

Why Andover Newton requires seminarians to take a course from the Yale School of Management

Congregational ministry requires business skills.

by [Sarah B. Drummond](#) in the [February 12, 2020](#) issue



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Because my dissertation for a PhD in education included a study of a foundation-funded campus ministry, I needed some background I could find only through courses in the business school. I chose courses that would help me better understand the business of philanthropy and theories of institutional change. I signed up for one on nonprofit fundraising, hoping to gain a grasp on how foundations think and operate.

And then I failed the midterm. Why? Because I answered questions the way an MDiv student would. I offered moral analysis and raised new questions, rather than actually answering the questions posed by the professor.

I quickly figured out what was expected and came at the material like a business school student. Not only have I used that material throughout the intervening years,

but my experience learning alongside business students has also helped me to relate better to business leaders.

Later, when I began working in theological education, serving as an administrator and teaching about ministerial leadership, I began to receive feedback regularly from church members and seminary graduates telling me that ministers needed more business education. Despite my own experience, I initially resisted the idea. I knew that students are coming to seminary less biblically literate and less churched with each passing year, and I thought they needed every second, every credit, every course in traditional theological disciplines that the school had to offer.

Yet when the school I serve, Andover Newton Seminary, became embedded at Yale Divinity School and part of a university with a world-class business school, the Yale School of Management (SOM), which is known for its focus on social enterprises, I had the chance to revisit the issue. I even had the chance to imagine how business education might be integrated into the MDiv curriculum.

As part of our deliberations on the shape of the Andover Newton program at Yale, we asked participants in an alumni survey to name some “inspiring” ministers, and then we reached out to those inspiring leaders for comments. All of them named as a potential area of curriculum growth the idea of teaching the leadership skills needed to direct a nonprofit business. So we wondered: What would it be like to include business school courses in an MDiv curriculum?

Andover Newton’s diploma program at Yale Divinity School includes many components one might expect from a school that educates clergy for congregational leadership in traditions with a congregational polity, in which congregations govern themselves. Anyone who has led a freestanding faith community will tell you that a locally governed church needs ministers who can attend to every dimension of institutional life. Although the denomination may offer resources like consulting and training, the minister must be an independent generalist.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the business knowledge demanded of ministers in locally governed congregations involves managing the church building. In some faith traditions, the denomination owns the building. In the congregational way, the building belongs to the community. That means the pastor has to possess enough financial knowledge to guide the congregation in sustaining the building and enough strategic skill to prevent the building from sucking up all attention and

resources. Even ministry challenges that are not about business might include a business dimension, such as how to create a program or evaluate staff. Most ministers learn business skills on the job, but doing so takes time, rendering our graduates vulnerable in their early years in ministry.

Since Andover Newton launched its diploma program at YDS, diploma seekers have been required to take two or three courses in leadership, including at least one course at the Yale SOM. Each year, students receive a list of the courses that have been vetted by the Andover Newton dean and an SOM academic administrator. The school's assistant dean, Gabriel Rossi, says he recommends courses that are "directly related to leadership and ethics, nonprofit management and social enterprise." Andover Newton recommends over 20 specific courses—such as Introduction to Nonprofit Accounting, Negotiations, and Introduction to Marketing—but any SOM course meets the requirement.

The requirement is too new to assess its impact, but early feedback suggests that the aims of exposing students to management knowledge and a business way of thinking are being realized. Second-year MDiv student Jack Mahoney, who took the course Managing Social Enterprises in his first year, commented, "I don't know anything about social enterprises, or business in general, but I was eager to get away from the YDS campus and see how theological thought could exist in another context. The course proved to be one of the most interesting classes I have taken so far."

Mahoney said learning the vernacular of the school and of economics took some time, but the professors and teaching assistants helped:

The projects challenged me to think and write in different ways. . . . The thing I enjoyed most about taking classes at the SOM was encountering people who are learning to deal with some of the problems we study at YDS in a very different way. In YDS classrooms we can get stuck flying at 10,000 feet, seeing all the great and terrible problems of the world, and it can get very overwhelming. Taking a class at the SOM provided me with an opportunity to meet people who have chosen to attack one or two of those problems by building economic and social structures to meet a particular need that they want to help provide.

MDiv student Arthur Thomas described a project in which he and a group of SOM classmates created an intervention plan to address youth unemployment in Mumbai, India. In his mind, the issue was, “How do you heal this community?” He realized that his classmates likely had a different framework in their minds, but they worked together, and the group’s project received international recognition.

MDiv student Emily Bruce used the word *translating* when describing what it was like to take a course on nonmarket strategy. Though the course focused on how financial markets respond to political upheaval and natural disasters, she was able to connect what she learned with what happens in congregations when local political issues or scandals involving senior staff disrupt strategic plans.

Divinity students recognize a culture clash when they enter the world of SOM. Bruce described what it was like to be in class with those whose futures were likely to be different from her own. “I sat next to an MBA student who already had a job lined up after graduation. He was moving to China to work for Apple. I stared at him for a few seconds after he said this, trying to imagine even a glimpse of what his life was going to be like.”

Deniqua Washington described a conversation with a classmate who told her frankly and matter-of-factly about how much money he made before attending SOM and how much he expected to make afterward—a topic she had not discussed with even her closest YDS friends.

Ministry challenges often have a business dimension. Can ministers be prepared?

Mahoney and other students reported occasional moments when their lack of quantitative knowledge presented an obstacle. “I got into some hot water when a project required us to analyze data and determine a Social Return on Investment (SROI),” said Mahoney. “Luckily, the teaching assistants helped me find a group to work with, and I did the best I could to help out.” The project involved monetizing the value of not being in jail and the value of not going back to jail. “I asked the question, ‘How do we monetize faith, or trust in community?’” The SOM students told him that was a “very div school thing to say.”

Bruce described feeling some shock at how coldly and quantitatively some business school students responded to human tragedy. Thomas said he came to accept that business school students were more outcomes-oriented and less inclined to process the human dimensions of leadership in the way his divinity school classmates would

have expected and insisted upon.

There is no denying that ministers' perspectives will differ from those of leaders in the for-profit and nonprofit business worlds. A minister's bottom line cannot be measured in dollars or SROIs. In the end, the goal for divinity students in SOM classes is to learn how to think analogically about how business skills might be adapted in ministry and about how human and communal transformation might be assessed.

Professors in the SOM are not surprised to hear these points of difference. Judith Chevalier, who teaches nonprofit strategy, said she is occasionally surprised by MDiv students' questions about basic business concepts, but usually she finds their questions refreshing. They require her to avoid jargon and take less for granted.

Perhaps this openness and patience has something to do with the SOM's unusual commitment to educating leaders for all kinds of institutions. Sharon Oster, former dean of SOM and professor emerita of management and entrepreneurship, said, "The Yale School of Management was founded on the idea that good management principles are useful across the private, public and nonprofit sectors. Other MBA programs have increasingly come to recognize this as well."

Though SOM is especially committed to applying business knowledge to nonprofits, James Dana, who teaches economics and strategy at Northeastern University, believes that those preparing for ministry could benefit from business school classes at any institution: "Business courses have very wide appeal to students. They can be extremely engaging. And the classroom experience highly values diversity of opinion."

Oster agrees that divinity school students can bring richness to a classroom that professors in business schools value:

Breadth of experience and interests in the students, under the hands of a good teacher, can make a classroom come alive and help students to see connections in places they would not normally have expected. In my own classroom experience with students from the divinity school, I have found that hard work and interest help to compensate for the fact that they sometimes have less quantitative backgrounds.

What do ministers think of the idea that their successors might gain some education in business during their MDiv studies? Rick Huleatt, a United Church of Christ minister with more than 35 years of experience, is one of many ministers who think business education would have been a help to him. Budgets, fundraising, and endowments all present challenges, and managing them requires particular gifts and skills.

By far the hardest aspect of church management for me involved personnel issues. How to develop personnel policies that were fair and then stick to them, I found to be especially challenging. Part of that had to do with the uniqueness of the position. On the one hand, you were the pastor. On the other hand, you were the chief executive of a small not-for-profit.

Jeff Haggray, executive director of American Baptist Home Mission Societies and of Judson Press, who works with hundreds of pastors, notes a cultural shift that helps explain the necessity of ministers wearing both business and pastor hats at the same time:

There was a time when many congregations consisted of a plethora of highly skilled and influential members from the wider community to provide guidance and insights on the wide range of organizational and business needs of the church. While some congregations still have those gifts among their members, many do not.

Recalling my own experience taking courses in a business school, I am mindful that students do not need a lot of business background to prepare for religious leadership. Just a handful of courses can provide students the language, attitude, and confidence to address business-oriented leadership questions.

Bill Goettler, associate dean at YDS, says that a quarter of YDS students indicate an interest in taking courses at the SOM, though only a small fraction of that number follow through. By making it a requirement, Andover Newton is nudging people toward a kind of learning that, on some level, they realize they need.

Perhaps most interesting is the way new theological questions can arise in business classes. Washington shared an example of how this happened in the course

Strategic Management of Nonprofit Organizations. "I had to answer questions like whether or not nonprofits were supposed to work to no longer be needed, which led me to ask myself this same question as it relates to denominations and churches."

As long as the world still needs churches, it needs a learned clergy, and the clergy need whatever education is called for by the times. Today congregations are calling out for multidimensional leaders, and business education is rounding out an increasingly important dimension of pastoral ministry.

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