We are here at the threshold of Starr King School for the Ministry!

(Leader/All): We are here.

We who have crossed many thresholds already to arrive at this space and time

Coming out – from identities and locations that didn't embrace the fullness of who we are

Coming across – distances, boundaries, discoveries, that have beckoned us to deeper life and challenged us to change

Coming with – our loves, our partners, our children, our memories, our knowledge, our wisdom, and our willingness

Coming to – our senses, our awareness of the critical issues that threaten the well-being of earth's creatures, communities, and cultures

Coming again – to decisions, commitments, hopes, determinations that we know matter

We are *here* at this threshold, the threshold of a house of study, where minds and heart are on fire

the threshold of a house of spirit where prayer and contemplation take us deeper

the threshold of a house of hope for greater justice and compassion in the world

the threshold of a house of history with archives, and books, and memories that can inform our present lives and link us to a communion that crosses the boundary of death

the threshold of a house of preparation for the thresholds we will lead others to cross

for the thresholds yet to come  
for the thresholds the world stands on – poised, now, as always  
between the possibilities of violence and the possibilities of peace.  
Come, let us cross this threshold together!<sup>1</sup>



The emphasis on empowered, student-centered learning is reflected in the variety of modes by which students may pursue course work and in the flexibility to craft personalized degree programs, owing to our threshold requirements. Starr King courses are both rooted in rigorous contemporary scholarship and designed with the aim of equipping religious and social change leaders to enact justice and provide spiritual care. Students are encouraged to develop praxis-learning opportunities outside the classroom and reflect on these with their advisors and other faculty. Such opportunities include not only field education and internships but other experiences of personal development and activism that will not appear on an official transcript.

## **ES.2 Campus-based education**

### **On-campus semester-long courses**

Starr King School for the Ministry offers residential courses in a variety of formats. Our semester-long courses are seminar-format and meet weekly for three hours. A few courses are taught in the evening, but most are morning or afternoon seminars. During Fall and Spring semesters we also have weekend intensives, focusing on a specific topic. For example, Spring 2019 we offered [Nova Crisis Response Training](#), in partnership with our Ministry in Times of Disaster course (PSRS 2300).

The classes take place in our SKSM classrooms with faculty and students physically present. Additionally, because each classroom is equipped with a large wall monitor and staffed by a



“tech-minister” our classes often include a combination of high-residence students on-campus and low-residence students who attend by Zoom. On-campus students receive residency credits, students who connect by Zoom receive distance education credits for these courses. We call these “hybrid” courses.

We have students who live inside the immediate easy-commute Bay area, and long-commute students who come to on-campus classes, arranging their academic schedules so they drive or take a train once or twice a week. It is not that unusual for a student to plan on a 2-hour train ride to get to the GTU campus. These students take both distance- and on-campus courses, but miss out on evening/weekend community events that bring local students together.

In Fall 2018 semester there were 48 California students

Local – Bay area commute	27
Local – part time (house burned out in forest fire)	1
Local – works full time	2
About a two hour commute	6
More than two hours away but still in state	12

California is a huge state. We have in-state students who drive 5 hours to come to special events, but who for all intents and purposes are distance students. Our Dean of Students coordinates home hospitality for our distance students who come for intensives or events. Some students stay at local air B&Bs. Because of this demographic trend, we are finding that fewer students are attending the weekly on-campus chapel services and evening/weekend on-campus events like scheduled evening lectures and our monthly dinner gathering of MASC students. We are careful to make sure that all of our on-campus activities, including our weekly chapel services, are shared with our distance education students by Zoom.

### **On-campus week-long intensive courses**

Starr King School for the Ministry has three-week Summer and Intersession terms, during which 5-day (8 hours/day) intensive courses are offered. Students do their course reading before the intensive course begins. Intensive terms are timed so that new student orientation takes place at the beginning of the three-week period and newly enrolled students often begin their studies with an intensive course. In January, our symposium is also timed to dovetail with the intensive on-campus week-long courses so that students can make the most of their time during their time in Berkeley. We strongly suggest that entering students take the ECO intensive (offered in the summer and winter terms) as their first course.

### **On-campus corporate worship**

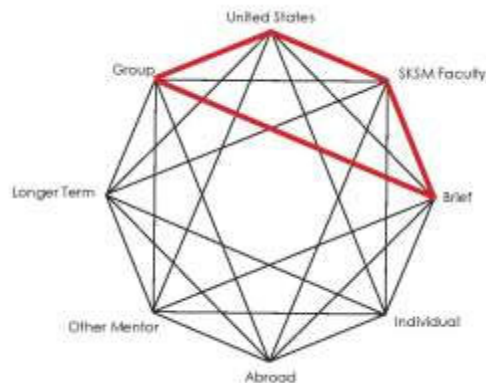
Starr King School for the Ministry considers corporate worship a part of students’ faith formation. All services invite community members to join on Zoom. We have been experiencing dwindling chapel attendance. We are experimenting with various styles of chapel services, including student leaders, faculty and guest speakers, some of whom include student worship leaders who are themselves on Zoom. We plan to continue to explore what new models of ritual gatherings best fit our multireligious and multilocational community.

## Residency

Starr King follows ATS's stipulation that residency be limited to the on-campus, in-person classroom interactions of students with instructor. In 2015 we requested and were granted an exception to ES.2.1.1 reducing residency requirements to 22.5 credits rather than 30. In 2018 we submitted a follow-up report documenting how the first group of students graduating under this immersion learning exception had met expectations. Our school has been a supporter of contextual education, in particular, in immersion learning experiences since our 2009 Self-Study Report in which we had written:

Immersion learning can be defined as learning in which the *contextual site* is the central component of the learning—a focus of reflection for both the student and the teacher.

Contextual education takes many forms—group/individual, brief/longer term, US/abroad, individual/SKSM faculty led



This figure shows the four factors in all possible combinations. The red trapezoid shape represents one configuration—a brief group immersion trip in the US led by SKSM faculty.

Our students and instructors continue to include immersion experiences in the fabric of Starr King School for the Ministry's educational life. We continue to provide partial funding for students' immersion experiences through our Growth and Learning Fund and through our Starr King Individual Learning "SKIL" experiences (ES.5 Faculty-directed educational instruction).

- ECO class immersion with Faithful Fools (discussed in Standard 3)
- Ministry in Times of Disaster intensive included an immersion trip to Sonoma County to learn from the survivors of the 2017 fires, religious leaders, and members of the North Bay Jobs with Justice Alliance for a Just Recovery.
- Mindful Walk Pilgrimage in Transylvania with the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council, 2018
- Students in "Effective Justice Ministries" class were given the option to join the professor in a 5-day UU College of Social Justice US/Mexico Border Witness for Religious Leaders in collaboration with BorderLinks, Tucson, AZ. Four students participated. After they returned they shared their experience with the class and through preaching in local congregations. Some also joined the professor to

participate in the California Immigrant Policy Center's Immigration Lobby Day in our state capitol.

- Upcoming "Tijuana Immersion" connected with the Forced Migration and Social Justice course, Spring 2020.

Students report that these immersion experiences are life-changing.

### **ES.3 Extension education**

Starr King School for the Ministry does not have an extension education program.

### **ES.4 Distance education**

Looking back to our 2009 self-study report, these last ten years have witnessed distance education shift from experimental to normal. We already had a Director of Distance Education, but ten years ago the GTU had just adopted "Moodle" for the first time. Now, distance education is an integral part of our school. Some of our students plan on an entire SKSM experience of Fall and Spring semesters online, and Summer and Intersession terms in Berkeley. The plan (or hope) expressed by some of our students is to be distance learners for two years and spend their final year of study living in Berkeley.

### **Educational design, resources, and institutional procedures**

Starr King has a robust selection of Moodle-based asynchronous classes, and Zoom-based synchronous classes. The curriculum committee (mentioned in Standard 1 and 3) reviews the course plan for the following academic year. Each course appears in our course listings with its associated SKSM Thresholds (mentioned in Standard 3 and described more thoroughly in Education Standard) and associated [Competencies \(for the Unitarian Universalist Association's ordination requirements\)](#). The M.Div. and MASC programs include distance education courses in conformity with residency requirements of their degree program standards. Each distance learning course subscribes to the same goals and objectives established for campus-based courses. Every distance learning course is evaluated each time it is offered in the same way, each is similarly linked to the thresholds/4-Cs and to UU denominational requirements.

Preparation for online learning begins at the admissions process, during which we make sure that each candidate who applies for admission as a low-residency student has the characteristics and available technology to thrive in an online environment. These issues are addressed in each candidate's interview and noted on the candidate's admission form.

Most students, even those living locally, take some courses online. The online courses are a basic part of the educational experience at Starr King. The courses are approved and reviewed in the same way campus courses are, reviewed by our curriculum committee and Dean of Faculty regarding syllabus, content, requirements, learning goals. Student learning is assessed in the same way whether a course is residential or online class. Moodle retains students' (and instructors') written work and student learning is easily documented.

Online classmates become a community of learners and seem to become a close cohort of learners as they take online classes together each semester and join together in campus

community during the summer and intersession intensive terms. Many online instructors check in and make comments/replies to their Moodle class almost every day. Online instructors report that the level of interaction feels much higher than in a three-hour campus seminar where students and instructors are together once a week. This may also point to a problem with excessive expectations for online courses, born from an initial attempt to prove the quality of online education. Attention should be placed in ensuring clear and equitable expectations for teaching in all modalities.

Some of the Unitarian Universalist formation courses are only taught online. With only two Unitarian Universalist seminaries, most UU seminarians attend Christian seminaries. Our UU-specific polity, history, and theology courses are taken by “special students” -- Unitarian Universalist students attending Christian seminaries.

### **Contracted educational services (ChI and RFC)**

We are a Unitarian Universalist seminary, with approximately 2/3 of our student body coming to study at our school, most with the intention of ordination as a Unitarian Universalist minister. Not all Starr King students have a goal of Unitarian Universalist ordination. In 2014 Starr King School for the Ministry affiliated with the [Chaplaincy Institute](#) (ChI) an interfaith seminary in Berkeley. Concurrently, the ChI Interfaith Community is a religious, ordaining entity that has been recognized as an Ecclesiastical Endorsing body by both the APC and the ACPE (Association for Clinical Pastoral Education). The affiliation provides a pathway for our unaffiliated, non-denominational students to meet both the educational and ecclesiastical requirements for certification as a professional interfaith chaplain by integrating the ChI Certificate of Interfaith Studies into Starr King’s accredited master’s degree (Master of Divinity or Master of Arts in Social Change) programs. The affiliation also allows students to pursue training in spiritual direction through the ChI Certificate in Interfaith Spiritual Direction.

Students apply separately to both Starr King School for the Ministry and to the Chaplaincy Institute and the two entities’ admissions committees discuss each Joint Program applicant. Because the primary objective is a successful graduate education oriented to Starr King’s ECO values, each joint-program student is required to matriculate first at Starr King, complete at least one semester of study, and pass the ECO Core Intensive. Due to high demand and limited capacity, students often experience additional wait time before beginning their ChI studies.

The Chaplaincy Institute implemented a revised curriculum design during the 2018-2019 academic year. The ChI Interfaith Studies Certificate now consists of 8 required courses and a combination of electives that totals 400 hours of classroom time. Starr King assigns credit values to each ChI course based on an estimation of classroom time and individual study. While the exact total may vary due to each student’s course selections, the approximate credit for a complete Interfaith Studies Certificate is 21. The Spiritual Direction Certificate is structured according to student cohorts, which complete four courses in succession over a one-year period. These courses are valued at 2 units each for a total of 8. Additionally, spiritual direction students have the option of registering their ChI practicum credit for 2 units of field work.

In the Spring 2019, ChI hired three core instructors with close ties to UUism and our school.

Starr King School for the Ministry's Director of Contextual Education oversees the procedures and policies that have been carefully worked out between the two entities. Each activity in each course has been evaluated by our Director of Assessment working with ChI's Dean of Faculty to ensure that the ChI course material matches our threshold requirements. Students are evaluated by the two joint ChI-SKSM faculty after each course using our slightly modified SKSM Student Evaluation forms. There is formal and informal ongoing coordination/cooperation between the two entities, with a SKSM faculty attending the ChI ordination ceremony when a SKSM student is ordained and the ChI dean attending SKSM commencement ceremonies.

From Spring 2016 through Fall 2018, Starr King also contracted with the Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute ([religiousfreedomcenter.org](http://religiousfreedomcenter.org)), located in Washington, DC. The Religious Freedom Center developed courses for emerging and established religious leaders to cultivate competencies in the areas of legal literacy, religious literacy, and civil discourse, with the goal of preparing leaders to address the challenges of the nation's increasingly pluralistic population. Instructors trained students in the civic principles needed to engage in a variety of historical and contemporary religious liberty and public policy issues in the United States and abroad. The RFC partnered with SKSM and other seminaries and institutions of higher education to offer these courses for graduate academic credit. Consequently, the RFC designed its curriculum in accordance with ATS distance learning, community of learning, training and technical support accreditation requirements (ES.4.2) (See [2018-2019 Agreement](#))

Students studied alongside theologically and ideologically diverse peers and benefited from contact time with expert scholars, lawyers, activists, and politicians. The courses were delivered in a "blended learning" format. The majority of instruction occurred asynchronously online, but students also participated in a three-day immersion at the RFC's physical location, which was the Newseum situated on the Washington Mall. The RFC offered four courses that students could take individually on an *ad hoc* basis. Additionally, students had the option of pursuing a *Certificate in Religion in Public Life*, which was completed by an additional capstone project, registered for credit at SKSM as an independent study.

The RFC program was well-regarded by participating Starr King students, who reported the quality of instruction as excellent. Starr King was one of the most active institutional partners for the RFC in terms of number of students contributed and in consultations among the respective organization's leadership. However, the RFC soon determined that course registrations were not sufficient to maintain the financial viability of their educational program. After attempting to implement a redesigned curriculum in January 2019, the RFC all but entirely discontinued its course offerings. SKSM and the RFC do not currently maintain a contractual agreement, but the institutions remain in dialogue about further partnership opportunities.

### **Library services**

Starr King is fortunate that the GTU library places a high priority on meeting the needs of distance learners. Last year we began asking our students about library use in their course evaluations and were dismayed that students were hardly using the library system. In our faculty meetings we began to share our experiences in ways to encourage students to use the library resources. This year we made a strong suggestion to all instructors, especially those who teach

online to make sure that some assigned reading for their courses require that the students in their classes turn to the GTU library to access their reading assignments. We have changed the course evaluation forms to ask each student if they used library resources for their course work.

Starr King has had a PhD level Director of Online Education, a faculty member who teaches online and who is also responsible for providing technical support services to students and faculty. Students have access to his training videos and he takes part in student orientation to help students with their first Moodle encounter. As mentioned elsewhere, Starr King, as the earliest adopter of online education at the GTU, has had a Director of Online Education for many years, predating the GTU Library's distance learning staff support. We also have an excellent relationship with Dr. Kyle K. Schiefelbein-Guerrero, the GTU Director of Digital Learning, who is available to help us.

Many SKSM faculty teach online and on-campus courses, and there are those faculty who teach on-campus/distance learning courses simultaneously in classes that include both local and distance education students learning together. All faculty is hired using the same criteria. Faculty members—full-time, part-time, and adjuncts, are evaluated by their students at the mid-point of a course (so adjustments can be made if necessary) and at the end of the course. (as was discussed in Standard 5).

Advising faculty engaged in distance education participate in all faculty training, meetings, and activities together with faculty teaching on-campus. Those faculty who live elsewhere during the Fall and Spring semesters participate by Zoom and often teach on-campus during Intersession and Summer intensive terms. They are fully familiar with our administrative structures. SKSM clearly describes distance education programs on our website, including a clear description of the technology skills and equipment required of the student. The admissions process includes discussion during the interview process about the candidate's skills and familiarity with technology. Once admitted, the videos included in new student orientation take care of almost all difficulties, but we do offer personal telephone support to the infrequent new distance education student who is anxious about computer proficiency especially in Moodle.

All SKSM students, whether they are local, long-distance commuters, or distance learners, have exactly the same access to all support and academic services. Each student has an academic advisor with whom they meet regularly, access to the financial aid officer, to the registrar, to technological support, vocational guidance, internship/CPE guidance, and employment opportunities for the Unitarian Universalist students.

### **ES.5 Faculty-directed individual instruction**

SKSM students can participate in Starr King Individualized Learning (SKIL) courses. A SKIL course is intended to deepen a student's study and practice in a certain threshold and is limited to meeting a student's unique educational interests that cannot be met in regular classes. A SKIL includes student work and substantive one-on-one instruction with a faculty member. It can also include research, activism, creative expression, immersion experiences, and/or congregational life. A SKIL course can be done by one or small group of students working with an individual faculty sponsor.

When the faculty created the idea of “Portals” it was decided that students who are in their first semester (MASC) or first year (MDIV) can take a SKIL course only if it is a group course. This is to ensure that students get ample opportunity to interact with their peers in classes and engage in the SKSM community before taking on advanced independent study on their own. Faculty has been satisfied with how this practice has shaped students’ early Starr King experience.

SKIL courses require a form and preliminary syllabus to be completed before the regular registration process and approved by the student’s faculty sponsor and advisor. The syllabus must be clear in the course’s purpose; frequency of meeting with faculty member; learning outcomes; method of evaluation; primary texts and sources for the course; the course outline and calendar. All SKIL proposals must be discussed with the advisor and intended instructor well in advance of registration deadlines for a given term. Faculty assent to SKIL oversight is at their discretion as can be seen in samples of recent SKIL courses that are included in our sample syllabi.

#### **ES.6. Assessment of student learning outcomes**

As discussed elsewhere, our school uses our four program goals (the 4-C’s) as a mnemonic to remember the four definitive paragraphs in our foundational ECO statement:

1. To be what we want to see... is the first C (**C**alling forth wholeness, healing, and liberation)
2. To shelter prophetic witness in the world... is the second C (**C**ultivating multi-religious life and learning)
3. To counter white supremacy... is the third C (**C**ountering oppressions and embracing radical hospitality)
4. To work for the common good... is the fourth C (**C**reating just and sustainable communities)

We have used the 4-C’s as part of our assessment structure since 2014-2015 when a comprehensive threshold-by-threshold student assessment report was submitted to ATS. ATS explained to us that it was not a sustainable design, that there were too many variables for a small class size such as ours. The November 30, 2015 letter states that:

Commission staff wonder whether this plan will continue to serve the school well over the long term. As it assesses the effectiveness of its assessment plan, the school may also wish to consider revisions that would simplify the work of assessment while still remaining attentive to the expectations of the Commission Standards.

In light of that, faculty worked with the Assessment Coordinator to bring the thresholds and program goals into congruence, linking two thresholds to each of the four C’s and thus to our learning outcomes. This has been part of an ongoing process to enhance and improve our assessment methods. There is discussion about this in the Assessment Plan, in Standard 3, in the Degree Program Standards, and elsewhere in this self-study.



## **Starr King's thresholds**

Starr King's eight thresholds have served us well since before our last (2009) self-study. The Threshold self-assessment form in the Documents Room serves as a guide for faculty, and for students. In their first year, students conduct a Threshold Review with their advisor to identify areas where they already have some experience and those that will require more of their attention. In their second year (or halfway through their program), students work with their advisor as they write an in-depth Threshold Assessment that reflects their work to date in each of the threshold areas. This assessment will become an essential part of their Portfolio Conference and Packet. In their final year, students prepare a Final Threshold Assessment – again in conversation with their advisor – as part of their Petition to Graduate.

## **4-C's, Thresholds, and Rubrics**

We work constantly on improving our individual student assessment methods. Our faculty discusses and reviews our assessment ideas and its various activities at faculty meetings throughout the academic year, each year choosing one or two procedural changes to draft, pilot, and implement. This past year, with consultation with our ATS liaison, we have created rubrics for our student evaluation form (with great enthusiasm on the part of faculty and student body leadership).

Every year there is consideration and conversation about assessment methodology. What is working, what isn't working? What is a reasonable goal to work on during a specific year. During the 2017-2018 academic year two specific topics were tackled during faculty meetings. (1) Attention to bringing the eight thresholds into a more sustainable assessment format while still making sure that there continued to be alignment of individual course learning outcomes and our degree program goals (as stipulated in ES.6.2.2) and (2) Continuing to find and try the right Pass/Fail rubric that we all could feel would meet our needs – not only faculty needs, but students' needs as well. With an individualized student-centered academic program that only includes three required courses – all other courses chosen depending on individual students' vocational and spiritual paths – finding the right way to rubricize students' grade reports had thus far eluded us.

We stayed with the individual threshold framework continued until the 2017-2018 academic year when we returned to the "4-C's" that linked directly to our mission statement and ATS content areas. The thresholds have been part of the SKSM imagery and pedagogy for as long as we remember (those of us here). At some previous point the thresholds had been allocated into the Four-C's – two thresholds in each "C" but when faculty discussed them some of the choices that had been made did not make sense. Therefore, in 2017-2018, each faculty member was asked to sort the eight thresholds into the 4-C's. There was not perfect congruency, but with discussion among the faculty, we reached consensus. We can now comfortably continue using our eight thresholds with students and consolidate selected learning outcomes from each threshold into the 4-C's for assessment purposes piloting it with the assessments for the 2017-2018 graduating class and reporting back to the faculty for discussion and continued implementation.

The topic we are working on this year (2018-2019) is solving the search for the “perfect” Pass/Fail rubric for our individual class grading system. We are hopeful that we have possibly come to a successful conclusion, waiting to see how it works during the spring semester. We are pilot testing a new student evaluation sheet this semester that will not only give us the information we need for a Pass/Fail rubric, but also looks almost identical to our old Grade sheet with a simple added column and clearer organization and language. Faculty members are looking forward to trying it out, and there is good buy-in from student leadership.

#### **ES.6.4 Faculty, students, and trustees**

As discussed earlier, in collaboration with the Assessment Coordinator, the faculty works continually to establish, monitor, adjust, change evaluation of student learning. The results of assessment activities, through ongoing discussion at faculty meetings and working with individual faculty members, does translate into curriculum and educational practices. Documentation of how this happens can be found in faculty meeting minutes. Communication to the broader community takes place primarily through our annual effectiveness statements that appear on our website. All course listings and course syllabi have pertinent threshold areas clearly marked. The Assessment Coordinator reports about program effectiveness and updates information about assessment process/changes/etc. to the Board every year at the Board’s Spring meeting in Berkeley. The effectiveness statement is included in the Board members’ packets before each spring meeting. It includes not only numbers and percentages, but also narrative quotations from students’ work (in effect, as testimonies) so that the Board gets to hear the students’ amazing work.

#### **ES.7 Academic guidelines: admission, transfer of credits, shared credit in degree programs, and advanced standing**

Admissions issues and processes will be covered extensively in Standard 6. Although almost all students come to Starr King having earned a baccalaureate degree, we do accept a small number of students who don’t. We make sure non-baccalaureate students comprise less than 15 percent of our student body. Our application process requires written essays, which give us a rough estimate of an applicant’s academic skill and ability. We also, very occasionally, ask for a writing sample. In our experience it is not lack of ability that brings an applicant to us without a baccalaureate, it is usually a personal story about leaving undergraduate work long ago and going into the computer world, or decades-past youthful discontent that caused them to leave their undergraduate studies. [Transferring to Starr King](#) is clearly described on our website. We accept only credits from accredited institutions of higher education (with the exception that we do give credit for prior completion of Chaplaincy Institute credits).

#### **The following criteria will be applied in determining pre-admission transfer credits:**

- Transferred course work must be relevant to the degree requirements and learning goals of the MDIV and/or the MASC
- Credit-hour equivalency will be determined by SKSM.
- No course work or CPE work that has been counted in the awarding of a completed degree at another institution will be transferrable.
- Limits on allowable transfer credits will be observed.

- **Allowable limits on transfer credits:**
- For MDiv candidates no more than 30 credits can be transferred.
- For MASC candidates no more than 15 credits can be transferred.
- For joint MDiv/MASC candidates no more than 39 credits can be transferred.

### **Shared Credits**

Starr King students sometimes decide to do both MDiv and MASC degrees—usually after they have been at Starr King and have found their vocational interests shifting. There are not “shared credits” for the joint MDiv/MASC degrees. The joint MDiv/MASC student does the 90 credits for the MDiv and can get credit for 24 credits of the 48 MASC degree, or vice-versa.

### **Advanced Standing**

Accepting an applicant with advanced standing is a very rare occurrence. As with transfer credits, the Dean of Faculty is the person who makes the decisions.

### **ES 8 Nondegree instructional programs**

We have two nondegree instructional certificate programs listed on our website. The first and most important certificate that we offer is the [Certificate in Unitarian Universalist Studies](#), directed by [Dr. Meg Richardson](#), Assistant Professor of Unitarian Universalist History. This certificate is ideal for seminarians attending non-UU schools, enabling them to take six Starr King courses that offer the full complement of Unitarian Universalist topics relevant to ministry and religious leadership and expected by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee. Rev. Dr. David Pettee, the credentialing director of the Unitarian Universalist Association, refers students to this certificate program, and has complimented us in how much he feels it helps non-UU seminary students master the required material. The certificate requires completion of six online courses and short-term intensives in UU theologies, UU history, UU polity, UU social justice priorities, global religious traditions, and congregational administration.

The [Certificate in Multi-Religious Studies](#), directed by [Dr. Ghazala Anwar](#), Associate Professor of Quranic Studies, engages students in exploring the intersections and interactions among the world’s diverse religious traditions. Again, these are regular Starr King and GTU courses that the student completes. It is sometimes chosen by Starr King students to formally express their interest in multi-religious studies.

It is recommended that:

- SKSM continue US/Mexico border immersion experiences, working cooperatively with the UU College for Social Justice, the UU Justice Ministry of California, and other justice organizations.
- SKSM continues to seek funding opportunities for its international immersion courses.
- hybrid classes (brief intensive plus semester-long online study) become more the norm than the exception.
- continue to emphasize and enhance community-building experiences during Intersession and Summer terms for low-res students taking intensive classes.

## **Degree Program Standard A: Master of Divinity (MDiv)**

### **A.1 Purpose, goals, learning outcomes, and educational assessment**

#### **Purpose of the degree**

The purpose of Starr King's Master of Divinity degree is to educate and prepare people for Unitarian Universalist ministry and other forms of progressive religious leadership including: parish ministry; religious education; chaplaincy; community ministry; spiritual direction; and interfaith ministry.

The M.Div. degree meets the graduate-level educational requirements for fellowship as a Unitarian Universalist minister, board certification as a Chaplain or Pastoral Counselor, and/or for ordination in a variety of other religious traditions and interfaith contexts. The M.Div. degree is also the recommended degree for admission to advanced programs oriented to theological research and teaching such as the Doctor of Ministry.

#### **Primary goals of the program**

Starr King's M.Div. degree prepares people for vocations in parish, community and religious education ministry, chaplaincy, and related forms of religious leadership in diverse religious traditions. The primary goals of the program are to equip graduates with knowledge, skills, and supervised ministry experience for (1) cultivating multi-religious life and learning; (2) countering oppressions and embracing radical hospitality; (3) creating just and sustainable communities; and (4) calling forth wholeness, healing, and liberation.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

Program goals are further articulated through the school's thresholds and learning outcomes. Starr King requires its students to engage in learning – through courses, advising, individualized learning projects, supervised ministry experiences, and indirect means - in the eight specific areas known as “thresholds” that come together in our 4-Cs. The ways in which program goals are integrated with the school's thresholds and learning outcomes are shown below.

#### **Program Goal 1: Calling forth wholeness, healing, and liberation (ATS: Personal and Spiritual Formation)**

Learning Outcomes: Graduates have explored different faith traditions' core spiritual practices and how these have been used to foster spiritual growth and care for self, others, and the earth. Graduates have developed or deepened personally sustaining spiritual practices.  
(*Threshold: Spiritual Practice and Care of the Soul*)

Learning Outcomes: Graduates are able to use the arts and ritual in congregational, interfaith, and/or community settings to foster wholeness, healing, and liberation. Graduates understand the importance of avoiding cultural appropriation and develop trauma informed practices in rituals. (*Threshold: Embodied Wisdom and Beauty*)

**Program Goal 2: Cultivating multi-religious life and learning**  
**(ATS: Religious heritage)**

Learning Outcomes: Graduates have studied written/oral sacred texts, interpretive methods, and cultural contexts. Graduates are able to use written/oral sacred texts in faith or interfaith communities and/or other settings. *(Threshold: Sacred Text and Interpretation)*

Learning Outcomes: Graduates are able to articulate their own thea/ology and use thea/ological language in their ministry. UU graduates understand and can critically engage in discussion of UU perspectives, values, and practices. *(Threshold: Thea/ology in Culture and Context)*

**Program Goal 3: Countering oppressions and embracing radical hospitality**  
**(ATS: Capacity for ministerial/public leadership)**

Learning Outcomes: Graduates have studied intersectionally systemic oppressions and approaches to justice making, and demonstrate an understanding of theological and ethical issues inherent in life, work, and the practice of ministry. Graduates are able to speak and write on critical issues of our time in a contextually sensitive manner. *(Threshold: Prophetic Witness & Work)*

Learning Outcomes: Graduates understand their own religious tradition within its larger historical, cultural and social context, and have learned to engage in interfaith and multi-religious dialogue and practices. Graduates demonstrate knowledge of faith foundations and historical movements for social justice and social change. *(Threshold: History of Dissenting Traditions & Theological Quest)*

**Program Goal 4: Creating just and sustainable communities**  
**(ATS: Cultural context)**

Learning Outcomes: Graduates have demonstrated capacity to work collaboratively in interfaith/ecumenical settings and activities. Graduates are able to engage in the democratic process, sharing leadership/administrative duties. *(Threshold: Life in Religious Community & Interfaith Engagement)*

Learning Outcomes: Graduates are able to design and/or facilitate teaching and learning that is alert to cultural contexts, learning styles, and social locations. Graduates have an understanding of the power of education to address injustice and foster the wholeness, healing, and liberation of people, their communities, and the earth. *(Threshold: Educating for Wholeness and Liberation)*

Program goals, thresholds, and learning outcomes inform – and build upon - each other in coherent and challenging ways through assessments, feedback, and reflection. Each course proposal indicates intended specific threshold(s) it addresses. Each course evaluation (from students and faculty) refer to the overall program goals—the 4-Cs.

**Educational assessment**

Starr King School employs a variety of assessment measures and practices – both direct and indirect - to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its MDiv. program. These include but are not limited to narrative course evaluations by faculty; student evaluations of courses; threshold student self-assessments; student portfolio conferences; evaluations by mentor ministers,

chaplains and field site supervisors; regular meetings with advisors; and petitions to graduate reviewed by faculty and the board. Assessment is addressed in Standard 1 and in the Educational Standard section.

Starr King has also developed and refined its assessment tools for collecting data about how well the degree program is meeting the needs of students and the school's overall goals for the program. This includes documentation of graduates' learning outcomes by individual and by year of graduation; exit surveys with graduating students; tracking the percentage of students who complete the degree program. The school also keeps data on the percentage of graduates who find appropriate placement – given their vocational goals – one and two years after graduation.

## A.2 Program Content

Starr King prepares M.Div. students for ministry and religious leadership through a holistic and integrated curriculum based on the 4-C's that emerge from our school's mission and statements. It is a core part of our story—the ways in which the 4-C's encircle our eight threshold areas and how they fit into ATS's instructional areas.

### Example of a narrative student evaluation form...

Course Series/Number ED 4072 Title Adult Religious Education Units: 3

Grade (circle one):	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Credit (pass)	<input type="radio"/> No Credit (fail)	<input type="radio"/> Incomplete	<input type="radio"/> In Progress	<input type="radio"/> Withdrawn
Evaluation Based on (circle one or more)					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Term paper	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Class discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> Interview	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Class presentation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reflection essays	<input type="checkbox"/> Moodle postings

ACADEMIC EFFORT	P=Pass M=Middle F=Fail P/M/F	COMMENTS
1. Demonstrates deep engagement with material presented	P	Luna attended well to the readings and brought both her ideas about the reading and from her life experience into the class in rich and meaningful ways.
2. Written material is clear, coherent, contextualized	P	Yes!
3. Completes assignments thoroughly and on time	P	Luna's work in the course was consistently high quality
ECO GOALS	P/M/F	COMMENTS
4. Demonstrates sufficient flexibility to deal with differing/multiple paradigms of inquiry	P	
5. Demonstrates sensitivity to and responsible handling of ethical problems if they occur	P	
6. Is guided by Starr King's ECO philosophy and demonstrates consistency with ECO practices in class participation.	P	
PARTICIPATION	P/M/F	COMMENTS
7. Attends class regularly, always or almost always on time.	M	Luna had a tight schedule with her chaplaincy work and the course start time.
8. Comes to class prepared to contribute	P	Always
9. Takes responsibility for their own actions and effort	P	Luna is very conscientious in this way.

#### Please discuss the student's strengths in your class.

Consistently in the course, Luna integrated the study of adult learning theory and her practice, both as a spiritual director and as a leader in Women Within. Luna is curious, engaged, open, thoughtful, as well as being diligent as a student. She was able to learn a lot from the class and really make it useful to her context of ministry. Her final project was developing a course for use in UU congregations for those who have been at the church for more than 3 years to deepen their faith by living their values more fully. It demonstrated synthesis of her study of learning theory, her experience as an educator, and her work as a spiritual director. It will be a valuable addition to any UU congregation.

Instructor's level of concern for student progress (circle one): X(1) No concern (2) Some concern (3) Serious concern

#### Please discuss growing edges for the student.

Luna is a life-long learner, which will serve her well.

The thresholds represent more than sets of knowledge to be learned. They also integrate the arts of ministry (e.g., worship and liturgy, preaching, teaching, pastoral counseling, administration, public witness, and stewardship) with the disciplines of theological and religious studies (e.g., theology, ethics, Biblical studies, world religions, church history, religious education, cultural studies, psychology, sociology of religion, and congregational studies), and spiritual practice and self-care (e.g., development of personal qualities and habits for a successful, spiritually grounded and healthy ministry).

Students are expected to develop proficiency in all eight thresholds and most often have one or two specific thresholds that serve as unofficial areas of key interest.

They do so through a combination of coursework, field education, internships, immersion experiences, and individualized learning, all within the advisory support and guidance of faculty.

...using this P/M/F grading rubric

<u>PASS</u>	<u>MIDDLE</u>	<u>FAIL</u>
ACADEMIC EFFORT	ACADEMIC EFFORT	ACADEMIC EFFORT
1. Demonstrates deep engagement with material presented	Demonstrates some engagement with material presented, but not consistently nor with much depth	Superficial or unreflective engagement with material.
2. Written material is clear, coherent, contextualized	Written material is sometimes unorganized, or unclear, may be without context .	Written material is unorganized, unclear, not contextualized.
3. Completes assignments thoroughly and on time	Assignments incomplete or frequently late.	Assignments consistently late or not turned in at all.
ECO GOALS	ECO GOALS	ECO GOALS
4. Demonstrates sufficient flexibility to deal with differing/multiple paradigms of inquiry	Reluctant or inconsistent flexibility in engaging with differing/multiple paradigms of inquiry	Demonstrates rigid patterns of thinking, unwilling to deal with differing/multiple paradigms of inquiry.
5. Demonstrates sensitivity to and responsible handling of ethical/professional problems	Sometimes insensitive to or irresponsible about ethical or professional problems	Insensitive to or irresponsible about ethical or professional problems
6. Is guided by Starr King's ECO philosophy and demonstrates consistency with ECO practices in class participation	Class participation is sometimes inconsistent with Starr King's ECO practices in class participation	Class participation is inconsistent with Starr King's ECO practices—e.g. divisive, disruptive, disrespectful.
PARTICIPATION	PARTICIPATION	PARTICIPATION
7. Attends class regularly, always or almost always on time.	Is consistently or frequently late or absent, but has addressed the situation with the instructor.	Exceeds maximum absences without instructor's permission
8. Comes to class prepared to contribute	Sometimes/often unprepared or contributes inconsistently.	Unprepared and does not contribute meaningfully.
9. Takes responsibility for their own actions and effort	Sometimes makes excuses or inconsistently takes responsibility for their actions and effort.	Makes excuses or does not take responsibility for their actions and effort

**Religious heritage:** Students come to Starr King from a variety of religious backgrounds and traditions. As a result, the MDiv curriculum on religious heritage is both broad and focused. Since the majority of MDiv students are preparing for Unitarian Universalist (UU) ministry (a consistent 60 percent to 2/3 of our students) a number of courses and opportunities for learning focus on UU Theologies, History, Polity, Religious Education, Ethics, and Leadership as well as on progressive Christianity. Students – whether UUs or not - are also encouraged to take courses at Starr King and the Graduate Theological Union that examine the histories and heritages of other world religions such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous, earth-based traditions.

Starr King's MDiv students take courses in sacred texts not only at Starr King but in the wider Graduate Theological Union. In 2018-19 the Graduate Theological union offered quite a few residential, online, and intensive courses in Biblical studies, as well as additional courses in the Qur'an, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Orthodox, and other sacred texts. In addition, Starr King students are able to take language courses in Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, Yiddish, Sanskrit, Farsi, etc. at the University of California, Berkeley if they wish to work with sacred texts in their original languages.

Becoming conversant in the broader heritage of Unitarian Universalism, Christianity, and other world religions is an important focus in Starr King's MDiv program. Students come to understand their own religious tradition within the historical context of religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue, dissenting traditions, and multi-religious engagement. Students also demonstrate an understanding of the faith foundations of historical movements for social justice and social change.

As stated earlier, Starr King's eight threshold areas are designed to integrate and deepen students' knowledge of religious traditions, sacred texts, theologies, histories and cultures. Students become familiar with rituals, prayers, and spiritual practices from various religious heritages and contexts and are able to use them in culturally appropriate ways.



## **Cultural Context**

Starr King's MDiv program provides numerous opportunities for students to develop a critical, intersectional understanding of contemporary cultural and social issues. Students also develop skills in addressing injustice and other contemporary issues in creative, counter-oppressive, spiritually grounded, and culturally appropriate ways.

Through courses, field education, immersion experiences and individualized learning, Starr King MDiv students study a broad range of contemporary issues, including immigration, racism, trauma, climate disruption, gender issues, economic injustice, and resilience and sustainability. This multi-religious, trauma-informed, counter-oppressive instruction routinely draws on the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences, including poetry, psychology, neuroscience, economics, and earth science.

SKSM's MDiv program is rooted in an understanding and appreciation for the multi-faith, multi-cultural nature of today's congregations, communities, and world. Students learn to engage in this world in respectful, culturally appropriate, counter-oppressive, and effective ways. They also have opportunities to work collaboratively with others in interfaith and ecumenical settings and activities, including in response to natural disasters, racism, immigration, hunger, homelessness, and public witness. Some SKSM MDiv students prepare for and become ordained interfaith ministers and chaplains.

MDiv students are encouraged and supported in their personal and spiritual formation from the moment they step through Starr King's doors. There are courses, field education, individualized learning activities, chapels, and rituals which give them opportunities to develop and/or deepen their spiritual practices, to create an on-going practice for self-care, and to teach and support others in their congregations, communities or the school to do the same.

## **Personal and spiritual formation**

MDiv students participate in coursework, field education, internships, clinical pastoral education and the life of the School as ways of gaining proficiency in the practical arts of ministry, including: worship, preaching, liturgy, rituals, pastoral care, religious education, administration, and stewardship.

Starr King emphasizes a holistic approach to theological education and praxis that has students develop, challenge, and integrate their capacities for religious leadership on multiple levels: intellectual and affective, individual and corporate, ecclesial and public. SKSM MDiv students work with their academic advisors, faculty, mentors, ministers, and/or spiritual directors to address issues of concern that arise during their time at SKSM, including their personal faith, emotional health, ethical behavior, academic progress, public witness, and ministerial authority.

Students preparing for Unitarian Universalist ministry are encouraged to work with a mentor, attend ministers' retreats, general assemblies, and undergo career assessments as a means of preparing to become ordained ministers, chaplains, and religious educators. Students preparing for religious leadership in other faith or interfaith traditions follow a similar course in discerning their call to ministry.

### **Capacity for Ministerial and Public Leadership**

Starr King's holistic theological education model also means that MDiv students are engaged in ongoing theological reflection and praxis. While there are courses that are clearly dedicated to teaching the practical arts of ministry, these are also grounded theologically and spiritually. Likewise, courses that appear to be primarily academic (e.g., related to theology, history, contemporary issues, and theory) regularly include a praxis element that encourages students to apply what they are learning to real-life issues in their congregations, communities, the larger world, and their own lives.

This is perhaps best seen in Starr King's strong commitment to countering oppression and building just and sustainable communities. MDiv students regularly reflect theologically on their work – with the aid of faculty, peers, and others. This includes examining difference, privilege and power in their lives and communities through an intersectional lens. It also means that students do the actual hands-on work of countering oppression and building just and sustainable communities through coursework, field education, internships, rituals and activities sponsored by the School and other organizations. In this fashion MDiv students gain significant skills and experience that strengthen and challenge their capacity for ministerial and public leadership.

SKSM provides a broad foundation in the practical arts of ministry, including courses and field education on worship and liturgy, preaching, religious education, rituals, pastoral counseling, church administration, public witness, disaster ministry, and stewardship. These courses and educational opportunities complement Starr King's rich offerings in theology, history, and specific contemporary issues such as immigration, racism, forgiveness and moral repair, trauma stewardship, and climate change.

Starr King requires its MDiv students to take a core intensive on Religious Leadership and Ethics. It also offers a variety of other classes on ethics including health ethics, sexual ethics, environmental and public ethics. These courses are supplemented by field education, internships, and clinical pastoral education offerings that give students a real-life grounding in professional and ministerial roles and ethics.

SKSM MDiv students are encouraged to engage in field education, internships, clinical pastoral education and other hands-on ministry activities. These supervised opportunities are developed, coordinated, and publicized by the Director of Contextual Education in response to students' needs and interests. This ensures that students develop learning goals, receive supervision, and are evaluated as they apply their knowledge and strengthen their ministerial skills in specific settings.

The Director of Contextual Education – in consultation with faculty, ministers, and consultants – reviews the qualifications, experience, and effectiveness of those supervising MDiv students in congregations, hospitals, prisons, community settings, etc. Students serving internships in congregations will typically be supervised by an ordained minister, those working as chaplains will be supervised by an ACPE and/or board-certified chaplain, and students serving in other settings will be supervised by religious and/or community leaders with a proven record in teaching and supervising students in the field.

### A.3 Educational resources and learning strategies

#### Location

It used to be that an MDiv meant that seminarians (and their families) moved to congregate on-campus housing (or off-campus apartments), studied with, prayed with, played with, ate with, other seminarians. For Starr King, this model is not in the distant past. Until a few years ago, some of our students shared housing in the Pacific School of Religion's dorms and apartments. Although we have had a robust distance learning community for many years—the first of the GTU schools to intentionally support the formation needs of distance students—we now find ourselves a school with the majority of students attending their courses online.

As our student body shifts to the majority of our students being distance learners, forming on-line communities, and meeting on campus twice a year in Intersession and Summer intensives, we are also shifting activities to provide a supportive learning/community/spiritual formation environment so that our distance students have sufficient significant opportunities of personal and spiritual formation. Our on-campus student orientation that segues directly into the Summer or Winter intensive semester, is very intentional in efforts to build supportive community among students who will be in relationship with each other primarily online for their Fall and Spring semesters. During orientation we have communal worship, many communal meals, and we organize small cohort groups that will remain together through the seminary experience. Our experience has shown that the incoming students form collegial friendships that last through seminary and beyond.



**In the ECO class, students work in small groups...**

Our three required core courses are all on-campus intensives held during Winter and Summer semesters and we encourage incoming students to take the [ECO core intensive](#) as their first class. As the linked course description states, “M.Div. and MASC students work together to form a framework for counter-oppressive spiritual leadership.” As the students work in small groups to discuss how “spirituality, ministry, and religious activism respond to the multiple and

intersecting realities of injustice, suffering, and oppression in our lives and our world” they form tightly-knit community that they carry home with them. During our Winter and Summer intensive terms we have mid-week vespers and community meals for the entire community. Our annual Symposium is an urban retreat during the Winter intensive with small group activities.

Then after students have gone “home,” lots of things happen in our “Zoom rooms.” We have large wall-mounted monitors in each classroom.



**An example of a hybrid class in which “high res” and “low res” students study together**

Each faculty member has their own Zoom Room. We have become comfortable with Zoom to bring us into “the same room” -- together although not in physical body. Faculty advisors meet with advisees on Zoom. We do rituals on Zoom. Having training by our UU denomination’s Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF has 7,000 members and conducts all worship services online, has staff that meets online, etc.) enabled us to experiment with our weekly chapel service, having once-a-month online worship and having a Zoom connection for faculty/students to participate. Our student government has student leaders who participate in meetings by Zoom.

As discussed in the Educational Standard chapter, many of our local students take some of their courses online. For example, the UU Theology and UU History courses are taught online. When graduating student/program assessment is done annually (collecting data for our annual effectiveness report) learning outcomes, satisfaction, and vocational placement are all evaluated and consistently there has been no difference between the two groups of students. As discussed in the Educational Standard chapter and in Standard 4, online access to the GTU library system is easy, and the GTU library is part of the ATLA Reciprocal Borrowing Program. Our GTU library reference librarians are eager to work with individual GTU students so they can use their local theological school libraries. Our librarians work directly with other ATLA Reciprocal Borrowing Program member libraries.

As discussed in Educational Standard and in Standard 1's assessment section, we have policies and procedures regarding individualized study (our SKILs), supervised ministry practice, CPE, and other fieldwork.

### **Duration**

The MDiv degree is a 90-credit degree. As our student body shifts to a higher percentage of distance learners, we are finding that part-time study is increasing, because students are keeping their employment as they add graduate seminary work to their lives. Our Spring 2019 edition of our student handbook (page 68-70) clearly discusses Satisfactory Progress Procedures. We observe the 10-year limit on course credits that can be applied toward a degree.

### **Distinctive resources needed**

Students at Starr King who are “hi res” (i.e. living within commuting distance of campus) thrive in the rich cultural life of the GTU. There is always something going on at the membership schools and our bulletin boards are covered with GTU community events that create informal educational experiences and religious fellowship for our students. Our “low-res” (i.e. living beyond an easy commute) students do not have this level of campus community. On the other hand, our low-res students are living in their own communities and are involved in their home churches and their spiritual/religious experiences are grounded in the community in which they and their families live, and do not experience the difficulties of relocation. Our UU students are mandated to be members of their local UU congregations. Our multi-faith students, while not mandated, are involved in their own communities' spiritual/religious activities.

Our faculty, whether we are teaching online or in person, whether we are advising or adjunct faculty, bring our cultural/spiritual/religious disciplines with us as we teach and are attentive to our students' spiritual development and professional growth. Our faculty members bring religious leadership experience to the classroom. As discussed in Standard 5, our culturally diverse faculty bring a wealth of diverse perspectives that enrich our students' educational experiences.

### **Community resources**

We are by no means isolated. Our school has close relationships with the area UU churches. Each year our symposium and our commencement are held in local churches. Our students often do their parish internships in local and regional UU churches. Those of our students who are studying at the Chaplaincy Institute (ChI—with whom we have a contractual relationship) have found deep spiritual community in ChI. As discussed elsewhere, being part of the GTU means that there are ongoing cultural/spiritual community events on and off campus.

## **A.4 Admission**

Information about admission is thoroughly covered in Educational Standard and in our Standard 6 chapters. The vast majority of our students come to us with undergraduate degrees from accredited institutions of higher education. We do occasionally accept students who have not completed their baccalaureate degrees, but we evaluate their academic abilities as part of the admission process.

## **Degree Program Standard B: Master of Arts in Social Change (MASC)**

### **B.1 Purpose, goals, learning outcomes, and educational assessment**

#### **Purpose of the degree**

##### **Purpose of the degree**

Founded in 2005, Starr King's Master of Arts in Social Change program prepares people to become spiritually grounded, transformative leaders of social change. It was among the first institutions of higher learning to formalize a counter-oppressive pedagogical focus in the form of a two-year professional master's degree. (Classification II: Master of Arts in specialized ministry).

#### **Primary Goals of the Program**

Graduates of Starr King's MASC degree program demonstrate skills in: promoting goals of justice, equity and compassion in society through religious or secular institutions; providing an ethical grounding in ministerial and theological education to pursue students' passions; improving professional competency in religious and social change. These skills are developed through the four primary goals of the school tied directly to its ECO mission. The M.A.S.C degree program aims to prepare spiritually grounded agents of social change and transformative leaders with the knowledge, professional skill, and personal capacities to:

1. Call forth compassion, wholeness, healing and liberation
2. Cultivate multi-religious life and learning
3. Counter Oppressions and embracing radical hospitality
4. Create just and sustainable/regenerative communities

#### **Graduates' vocational roles**

Graduates of the MASC program typically work as professionals in a wide variety of social change settings centered on environmental, racial, economic, political and/or social justice. Their specific roles include, but are not limited to: work as community organizers, film-makers, non-profit managers, researchers, activists, artists, teachers, youth ministers, storytellers, and church staff coordinating justice initiatives. These positions are situated in secular, congregational, and/or interfaith settings. A few MASC graduates continued their integration of academic and justice work successfully completing their Ph.Ds (at the GTU, Union Theological Seminary in NYC and Claremont School of Theology).

#### **Learning Outcomes**

##### **Starr King's model of theological education**

Starr King requires its MASC students to engage in in-depth and experiential learning through: courses, individualized learning projects, advising, immersion experiences, supervised internships and field education, community gatherings and school chapels, symposia, spiritual practice and formation. These learning opportunities – both direct and indirect – are linked to

Starr King's primary goals (the 4 C's noted above) and its eight threshold areas. The articulation between program goals, thresholds, and learning outcomes is outlined below.

### **Learning Outcomes for MASC Students**

Starr King uses and follows the same Educational Standard (ES) in the MASC program as it does in the MDiv program. Starr King's MASC degree programs are individually designed to integrate theology, spiritual practice, and professional development in response to students' particular interests and gifts. MASC emphasizes not only theological knowledge, but practical experience in engaging Starr King's Eight Thresholds through a multi-religious, counter-oppressive lens, inspiring new insights and generating new forms of ministry and spiritual leadership to support and lead institutions and organizations that work for progressive social change. Engaging with each threshold also requires students to deepen personal qualities and habits for successful spiritual leadership and/or ministry. The Thresholds overlap and intersect with one another, and the Primary Goals of the Program, in multiple ways. As students work with them, in dynamic interaction with one another, they develop a matrix of knowledge and skill that will enable them to move forward in the world equipped to offer ministry, serve as a chaplain or spiritual leader in ways that will demonstrate the Primary Goals of the Program.

### **Program Goal 1: Calling Forth Wholeness, Healing, and Liberation**

Learning Outcomes: Graduates have personally sustaining spiritual practices. Students graduating with the MASC degree can integrate their sustaining spiritual practices, personal growth, and pastoral care into social change work.

*(Threshold: Spiritual Practice and Care of the Soul)*

Learning Outcome: Graduates demonstrate an understanding of embodiment, relationality, and the role of ritual and the arts in transformative social movements.

*(Threshold: Embodied Wisdom and Beauty)*

### **Program Goal 2: Cultivating Multi-Religious Life and Learning**

Learning Outcomes: Graduates have read and are able to utilize sacred texts from different religious traditions in their historical and cultural context. They are able to apply sacred texts to contemporary social change issues.

*(Threshold: Sacred Text and Interpretation)*

Learning Outcomes: Graduates are able to articulate their own theology and integrate thea/ological language in their social change work. They value differing and conflicting thea/ological ideas from a cultural and interreligious perspective. *(Threshold: Thea/ology in Culture and Context)*

### **Program Goal 3: Countering Oppressions and Embracing Radical Hospitality**

Learning Outcomes: Graduates demonstrate an understanding of theological and ethical issues inherent in life and work, and the practice of social transformation. They have engaged critical issues of our time in a contextually sensitive manner that promotes radical hospitality.

*(Threshold: Prophetic Witness & Work)*



Learning Outcomes: Graduates understand their own religious practices within the historical context of religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, and social dissent. They demonstrate knowledge of the faith foundations of historical movements for social justice and transformation. *(Threshold: History of Dissenting Traditions & Theological Quest)*

#### **Program Goal 4: Creating Just and Sustainable Communities**

Learning Outcomes: Graduates have demonstrated capacity to work collaboratively in interfaith and secular communities to address local and global problems of inequity, conflict, and injustice.

*(Threshold: Life in Religious Community & Interfaith Engagement)*

Learning Outcomes: Graduates are able to design and/or facilitate teaching and learning that is alert to cultural contexts, learning styles, and social locations. They have demonstrated the power of cultivating relationships in the development of wholeness, healing, and liberation of others and the earth.

*(Threshold: Educating for Wholeness and Liberation)*

#### **Coherent and integrated curriculum**

In order to meet the learning outcomes specified above, Starr King has intentionally consulted with students, staff, faculty, board, and community members to design – and continuously assesses and revises – a strong, coherent, and integrated curriculum for its MASC students.

Graduates of the program have demonstrated meeting the learning outcomes of the eight thresholds directly through their threshold assessments and coursework in partnership with their advisor. In addition to the thresholds assessment and courses passed, graduates demonstrate competency in the learning outcomes through a mid-degree portfolio conference, and a combination of coursework, fieldwork (there is a required internship), independent study, experiential learning, and special projects.

#### **B.1.4 Educational assessment**

##### **Assessment measures and practices**

Starr King employs a variety of assessment measures and practices – both direct and indirect – to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its MASC program. These include but are not limited to: narrative course evaluations by faculty; student evaluations of courses; threshold student self-assessments; student portfolio conferences; evaluations by community and field site supervisors; regular meetings with advisors; and petitions to graduate reviewed by faculty and decided upon by the board. Assessment is discussed in Standard 1 and elsewhere in this report.

##### **Meeting student needs and program goals**

Starr King has developed and refined its assessment tools for collecting data on how well the MASC degree program is meeting the needs of MASC students and the school's program goals. This includes documentation of student learning outcomes by individual and by year; exit surveys with graduating students; and collecting data on the percentage of graduates who find appropriate placement – given their vocational goals – within one and sometimes two years after graduation.

## **B.2 Program Content**

### **Instruction**

Starr King prepares MASC students to become spiritually grounded, transformative leaders of social change in their communities, congregations, and world. It does so through a holistic and integrated curriculum based on our four Cs and our eight threshold areas.

The thresholds represent more than sets of knowledge to be learned. Students work closely with their advisors to design a program that integrates theology, spiritual practice, and professional development in response to MASC students' particular interests and gifts. Emphasis is placed on developing practical experience and leadership skills in a variety of subjects, including: community organizing, social media, non-profit management, political action, ethics, teaching, justice ministries, and fundraising. In addition, MASC students are also expected to develop the personal qualities and habits – through spiritual practice and self-care – needed to sustain their roles as leaders of progressive social change in healthy, effective, and spiritually grounded ways.

### **Religious Heritage**

Students come to Starr King from a variety of religious backgrounds and traditions. As a result, the MASC curriculum on religious heritage is both broad and focused. Through courses and innovative immersion experiences, students study histories, sacred texts, and theologies at Starr King and the larger Graduate Theological Union including Christianity but also other world religions such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous, earth-based traditions.

### **Cultural Context**

Starr King's emphasis on ECO gives MASC students continual opportunities to develop a critical, intersectional understanding of oppression and privilege – both historic and contemporary – in a variety of settings. Students are also expected to develop skills in cultural humility and how to avoid or confront cultural misappropriation. Some MASC students spend time learning a new language and/or doing contextual education in a certain region or with a certain population group as a further means of developing linguistic skills and deeper cultural understanding.

### **Personal and spiritual formation**

MASC students are encouraged and supported in their personal and spiritual formation through courses, field education, individualized learning projects, chapels, rituals, the arts, spiritual direction and mentoring. These activities give students opportunities to develop and/or deepen their spiritual practices; to create a sustainable practice for self-care; and to teach and support others in their organizations, communities and/or the school to do the same.

### **Specialization**

MASC students are also encouraged to develop specific knowledge and leadership skills in addressing injustice and fostering progressive social change. This includes specializing in different aspects of countering-oppressions and building just and sustainable communities. Through their community internships and MASC projects – both program requirements – students develop specialties in fields that include but are not limited to: climate change,

homelessness, LGBTQ rights, trauma-informed spiritual practices, prison ministry, community organizing, social media, teaching, and youth ministry.

### **Supervised experiences**

At Starr King contextual education fosters the integration of theory and practice for students preparing for religious and social change leadership. This is a “hands-on” model of learning in which emerging leaders engage practices of ministry and justice-making in various contexts and communities, honing their professional skills, and benefiting from the insights of experienced mentors and supervisors. For MASC students, this includes successfully completing a supervised internship – including a faculty-led internship reflection group - as a requirement for graduation.

### **Selection of qualified supervisors**

Believing that students should follow a personalized course of study in consultation with their advisors, and serving a population that resides across the country, Starr King does not follow a traditional “placement” model of field education. Typically, students self-initiate field education opportunities that match their passions, vocational interests, and logistical capacities. Starr King’s Office of Contextual Education provides students with assistance in locating and crafting an appropriate field education experience. The Office works directly with prospective field supervisors to ensure they meet the needs and expectations of students and SKSM as an institution. Towards that end, Starr King has established procedures and policies regarding the selection, development, evaluation, and termination of supervised ministry settings.

## **B.3 Location**

### **The learning environment**

Starr King offers multiple locations in which MASC students can learn and engage with peers, faculty, and others, including: residential and hybrid courses, field education, immersion experiences, and distance learning. In each of these locations a strong, collaborative learning environment is created and sustained through intentional and substantive interaction. In most of these settings, they learn alongside their peers in the MDiv. Traditionally MASC students met monthly for a community gathering/dinner with the director of the program (who is also the Dean of Faculty and started the program in the fall of 2005). These moments nurtured community, and offered all the students in the program an occasion to check in and network with each other and the MASC director. In the Spring of 2019 we experimented with multiple monthly Zoom community calls to accommodate the ever diverse needs of our multilocal community.

### **Assessment for evaluating learning environments**

Starr King’s assessment tools allow the school to evaluate the effectiveness of its learning environments wherever they are located. This includes comparing how well MASC students in its low-residency and high-residency programs meet Starr King’s stated learning outcomes. MASC students and MDiv students take courses together and are assessed using the same rubrics. MASC students’ community internships include assessments by the students’ on-site supervisors and are overseen by the Director of Contextual Education.

**High-residency requirement**

MASC students must take at least one-quarter of their required 48 units of credit in high residency at Starr King and/or other Graduate Theological Union schools. MASC students are physically on campus for courses, school meetings and functions that support regular and substantive student-faculty and peer-to-peer interaction. Low-residency students are on campus during Winter and Summer semesters for intensive coursework and the intentional activities planned for those semesters—vespers, community meals, etc. (Note: Conducting one-quarter of the degree program in high-residency mode is an approved exception to ATS Educational Standard, section ES2.1.1.1.)

**Distance learning**

Starr King's distance learning approach has led to growing numbers of low-resident MASC students in recent years as well as increased enrollment of other GTU school students in Starr King's online courses. Starr King has a Director of Online Education who works with faculty, students, and staff to ensure that distance learning is easily accessible, innovative, academically rigorous and skills-based, and contributes to students' personal and spiritual formation. The school's assessment of online learning outcomes utilizes the same tools as those for high residency courses. Comparison between low residency and high residency students has shown no difference in students' meeting their program goals.

**Access to appropriate resources**

MASC students enjoy regular and substantive interaction with faculty, advisors, and one another. They also have access to the impressive resources of the Graduate Theological Union Library and UC Berkeley.

**Individualized learning**

Starr King's Individualized Learning (SKIL) courses allow MASC students to engage in research, activism, leadership skills development, or creative expression on specialized topics of interest; to attend workshops, retreats, or conferences; and deepen their understanding and practice of particular spiritual practices. Students must complete a preliminary syllabus for their SKIL courses and secure a faculty sponsor – prior to registration - with whom they work closely. A SKIL can be done by one student or by two or more. MASC students are allowed to take a SKIL course their first semester only if it is a *group* course. This is to ensure students get ample opportunity to interact with their peers in regular classes and engage in the Starr King community before pursuing advanced individualized learning on their own. The final MASC requirement also offers students an opportunity to integrate their learning in the program and offer a creative contribution by completing a project of their choice and design working under the supervision of the Director of the MASC program and their own advisor.

**Established procedures and policies**

Starr King has established a series of procedures and policies regarding supervised field education, individualized learning, online education, advising, and related matters to ensure there is clarity for MASC students, faculty, staff, and board members and that these procedures and policies are readily accessible. Handbooks on such procedures and policies have been compiled for students, faculty, advisors, staff, and board members and are regularly updated.

## **A Responsibility to Enjoy Yourself, A Responsibility to Flourish.**

Practices of Personal and Organizational Sustainability  
in the pursuit of Social Change.



The final MASC requirement also offers students an opportunity to integrate their learning in the program and offer a creative contribution by completing a project of their choice and design working under the supervision of the Director of the MASC program and their own advisor.

### **B.3.2 Duration**

#### **Time commitment**

In order to meet the goals and requirements of the Master of Arts in Social Change degree at Starr King, the MASC program requires a minimum of two academic years of full-time work or its equivalent. The 48 credit MASC degree includes a full 10 credits of internship (400 hours).

#### **Time limit**

All course credits applied toward the Master of Arts in Social Change degree requirements must be earned within seven years of the awarding of the degree.

#### **Distinctive resources needed**

MASC and MDiv students share the same faculty, library, and advising services. MASC degree programs are individually designed to integrate theology, spiritual practice, and professional development in response to students' particular interests and gifts. Hybrid and online course offerings that include leadership development, community organizing, understanding systems of power—in other words, courses that bring praxis and theory together—are most popular with



**Working on immigration rights**

MASC students. The MASC degree emphasizes not only theological knowledge, but also practical experience in community organizing, media relations, non-profit management, political action and social service ministry. Faculty members teaching courses like these are themselves involved in community action/management/social service ministry. To further broaden MASC students' experiences, at least two courses must be taken at other GTU schools.

In addition to the base of coursework, the MASC program aims to foster students' personal growth, spiritual practice and deepened commitment to social justice. Graduates of our program leave prepared to support and lead institutions and organizations that work for progressive social change.

### **Vocational guidance for MASC students**

MASC students are advised to use their internship experience and the preparation of their MASC final project to find greater focus in their vocational discernment, and to network with organizations and groups that would be interest in their work.

### **Relationships with the religious community or communities**

MASC students learn to ground their activism and work for change in their spiritual life and in their spiritual community, as well as learn to collaborate in interfaith justice movements.

### **Relationship with other theological institutions, universities, professional schools, and social agencies**

MASC students have to take at least 6 credits outside SKSM. They study at other schools at the GTU, and often take specialized courses at UC Berkeley. Several MASC graduates have

completed a doctorate (at the GTU, Claremont School of Theology, and Union Theological Seminary).

## **B.4 Admission**

### **Admission requirements**

Admission requirements for the MASC degree include: (1) a baccalaureate degree from an institution of higher education accredited by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, or approved by a Canadian provincial quality assurance agency, or the demonstrated educational equivalent of an accredited or approved North American baccalaureate degree; (2) evidence of the potential and qualities desired for spiritually grounded, transformative leaders of social change; and (3) the academic ability needed to be successful in graduate education.

### **Provision for students without a baccalaureate degree or its educational equivalents**

In certain circumstances, Starr King may accept students into its Master of Arts in Social Change degree program who do not possess a baccalaureate degree or its educational equivalent. Its criteria for doing so includes: (1) proven life and work experience related to progressive social change; and (2) an assessment that the student's academic ability is suitable for a graduate level master's program, ascertained through interviews and writing samples (including the essays in the SKSM application itself).

It is recommended that:

- SKSM begin a process of inquiry about short-term and long-term implications of 72 credit MDiv degrees.
- internship in the MASC program be reduced to 5 credits (200 hours), the current 10 credit internship is an accessibility issue because most MASC students are employed and losing 400 hours of income is a difficult financial burden.
- SKSM reduce the current symposium requirement for MASC students, from two to one symposium.



## **Standard 4. Library and Information Resources**

The GTU library<sup>6</sup> consists of the main building in Berkeley, the Flora Lamson Hewlett Library, designed by the noted American architect Louis Kahn, along with a branch library located in Geneva Hall at San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo. The Flora Lamson Hewlett Library serves as the common library of the eight-member school consortium and is the primary symbolic and collective enterprise of the schools, centers, and affiliates of the GTU. The library exists as the historic embodiment of the consortium's will to carry out its mission of educational excellence up to and including the doctoral level. Initially formed in 1969 from the consolidation of the member schools' individual libraries, the GTU library continues to build on its ecumenical heritage, making it one of the most diverse and comprehensive theological libraries in the nation. The breadth of the ecclesial affiliation and denominational representation of the member schools provides the foundation of the library's strength, incorporating Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Congregational, and Unitarian Universalist theological scholarship into a single collection.

### **4.1 Library collections**

The library's mission "is to develop and maintain resources of superior quality for teaching, learning, and research in the disciplines of religion and theology for both professional and academic degree programs." To carry out this mission the library is guided by its collection development policy, which pays close attention to the programmatic needs of the GTU at the doctoral and M.A. levels, as well as the professional ministry and continuing studies programs offered at the member schools and other consortium partners. The collection development policy is reviewed annually by the Faculty Library Committee. The library concentrates its collection-building efforts on subjects that fall within the BL-BX (Religion) classification of the Library of Congress Classification Scheme, with supporting collections in other areas. The approach to religions is primarily textual or literary, then historical, then theological and philosophical, and finally from other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and mythology.

The historic collections of the GTU library represent the European/North American theological traditions of Christianity in Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant forms. In addition to these historic commitments within European Christianity, new foci are being developed to support the study of religious experience in Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia as these areas grow in importance to scholarly and professional work undertaken at the GTU. Library collections are developed to support the academic and formative programs offered by The Centers for Jewish Studies, Islamic Studies, Dharma Studies, Theology and the Natural Sciences, Art and Religion, together with other affiliated programs like the Institute of Buddhist Studies. The GTU library's current holdings include more than 500,000 volumes and 290,000 microforms, audio and videocassettes, and other media. The library subscribes to 1,145 current periodicals.

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<sup>6</sup> This information was obtained from the GTU Library reference staff.

Membership in the Statewide California Electronic Resources Consortium (SCELC) has enabled the library to subscribe to a growing number of databases essential to its mission. The library's electronic resources now include subscriptions to 83 research databases, including the ATLA databases and JSTOR. Many of these databases provide access to full-text versions of scholarly articles, etc. Access to these resources is found on the library's website, where a list of available databases is provided. A recent development announced by EBSCO to offer libraries permanent ownership of e-book titles without ongoing maintenance fees and check-out limits marks a significant change in the industry. This change, affecting some titles in the fields of religion and theology, will now make those titles available to the GTU library and a program of e-book purchases was initiated in 2017.

The special collections department of the library holds over 300 works of art and artifacts that make up the GTU World Sacred Art Collection, as well as the institutional archives of the GTU. The department houses over 11,600 rare books and more than 2,200 linear feet of archival materials and manuscripts representing faculty research and religious activities in the American West. Finding aids for the archival collections can be accessed through the library catalog and the Online Archive of California, where there are links to a growing number of digitized materials.

Among current library partners is the University of California, Berkeley, with whom there is a long-established reciprocal borrowing arrangement that provides GTU students and faculty access to one of the finest libraries in the world. In 1999, the GTU library entered into a cooperative collection agreement with UCB, formalizing collection development practices that had been followed for some time. The agreement is quite extensive and is regularly reviewed and reaffirmed as part of a bi-annual meeting of GTU and UCB library selectors who also exchange information on a variety of library, budgetary, and collection issues. Members of the GTU consortium have access to the library collections of other Bay Area libraries, including Stanford University, Santa Clara University, and the Swedenborg House of Studies housed at the Pacific School of Religion, one of only three such collections in the world.

### **Rare books and other library resources at SKSM**

Starr King School for the Ministry houses a 1,300-volume library covering the history of Unitarians and Universalists from the early 16th century to the Rev. Thomas Starr King's San Francisco ministry during the Civil War to more recent volumes published by Earl Morse Wilbur published posthumously in 1957. [There are also 1960s books on the list with his name.](#) The collection is housed in climate-controlled facilities in the SKSM building.

The collection was named for Earl Morse Wilbur, the school's first president (1904 to 1931) and the author of "A History of Unitarianism, Vol. I & II," the first comprehensive chronicle of the movement since the 16th century, as well as "Our Unitarian Heritage," available online. These works appear in eight languages and are priceless treasures of Unitarian Universalist history. Visitors can search the collection by author, date, language and title.

- [List of books sorted by author's name](#)  
(128 pages in Adobe Acrobat PDF format)

- List of books sorted by date and place of publication  
(130 pages in Adobe Acrobat PDF format)

The list by Author offers a rich cast of characters who have pieced together a tapestry of our Unitarian history. The collection is used by faculty, students, and US and international scholars who use the collection for their research.

**A photo of books in our rare book collection**



The books of the Earl Morse Wilbur Rare Book Collection can be studied in the Starr King Reading Room. The Reading Room contains a variety of Unitarian Universalist Association resources, books from the Ministerial Fellowship Committee's reading list, newsletters from congregations, UU organizations and more. These resources can be taken out of the Reading Room. Recent publications

from Beacon Press are shelved just outside the Reading Room, and can be checked out and returned on an honor system. Starr King has worship resources available. Worship resources cannot be removed from the building and always replaced on the shelves when done being used

#### **4.2 Contribution to learning, teaching, and research**

The GTU library employs 1.5 FTE reference librarians who, working with the director of library services, are responsible for library outreach and educational programs. Reference staff conduct user surveys and keep annual library use statistics which are compiled in the director's office and reported to the GTU administration and the faculty and trustee library committees.

Current statistics show that use of print materials has been in decline over the last decade. Circulation of materials is down from 100,000 items/year to about 52,000 items/year. Less formal statistics show that in-house usage is also in decline. A number of factors have contributed to this change: falling enrollments at the member schools; a reduced number of Consortial faculty; a growing prevalence of online instruction that may not require engagement with outside resources; the rise of distance learning students; and a generalized shift toward a reliance on digital materials. While it is important to stress the continuing value of our print resources for student success, GTU must recognize that, going forward, ready access to relevant digital material is critical going forward.

The GTU Library subscribes to a number of digital resources. Statistics from just one of our vendors, EBSCO—which includes the ATLA Religion Database, the Catholic Periodical & Literature Index (CPLI), Philosopher's Index and a dozen other critical resources—is instructive. Last year the library recorded 65,622 user sessions, these involved 104,042 individual searches, from those searches 33,077 full-text articles were downloaded by current GTU faculty and students. With our print and digital resources the library remains a significant support for all members of the GTU consortium. And the GTU library remains one of the largest circulating libraries within ATLA.

Many library services that were once accessed in-house have now been moved to the library website and thereby also support online students in new distance education programs just beginning at several of the member schools. In addition to overseeing the consortium's learning management system, Moodle, the library now offers through its website a number of services to enhance student learning. These services include LibGuides (subject-specific bibliographies, with active links to library materials), live video and chat reference service, and subject-specific tutorials, such as how to use the ATLA databases and WorldCat. For residential students, the library continues to provide a full orientation program given each fall and attended by approximately 200 students.

In Sept. 2017, the library rolled out a new way to search: *Summon*. Summon, officially called a "discovery layer" adds functionality to the existing 90+ article databases by allowing a user to search them simultaneously together with the library catalog, the library's tutorials and guides, and many open access resources. This change not only saves the time of faculty, staff, and students, but allows access into lower-use databases that students may have overlooked. It incorporates many facets to help the users narrow their search- for example, limiting to only peer-reviewed articles, as well as displaying background information from the online encyclopedia collections and a chat box to reach a GTU librarian directly.

Library skills are critically important for graduate study. Starr King faculty have been instructed to require SKSM students to learn to use the GTU library resources, by assigning journal articles that must be accessed through Summon. In addition, we have added an item in our students' final course evaluation that asks students whether they have used (and found useful) the GTU online library services.

#### **4.3 Partnership in curriculum development**

The library participates in curriculum development in a largely supportive role centered in the various GTU committees that develop and support academic work. A SKSM faculty member has served as an active member of the Faculty Library Committee for several years. During the year, and especially when the collection development policy is annually reviewed by the Faculty Library Committee, this SKSM faculty member brings collection suggestions from the SKSM faculty to the library. The collection development librarian has been enthusiastically responsive about acquiring publications and resources specifically requested by SKSM. These include the following journals: *Body and Religion*; *Buddhist Studies Review*; *Comparative Islamic Studies*; *Ecotheology*; *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*; *Fieldwork in Religion*; *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy*; *Implicit Religion*; *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*; *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology*; *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion*; *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*; *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*; *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds*.

#### **4.4. Administration and leadership**

The library is run within a complex structure that seeks input from all stakeholders within the consortium. The director of library services reports to the president of the GTU and is a member

of the president's Executive Team. A Faculty Library Committee meets monthly during the academic year. The committee is composed of one faculty representative from each member school appointed by the school dean, along with one doctoral student elected by a vote of the doctoral students. The committee is staffed by the library director and the assistant to the director. During the course of the year, the committee hears reports from various library staff on matters relating to collection development, library use, and operational matters. These matters are then reported out in the various school faculty meetings. The GTU Board of Trustees' Library Committee is composed of board members appointed by the GTU President and board chair. The committee meets three times during the academic year (October, February, and May) and is staffed by the library director and assistant to the director. The committee reviews library budgets, policies, and strategic planning initiatives and ensures that library operations are in line with academic programs and direction.

#### **4.5 Resources**

Library access was easy before, but starting in the Fall 2018 semester the GTU library has made access to online materials and support for distance learners as simple as a click on the right sidebar in Moodle, so that any student doing their work in an online class has direct access to electronic resources and a live reference librarian (during library hours). The GTU library has a smart class room and has provided Zotero training for SKSM faculty locally and through Zoom, with faculty members who work remotely. The library also provides our students with live Zoom library orientation with SKSM classes. The library staff is always responsive and proactive to meet our needs.

The library is guided by professional standards in recruiting and maintaining its staff. In terms of staff competencies, six members of the library staff have master's degrees in Library and Information Science, and three librarians, including the director, also have advanced degrees in religion and theology. The most important resource for any library is its materials. The consortial budget for library materials has remained essentially flat over the past decade. The library now adds an average of 5,000-6,000 titles per year, down from a high of 6,000 to 7,000 titles during the previous decade.

Our budget allocation for the GTU library is calculated as follows. The total estimated annual budget of Starr King is approximately \$3,000,000. The amount we are spending on the GTU is approximately \$23,000 per month, so on an annual basis = \$276,000. The portion being allocated by GTU to the library vs. other GTU costs is approximately \$17,000 per month or \$204,000 annually. So the library as a percentage of our total budget is  $\$204,000 / \$3,000,000 = 6.8\%$

It is recommended that:

- SKSM continues to advocate with the library for increased library material on topics such as queer studies, White supremacy, environmental justice, climate change, and other ECO topics central to our school's mission.
- SKSM instructors require that students routinely use GTU library resources as part of their everyday coursework.

## **Standard 5. Faculty**

### **5.1 Faculty qualifications, responsibilities, development, and employment**

Starr King's unique educational vision grounded in educating to counter oppression and build just and sustainable multi-religious communities has continued to be carried on faithfully by a group of committed and gifted faculty. As it has been true in the last 20 years, SKSM faculty is now mainly comprised of people traditionally underrepresented in the academy: women, queer people, and people of color. White women are currently the largest represented group. As of March 2019, Starr King is employing a total of 30 faculty members, for a Full Time Equivalency (FTE) of 16.25. Faculty have responsibilities in teaching, advising, formation, administration, research and other areas of the school's programs and departments.

Following up on the ATS recommendations from 2009, we have made the nomenclature for faculty categories compatible with graduate education standards. We moved from having only the categories of core faculty and associate faculty to using the traditional language of Assistant, Associate, Full Professor, Adjunct, Visiting, and Research Faculty. While we employ 30 faculty members, currently only two faculty teach full time. Three more people work full time but also hold substantial part-time administrative responsibilities (CAO/Dean of Faculty; Associate Dean; ATS Assessment Coordinator). This is a major improvement from two years ago, when only two professors worked full time for the school.

Only two of the faculty advising students are on the permanent Core Faculty with full voting rights (both hired by national searches), the others are part-time faculty with annual contracts. Some of the part-time contracts have been renewed for over ten years. The titles of advising faculty includes the appropriate ranking as assistant, associate and full professor, depending on experience.

Currently, we have on faculty eleven people with a doctorate and two that are about to finish their PhDs. Other members of the faculty have been chosen because of their extensive experience in their area of teaching, such as transformative rituals, church administration, community organizing, leadership development, interfaith chaplaincy and social justice activism. This faculty composition allows SKSM to tend to the different formation needs of our diverse student body. We are proud to have faculty members that hold academic credentials, maintain organizational and professional affiliations, and bring expertise in multiple areas connected to the curriculum and our thresholds based on knowledge and vocational experience. In particular, our faculty members hold expertise in areas of much-needed attention for 21st century ministry that counters oppressions, engages in trauma response and dismantles white supremacy.

#### **Core Faculty**

Core faculty are either hired through a national search and have a permanent contract or are ex-officio members, as in the case of the President and the Dean of Students. Their specific nomenclatures are related to their seniority. The nature and composition of the core faculty has gone through significant changes in the last five years. These changes are related to the challenges the school faced when it went through the process to replace its President (who had

served for 25 years). At the beginning of the search process in 2013, the core faculty was composed of nine faculty. Only one of them is still serving in that capacity today. Two more of them have continued to serve as advising faculty.

During the final stage of the campus visits in 2014, three presidential candidates were presented for interviews at the school, one being an internal candidate, a white woman on the SKSM faculty. After the search committee made its final deliberation and chose an external candidate, who would be the first black woman president of the school, an anonymous person released the confidential feedback from the campus interviews to the press, denominational leaders, and the whole school community, claiming that the current administration had maliciously short-changed the internal white candidate. We later learned that the material had been released by someone on the search committee to students, board members and the internal candidate.

The board of trustees appointed an independent review team to do an investigation to review the presidential search process and delayed the delivering of the diplomas to two graduating students who were closely involved in the spreading of the confidential material. The internal candidate left the school as the new president stepped in. During the investigation, the President and the board of trustees decided to temporarily take away the core faculty title and voting privileges from all part-time faculty. Some of the core faculty resigned in protest as the new semester was about to start. The Dean of Faculty had to hurriedly hire several part-time faculty to serve as advisors and to teach the courses. None of the new part-time faculty were hired as core faculty, but they were given renewable annual contracts.

The core faculty today is composed of four full-time members. Of the core faculty, one teaches full time, one teaches half-time and serves as Dean of Faculty and Chief Academic Officer, one is the President and teaches one course per year and one is Dean of Students with limited teaching responsibilities. Each core faculty member has teaching responsibilities and significant responsibilities related to the management and care of the educational programs of the school. Two of the core faculty are also advisors to students. Some of the core faculty also serve as GTU Consortial faculty, and one as Core Doctoral Faculty. Two core faculty members have PhDs, one is finishing her dissertation and one is a professor of the practice (the President).

### **Advising Faculty**

Our core faculty are supported by an advising faculty body that leads the educational practices of the school through advising degree students, teaching courses and supporting SKILs (Starr King Individualized Learning) courses, and serving on school committees. In 2008, SKSM started implementing a new advisor-advisee ratio so that the SKSM holistic advising model could be more fully and sustainably embodied. This change was part of the new educational model spearheaded by the late SKSM Provost, Dr. Ibrahim Farajajé. The school moved from having a few full-time Core faculty that advised the whole student body (with advising loads of 19-22 for each faculty), to a model that integrated a number of additional part-time advisors. Ideally, a full-time advising load would not exceed 7-9 students. This new model took different configurations over the last ten years. Originally, part time advising faculty were supposed to receive a salary in line with the compensation of Core Faculty. This is generally no longer the case.



Currently, SKSM has 15 faculty serving as advisors, for an FTE of 12.50. A full-time advising load is currently between 8-12 students. All advisors are invited to the faculty meetings and always have speaking rights. For a short time, the year after the breach of confidential information, only core faculty had voting rights. This created some difficulty and unease. Full voting rights were granted again the following year. However, the administration is still considering whether it is fair and efficient to give the same decision-making power to full-time as well as very part time faculty. We are aware of the incredible strength of the faculty composition as well as some of the issues that are faced.

### **Adjunct Faculty**

Our core and advising faculty are joined each year by adjunct faculty who add an array of talents to our course offerings. Some of our adjunct faculty members are Starr King or Graduate Theological Union graduates who return to the school with broad expertise in progressive religious issues.

In addition to hired faculty, GTU doctoral students who participate in the Newhall Scholars teaching fellowship contribute to the educational program at Starr King by teaching a course while mentored by a Core Doctoral Faculty member. Also, selected student teaching fellows from Starr King participate in the Hilda Mason teaching fellowship program. Teaching contributions to the whole curriculum is discussed later in this chapter.

The work of the faculty and the Dean of Faculty/Chief Academic Officer is supported by a Coordinator of Academic Programs. The significantly higher professionalization of this position in the last two years has been a major contribution to the efficiency of the academic office. Unfortunately, in May we suffered another transition in this position.

### **Academic Freedom**

As highlighted in Standard 3, “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning” is one of the Unitarian Universalist Principles in which SKSM is solidly rooted. Faculty, staff and students come to SKSM because of its commitment to and lived record of freedom of faith, inquiry and expression. The Faculty Handbook has a lengthy statement about academic freedom, and faculty recently produced an updated [academic freedom statement](#) and [Freedom of Inquiry statement](#).

### **Composition of the faculty**

Starr King’s faculty have been selected because their knowledge and gifts provide diverse and important voices that challenge and enrich theological education. Additionally, their work resonates with the school’s commitment to transformative pedagogies and to educate to counter oppressions and build just, sustainable communities. Much of this is addressed in Standard 1. The current composition of the faculty reflects a diversity of genders, races, ethnicities, and religious traditions. Particular attention is placed on fostering diversity within the academic leadership. Since its adoption of its ECO commitment, SKSM has focused on hiring faculty who have been historically underrepresented within the academy. For instance, the last four academic deans and CAOs of the school have included two black men, two white women, three queer

people, and three people living with chronic disabilities. The core faculty is currently composed of one black woman, one afro-Latina woman, one white American man and one white Italian woman. The advising faculty is currently composed of two Jewish women, one black man, four people of color, five white women and one white man. Three people on faculty are from other countries (Argentina, Italy, and Pakistan). Starr King's multireligious commitment is also reflected in the religious diversity of the faculty. Currently, our faculty is composed of:

- Unitarian Universalist - 9
- Jewish - 3 (one secular)
- Christian (Baptist, Waldensian, Old Catholic)
- Muslim - 1 (one Muslim core faculty member teaching Islamic Studies passed away and has yet to be replaced)
- Humanist - 1
- Buddhist - 1

Please note that several members of our faculty identify as multi-religious, and belong to more than one religious tradition (e.g. UU-Jewish, Sufi-Jewish, Christian-UU, Christian-Buddhist, UU-Pagan).

### **Faculty meetings**

All core and advising faculty attend regular monthly meetings where they make decisions about degrees, the implementation of our curricula, academic practices, advising, formation questions and students' readiness to graduate. The faculty meetings are also an opportunity for faculty to consult one another regarding urgent student concerns and receive reports from committee faculty representatives as well as staff and student leaders.

### **Faculty Study Times**

In addition, faculty gather monthly for study time, which focuses mainly on issues that require deeper dialogue among colleagues, particularly as pertains to the mission and vision of the school. These are monthly two and one-half hour meetings to work on professional development topics, or to share and discuss faculty scholarship and other work.

### **Matriculation and Orientation**

Faculty advisors are one of the first points of contact that new students have when they matriculate at the school. Many faculty members also play a role in the planning, worship services and workshops included in Orientation, which is a multi-day introduction to the school on the residential Berkeley campus. Entering students also have their first 1:1 advising meeting.

### **Graduation**

Faculty advisors are closely involved in supporting students through the graduation process. Faculty work closely with their student advisees to determine their readiness to graduate. When a student petitions to graduate, their petition is reviewed and discussed by the whole faculty body (during faculty meeting times). We ask the students to submit a revised Threshold Self-Assessment that articulates their readiness to graduate around the different areas of formation. This serves as an important component of our assessment plan.

Faculty also play a significant programmatic and ceremonial role in Commencement exercises at the school.

### **Faculty Representation on School-wide Committees**

Faculty are active in all committees of the school depending on the time allotment of their particular contracts.

### **Admissions/Recruitment**

The faculty representative on the admissions committee provides a voice and vote on complete applications for degree programs at the school. Relying on their perspective and experience with teaching and learning at the school, this representative provides insight into the relationship between an applicant's materials and the mission and programs of the school.

### **GTU Library**

The faculty representative to the GTU Library Committee is discussed in Standard 3 and 4.

### **Curriculum**

Two faculty representatives serve on the Curriculum Committee in addition to the Dean of Faculty/CAO.

### **GTU MA and GTU Doctoral Admission Committees**

Core Doctoral Faculty rotates in serving and chairing these committees.

### **Relationship to GTU Faculty and Programs**

SKSM faculty that hold, or are about to receive, a doctorate are considered Consortial Faculty. This means that they can advise GTU MA students, and can participate in GTU MA and doctoral thesis, exam and dissertation committees, and areas meetings. Currently, three SKSM Faculty actively serve as such. Only one faculty serves as GTU Core Faculty, with responsibility to advise doctoral students, teach doctoral level courses and contribute to the Theo-Ethics Doctoral Area (25% of FT). Our late professor of Islamic Studies, Ibrahim Farajajé, also served as a Core Doctoral Faculty member and has not yet been replaced.

While SKSM has been committed to strengthening its participation in the Core Doctoral Faculty, there has also been uncertainty about the future of the GTU doctoral program. New decisions will be made as the GTU clarifies its mission.

### **Faculty Relationship to Faith Communities**

Our faculty serve faith communities as leaders in ways that enhance the effectiveness of the school's teaching and student learning. For instance, while serving at SKSM, two of our core faculty have also held significant leadership positions in their denomination. Our faculty serve in important denominational committees and taskforces, as worship and program leaders, associate ministers, and as sheiks or rabbis in their respective faith communities.

### **Policies and Handbooks**

At the time of a faculty member's hiring and again at the beginning of each academic year, faculty members receive an updated copy of the Faculty Handbook and additional handbooks

relevant to their roles and responsibilities (for instance, advising). The purpose of the handbooks is to outline faculty members' professional responsibilities and guide them in their work. One section of the handbook supports the bylaws and the personnel policy of the school which provide directives regarding the appointment, compensation, support and evaluation of the president and the faculty. A second section of the Handbook offers detailed support for the teaching responsibilities of all faculty member, including topics such as registration, grading, use of educational technologies. The particular rights and responsibilities for advising faculty members are outlined in the advising faculty handbook. All these handbooks are updated by the office of the Dean of Faculty/CAO. Changes in the initial policy section need to be revised by the Academic Affairs Committee and voted on by the Board of Trustees. As such, they are not revised annually. The teaching support sections of the Handbook are revised annually and occasionally each term, depending on GTU wide change of practices (especially as it relates to cross-registration).

Faculty engage in annual performance reviews with the Dean of Faculty. Specific areas in which faculty are evaluated include teaching effectiveness, involvement in school and GTU consortium, committee work, faculty meetings and study times participation, worship and community life, denominational service, publications and research projects and contributions to the Educating to Counter Oppressions mission of the school. Faculty are required to set goals for the following academic year and make suggestions for future course offerings. Annual reviews are documented through forms.

Because of the variety of part-time positions offered to our faculty, our annual letters of appointment and understanding include important information about the specific responsibilities for each faculty member. Faculty are compensated according to their role and percentage worked. The Dean of the Faculty works in collaboration with the Vice President of Finance and Administration to determine the appropriate compensation.

Fair compensation has been an area of constant challenge and growth for the school, and it has been regularly reported to and discussed by the board.

### **Retention**

SKSM does not offer tenure but has long-term contracts for core faculty hired through national searches. The faculty handbook indicates that serving as permanent core faculty implies "no further evaluations for contract, though it may involve periodic qualitative evaluations for promotion in professorial rank. The bylaws of the school state that members of the faculty holding the rank of professor hold office until resignation or removal by the board by a 2/3 vote unless otherwise provided in the letter of employment. The personnel policies specify that the contract can be terminated by the school if the faculty member has failed to perform the duties for which they have been hired, or is the faculty member has engaged in grievous misconduct, or if financial exigency forces a reduction of employees." Traditionally, the work of core faculty is reviewed annually by the Dean of Faculty, and by the whole board when a faculty member is nominated by the Dean of Faculty for a change in rank.

Core faculty retention has also been assured by the offer of regular sabbaticals, one semester after three and a half years, or a full year after seven years of service.

The sustainability of core faculty positions has often been discussed; traditionally, new duties have tended to fall on their shoulders as they were the only people working full time. They have been being fully active within the GTU, holding administrative responsibilities (such as provost/chief academic officer and dean), and participating in SKSM and GTU committee meetings and ad hoc responsibilities.

To ensure educational continuity and offer some professional stability, SKSM has experimented with giving advising and adjunct faculty three years contracts. Currently the contracts are annual, but most have been renewed for several years (up to eleven years). SKSM's struggle for financial sustainability has not enabled the school to make many long terms commitments to its faculty. At the same time, in the last five years the school has retained most of its faculty, who is very committed to the excellence and uniqueness of the school.

### **Faculty Compensation**

As discussed previously, in 2008 the school started implementing a new advisor-advisee ratio so that SKSM holistic advising model could be more fully and sustainably embodied. Currently, SKSM has 15 faculty serving as advisors, for an FTE of 12.50 and a total cost of \$407,619 (minus Core Faculty). This cost does not include the additional costs of benefits depending on the faculty member's contract. The average salary for non-core faculty advising a FT load is \$45,000 (ranging from \$6,405 to \$61,316). This means that the current system pays most advisors a salary that is far below market rate and does not even meet the standards of a sustainable wage for the Bay area.

One of the school's key challenges is how to fulfill our educational mission in a sustainable way, while also respecting our ECO commitments to fair salaries, as well as the 2008 ATS recommendation we improve the way SKSM treats faculty. The board and administration are testing different options, in dialogue with the Dean of Faculty/CAO.

### **Workload**

A full-time teaching load includes teaching at least 12 credits, guiding 1-3 individualized studies (SKIL) each term, advising 8-10 master level students (or less if working with doctoral students), serving on at least one faculty committee, participating in the ritual, academic and social life of the school (either on campus or in online/hybrid mode). One of the most appreciated features of our educational model is also one of the areas that has caused the most challenges: our holistic model of advising can be very time consuming. A large percentage of our students struggle with financial and vocational issues, with micro and macro aggressions within and outside their faith communities, and with mental and physical health challenges. Our faculty is careful to respect the boundaries of their roles, yet is committed to advising the whole person, addressing how all the different issues affect students' learning and formation to spiritual leadership. Many of our students are at the fringes of their religious movements, and/or are involved in creating cutting edge entrepreneurial ministries and forms of activism. Accompanying them takes time, often comparable to or in excess of the time some of us spent with our doctoral advisors. Advising high residency or low residency students does not make a difference. We have noticed that advising part-time students can often take more time than advising full time students, as the part-

time students take longer to become familiar with the educational practices and are often part-time as they are overly committed in their work, activism, and family lives.

Faculty has often discussed the financial and physical sustainability of our current advising practice. While faculty are deeply committed to their students, they are also frustrated by excessive work hours and at not having enough time to focus on their own research, scholarship, and activism. We are currently discussing adjustments to the current model, while we acknowledge that faculty sustainability has been an issue that SKSM has tackled for decades, and that some significant progress has been made. For instance, no one in the current leadership suggests an 80-hour work week as ideal, and no one is supposed to advise twenty students with the current holistic model, as was done in the past. Faculty and administration are committed to find and model more sustainable work practices so that future leaders can learn from their lived praxis.

The work of part time faculty is carefully negotiated with the dean each year and discussed and revised during the year as necessary. Still, we are aware that this is still a work in progress.

## **5.2 Faculty role in teaching**

The SKSM educational model puts integrative learning at its core. While the aim of each course is to foster integrative learning, some courses and experiences are particularly focused on it:

- Integrative Theological Reflection Courses: to be taken by students in congregational or community internships
- Educating to Create Just and Sustainable Communities that Counter Oppressions (ECO) – This required courses model integration of theological reflection, spiritual practices and justice making.
- Advising - Describing what theological reflection means related to the advising relationship; in particular highlight the threshold assessment's questions inviting theological reflection.
- Contextual Education – In addition to integrative seminars for interns, integrative learning takes place with internship supervisors and during the January Congregational Intern Gathering.
- Relational-Constructive Learning - theological reflection also takes place in other aspects of the school, such as ritual, chapel, threshold assessments and portfolio reviews, and committee work.

## **Teaching**

We have already stressed the high value SKSM faculty place on teaching, seen as an embodiment of our theological values and educational commitment. Faculty is chosen for their educational philosophy and for their attention to pedagogical concerns. Additionally, faculty regularly reflect on their teaching during faculty and study times, annual reviews and 1:1 meetings with the dean, who is always available for both troubleshooting of issues and long term professional development planning. When students' course evaluations present problematic issues or questions, they are promptly addressed with the dean, and brought to the whole faculty if they concern common issues.

New faculty members receive training and tutorials on how to use educational technologies upon which both low-residence, hybrid and high-residence modes of learning depend, including Zoom, Populi, and Moodle. When new or updated technology is implemented, faculty have met with respective staff members to receive training and support integrating the applications into their teaching and advising work with students. Starr King faculty have access to many teaching resources on the Berkeley campus as well as remotely.

### **Scholarly materials**

Please see the section on Standard 4 for information about library and electronic resources of the school as well as access to scholarly materials, which are made available to faculty as well as students for their research and scholarship. In addition to library resources, Starr King has a range of worship-related resources for various liturgical arts and worship space design. Support for faculty access to and use of these resources is available during most regular business hours.

### **Classroom space**

Starr King faculty can reserve classroom or office space at the school's main building, as well as dedicated study areas in the GTU Library. SKSM has three classroom spaces equipped with audio, visual and web resources to provide a hybrid (online and in-person) teaching and learning environment. Two classroom spaces can also be arranged as a worship space, providing opportunity for teaching and learning across the disciplines of religious leadership and ministry.

### **Office space**

Some faculty have dedicated individual office space and all faculty have access to private office space when needed for confidential meetings with students. Faculty who conduct advising in low-residence are provided with consistent access to Zoom audio/video conference technology and they are given individual Zoom accounts. Faculty are asked not to meet with students outside of a campus office or Zoom account.

Faculty teaching is evaluated comprehensively during a 1:1 annual evaluation with the dean, using student course evaluations, syllabi and faculty self-assessment. The process of evaluation of a core faculty for a change in rank is described in the faculty handbook, and it is concluded by board review and final vote.

## **5.3. Faculty academic oversight of the programs of study**

Starr King faculty teach “by who we are and what we do” in order to educate the whole person. Each faculty member's pedagogical practice is expected to express the school's educational philosophy, which is described in the Faculty Handbook. We seek to educate in ways that:

- Trust in an empowering and liberating grace that is larger than ourselves
- Call forth and welcome the full, authentic presence of people
- Call forth and welcome silenced knowledge, feeling and experience
- Undergird human wholeness, integrity, relationally, and agency
- Foster self-awareness and self-respect
- Foster relational capacities and the ethics of community
- Foster knowledge and wisdom arising from engagement with primary texts and primary experience



- Foster an ongoing practice of inquiry, study, action and reflection

Faculty also have important responsibilities included in the Starr King Covenant (included in the Student and Faculty handbooks): “May we nurture a teaching and learning environment with integrity and compassion, as we take time to develop our academic strengths and support the unfolding power of those we are entrusted to guide.”

Starr King’s leadership encourages individual faculty members to become an integral part of the Starr King community, both inside and outside the classroom, in relation to their own modalities of teaching (high- or low-residence). The Dean of the Faculty welcomes and encourages participation in all aspects of our community life, including rituals, celebrations, special lectures and events. Faculty have specific roles in the regular key parts of the academic year.

## **5.4 Faculty role in theological research**

### **Faculty research**

Faculty are expected to participate in the scholarly communities of their areas of expertise, in relation with their different contracts professional background and contracts. Each year, the annual faculty self-assessment and review with the dean include a question about publishing. Advising faculty working less than 25% of full time, or working as professor of the practice, are not expected to produce academic work, but are certainly encouraged to write in their area of expertise.

SKSM does encourage faculty research yet does not make explicit requests in terms of output. The GTU standards for Core Doctoral Faculty (CDF) are followed. After the initial admission on the CDF, based on the review of one’s academic credential and writings, and the school insurance the faculty will free 25 percent of their time to devote to the doctoral program and academic research, faculty need to publish one monograph or two peer-reviewed articles every two years to keep serving on the CDF (in addition to their doctoral advising, service on committees, and regular teaching of doctoral level courses).

The greatest obstacles in establishing explicit publication standards for faculty are related to compensation, workloads, the preponderance of annual contracts and dealing with the ongoing financial instability of the institution and its effects. In the current circumstances, we are glad when faculty publish at all, and in fact several do produce remarkable work. Adjustments in workloads and compensations would ensure a more conducive scholarly environment, where at least core and some part time faculty have enough bandwidth for research and writing and collegial exchanges, and where more would serve on the Core Doctoral Faculty.

### **Evaluation of Faculty Research**

Similarly to how the faculty defines academic integrity in student work (see the [Statement on Academic Integrity](#)) it is dedicated to the intentional and honest practice of inquiry and reflection on one’s own reading, thinking, and writing. SKSM considers the conduct of research and academic scholarship to be moral and political work. Since the beginning of the term’s use in the West, “research” has always been connected to European colonialism as scientists and colonial powers sought to define, appropriate, commodify and disseminate knowledge about indigenous

communities as well as exploit nature. Academic research has also been marred by the intersection of sexism, racism, classism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and Christian supremacist views. Thus, Starr King faculty are committed to understanding the history of academic inquiry and knowledge production that depends upon and perpetuates colonialism, white supremacy, systemic violence, and multiple forms of oppressions. They are encouraged to dispute ideas of neutrality or objectivity in the creation of scholarly discourse and the categorization of sources of knowledge as “academic,” “logical,” or “original.” Starr King’s mission and educational vision embraces the notion that what is acceptable or unacceptable knowledge is better determined by a community than by a Western neoliberal framework.

With these commitments in mind, Starr King is enhanced by faculty members whose research is engaged in critical approaches to research and praxis, as well as the history and methodologies of indigenous and emancipatory scholarship across disciplines. The above is amended from the statement on academic integrity, which could be used to describe how Starr King defines “research” and “accepted standards in higher education” from ATS’s item.

SKSM has followed the last ATS report recommendation to strengthen faculty support to do research and ongoing professional development. While this is still an area of growth for SKSM, currently the faculty has the following opportunities:

- Sabbaticals for core faculty
- Course release for FT faculty finishing their dissertations
- Faculty study times
- Focused group work with consultants
- Symposia
- Participation in GTU doctoral areas’ work and Women’s Studies in Religion certificate
- Professional development of the Academic Program Coordinator

Faculty publication in the last years have included work on moral injury, queer theologies, Womanist theo-ethics, UU history, transformative pedagogies.

It is recommended that:

- SKSM moves more aggressively in planning a process to rectify what theologian Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite defines as the “ethical deficits” of theological schools: unfair faculty compensations, workloads, and terms of employment and excessive use of contingent faculty.
- SKSM comprehensively and creatively revises its advising model and curricula so that it can meet its educational mission while also compensating faculty fairly.
- SKSM reviews comprehensively its business model to ensure adequate resources are allocated to instruction needs vis a vis the needs of other departments. Excessive cuts in the instruction department may eventually mean drastically changing the nature of the school, the quality of its offerings and the breadth of its mission.

## Standard 6. Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, and Placement

### 6.1 Recruitment

Starr King's student recruitment policies and practices are outlined on our website under the heading entitled "[Admissions](#)", and its subheadings: Prospective Students, Application, Campus Visit, Tuition & fees, Housing, Transferring to SKSM, FAQs. Admission requirements for each program are listed in the program descriptions under the heading entitled "[Academics](#)" (see website page links).

The policies and practices are adhered to by the V.P. of Academic Enrollment, admission's staff, and the Admission's Committee in their work on the acceptance of applicants. Examples of how Starr King's student recruitment practices and policies are consistent with the purpose of the institution begin to show up on the first "Admissions" webpage in the welcome to prospective students. From the start we identify our institution as a flagship of prophetic Unitarian Universalist and multi-religious divinity education; a member of the Graduate Theological Union and an affiliate of the University of California at Berkeley. Moreover, the prologue identifies the kind of students we are seeking by asking prospective students a series of questions that anchor student recruitment to our institution's purpose and mission:

"Are you called to the life of spirit, sacrifice, and service? Do you seek a spiritual formation and professional education process that is personalized and yet global in scope? Are you committed to walking the paths of justice, mercy, humility, and compassion? If you answered "Yes!" to these questions, Starr King may be the place for you to begin composing the next chapter of your life. The world is in need of your gifts. Have you discovered them? Are you prepared to offer them?"

Once a prospective student has sufficient interest in our program they are guided on our website to explore their call to spiritual leadership by:

- Scheduling an Admissions Information Session, Campus Visit or Class Observation by filling out a "Prospective Student Form"
- Calling the admissions office or emailing us at [admissions@sksm.edu](mailto:admissions@sksm.edu) for more information.
- Applying to their program of interest using our online application. The application requires a \$65.00 application fee, official transcripts from all higher education institutions attended, three letters of recommendation, 8 essays, and a required applicant interview/meeting with an admissions staff (implemented in October 2018). The application process helps to determine if the applicant meets the requisite criteria for acceptance. There is an admissions committee which makes the final determination on acceptance into the program. The committee considers all parts of the application. The committee members include the President, a designated faculty member, two students, and the VP of Academic Enrollment.

Our entire website, along with each subheading under the Admissions heading, offers the prospective student a clear opportunity and several options to freely explore our educational programs and recruitment process. Our practice is to support prospective students and their

spiritual discernment process in the ways that are important to each student. In like manner, we utilize the following student recruitment practices to attract students:

### **Outreach**

Starr King plans and participates in outreach events that will attract those students who have an interest in our mission, principles and programs of study, such as the UUA General Assembly, Pacific Central District Assembly, Parliament of World Religions, Proctor, faith-inspired social justice events such as the Wild Goose Festival, and Rise-Climate, Jobs, and Justice and other events that attract those individuals who align with our mission.

### **Our Affiliations & Partnerships**

We also promote our affiliations and partnerships to attract students. We are a member of the Graduate Theological Union, a consortium of eight theological schools and eleven affiliated centers in Berkeley, CA. We have an affiliation with The Chaplaincy Institute and offer a joint Chaplaincy Program. These affiliations provide greater opportunities for students to learn more about different faith traditions and paths of religious leadership.

### **Digital Marketing**

Our website <https://www.sksm.edu/> is designed to support the interests of prospective students and applicants. As mentioned, the website offers the prospective student clear and concise ways to explore our school. Prospective students are encouraged to request information by filling out a “Prospective Student” form and if they are interested in applying we ask them to complete an online application. Our website is designed to provide clear and accurate information to our prospective students regarding our mission, values, history, educational philosophy, affiliations, academic programs, admissions practices, policy and compliance, faculty and staff, news and events, etc. We utilize marketing strategies such as SEO (search engine optimization, e.g. keywords) to ensure we are reaching prospective students who are interested in our mission and programs. We use language such as “Do you Feel Called to Religious Leadership” “Unitarian Universalism”, “Sacred Activism”, “Multi-Religious Life and Learning”, “Radical Education”, “Will you join us on this sacred path?” Are you called to the life of spirit, sacrifice and service?”

We also use videos featuring student experiences and testimonials. We have also linked our website to various social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, which provide versatile cost-effective ways to reach prospective students who may be interested in us. Our posts and videos align with our mission and values, e.g. educating to encounter oppression, participation in social justice events, upcoming events, student testimonials, etc. Our social media posts are linked to our website which encourages and allows prospective students to go to our site to further explore our school.

### **Campus Visits & Tours**

Prospective students are invited to visit the campus and meet with an admissions team member to learn more about our programs and school. During their visit, they are introduced to faculty and staff, offered a tour of the campus and surrounding area, “Holy Hill”, home of the Graduate Theological Union. Prospective students can also join the Chapel service on Tuesdays, and/or join a class in session.

### **Print Marketing Materials**

We use print materials such as brochures and promotional swag. The print materials provide snippets of information similar in content and language to our website. The brochures advertise our UU religion and philosophy, our programs of study, and our mission to counter oppressions and create just sustainable communities. They serve to direct students to our website or school for additional information about our programs of study. The promotional swag such as bags, wrist bands, sticker etc. are typically imprinted with our school name and logo and are used to attract and brand.

In addition to the descriptions of the recruitment practices listed above, the school provides clear information on the potential vocational opportunities available to graduates of our programs. Opportunities for graduates are presented in writing on our website in the following places:

Under the heading “Academic”, in the description of the Master of Divinity Program it states: Starr King’s M.Div. degree prepares people for vocations in

- Parish ministry
- Community ministry
- Religious education ministry
- Chaplaincy
- Related forms of religious leadership in diverse religious traditions

In the description of the Master of Arts in Social Change Program:

The MASC program is designed to cement your skills in

- promoting goals of justice, equity and compassion in society, through religious or secular institutions
- providing an ethical grounding in ministerial and theological education to pursue your passions
- improving professional competency in religious and social change
- Also, our brochures offer descriptions of potential opportunities available for graduates.

The M.Div. brochure states:

“The Starr King’s Master of Divinity program prepares you for any type of ministry or religious leadership you are called to.”

The Master of Arts in Social Change brochure states:

“Graduates of our program leave prepared to support and lead institutions and organizations that work for progressive social change”

Additionally, we have utilized social media sites, such as YouTube to offer prospective students insight into the kind of work a graduate may take up. For example, in a video called “Starr King the Best Place for Me” a graduate of the M.Div. program who now holds a position as [Director of Prison Ministry](#), Church of the Larger Fellowship, talks about her inspiration and journey through the program.

## 6.2 Admission

All students admitted to Starr King possess the requisite undergraduate degree for the program to which they are admitted or demonstrate equivalency (if applicable). Further clarification will be found in Educational Standard 6. 2. The established admissions criteria for each degree program includes the following: applicant's academic background, personal and spiritual experience, a commitment to social justice, and countering oppressions, and the potential to serve diverse multi-faith communities, and the world. The admissions application process is designed to ensure the criteria are met for each degree program. The following is an overview of the process:

1 . The applicant is required to submit an online application on the Starr King website. The application steps and requirements are listed on the "Apply" page (See online application <https://www.sksm.edu/admissions/electronic-application> )

The requirements for the Master of Divinity, the Master of Art in Social Change, the Master of Arts, and the Chaplaincy Institute Joint Program include: official transcripts from all colleges attended, 7 essays which address much of the admissions criteria, an autobiographical statement that speaks to the applicant's personal and/or professional experience, 3 letters of recommendation, an admissions interview, and a \$65.00 application fee. (See essay application: <https://www.sksm.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Application-Essay-and-Autobiographical-Statement4.pdf> ). The requirements for the Chaplaincy Institute Joint Program require supplemental essay statements.

2 . Once the application is complete an admissions staff member schedules an interview/meeting with the applicant to discuss their application and interest in Starr King. The admissions staff member uses an Applicant Interview Guide to guide the meeting and support the application process for acceptance. The admissions staff member makes a recommendation for: acceptance, provisional acceptance. or denial. The recommendation is forwarded along with the Applicant Evaluation to the Admission's Committee for final determination.

3 . The Admission committee members which include the school president, a faculty member, two students elected by the student body, and the VP of Academic Enrollment & Student Services review the application in its entirety using the Applicant Evaluation as a guide to weigh the applicant's qualifications for acceptance (See Applicant Evaluation form in the Document Room). The committee makes the final decision on each applicant.

Starr King's admission policies and process meet the essential standards required for admission into post-baccalaureate level programs. As demonstrated in Standard 6.2.1, the admissions application process requires that we evaluate the applicant's capacity to meet the admissions criteria for each master's program. To summarize, we verify the educational background of each prospective student through the review of official transcripts, we require the applicant write several essays that address most elements of our admissions criteria, provide three letters of recommendation, and complete an admission interview. Finally, an admissions committee which includes, the President, one or two faculty members, two SKSM students and the V.P. of Academic Enrollment evaluates each applicant using the Admissions Applicant Evaluation as a guide to determine acceptance into the program. This process applies to all student applicants,

and because it is a standardized process, the criteria for acceptance is the same for all students. As well, the admissions committee, which represents a cross-section of our institution's members, carefully considers the viewpoint of all committee members when determining acceptance. The Admissions committee also serves to uphold the purpose of the institution when considering accepting a student into the school.

Starr King's current admissions process provides the means for assessing the quality of applicants to each degree program. Recently, the school created a new position, V.P. of Academic Enrollment & Student Services. The V.P.'s role is to provide comprehensive oversight for planning and implementation of goals, objectives and strategies related to admissions and student services. The new Admissions Applicant Evaluation is one of the new strategies we have implemented to assess and strengthen the overall quality of the incoming student population. Starr King has always utilized a comprehensive approach to student admissions. However, we believe the implementation of a more standardized evaluative component provides a clearer, more uniform assessment of our entering students, how to serve them, and what strategies can be used to strengthen our applicant pool. We write about our support strategies elsewhere in this self-study report. (See Standard 3 and Educational Standards) (See Appendix -- for Faculty Advising Handbook)

SKSM's purpose as a Unitarian Universalist and multi-religious seminary is to educate people for Unitarian Universalist ministry and progressive religious leadership which includes a core commitment and goal to educate to counter oppressions that are based on religion, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, or disabilities. Discussion of diversity efforts can be found in other sections of this self-study report. Our admissions efforts, by way of our institution's purpose, are grounded and inspired by that commitment. The following efforts reflect that commitment:

### **Outreach**

Outreach to those in historically marginalized communities, such as black colleges and organizations, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Graduate Theological Union's Welcome to New Students of Color, Green the Church), LGBTQIA community events, multi-religious organizations (Parliament of World Religions, membership and affiliations with the Graduate Theological Union, and its eight theological schools, and 11 affiliated centers which include the Center for Islamic Studies, The Mira and Ajay Shingal Center for Dharma Studies, Institute of Buddhist Studies). SKSM strives to invite students of all races, ethnicity, faith, sex, gender and or disability to join us. Our "marketing" efforts and language reflect this tenet.

### **Digital and Print Marketing**

Our commitment to diversity and countering oppressions is advertised on our admission brochures materials and our website. For example, on our website under the Prospective Student heading, we state "Because of our mission and identity as a Unitarian Universalist and multi-religious divinity school, we welcome students from a variety of religious backgrounds, callings and identities." As well, Our *Educating to Counter Oppressions* (ECO) affirmation published on our website under the heading Educational Philosophy, states, "In our work we strive to embody what we hope to see in the world—a just loving humanity and community in which people are free to be themselves fully and without fear, a community where no one is exiled, silenced or



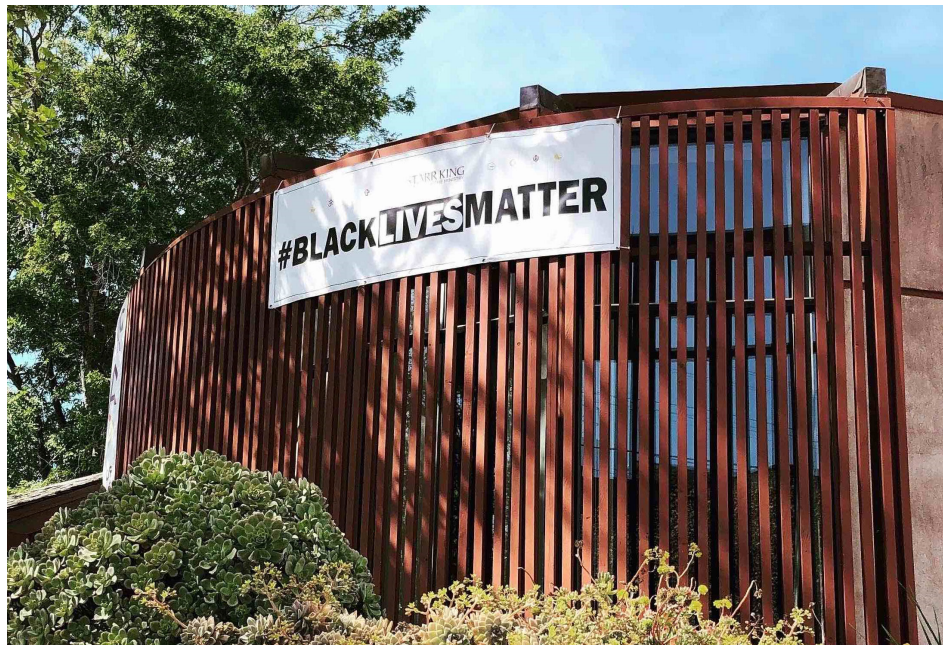
exploited because of gender, gender expression, race, color, ethnic or national origin, religion, sexual/affectional orientation, age, class, physical character or disability.”

### **Scholarships**

SKSM collaborates with the UUA to offer the UUA Presidents Scholarship on an annual basis. This scholarship is used as an incentive to recruit students of color and covers full tuition in the first year of study. Several additional scholarships specifically support minorities and women and may be utilized to encourage matriculation.

### **Campus/Facility**

- Wheel chair accessible
- Gender neutral bathrooms and a one-person restroom
- Black Lives Matter” banner on outside of building



### **Educational Programs**

- ECO Educating to Countering Oppressions: Required Course
- Master of Arts in Social Change: areas of specialization include: Anti-Oppression work, including racial, gender and GLBTQ justice, Economic Justice, Immigration issues, HIV prevention and care, Interfaith Chaplaincy through affiliation with The Chaplaincy Institute)
- Master of Divinity: Global, relational, and multi-theological approach.
- Low residency Master's Degree Programs: encouraging prospective students to apply from regions and countries outside of our local area.

SKSM attracts and accepts students into our programs from a broad variety of academic backgrounds, people with diverse professional/personal interests and life experiences. Our admissions requirements do not call for specific undergraduate coursework, but instead considers

the whole person. We often have students with PhDs who have completed careers and now want to “give back” to the community, want to experience a long-delayed spiritual call to seminary. Our admission process includes, academic studies, and personal, professional, and spiritual experience. The SKSM application process reflects this emphasis as well.

Our graduating class size has remained consistent over time, except for 2015, in which the issues surrounding the Presidential search (described elsewhere) resulted in a reduction in the number of students who were awarded degrees that year.

Degree	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
MDiv	14	7	14	12	18	13
MASC	2	0	1	4	3	4
MA	0	0	0	1	0	0
total	16	7	15	17	21	17

### 6.3 Student Services

The Student Services department of SKSM consists of the Vice President of Academic Enrollment and Student Services, the Dean of Students, and the Registrar. Policies stipulating students’ rights and responsibilities are published in the *Student Handbook*, which is subject to annual review and revision. Physical copies of the Handbook are provided to entering students, while the digital version is uploaded to the website. All matriculated students are informed when the revised Handbook is accessible to view and download.

Reliable and accessible services provided by SKSM include a student health insurance plan, financial aid support and guidance, and disability accommodations, which are enacted in coordination with GTU Student Services. The Student Aid Fund provides financial support for emergency situations and positive opportunities that students encounter external to the institution. Through the Personal Growth and Learning Grants, students apply for and receive awards to support extracurricular learning experiences and counseling/therapy sessions.

The school maintains permanent physical and digital files for all matriculated students, including coursework evaluations, threshold self-assessments, portfolio conference records, and signed institutional forms. The physical files are stored in locked, fireproof file cabinets in the Registrar’s office. The digital versions are uploaded to Populi. The Registrar holds primary responsibility for filing and maintaining these records in both formats. Inquiries and applications for admission are all conducted through Populi and automatically saved there.

Program requirements, tuition and fees, and academic policies are all clearly stated in the Student Handbook and on the school website. Student financial aid is distributed according to the *ATS Policy Guidelines*, with oversight provided by FA Solutions, our service vendor.

Our [Student Handbook](#) (see link or Appendix) clearly state policies regarding students’ rights and responsibilities, our “code of discipline,” especially in the Community Policies section. The

Handbook includes a specified process for addressing formal student complaints of both an academic and a personal character.

## 6.4 Student Borrowing

All students are required to undergo entrance counseling on loan debt and borrowing. The online Financial Aid Portal operated by our service vendor, FA Solutions, requires students to acknowledge loan conditions and available resources before accepting a loan. Students may lower the total award via the Portal. Students receive exit counseling upon withdrawal from the program or during their last semester of registration.

## 6.5 Placement

Starr King employs a variety of tools to assist students find relevant and meaningful employment upon their graduation. Academic advisors frequently play a crucial role through direct coaching in methods and opportunities pertaining to networking, searching for position announcements, and interviewing. Faculty also closely advise students who are applying for doctoral research. The Director of Contextual Education advises interested students regarding the requirements for becoming certified chaplains. Students in the MASC degree program are encouraged to develop their internship experiences in fields where they wish to fulfill their calling, while their MASC projects assist them in gaining additional clarity about the work they wish to do upon leaving the school. The school's social network for alumni, [Starr King Connect](http://starringconnect.com) (starringconnect.com), and the SKSM Grad Association both provide ongoing opportunities for networking and announcements of job opportunities.

SKSM works to ensure that students who are seeking employment as fellowshiped UU ministers are well prepared to meet the UUA Ministerial Fellowship Committee. Starting with SKSM's New Student Orientation, interested students are invited to meet with the UUA's Ministerial Credentialing Director and SKSM's Director of Partnerships and Emerging Programs to begin becoming informed about the process and stages of ministerial fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Post-graduate placement (surveyed 6 months after graduation)	Class of 2015	Class of 2016	Class of 2017	Class of 2018
Vocational placement	64%	67%	75%	43%
Further study (internship/residency)	18%	20%	13%	48%
<b>Vocational placement or internship/residency</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>91%</b>
Non-vocational placement	9%	13%	6%	0%
Seeking placement	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	0%	0%	0%	10%*
Unknown	0%	0%	6%	0%

\*one student was pregnant; one student was caring for her grandchildren

SKSM is blessed with faculty who have served, and who still serve, in a variety of leadership roles within the UUA and other UU organizations. Through their networks and their teaching, students are assisted in exploring a wide variety of ministries – parish ministries, chaplaincy (hospital, military, campus, hospice) social justice and entrepreneurial.

As the process of finding internships, initial employment, and ongoing success in UU ministry is supported by a strong network of collegial relationships, SKSM actively collaborates with the UU Ministers Association to help interested students participate in a UU Ministerial Formation Network (MFN) retreats and discernment groups. A MFN discernment group is offered at SKSM for high residency students. Low residency students are encouraged to participate in an on-line discernment group.

SKSM actively encourages UU students to attend meetings of UU organizations through which they can learn more about the larger landscape of UU ministry, and help students build a wider network of collegial relationships. Travel stipends through SKSM's Personal Growth and Learning fund help students attend the annual UUA General Assembly and UU Ministers Association Ministry Days. UU students of color are encouraged to attend the annual "Finding Our Way Home" retreat for UU religious professionals of color. Black UU students are encouraged to participate in convenings offered by Black Lives UU.

SKSM manages an email list serve "UU Formation" to provide UU students with additional information about employment, scholarship and other opportunities of special interest.

SKSM's Director of Partnerships and Emerging Programs has served in UU ministry for 33 years and is SKSM's primary point of contact with the UUA Ministerial Credentialing Office and other UU institutions. She is working to develop more internship sites in UU congregations and serves as an additional source of support and guidance for UU students as they navigate the fellowshiping process and transition from seminarian to employment.

Historically, the tracking of the placement of graduates was done by the dean of students, but when this position was temporarily cut it lost an official functional "home" at SKSM. It has been the Assessment Coordinator's and the Dean of Faculty's responsibility. This year, it was decided that this function will live in the Advancement department, since that area encompasses alumni relations. Jessica Neno Cloud will set up a system of surveys that will begin before students graduate, tracking their plans and contact information as known a few weeks before the graduation ceremony, then surveys will continue (through email and perhaps phone) over the next few months to several years. A more specific schedule and survey content (modeled on examples provided by ATS) will be drawn up in consultation with faculty in the coming months. Some data will land in Raiser's Edge and other data points will be stored in spreadsheets for more detailed analytical purposes.

It is recommended that:

- student services personnel develop a protocol for evaluation because there is none currently.
- SKSM implement an overall evaluation of student services

## Standard 7. Authority and Governance

### 7.1 Authority

Starr King School for the Ministry derives its authority to establish educational programs; hold, maintain, and dispose of property for the benefit of the seminary; and confer certificates, diplomas, or degrees from its Articles of Incorporation, originally filed with the Secretary of the State of California on May 12, 1906 and amended May 23, 1991. The Articles of Incorporation vest authority to manage the assets of Starr King and ensure Starr King's institutional integrity and quality in the Board of Trustees ("Board"), the constitution of which is further described in Section 7.3 below. The authority delegated to the Board, faculty and administration to fulfill their responsibilities is further defined in the *Bylaws of Starr King School for the Ministry*. The Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws are located in the Appendix.

The Board oversees Starr King's mission, values, vision and strategic priorities. While the Board has ultimate authority and responsibility for Starr King, it delegates authority over administration of the school to the President and the Executive Committee and authority over curriculum development to the Faculty. Starr King's Bylaws as amended set forth limitations on the authority of the President, Executive Committee, and Faculty. Additional limitations and delegation policies are set forth in the Faculty Handbook, which is incorporated by reference in Starr King's Bylaws.

Starr King is a Unitarian Universalist-identified seminary as per its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. The Unitarian Universalist Association is the denomination's national organization, but it does not exercise authority over Starr King or the other UU-identified seminary, Meadville-Lombard Theological School. Accordingly, Starr King exercises its authority independently of the UUA. However, Starr King does have a formal relationship with the UUA's Panel on Theological Education (*UUA Panel*), which financially supports Starr King through a fund it administers. Pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding with the UUA Panel, Starr King prepares regular reports for the UUA Panel and the President meets with the UUA Panel twice yearly, during October and April.

Starr King is also a member school of the Graduate Theological Union and operates under a Common Agreement, which sets forth the rights, responsibilities, and powers of the respective component member schools. The current Common Agreement was adopted by the GTU and its member schools in 2001. The SKSM Board of Trustees voted to approve the most recent revision of the Common Agreement in April 2019 (see Appendix). Pursuant to the Common Agreement, Starr King maintains full authority over its own educational programs and shares responsibility for consortial operations.

Starr King's President serves on the GTU Board of Trustees, the Consortial Council, and the Library Committee. The Dean of Faculty serves on the GTU Council of Deans. Starr King faculty members serve as Core Doctoral Faculty and Consortial Faculty as well as participate in the work of the GTU's academic departments, the GTU Library Committee, and other academic-leadership and advisory bodies.



## 7.2 Governance

Starr King uses a shared governance model, which give voice to the various constituencies of the school. Starr King's Bylaws, Faculty Handbook, and Student Body Bylaws clearly outline the authority and responsibilities of the Board, administration, faculty, and students. While the Board is ultimately responsible for the creation, review, approval, implementation, and evaluation of all policies, the President may draft and recommend for approval of the Board those policies involving the administration and operation of the school. The Dean of Faculty coordinates the development and implementation of academic policies and practices in collaboration with the faculty as a whole. The student body elects its own leadership, which facilitates feedback between the administration and students and represents the latter on the Board of Trustees and various committees.

The school's ECO commitment facilitates a culture of empowerment in which the various constituencies are welcomed into processes of deliberation and decision-making. Students and alumni join trustees, faculty, and staff in serving on *ad hoc* bodies such as personnel search committees and recent efforts like the Housing Task Force and Community Life Task Force. Ever attentive to the need to stay on the leading edge of progressive theological education, Starr King encourages creative input from all corners.

## 7.3 Roles of Various Parties

### 7.3.1 Governing Board

#### **Mission of the school and overall integrity**

The *Board of Trustees* (Board) is the governing body of SKSM. It oversees the school's fulfillment of its mission and maintains its integrity as an independent institution of higher learning.



**The Board at its April 2019 meeting in Berkeley. (One Board member attended by Zoom.)**

**Fiduciary responsibility**

The Board holds chief fiduciary responsibility for the school. It maintains an active Finance Committee that coordinates with school staff to assess the school's financial health. The committee performs detailed budgetary reviews on an annual basis. At each biannual meeting, the entire Board receives reports from the Vice President of Finance and Administration and the Vice President of Advancement on the status of revenues, operating expenses, and giving. The Board maintains a contract with the investment analysis firm Boston Common Asset Management, which provides a report at every fall meeting. The Board also requires the performance of professional yearly audits.

**Accountability for SKSM's adherence to legal and ATS requirements**

The Board receives reports from staff on the school's implementation of ATS requirements and reviews draft versions of the school's accreditation self-study reports. Adherence to legal requirements is maintained with the support of professional counsel. The Board receives an ATS-stipulated annual report on academic program effectiveness as part of the packet of materials prepared in advance of the spring meeting.

**Board membership**

The Board recruits members who exhibit a variety of qualifications in the areas of business and financial acumen, theological scholarship, ministerial leadership, and social justice activism. Special attention is given to identifying persons who have a high profile within Unitarian Universalism, as these build and sustain goodwill within the school's primary external constituency. The preferred skill set for new trustees will vary from year to year as the Board selects persons who best support the school's addressing of current needs. The practice of actively orienting new members to Board practices and procedures is being renewed after a lapse in recent years. A trustee working group is currently developing a new member orientation packet. The packet will set forth qualifications and expectations for trustees, outline the role of the Board, describe the schedule of meetings and committee work, and define the culture of the Board as an inclusive and hard-working group that focuses on its own role in governance of the school and respects the responsibilities of the president and other leaders.

The Board is diverse in terms of race and gender. Nine members are women. Five trustees are persons of color. All members are expected to contribute financially to the school; the majority are currently doing so and the importance of giving is being re-emphasized to achieve a 100% participation rate.

**Contractual budgetary powers**

As stated in the *Bylaws*, the Board is responsible for selecting the President, approving faculty appointments, conferring degrees, approving budgets, managing institutional investments, and the sale of real or personal property. Responsibility for school operations is delegated to the President.

**Ongoing institutional planning and evaluation**

The Board has set the standard that a strategic plan or comprehensive institutional review should occur at a minimum of every five years. The previous strategic plan was meant to be renewed /



revised in 2014. The current strategic plan is in process, as stated above with reference to Institutional Standard 1.2.

### **Adequate structures for implementing policy**

The Bylaws stipulate several standing committees that review and implement school policy. These bodies are the Executive, Admissions and Scholarship, Trustee Development, Finance, Advancement, and Academic Affairs committees. Advisory and *ad hoc* committees are formed as needed. There was a lapse in committee functioning following the disruptions that occurred during and after the selection of the current President. The Board has renewed its commitment to the committee structure and is at work rebuilding and operationalizing those that had become inactive.

### **Relationships with constituencies**

The Board actively supports the school's primary relationships within Unitarian Universalism. The UUA, its congregations, and members, constitute the largest source of donors, students, and supporters of Starr King. The Board has expended considerable effort to repair strong connections across the denomination after the tumultuous events of 2014. That crisis was so damaging to the reputation of the school that it became difficult to fill Board positions, resulting in the low roster of trustees compared to the standard set by the bylaws. The Board has made tremendous headway in restoring SKSM's good name throughout the UU community.

### **Collective authority**

No trustee acts unilaterally to direct institutional resources or commit the Board to any course of action.

### **Conflict of interest policy**

The Board follows the general Conflict of Interest Policy of Starr King School for the Ministry, which applies to "the School's directors, officers and employees." The policy requires all such persons to conduct their duties objectively without regard to personal or financial interest. Trustees neither receive material compensation from the school nor conduct any business relationships with it.

### **Effective structure; executive committee**

The school bylaws state that the Board of Trustees should number twenty members. In practice, the Board has found it difficult to fill all positions for the past several years, due to the circumstances noted above. The current number of members is thirteen: eight elected by the Board itself as well as all five *ex-officio* members stipulated in the Bylaws. Trustees acknowledge that the Board should be larger in order to better represent the school's constituencies, include adequate involvement of persons with varied skill sets, and increase the Board's ability to conduct effective oversight and creative planning.

The Board has made recent strategic additions to its membership to address known needs. The Board is also currently re-evaluating its optimal size and will make necessary changes to the bylaws to reflect the outcome of this conversation. During the November 2018 meeting, the Board prioritized reactivating its Trustee Development Committee for more effective and systematic recruitment of trustees.

The Board holds its major biannual meetings each November and April in Berkeley. The April meeting focuses on a detailed review of the proposed budget. Additional regular meetings are conducted via conference call or video conferencing in January and May/June. The upcoming year's budget is approved in the May/June meeting. The Board Chair calls special meetings as needed to discuss urgent and complex matters. The Executive Committee meets via videoconferencing once per month and has delegated powers to act on behalf of the whole Board between its standing meetings.

### **Self-evaluation**

Board members have attended webinars hosted by the In Trust Center for Theological Schools and each trustee has access to the In Trust Center magazine and website. A session focused on the accreditation self-study in November 2018 indicated that the Board has allowed regular evaluation of collective and individual effectiveness to lapse in recent years. In April 2019, the Board created a three-person trustee group to draft a Board performance review process by October 1, utilizing ATS standards, In Trust Center resources such as the Wise Stewards Guide, and other potential sources for implementation in the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

Beginning in the summer of 2018, the Board has also made a commitment to hold regular trainings in Starr King's ECO philosophy during its biannual meetings to ensure that trustees will lead the school in accordance with its stated principles. Trainings have been led both by external consultants and SKSM faculty with a depth of ECO experience. During the April 2019 meeting, the ECO training session was conjoined with the reports shared by the Board's three working groups so that discussions about charting a sustainable course for the school's future would be grounded in the ECO commitment.

### **Evaluating overall institutional governance**

The Board evaluates overall institutional governance through a biennial assessment of the President as chief executive. As stated in Standard 1, this regular assessment is being revived after a period of inactivity. A Board working group is currently assembling a proposed process to be approved at the November 2019 meeting. Additionally, the Board receives reports from department heads at its November and April meetings, requiring administrators to identify developments and evaluate functioning in their areas of the school. Further overall evaluation of governance practices normally occurs during the strategic planning process, but this has not been the case in the recent planning cycle.

## **7.3.2 Administration**

### **Chief administrative leadership**

The President serves as the chief executive officer of the school. The President holds the responsibility to fulfill the mission of the school, implementing systems and policies under the authorization of the Board and in collaboration with faculty, staff, and the student body. The President is aided by the Executive Team in effective achievement of Starr King's purposes and policies. The Executive Team consists of the school's principal administrative officers who oversee institutional departments and academic programs.

### **Implementing school's values in resource and personnel management**

The school is ever attentive to embodying Unitarian Universalist values, multireligious expressions, and counter-oppressive commitments in its management of resources and personnel. The impact on the school's operations varies from simple gestures to systematic reviews and revisions. When hiring contracted services for school events, for example, SKSM prioritizes business that pay living wages to their workers and/or whose owners and operators inhabit historically-marginalized identities. Catered food will significantly or entirely consist of organic, sustainably-raised and harvested products.

Internal conversations in the past year have made clear how often it is assumed that personnel understand and assent to the school's ECO commitment. Starr King has brought in many new faculty and staff in the last five years who were not associated with the school when the ECO vision was formed. While personnel are not in any way actively opposed to ECO, several have expressed their confusion about the school's expectations for ECO-centered work. Conversations are currently underway as to the appropriate tools and processes for onboarding new staff and faculty to the school's ECO approach; not as an ideology, but as a way of imagining our common life and work for the betterment of all.

A perennial challenge for living our values consists of hiring adequate staff and faculty to fulfill the mission of SKSM and, furthermore, providing fair and just compensation for their work. The school is beset by two compounding financial difficulties; namely, revenue streams that are insufficient to increase wages and salaries, as well as the exorbitant cost of living that characterizes the San Francisco Bay Area. Starr King's limitations in this area are quite naturally shared by the sister schools of the Graduate Theological Union. Our staff and faculty perform their duties with a spirit of dedication to and love for the school, yet the problem of appropriate compensation is not consequently ignored by the administration. As Starr King implements efforts to achieve financial health and stability, our goal is to reach a future in which our employees can truly thrive in a context of sustainable responsibilities and incomes.

### **Staff reflects constituencies, diversity**

The administrative staff of Starr King reflects the school's affiliation with Unitarian Universalism, its multi-religious orientation, and its commitment to counter oppressions against historically marginalized identities. The diversity of both faculty and staff is detailed below in section 8.1. Starr King currently employs fifteen persons in staff roles. Eight of these staff have multiple roles in the school, whether combined staff-faculty or staff-staff positions (see Standard 1).. While Starr King benefits from talented and dedicated personnel who fulfill their duties with tremendous effort, it is a commonly-felt burden that the work to be done is always in excess of available time and resources.

### **Responsibilities and structures of accountability defined in appropriate documents**

Job descriptions for each position are usually held in the office of the Vice President of Finance and Administration. Structures of accountability are indicated in the Employee Handbook and the SKSM Organizational Chart. While a revised organizational chart was drafted in Spring 2019, updated job descriptions for all positions still need to be drafted and reviewed.

### 7.3.3 Faculty

The faculty participate robustly in school leadership and in discernment and decision-making processes. The bylaws delegate to the faculty the general responsibility for the educational life of the school. Among other functions, this entails recommending candidates for degree conferral, approving degree program transfers and withdrawals, and developing academic policies and processes. The regular faculty meeting and an additional faculty study time are both held once per month. Faculty deliberations are conducted and decisions approved in these meetings.

Faculty formally serve in a variety of leadership and oversight roles. The bylaws require one faculty trustee, who is typically the Dean of Faculty. Faculty are appointed to serve on the Admissions and Scholarship Committee of the Board, the Curriculum Committee of the administration, and the GTU Library Committee. Beyond these appointed roles, the Board and administration frequently solicit faculty input regarding the school's effectiveness in fulfilling its mission and its commitments to counter-oppressive, multi-religious education.

### 7.3.4 Students

The school bylaws guarantee student representation in formal governance structures, requiring two student *ex-officio* trustees and two members of the Admissions and Scholarship Committee. Additionally, two students sit on the Curriculum Committee. Student trustees serve two-year terms and the committee members serve for one year. All student representatives are nominated by their peers. They are elevated to their positions in elections conducted by the Student Body leadership during the Spring term.

It is recommended that

- the Board renew the practice of having members annually sign the Disclosure Statement, identifying any actual or potential conflicts of interest.
- the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees develop a plan for self-evaluation to be implemented by the coming fiscal year. (This is in process.)
- while a revised organizational chart was drafted in Spring 2019, updated job descriptions for all positions still need to be drafted and reviewed.

## **Standard 8. Institutional Resources**

### **8.1 Personnel**

Reflecting our commitment to a counter-oppressive and multireligious way of life, Starr King personnel represent broad human diversity in terms of race, gender, national origin, socioeconomic status, and religious or spiritual practice. There are currently 33 staff, faculty, and adjunct faculty. Twenty-three are female. Seven are people of color. Personnel span the gender and sexual identity/orientation spectrum: queer, gay and lesbian, transgender, cisgender heterosexual, etc. With low-resident faculty and staff in Ohio, Mississippi, New York, and Argentina, Starr King unites a broad swath of perspectives and contextual experience. Staff and faculty religious affiliations include Unitarian Universalism, Islam, African indigenous religious traditions, various Christian communions, Judaism, and multireligious spiritual orientations.

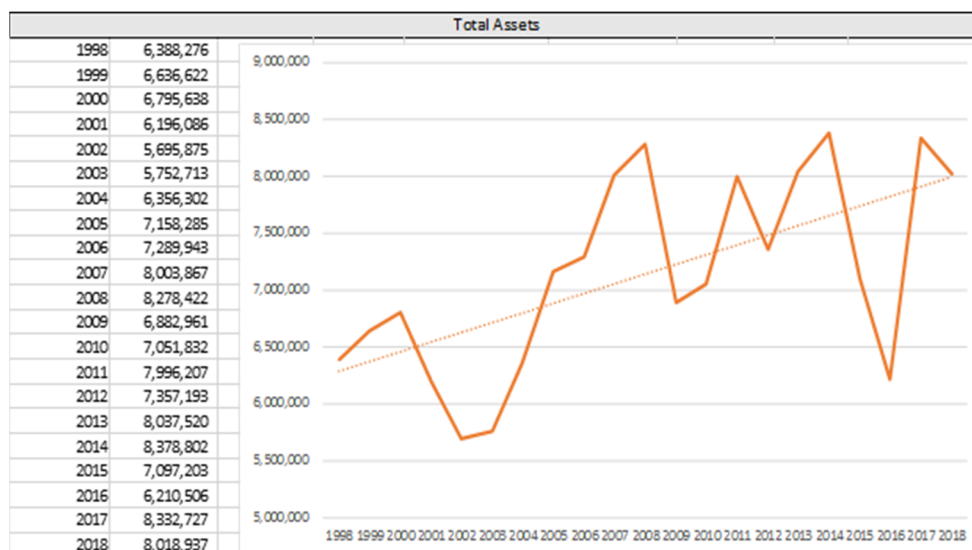
Starr King lists its personnel policies and procedures in the Employee Handbook and Faculty Handbook (see Appendices). These include policies and practices to ensure fair treatment and prevent, or quickly address, acts of discrimination and sexual harassment. The SKSM Employee Handbook details policies regarding confidentiality, conflicts of interest, appropriate conduct with students, discipline, and termination. The Faculty Handbook includes statements and policies regarding the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), legal non-discrimination requirements, and academic integrity. SKSM has a stated grievance procedure, but this is not included in the current version of either handbook. Most sections of the Faculty Handbook are updated annually (excluding major board level policy changes), but the Employee Handbook has not been updated since November 2014.

SKSM adheres to California law requiring two hours of interactive sexual harassment prevention training for all employees, to occur upon hiring and at two-year intervals. SKSM exceeds the legal requirement by having all faculty and staff complete *supervisory-level* training because every employee has some level of oversight for students' progress through the academic program, and thus each bears a weighted responsibility to intervene in situations of sexual harassment and other misconduct. In 2017, SKSM contracted with EverFi, an online education resources company, to provide updated training for faculty, staff, and students. This training course was implemented early in the 2018-2019 academic year.

It is the normal practice of Starr King to provide clear and up-to-date job descriptions for all at-will employee positions and post these with each hiring announcement. Recent and high rates of staff turnover have resulted in some slippage of this practice, and several current positions lack clear descriptions.

### **8.2 Financial Resources**

Starr King School continues to face challenges with the balancing of its commitment to its mission while confronted with an insufficient revenue stream. This dichotomy continues to challenge the President and the Board of Trustees. However, it creates an opportunity to rethink the model under which SKSM will continue to carry out its mission in a fiscally sound manner.



**...on the whole, despite the market volatility, the net assets of the school have continued on a positive trend**

The good news is that on the whole, despite the market volatility, the net assets of the school have continued on a positive trend. On an operational level, SKSM's ability to manage its financial resources effectively has been hampered by shifts in accounting services that occurred in the period of 2017-2018. Under the old "shared services" model at the GTU, many administrative tasks were centralized at the consortial level. The shared services paradigm was extensively deconstructed on June 30, 2017 and the GTU ceased oversight of certain financial operations such as payroll, financial aid, transcripts, billing, collections and payment services among others. The GTU did not provide a guided transition but instead merely transferred data to member schools' accounting firms. Starr King established payroll services with Paychex and payment services with Bill.com. The school also contracted with Chaney & Associates for accounting purposes beginning on July 1, 2017 but terminated the relationship on January 11, 2018, due to poor service. Starr King then contracted with Armanino LLP beginning January 1, 2018. Chaney & Associates' services were unsatisfactory insofar as much of the information normally associated with a non-profit school was not timely or accurately provided. Armanino is and continues to be a highly professional accounting firm. Despite the challenges created by the failures of Chaney & Associates, Starr King has successfully completed its annual audit; and been issued a clean opinion.

### **Financial Condition of the School**

Starr King has relied heavily upon endowments to meet or approach fiscal equilibrium. This is a dramatic inversion of the financial picture presented in the 2009 self-study report. At that time, Starr King was able to declare that, in the fiscal decade 1999-2008, operating revenues exceeded operating expenses in all but three years. However, along with many other entities, the advent of the Great Recession took a toll on fiscal state of the school. As indicated in this table of [operating revenues and operating expenses](#), Starr King has struggled financially, ending each fiscal year with a deficit for all but three – 2013, 2016 and 2017 occasions.

The budget was balanced in FY 2015-2016 by releasing approximately \$760,000 from endowed funds. The FY 2017-2018 witnessed a deficit of approximately \$369,442 which included an approximate \$1,227,000 release from endowed funds. Ongoing endowment draws greatly exceed the Board's recommended maximum of 5% annually. As of the year ended June 30, 2018, the Fair Market Value of the endowments were still in excess of the original contribution, or in words, the endowments were still above water.

One critical reason for recurrent deficits has been a decline in donor support, which, as described below, has since been reversed. This decline may be partly attributed to the absence of trained and experienced advancement personnel. Another significant factor was the public controversy that erupted around the most recent presidential search. Negative press and perceptions of school leadership, particularly within the Unitarian Universalist Association, dampened support for Starr King. Additionally, the administration, with the permission of the Board of Trustees, made a deliberate decision to fill staff and faculty gaps that were inhibiting the school's mission. The administration also contracted with communications consultants to develop a more effective approach to public promotion of Starr King. The result was a sharper increase in the deficit, which was intended as a short-term measure to bolster the school's ability to fulfill its mission and generate more funds. The school has consequently benefited from an increase in enrollment. For example, the average number of enrolled degree-program students in a given semester for the period of 2013-2016 was 73.8, but for the period of 2016-2019 it was 92.4.

The school's overall expenses in FY 2017-2018 increased in the areas of Instruction, which followed the authorization of the board to devote more resources into improving the education capabilities of the school after the cuts of a few years before. In addition, an increased investment was made in fund raising, adding technical capabilities and more human resources to further the school's fund-raising capabilities. The separation from the GTU resulted in incurring some significant one-time charges, along with an increase in professional services in the areas of accounting support and in informational technology area, both of which Starr King has needed to outsource as an economic alternative to the more expensive option of bringing those services in house.

The two principal sources of income for SKSM are tuition and donations. Tuition is a steady and gradually increasing source as the school adjusts its per-credit tuition yearly. Tuition supplies approximately 44% of the school's revenue needs in the range of \$1.4m. While donations have increased significantly; they are still well short of bridging the funding gap between tuition revenues and the expenditures necessary to carry on the mission of the school. Although work is continuing to decrease the expenses of operation, until the contributions materially increase, **Endowments will continue to primarily support scholarships but also fill in the gap between expenses and revenue.** Distributable endowments have been all but drained as the school has approached the legal limits for withdrawals. Much effort will need to be devoted to replenishing these funds in the coming years.

The Vice President of Finance and Administration is aggressively collaborating with the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees to develop a plan to achieve financial stability. This plan was submitted to the full Board at its April 2019 meeting.



### **Accounting, Audit, Budget and Control**

SKSM employs accounting and reporting procedures that are standard for nonprofit organizations in the United States. The school receives regular external audits, with the two most recent taking place in the fall of 2016 and the fall and winter of 2018-19. Audits are discussed in the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees and shared with the whole body to contribute to financial deliberations. Auditors are invited to attend the Board meetings at which reports are discussed and answer questions.

During the current fiscal year (2018-2019), the new Vice President of Finance and Administration has crafted a new budget development protocol to ensure that budget planning is collaborative, responsive to real departmental needs, and supportive of the school's mission. This new protocol will be a key component for the school to achieve financial stabilization. The Vice President has also created an initial five-year projection of revenues and expenditures. It is recommended that the school financial officers and the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees enhance this initial projection by developing a five-year financial plan that accounts for all expected revenues, expenditures, and capital projects.

At the end of the day, there will always be a tension between spending an optimal amount to carry on the mission of the School, and the reality of having inadequate funding. Starr King is not alone in facing this dilemma. The challenge is to develop a sustainable plan to bridge the contribution gap to cover the funding deficit between the tuition revenues and the operational expenditures; sufficient to not only carry on the mission of the School, but to replenish the endowments which must necessarily support the School while the plan is being fully implemented and the revenue stream from contributions makes its full impact on the operations of the School. Starr King has some unique challenges in raising money, but it also has some unique advantages as well. The challenge is to monetize those advantages in a sustainable manner, within a time frame that takes into account the realistic financial and political environment the School must function within.

### **8.2.3 - Business Management**

The school currently employs qualified and experienced personnel to handle business affairs: the Vice President of Finance and Administration, the Student Accounts Manager, the Vice President of Advancement, the Annual Giving Coordinator, and the Advancement Assistant. The School now has a professional financial and fund-raising team in place. The financial team will prudently conserve the School's resources while looking for ways to improve School's operational efficiencies. It will be working with the Board and Finance Committee to develop and implement a long-term plan to identify the necessary expenditures to accomplishing the mission of the School in a manner that takes into account the financial realities the School is operating within.

### **8.2.4 Institutional Development and Advancement**

The institutional advancement program supports the mission of Starr King by raising funds to support operating expenses, student scholarships and auxiliary aid, and designated endowments. The program cultivates donors for capital campaigns, planned giving, and regular, recurrent

contributions. The latter giving program is known as Starr King Sustainers, which recruits contributors who give on a monthly basis. The advancement program is administered by the Vice President of Advancement. The current officeholder was hired in 2015 after a seven-year gap in which interim advancement coordinators managed the program with less resources and professional training. In 2017, two part-time assistants were hired to support the chief administrator: an Annual Giving Coordinator, who produces all fundraising mailers and email/social media campaigns, and Advancement Assistant, who manages the Raiser's Edge database and processes all gift records and acknowledgments. One program objective is to elevate the Advancement Assistant to more fully support strategic use of the database and some data integrity and clean-up issues. The Annual Giving Coordinator also organizes our annual eight-week phonathon program, which employs students to call supporters, increasing our funds raised and growing our monthly Sustainers program.

Advancement functions are also supported by volunteer roles, including our Board of Trustees and the Advancement Committee of the Board of Trustees. The SKSM Graduate Association and its slate of officers also assist with advancement, alumni relations and fundraising. We have not had a capital campaign in recent years partially because we have been building our base of volunteer support, which will be necessary to complete a campaign successfully.

As a Certified Fundraising Executive and a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, the VP of Advancement abides by the Donor Bill of Rights and takes donor intention and confidentiality seriously. One of the first things she noted upon starting employment with Starr King was that the school had difficulty in consistently documenting donor intentions for designated gifts. She has implemented a process to secure fund agreements for all new funds created, documenting things like donor representatives, alternate donor representatives and scholarship criteria. She has also created a gift acceptance policy and a named fund creation policy both of which have been endorsed by a vote of the SKSM Board of Trustees. These new policies protect donors and the school's mission. The Advancement program is currently shaped by two major goals: 1) to increase annual operating revenue, and 2) to grow the Starr King Sustainers program in both [total revenue and number of donors](#).

Regarding support for general expenses, the school continues to increase annual operating revenue (\$575,555 last year versus \$461,148 in FY17). In addition to meeting a goal of \$525,000 for the operating fund in FY18, we also increased our total number of donors and gifts, broadening our base of supporters. From a low point around FY 2014/2015, the school is progressing toward the level of fundraising performance that the school experienced during the tenure of the previous Vice President for Advancement. FY17 was a highly productive year for SKSM in fundraising. The Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in summer 2017 was a huge success and added many new donors to our rosters, a significant percentage being monthly or multi-year donors. In addition to meeting the operating fund goal, the school added \$2 million to the endowment thanks to the generosity of a single donor who funded a scholarship endowment. Growth in the Starr King Sustainers program will contribute to the overall sustainability of fundraising for operating dollars over time, allowing a small staff to do more with less, because we don't have to "go back to the well" every year to renew donors.

SKSM has made significant progress towards growing the number of [multi-year pledges and monthly gifts](#). The revenue from the Sustainers program now represents over \$52,400 in annual support, nearly all of that supporting the operating fund. This compares favorably to the value of monthly donors at the beginning of FY16, which was only \$11,900 annually. Much of this progress can be attributed to two things: 1) our phonathon program which calls graduates and lapsed supporters for 8 weeks in the spring and 2) a generous match offered by our two of our donors.

### **Evaluation and Recommendations**

Despite significant strides in a short period of time, reaching our goals for our operating fund is still a struggle and takes up the vast majority of advancement staff time. We are currently recalibrating the advancement program to shift the focus to major donor cultivation and securing five and six-figure gifts. We also need to improve some processes around scholarships and fund management and data enrichment/clean-up in our database.

Advancement efforts are evaluated monthly at our “numbers” meeting of ARC (Advancement, Recruitment, and Communications team weekly meeting), allowing us to make quick strategic changes. The Advancement Committee of the Board of Trustees also reviews results quarterly and the entire Board evaluates efforts semi-annually at their in-person meetings in April and November. To further elucidate how the program has improved in the last three years and what we are currently doing to make the program increasingly stable and efficient, we have included several hyperlinked reports:

- [Sketch of Current Advancement Activities](#)
- [SKSM Research and Data Integrity Program Proposal 08.05.15](#)
- [SKSM Recurring Gift Program Proposal 07.29.15](#)
- [SKSM Advancement Strategic Plan FY16 and Beyond](#)

### **8.3 Physical Resources**

SKSM continues to maintain its own property at 2441 Le Conte Avenue in Berkeley. No significant alterations to the structure have occurred since the 1998 renovation, but various improvements have been implemented in recent years. An audiovisual equipment upgrade was made to the Fireside Room in 2017, consisting of a large-screen television, an improved microphone, and two webcams. Updated gender-neutral bathroom signage was adopted in 2018. At this time, there are no significant, identifiable deferred-maintenance issues. However, SKSM also lacks a formal maintenance plan with a forecasted schedule of actions.

SKSM contracted with Hixon & Associates Project Management to conduct a facilities condition assessment of the property in the fall of 2014. The report listed known or suspected deficiencies in the following set of categories: a) leaks and waterproofing, b) mechanical and electrical building systems, c) permits and seismic bracing, d) paths of egress, and e) handicap accessibility. Several actions were taken to address noted deficiencies. The roof was replaced with sprayed polyurethane foam in the fall of 2017, eliminating leaks. SKSM replaced the furnace in March 2015 and installed low-flow plumbing upgrades in May 2015. Two current questions derived from the facilities assessment pertain to the earthquake resistance of the

building. The original portion of the facility has been seismically braced, but it is unknown whether the retrofit meets current codes or recommendations.

The environment is safe, free of known hazards, and accessible. SKSM added an electronic lock system to its major entrances and installed security cameras and security lighting in early 2017. All faculty, staff, and students are issued electronic key fobs, and students are required to return these upon graduation. Persons with physical disabilities can access the building via exterior ramps on both levels. Internally, the two stories are connected by a single, four-foot wide staircase. The SKSM campus enjoys a lovely front patio and rear courtyard, both of which are landscaped with natural vegetation to serve as an oasis of green. The front of the building is xeriscaped with native, drought-resistant plants.

Our building is small and space is at a premium, leading to some constraints on school business. Several faculty share offices, but additional private space is offered to advisors to meet with students. These constraints are somewhat offset by the fact that several faculty, and more than half of the student population, are not resident in the Berkeley area. Many advisory sessions and other academic discussions take place via the Zoom videoconferencing platform. Maintaining privacy for confidential conversations within the building is a concern, as the walls between rooms are thin and it is fairly easy to overhear conversations. During the summer and early autumn, the upper floor of the building can at times become oppressively hot. These temperature spikes may hamper the progress of classes, particularly our August intensives, as well as requiring staff and faculty to leave their offices before the end of the business day. The installation of a central air conditioning system is prohibitively expensive.

#### **8.4 Information Technology Resources**

As the consortial system of GTU shared services started to unravel in 2016, SKSM began searching for an alternative IT support provider and in the fall of 2017, contracted with a local firm, Endsight (<https://www.endsight.net/>), to provide these services. Endsight technicians are reachable by email and phone during normal business hours and are very responsive. Starr King maintains broadband Internet service provided by AT&T. Five routers installed throughout the building provide comprehensive wireless coverage. In June 2018, SKSM transferred its shared computer drives and productivity and communications applications to Microsoft Office 365. The adoption of cloud-based Office 365 has considerably improved the ease by which faculty and staff may send and receive emails, read and edit documents, and review calendars from any location. New office phones with Internet connectivity and an online services platform operated by PanTerra were installed in July 2018. Starr King has utilized several telecommunication software platforms. SKSM began utilizing Zoom in the 2017-2018 academic year.

Due to the school's multi-locational status, with faculty, staff, and students in various regions of the country and world, it is imperative for Starr King to deploy adequate equipment and software for telecommunications. The three common areas used for classrooms, events, and meetings are equipped with flat-screen monitors, web cameras, microphones, and computers linked to the Internet. The Fireside Room received a major upgrade in 2017, featuring the installation of a new seventy-inch screen, a voice-tracking array microphone, and a second webcam mounted in the rafters. The webcams in the Round Chapel and Reading Room, however, provide comparatively

poor video resolution and are likely outdated. One considerable improvement for the Fireside Room would be the installation of a high-quality, motorized, remote-control camera.

### **Institutional data and IT**

With the deconstruction of GTU shared services, member schools needed to institute their own information technology (IT) platforms for registration, data collection and analysis, and other tasks. The previous online GTU platform, Colleague/WebAdvisor, was phased out during the first half of 2018. Starr King contracted Populi (<https://populi.co>) to serve as the school's online institutional management system. Staff and faculty gained access to Populi on January 1, 2018, and data transfers from Colleague to the new system began. Students gained access to Populi on March 7. Populi now serves as an integrated portal for admissions, registration, transcript generation, tuition payments and financial aid with robust reporting features which enhance the school's ability to track student demographics, enrollment, and financial balances.

The Advancement Team utilizes the Blackbaud database Raiser's Edge, which is a top-of-the-line Constituent Relationship Management database tool. Although the school has not had the staff resources to maximize the full potential of the database as yet, staff has been consistently improving our usage of this important software and improving our data integrity along the way.

## **8.5 Institutional Environment**

The institutional environment of Starr King centers on a strong spirit of camaraderie and collaboration as faculty and staff work together to fulfill the school's distinctive mission amidst limited physical and financial capacities. Formal opportunities to assess needs, receive feedback, and develop creative responses to changing conditions are fostered via regular meetings of staff, faculty, and administrative teams. Staff and faculty stress the importance of self-care with one another lest "burnout" become central in a setting with limited human resources.

The multi-locational character of the staff and faculty poses critical challenges to these efforts. Informal support is naturally more prevalent among employees who live in the Bay Area and utilize office space in the building. Low residency staff and faculty have at times reported insufficient and/or tardy communications, as well as difficulties in identifying the best means to enable their collaboration, as compared to those in high residency. Starr King must continually assess how to build a highly functional system of resource management that is no longer limited by the physical dimensions of the campus.

SKSM's highly collaborative system of leadership and management remains effective due to its size. While each role possesses defined areas of responsibility, staff frequently aid their peers with complex and/or urgent projects that cannot be readily handled by a given individual or office. School leadership empowers and trusts staff, both expecting responses to institutional needs and welcoming suggestions for structural change. The success and challenges of this system are well illustrated by the circumstances of the past academic year. After the sudden death of a key team member, several staff adopted her assigned tasks. While lacking some of her level of knowledge and skill, her peers ensured a vital continuity of responsibilities. It was some time later that school leadership formally re-assigned the deceased staff member's functions, following key input from the remaining staff.

Due to the close-knit working environment, conflict management is most frequently addressed in direct and informal communication. However, the refinement of the formal complaint procedure and the revision of the Organizational Chart will provide more robust mechanisms to address serious concerns in a responsible and timely manner.

## **8.6 Cooperative Use of Resources**

As detailed in the section below, Starr King's primary relationships for sharing resources occur within the consortial framework of the GTU. Additionally, the school collaborates with other organizations and institutions as needed to fulfill its objectives. Because Starr King's own property cannot host large events, the school rents space at other facilities. Commencement exercises are held each May in one of four area UU churches. The annual Symposium has been conducted at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland since its inauguration in 2012.

## **8.7 Clusters**

SKSM has been a member school of the Graduate Theological Union since 1964. The GTU is in itself a degree-granting institution accredited by ATS and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), offering doctorate and master's degrees. The benefits of GTU membership include the diverse setting that allows for creative interaction, the extensive library holdings, and the ability of SKSM students to cross-register at member schools, institutes, and affiliates, thus effectively and significantly expanding the range of courses that may be taken to complete a Starr King degree.

[The Graduate Theological Union consists of eight member institutions that are accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, five academic centers for theological and religious-studies scholarship, and four affiliate centers of learning.](#)

The purposes of the GTU and the nature of the relationships between its member schools are defined in the Common Agreement approved by the SKSM board this spring. The consortium exists to support ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and to share educational resources to prepare persons for ministry, academic research, and other forms of religious and social leadership.

The member schools retain legal autonomy, individual accreditations, and independent governance. Each school financially contributes to the GTU to support common graduate programs, cross-registration, and other consortial operations. The principal shared expense for member institutions is the GTU Library. Member schools also contribute faculty to the GTU graduate programs. The governance structure of the GTU consists of a Consortial Council, which oversees the pattern of relationships among the member schools, and the GTU Board of Trustees, which oversees the GTU's functioning as a degree-granting institution in its own right. Representation by the President or other chief executive of each school on both the Consortial Council and the GTU Board of Trustees ensures that all member schools are fully informed about and participating in discussions about objectives, resource allocations, and other policies. Deliberation about best practices for the healthy functioning of the consortium also occurs in



regular meetings of the academic deans, registrars, and student services personnel of the member schools.

The GTU generates revenue from tuition paid by M.A. and Ph.D. students, financial gifts from external donors, and assessments collected from member schools and affiliates. The assessments, which constitute the largest revenue stream, support consortial operations such as cross-registration, the common graduate programs, and the GTU Library (See *2019 Common Agreement*). The GTU is currently expanding its fundraising efforts through recruiting a full-time advancement officer after having filled a part-time position for the last several years.

Regular and frequent evaluation of GTU resources and structures occurs in the meetings constituted by or including representative personnel from the member schools and affiliates, including the GTU Board of Trustees, the Council of Presidents, and the Council of Deans. These discussions seek concurrent agreement on shared practices, resource allocations, and cooperative endeavors. Overall revisions in governance structure, membership terms, and financial obligations require a new Common Agreement developed and ratified by the participating institutions. The previous Common Agreement was adopted in 2001. In the last year an updated agreement was under discussion and was adopted at the end of Spring 2019. The new agreement stems from a review process conducted with external consultants during the 2017-2018 academic year, resulting in a proposed overhaul of the governance structure.

#### **8.7.4 Effectiveness**

Starr King and the sister schools of the GTU experience a reciprocal flow of students through the consortial cross-registration agreement. Additionally, the GTU has maintained agreements with other institutions, allowing our students to access courses at the University of California at Berkeley, Mills College, and Dominican University of California. For the 2018-2019 academic year, SKSM students are seeking 321 out of a total of 1,901.5 credits, or 16.8%, at these other schools. Meanwhile, 47 students from across the GTU have enrolled in SKSM courses in the first half of the 2018-2019 academic year.

Although the GTU has decentralized its previously robust ecosystem of shared services, the member schools still coordinate policies and practices to maintain effective consortial operations. The following personnel from the member schools and affiliates convene regular meetings during the academic year: respectively, the chief executive officers, academic deans, student services officers, registrars, and field education directors. The schools agree to a coordinated academic calendar. Member institutions submit course schedules well in advance of the forthcoming academic year and aim to avoid unnecessary repetition of similar courses across the consortium. The schools also collaborate in certain student services, including a joint disabilities accommodation process.

#### **8.8 Instructional Technology Resources**

The member schools and institutes of the Graduate Theological Union operate a common platform for course management and online education built on the Moodle software program (<https://moodle.gtu.edu>). All SKSM online courses are delivered via Moodle and professors are



expected to be proficient with its features for successful implementation. Training in the use of Moodle is provided via an instructional manual as well as group training sessions and personalized support from the SKSM Director of Online Education and the GTU Director of Digital Learning.

Starr King conducted a technological resources assessment with faculty in October 2018. Faculty indicated a need for more, and more regular, training in Populi, Moodle, and Sharepoint. Instructors were divided on the capacity of technological resources to ensure equitable classroom engagement between resident and distance-learning students in hybrid courses. Feedback both from faculty and from a student participant indicate the need for higher-quality microphone and camera equipment in the building and a strengthened Internet connection to prevent occasional interruptions caused by low bandwidth. Suggestions were made for hardware improvement and an annual technological resources audit.

It is recommended that:

- school leadership designate a team of personnel to conduct a more thorough review of technological resources and needs and to develop a comprehensive plan for securing and sustaining the appropriate equipment, policies, and processes
- SKSM identify and develop a timetable for installing upgraded camera equipment for instructional purposes
- the Employee Handbook receive an immediate review and update and that henceforth it will be reviewed and revised annually
- the grievance procedure be added to both handbooks during the next review cycle
- the President's Office immediately coordinate a review and revision of job descriptions for current personnel in every department of the school
- corrected job descriptions must be placed in the files of the designated human resource officer(s)
- SKSM hire a structural engineer to provide an overall assessment of its capacity for withstanding earthquakes
- SKSM develop a maintenance plan/timetable based on consultations between the Vice President of Finance & Administration and the Facilities Manager

## Conclusion

When we think of the strengths of our institution, we always mention first the students it attracts and those it graduates. Many of our applicants already have advanced degrees. They are called to justice-grounded, religious and spiritual leadership in multireligious settings and are looking for a seminary that matches their call. Certainly, our students don't choose SKSM because we are an easier school, or a less expensive school, or a conveniently local school. Students choose SKSM because of who we are, our ECO mission, and how our mission is reflected in our academic programs. This is the premise that we hold in our hearts. It is reflected in our annual assessment of our graduating students.

Of course, SKSM has an exceptional student body also because of the other major strengths of the institution, and how they synergize with each other:

- Our clear central mission and commitment to offer an “education that counters oppression and builds sustainable and just communities” and the ways that our ECO model is emphasized and interwoven throughout the culture of our school
- The breadth of academic opportunities, not only because of SKSM degrees, curriculum and instructors, but also because of the myriad learning opportunities available to our students through the GTU consortium, University of California at Berkeley, Mills College, and the many immersion/contextual opportunities of our geographic area.
- Our multireligious identity and our denominational identity nurturing each other as Unitarian Universalist students and students from many other spiritual traditions study with each other.
- Our commitment to student-centered transformative pedagogy and community opportunities that serve and support our students.
- Student participation in all parts of our school's governance and planning.
- The development, in the last ten years, of a new educational model that, by integrating online, hybrid, intensive and immersion courses, has made SKSM dramatically more accessible to students that cannot relocate to the Bay area.
- Our loyal, committed, and gifted faculty, who bring very diverse academic and professional expertise, embrace counter-oppressive education and spiritual formation, and think creatively to create and fulfill an educational model that meets the needs of our diverse communities and our ever-changing world. As they transform students, our faculty transform the world of theological education and engage the limitations of Western colonial academic models.
- Our dedicated staff, who embrace the ECO mission of the school and deeply care for the formation and success of our students and the transforming ministries they will engage in.
- Creative and courageous leadership by our President and our Board of Trustees.

One of the new capabilities we are working to develop is a culture of ongoing and sustainable faculty and student assessment. We seek a culture that helps us to see our strengths and the areas where we can improve our work, and also think proactively about the new challenges of theological education in relation to the needs of our students and communities.

This self-study process has helped us to prioritize among the many needs and possibilities for improvement, so that we can be more effective with our time, efforts, and resources. Here are some of the areas we have noted for three major areas of work.

1 . Pedagogy/curriculum:

- Improving programmatic design of our curriculum in order to integrate more deeply our ECO commitment in every educational experience (including adding a final required ECO integrative seminar, partnering with social justice organizations, offering more training in trauma-informed strategies).
- Making our degrees more financially accessible, including adjusting the degree requirements themselves (examining MASC requirements, exploring 72 credit MDiv degree)
- Attending to ways to better serve our growing low-res student population (hybrid classes, community-building experiences during intensive terms)
- Finding new ways to nurture a now fully multilocal community, including developing new worship opportunities that do not favor one participation modality (face-to-face) over another.
- Ensuring that faculty has enough time and resources to do professional development, research, and writing, so they are more fully equipped to lead the important educational challenges we are meeting.

2 . Technology:

- Upgrading camera and other equipment to improve hybrid course delivery and hybrid community meetings; researching other content delivery systems.
- Developing current social media policies for students, faculty and staff.
- Continuing to shift to electronic student records for greater accessibility.
- Ensuring each faculty has access to updated equipment.

3 . Building/infrastructure:

- Insuring the structural integrity of the building by having regular inspections and consultations as needed
- Improved equipping of our classrooms for hybrid/Zoom purposes with latest technologies
- Developing a maintenance plan/timetable

This self-study process also helped us to face some of the areas of our work where we fall short or don't fully meet ATS standards, with with a commitment to develop credible plans and sensible deadlines to meet those standards in the future.

**“New Beginnings”**

We are all well aware of our N8.b notation that asks us to develop a credible plan towards financial sustainability. The report has shown that the SKSM President and Board of Trustees has been working intensively in three task forces to address this major challenge in a timely and efficient way. Our CFO and Finance Committee also have developed a five-year projected budget, while the administration has been asked to reduce the school deficit in four years, with a combination of cuts, increased fundraising and new educational initiatives. This will be a

difficult task, but every person connected to the school is committed to finding new and sustainable ways to do the essential work SKSM has undertaken.

On June 10, 2019, the ATS Board of Commissioners granted us a year to develop a plan for financial sustainability. We have begun this work, as was discussed in Standard 1.2, and we will be working closely with ATS during this coming year to create and activate a credible plan we are calling “New Beginnings.”

Through subcommittees’ work, we have begun to address other significant areas of work that were not or are not currently in full compliance. Some issues were easy to address, such as updating our academic catalogue, updating the school’s organizational chart and creating a process to keep it consistently up to date and available to all constituencies of the institution.

Other issues are harder to address, as ATS asks our institution “how it has already implemented a credible plan to come into compliance with them in the near future” (ATS ch. 2, p. 15).

As of today (May 22) there are still some areas in which we have not yet documented our "credible" plans, or documented that we have implemented any actions to bring us into compliance. In relation to the ATS Standards of Accreditation (Notations chapter, pp 1 – 4), the areas of concern pertain to both the Board and the school having to do with:

- Planning (for example: the school’s strategic plan, which has not yet become a guiding document; the fiscal situation, which is very much in progress, as noted earlier.)
- Evaluation of significant departments/areas (for example: Board or Presidential evaluation,(currently scheduled for October 2019) student services evaluation, non-faculty staff evaluation)
- Protocol of evaluation of our fundraising strategies
- In keeping with our ECO commitment, we need to consistently improve the ethical treatment of personnel (for example: updated employee handbook, annual non-faculty staff reviews, grievance procedures, current job descriptions, lack of faculty compensation and support)

The students, staff, faculty, board of trustees and President of Starr King School for the Ministry know all too well the challenges of theological education today—we live with them, struggle to work around them, organize and reorganize ourselves to overcome them. It matters to us that we succeed--that we equip people with the skills and tools to create sacred social change, that we help to form religious leaders for Unitarian Universalism and for other faithful communities in a world racked by hatred and division.

As intense as it has been to conduct this self study, it also has helped us understand more fully what we must do to create, once and for all, a school that is both academically AND financially thriving. We are people who spend our days and months and years doing hard things for good reasons, so we welcome the chance to work with ATS, so that we might become a seminary that is both transformative and sustainable for all who cross our threshold.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

1. Current Organizational Chart
2. Current Strategic Plan
3. Assessment Plan
4. Current Budget and Five-Year Plan
5. Audit and Management Letter
6. Handbooks: Board, Faculty, Staff, and Student
7. Academic Catalog
8. Targeted Issues Checklist