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# An Analysis of the Perseverance of Seminary Master's Degree Graduates in Professional Ministry

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The University of Southern Mississippi

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF SEMINARY MASTER'S DEGREE  
GRADUATES IN PROFESSIONAL MINISTRY

by

Steven Thomas Smith

Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2011

## ABSTRACT

### AN ANALYSIS OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF SEMINARY MASTER'S DEGREE GRADUATES IN PROFESSIONAL MINISTRY

by Steven Thomas Smith

August 2011

The study examined whether there is a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in professional ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in professional ministry on selected demographic, educational, personal, and employment variables. The sample consisted of 178 master's degree graduates from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the United States who graduated during the 1996-97 academic year. Of these graduates, 127 (71.35%) were identified as persevering in professional ministry, and 51 (28.65%) were identified as not persevering in professional ministry. The variables investigated in this study were the student's age at the time of receiving the master's degree from the seminary, the gender of the seminary graduates, the undergraduate major of the seminary graduates, the type of undergraduate institution, relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation, the quality of seminary education as perceived by the master's degree graduate, employment of the student in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary, employment of the student in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree, parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position, and employment of the student in a non-ministry position as a career choice before entering seminary.

An alpha level of .05 was used for the Chi-Square analyses and *t* tests of this study. Tests of the ten hypotheses were conducted using the Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .005 per test (.05/10). Significance was found on the variables of the gender of the seminary graduates and relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation.

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A Dissertation  
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August 2011

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Seminaries around the world play an important role in the preparation of students for employment in professional ministry by providing both professional training and academic preparation for ministry. The databases that were researched for this study were Dissertation Abstracts International, Proquest's Dissertations and Theses, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, PsycARTICLES, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Google Scholar. The holdings of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee, were also researched. This chapter will present the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, assumptions, delimitations, definitions, limitations, and a summary.

#### Statement of the Problem

Data related to whether or not seminary master's degree graduates are persevering in professional ministry are limited. This researcher's review of the related literature has identified few studies that examined the perseverance of seminary graduates in professional ministry. Therefore, more studies are needed to explore the perseverance of seminary graduates in professional ministry in an attempt to more fully understand the context(s) in which perseverance occurs.

The research that most closely parallels this researcher's project (Hook, 1992) studied predictors of perseverance in professional ministry using Trinity Evangelical Divinity School students who received the Master of Divinity degree in 1978, 1979 or 1980. They were classified as either persevering or not persevering in professional

ministry at the time of the study, 12 to 14 years after graduation. Two variables were found to predict perseverance in professional ministry: the type of degree held by graduates prior to entering seminary and the graduates' scores on scale 6 of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). This scale indicates the subject's sensitivity to others. High scores on this scale indicate a person's awareness of others and sensitivity to the criticism of others.

Mason (1992) examined perseverance in professional ministry using the Theological Schools Inventory results of first year seminary students who graduated (all degrees) from Asbury Theological Seminary. He found that those who scored higher on the Natural Leading Scale (talents, abilities, encouragement from others) were more likely to persist in professional ministry 8 to 17 years after taking the inventory than those who scored higher on the Special Leading Scale (special call from God).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine whether there is a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in professional ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in professional ministry based upon selected demographic, educational, personal, and employment variables. The students were those who received a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the United States during the 1996-97 academic year. This population sample will be more fully described in Chapter III.

## Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study were as follows:

H1: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of age at time of receiving the seminary degree.

H2: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of gender.

H3: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of undergraduate major.

H4: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of type of undergraduate institution.

H5: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation.

H6: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of the perceived quality of seminary education.

H7: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not

persevere in ministry on the variable of employment in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary.

H8: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of employment in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree.

H9: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position.

H10: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of employment in a non-ministry position as a career choice before enrolling in seminary.

The relationship of each independent variable to the dependent variable, perseverance in professional ministry, was analyzed to determine if there is a significant difference using the Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .005 per test (.05/10).

#### Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it resulted in additional data related to the perseverance of seminary master's degree graduates in professional ministry. These data resulted in suggestions regarding the student experience related primarily to the area of academic experience while obtaining the seminary master's degree. Ensuring successful academic experiences for master's degree students is a significant function based on the

research of this study. Seminaries typically view their role as providing theological education as well as practical training for their students. Thus, this information is significant for any seminary that desires to exert a positive influence on the perseverance of its master's degree graduates in the professional ministry.

#### Assumptions

There were two assumptions for this study. The first was that students who enroll in a seminary master's degree program plan to graduate and enter professional ministry. While some who enroll are spouses of those who plan to enter professional ministry, this researcher's experience is that most seminary applicants are those who actually plan to enter professional ministry. The second assumption was that participants in the study would provide honest answers to the survey items.

#### Delimitations

There were several delimitations for this study:

1. The students for this study were only from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the largest Southern Baptist Seminary and the largest seminary in the world. The study was delimited to this seminary because of the accessibility of the student contact information to the researcher.
2. Students for this study were delimited to those receiving the master's degree of all content areas because the majority of seminary master's degrees are regarded as professional degrees that prepare students for professional ministry.
3. The sample of students was delimited to those who received the master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary during the 1996-97

academic year. Some of those graduates were not included in the study because they had moved from the addresses available to this researcher.

### Definitions

The following definitions are helpful for understanding the context of this study:

*Professional ministry:* ministry positions which are typically held in a church or some other type of formal ministry setting. Such positions are typically held in the areas of pastoral ministry/preaching, adult education, childhood education, music, youth, recreation/activities, missions, counseling, and administration. For this study, professional ministry also means that the minister was financially compensated for his/her service.

*Seminary:* a graduate institution that offers a variety of master's degrees as well as doctorates, and increasingly bachelor's degrees, for the preparation of individuals for professional ministry. The seminary in this study, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, is a large institution in the United States that offers degrees at both the undergraduate and graduate level (including doctorates).

*Seminary master's degree graduates:* students who have earned a master's degree from a seminary.

*Perseverance in ministry:* for purposes of this study, employment in professional ministry for a time period of nine years as reported by each respondent on the survey instrument.

*Non-perseverance in ministry:* for purposes of this study, non-employment in professional ministry as reported by each respondent on the survey instrument.

*Positive affectivity:* the extent to which a person is enthusiastic, active and alert.

*Role ambiguity:* necessary information available to an individual is inadequate or unclear.

*Role conflict:* the perception by an individual that various demands placed on him/her are incompatible with one another.

*Negative affectivity:* the extent to which a person is distressed, dissatisfied and anxious.

### Limitations

One limitation for this study was that the participants were from a single seminary rather than several, which limits the scope of the research. Another limitation was that the amount of data collected was dependent on the responsiveness of the research subjects to the survey instrument.

### Summary

This chapter has presented a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, assumptions, delimitations, definitions and limitations. Data related to the perseverance of seminary master's degree graduates in professional ministry are limited. Therefore, more research is needed to explore the perseverance of seminary graduates in professional ministry in an attempt to more fully understand the context(s) in which perseverance occurs. This study examined whether there is a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevered in professional ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who did not persevere in professional ministry on selected demographic, educational, personal and employment variables. It resulted in data related to the perseverance of seminary master's degree

graduates in professional ministry. Chapter II will provide a review of the literature on perseverance in the professional ministry.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The databases that were researched for this literature review were Dissertation Abstracts International, Proquest's Dissertations and Theses, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, PsycARTICLES, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, JSTOR, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Google Scholar. These databases were searched regarding job perseverance in ministry and several other helping professions, including medicine, social services, education, law enforcement, emergency services, psychotherapy, and psychological counseling. The holdings of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee, were also researched.

This chapter will review the historical Southern Baptist understanding of the concept of "calling" as it relates to both laity and clergy and its reality in the larger population. The chapter will then focus on the literature related to research in the area of job perseverance.

#### The Concept of Calling

While this study will not examine the various aspects of the concept of "calling," it may be helpful to review the concept itself in the context of Southern Baptist life and in the larger population. The Biblical concept of calling involves an individual encounter with God, God's invitation for that individual to follow him in righteousness and purpose, and the individual's response to that invitation (Gandy & Barr, 1992). Thus, everyone who responds to God is called to minister to those inside the church and those outside the church. The church has acknowledged since New Testament times that individuals may

be called to perform special tasks and/or to a particular form of ministry as their vocation in life (Gandy & Barr, 1992).

As various forms of ministry have developed, various perspectives concerning the concept of call to ministry have also developed. Differing beliefs about the call to ministry are found among Baptists (Gandy & Barr, 1992). Some believe that only the pastor is called to a vocation in ministry because of the special responsibility of the position in leading a church. Others believe that everyone involved in a ministry vocation is called but that the calling of a pastor or foreign missionary is higher than that of the others. Some believe that there is no rank among those called to a vocation in ministry. No one position in ministry is higher than another. Still others believe that there is no difference between a ministry vocation and any other occupation. Every Christian is called to a particular occupation or vocation inside and outside the church.

The concept of call common among most Baptists may be described in three ways (Gandy & Barr, 1992). Everyone is called to salvation which requires a response of faith and commitment (general call). Since discipleship and service are inherent in Christian commitment, all Christians are called to minister. Baptists have also historically acknowledged that some individuals within this general call have leadership gifts or abilities (special call). These leaders help equip other Christians for service rather than doing all of the work themselves. Finally, individuals may be licensed and/or ordained by the church for service in a particular ministry vocation (calling through the church). This affirmation is usually given in reference to employment in a specific position in a church or other formal ministry organization.

Since the subjects of this study are master's degree graduates of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, it is likely that they are familiar with the concept of calling described above. Such familiarity with calling was found by Larsen (1995) in a wide-ranging survey of contemporary demographics related to students and graduates of seminaries accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. Seventy-five percent of seminary students reported feeling a calling to the ministry in 1991, about the same number that Larsen found in a 1986 survey.

This familiarity and feeling of calling, with the accompanying understanding of his or her calling, may have some influence on his or her perseverance in ministry. As the societal influence of pastors has lessened in previous decades, those who find legitimization from the occupation or from the support of their congregations are more likely to struggle with effectiveness (Miner, Sterland & Dowson, 2006). Those who possess what the authors call an "internal orientation to ministry" are more likely to "possess important psychological protections against the changing composition and support of their congregations" (Miner et al., 2006, p. 218).

A subsequent study (Miner, Sterland & Dowson, 2010) showed that this internal orientation was positively influenced by a sense of spiritual relatedness, autonomy, and competence. The authors write:

Nonetheless, these dimensions are highly interpretable as buffering responses to secularization processes which weaken absolutist claims regarding Christian (or any) spirituality, undermine external sources of legitimation, and call into question the competence of generalist clergy to carry out traditional tasks such as counselling and financial administration. Hence, these dimensions provide a

means of explaining why an internal orientation to ministry should be more or less adaptive in secularized settings for ministry. (Miner et al., 2010, p. 181)

Cousineau, Hall, Rosek & Hall (2010) found a positive correlation between missionary perseverance and the sense of being “called” to the mission field. The ministry experience was enhanced by personal spiritual expressions and quality of marital relationship.

Duffy & Sedlacek (2010) studied students at one large public university. Of students surveyed, 44% indicated that they felt they had a distinct career calling while 9% said they did not. More than a fourth indicated that they were still searching for a career calling. Those who felt a distinct calling were more likely pursuing careers that led to additional post-undergraduate work: medicine, doctoral work, and legal professions. Other career development studies have found a connection between an individual’s calling and his or her spirituality (Brewer, 2001). Those who are spiritual or religious are inclined to manifest more mature career decision-making processes (Duffy & Blustein, 2005), use spiritual frameworks as coping mechanisms for career difficulties (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006), affirm work values of meaning and service (Duffy, 2010), and value highly helping others and social justice (Leak, 1992).

Thus, master’s degree graduates of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and of most seminaries, would view calling as an important aspect of their commitment to ministry. The issue is whether they have persevered in their perceived calling to ministry, which is ministry for which they have been financially compensated. This

chapter will now review the literature related to job perseverance by each independent variable

#### Age at the Time of Receiving the Master's Degree from the Seminary

Hook (1992) studied age at the time of matriculation using Trinity Evangelical Divinity School students who received the Master of Divinity degree in 1978, 1979, or 1980. They were classified as either persevering or not persevering in professional ministry at the time of the study, 12 to 14 years after graduation. Age at the time of matriculation was found to be a predictor of perseverance in ministry in conjunction with the MMPI validity, clinical and selected research scales.

In general, the age of students pursuing post-graduate degrees has increased. The average age of students in 1999-2000 was 32.6 years old, with 22% over age 40 (Glazer-Raymo, 2005). While those under 30 account for nearly a third of students enrolled at seminaries of the Association of Theological Schools, those over 50 comprise the fastest-growing demographic. That population has increased from about 12% of the total student seminary population in 1995 to 20% in 2009 (Newsome, 2011).

Age may be a reflection of a societal shift in the number of youth who have no definable career ambitions. Higher career ambitions tend to develop into greater career opportunities later in life. Staff, Harris, Sabates & Briddell (2010) reported that in 1992 almost 10% of youth did not know what job they wanted to be employed in at age 30 (the mean age for both perseverers and non-perseverers in this study) and that the percentage had not changed in 2002. Arnett characterized the late twenties in this way:

Emerging adulthood is distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and

adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews. Emerging adulthood is a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course. (Arnett, 2000, p. 469)

The variable of age at the time of receiving the master's degree from the seminary is a variation of Hook's (1992) variable and the demographic data as well as life stage research indicate it is reasonable to explore its impact on perseverance in ministry. It is important to have data regarding age at the time of graduation because students may progress through the seminary degree programs at differing paces even though they may have started at the same time and be the same age. The student will be older and his or her life perspective may be more mature at the time of graduation than when he or she began the degree program.

#### Gender

Craig (1992) studied predictors of church employment status four months after graduation using Christian Church Bible college graduates. This research found gender to predict the employment of graduates in a church. Male graduates were found to be more likely to find church employment than female graduates four months after graduation. Likewise, Larsen (1995) found that 92% of seminarians anticipated ordination, but only 85% received ordination. More men (88%) were ordained than women (74%).

Wheeler (2001) found that about 80% of seminary students said they intended to pursue some type of religious occupation after graduation. But 29% of male students said they had no intention of pursuing ordination after graduation. That figure was naturally higher for women, with about half saying they would not be ordained.

A subsequent study (Wheeler, Miller, & Aleshire, 2007) found that interest in congregational ministry increased during seminary. The study tracked a group of students entering seminary. Of those, about half said they intended to pursue congregational ministry upon graduation. By the time those students were surveyed again at graduation, the number had increased to almost two-thirds. Women's interest in congregational ministry increased slightly more than men's.

The gender differential is familiar throughout virtually every profession. Research by Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser & Robinson (1997) showed that most women in a ground-breaking field experienced sexism at some point in their careers, manifesting in barriers, lack of opportunity, and/or negative attitudes from others. Women in non-traditional fields relied on the support and acceptance by other women as a defining element of their success (Richie, et al., 1997). Given the relatively small number of women attending seminary—and by extension an even smaller percentage who persevere in ministerial professions—the lack of role models and support may have had a dampening effect.

This behavior also becomes apparent only after graduation, however. Perrone, Sedlacek and Alexander (2001) found there were no gender differences in academic resilience or in behaviors that influenced seeking help for career-related challenges.

Rogers, Townsend & Lindner (2004) also found no gender differences in perseverance of students in agriculture education programs.

While the current research measures perseverance over the longer time period of nine years rather than four months of Craig (1992), the variable of gender provides comparable data for a seminary graduate population. Further research on gender, then, is supported by the lack of data on gender regarding seminary graduates and the continued professional success of males compared to females to determine whether the same pattern exists among seminarians.

#### Undergraduate Major

Hook (1992) studied the type of degree held by graduates prior to entering seminary Trinity Evangelical Divinity School students who received the Master of Divinity degree. The type of degree held by students before entering seminary was defined as either graduate or undergraduate. Chi-Square analysis of the data revealed that 5.8% of those who persevered in ministry held graduate degrees prior to entering seminary, while 16.7% of those who did not persevere held graduate degrees prior to entering seminary.

While not a direct correlation to career perseverance, the choice of an undergraduate major proved to have a significant impact on earning power to those in the legal profession (Craft & Baker, 2003). Many future lawyers chose political science as an undergraduate study area, followed by history. Those who studied economics earned more than 18% more than political science majors. No other undergraduate majors show such disparities.

The variable of undergraduate major is a modified form of type of degree studied by Hook (1992). This variable focuses on the undergraduate degree only and on the type of degree according to academic major. The variable of undergraduate major provides specific data similar to Craft and Baker (2003) and more specific data than Hook (1992) in the area of undergraduate degree obtained prior to entering seminary.

#### Type of Undergraduate Institution

Hook (1992) studied the type of undergraduate institution of graduates prior to entering seminary using Trinity Evangelical Divinity School students who received the Master of Divinity degree. The type of undergraduate institution attended by students before entering seminary was defined as Bible college, Christian liberal arts college, or secular college or university. While type of undergraduate institution was not found to be statistically significant related to perseverance in ministry, a trend was noted that Bible college graduates had a higher perseverance rate than graduates of the other categories of undergraduate institutions.

The type of university selected also showed some signs of influence on a student's career perseverance (Reitz, 1975). Pressures apparent on students at more selective colleges and universities may ultimately lead to dissatisfaction with future careers. Students who study science at selective universities may be pressured to pursue a doctoral degree. If there is no interest or ability to do so, that student may not feel he or she is a success in science and pursue another field of study. Students at less selective universities experienced more career perseverance because of the rules for success were less rigid.

It appears that the earlier the future seminarian determines his or her career path, the more likely the perseverance. The Catholic faith includes “minor seminary,” a program that prepares high-school boys for ministry. Upon graduation, they attend a “major seminary” for more formal theological training before entering the priesthood. Dougherty (1968) found that students who attended minor seminary were significantly more likely to be ordained into the priesthood than those who attended an all-boys Catholic school, co-ed Catholic school, or public high school before attending seminary.

Blanchard (1981) conducted research on the type of seminary attended and the ministerial role orientation of pastors. Type of seminary was defined as vocational (stresses practical competence and spiritual formation), religious community (stresses mastery of tradition and spiritual formation), or university (stresses mastery of tradition and secular awareness). Role orientation of pastors was determined by their ranking of their level of enjoyment of various activities involved in their pastoral role. The study found that the type of seminary attended significantly affected the role preferences of pastors.

The variable of type of undergraduate institution for this study as public or private is a modification of type of undergraduate institution studied by Hook (1992) that provides a broader view of the type of institution. The study by Blanchard (1981) supports the use of type of undergraduate institution as a variable by establishing that type of seminary affects the role preferences of pastors and is thus important for studying the ministry as a profession. Since Reitz (1975) and Dougherty (1968) demonstrated the impact of type of institution on different populations than Hook (1992) and Blanchard (1981), it has a broad appeal for providing additional meaningful data.

## Relevance of the Master's Degree to Ministry Position(s) Held After Graduation

Reeves (1982) conducted research related to the transition from seminary to vocational ministry of Master of Religious Education graduates from a Southern Baptist seminary. Factors were identified which present potential problems for seminary graduates in the transition from seminary training to ministry. Suggestions for improvement in seminary training included course work in spiritual development, finances, filing systems, study techniques, and development of personal libraries. Assistance in these areas would help smooth the transition from seminary to ministry and also probably help in perseverance in the ministry.

Larsen (1995) surveyed Master of Divinity degree seminarians from a variety of denominational backgrounds. He found that 77% said that they felt their seminary education was appropriate while they were students, yet 55% felt that way after graduation. The same study reported that seminary had prepared them well in terms of theology, preaching, and pastoral care, but it had done little to prepare them for the organizational and administrative needs. Still, 75% felt that seminary was helpful in preparation for their career.

The variable of relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation provides a broader scope of data than Reeves (1982) because it encompasses degree programs across a broader spectrum of the seminary's academic programs. This allows a view of the seminary as whole regarding the relevancy of its master's degree programs. Relevance of the master's degree will also provide data related to Larsen's (1995) finding that there were gaps in the preparation of students for ministry after

graduation. Thus, it will provide an overall view of degree relevance for ministry as well as specifically for ministry preparation.

### Perceived Quality of Seminary Education

Brainard (1996) studied the educational preparation of Assemblies of God ministers for their first ministerial positions. Respondents to a survey and an interview indicated greater satisfaction with the biblical and theological aspects of their educational preparation for ministry than with the practical aspects of their preparation. The need for more practical application of theories presented in class was identified as well as the need for internships and mentoring relationships during the preparation process. Respondents also indicated a need for professional education to develop critical thinking skills, leadership skills and attitudinal/spiritual characteristics.

McKenna, Yost, and Boyd (2007) found that formal educational training, including seminary, was an important aspect in the development of pastors. The pastors self-identified this type of formal training as a key factor; only good role models and learning from mistakes ranked higher. The authors wrote:

In these events, pastors often discussed some key truth that they discovered during the educational experience (e.g., the importance of casting a vision for your church) as a catalyst that was then either realized and/or applied several months later in their positions as leaders. (McKenna et al., 2007, p. 182)

The most significant of lessons tended to fall into two categories, professional skills/technical knowledge and casting a vision.

Lifeway Research, a division of Lifeway Christian Resources that has the same denominational heritage as Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, conducted a

survey asking Protestant pastors how often they used materials learned in seminary. Of those surveyed, 85% had taken some seminary courses and 96% of that group said they would make the same decision to attend seminary again if necessary (Lowery, 2010). The perception of usefulness of training increased as well. For those who had attended some seminary, about 86% said the training had value; those who had received a doctoral degree were more enthusiastic with 94% indicating the training was worth the investment.

The variable of perceived quality of seminary education continues the study of Brainard (1996) which involved a broader scope of the seminary experience than a single degree program. The variable for this study broadens that scope to include the graduates' overall seminary experience which would include both academic and non-academic aspects of the seminary experience. This variable also coincides with the research of McKenna et al. (2007) and Lowery (2010) who documented the positive impact of satisfaction with higher education levels on employment after graduation.

#### Employment of the Student in a Ministry Position Prior to Enrolling in Seminary

Craig (1992) studied predictors of church employment status four months after graduation using Christian Church Bible college graduates. This research found number of hours spent in paid church work to predict the employment of graduates in a church. Bailey (1989) examined factors related to the perseverance of male pastors in the Free Methodist Church. Pastors classified as persevering were found to have stronger career commitments than those classified as non-persevering. An awareness of the results of pastoring is a significant influence on job satisfaction (Zondag, 2004). This impacts perseverance since pastors determine their possibility for success or failure in the position

based on previous experience, unlike in other professions where more clearly defined goals are apparent.

Experience in a particular field has proven to be a strong indicator of a desire to continue in that field. College students who participated in a language-immersion study-abroad program were more likely to continue their education in that language upon returning home (Armstrong, 1984). Four in 10 college students chose the language as their major while others chose a double major that involved further study of that language. In addition, 56% believed that the immersion experience was a factor in their future career choice. International business, medical practice aimed at ethnic minorities, and legal issues aimed at immigrants were among the career choices that were influenced by the immersion program.

The variable of employment of the student in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary is a modification of the study by Craig (1992) since this study involves seminary graduates rather than college graduates and the time frame of nine years after graduation instead of four months after graduation. However, both studies utilize data related to compensated professional ministry during the undergraduate experience. Using the variable of employment in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary is supported by the study of Brainard (1996) in which persevering pastors were found to have stronger career commitments than non-perseverers. Such career commitment could be indicated by employment in ministry prior to enrolling in seminary like the dependence on previous experience by pastors (Zondag, 2004) and language students (Armstrong, 1984).

### Employment of the Student in a Ministry Position While Obtaining the Master's Degree

Craig (1992) studied number of hours spent in paid church work as a predictor of church employment status four months after graduation using Christian Church Bible college graduates. Those paid for church work during college were more likely to be employed four months after graduation. Bailey (1989) examined the perseverance of male pastors in the Free Methodist Church. Persevering pastors were found to have stronger career commitments than those classified as non-persevering.

Internships, whether paid or unpaid, also offer students a window into their future. Kardash, Wallace, and Blockus (2007) found that science students who were able to perform an internship while in college gained the most experience in learning to “think like a scientist” (p. 260). About half of the participants cited the gains made in this area as significant. One in five also remarked on the experience as providing career direction. Only a small number of students found the experience dampened their desire for a future career in science while a majority found their desires increased.

The variable of employment of the student in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree is a modification of the study by Craig (1992) since this study involves seminary graduates rather than college graduates and the time frame of nine years after graduation instead of four months after graduation. However, both studies utilize data related to compensated professional ministry while obtaining the degree. Using the variable of employment in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree is supported by the study of Bailey (1989) in which persevering pastors were found to have stronger career commitments than non-perseverers. It is also supported by the research of Kardash et al. (2007) that found that actually participating in a profession

positively impacts a student's employment in that profession after graduation. Such career commitment could be indicated by employment in ministry while obtaining the master's degree.

#### Parental Encouragement to Pursue a Ministry Position

Craig (1992) studied parental attitude of wanting children to enter church work as a predictor of church employment status four months after graduation using Christian Church Bible college graduates. While parental attitude was not found to be a predictor of church employment for college graduates, the variable of parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position for seminary graduates provides a different dimension of data.

Subtle influences also cannot be overlooked as a child matures and begins to explore his or her career path. Adamuti-Trache and Andres (2008) explored whether what they termed "cultural capital" influenced a child to pursue science courses at an early age, which then led to pursuit of degrees (p. 1557). Unspoken parental cues, they found, may be a powerful influence in the child's ultimate career choice.

Regarding the topic of parental influence on career choice, Bregman and Killen (2000) found that parents can have a significant effect on a child's future vocational plans. Parents receive credit for their own work experience and the financial resources that are often used to provide the child's education. However, a strong-armed attempt to overtly influence a decision can have a negative impact.

Bregman & Killen (2000) found this influence did not change as the child matured, comparing 10<sup>th</sup> graders, younger college students, and older college students. Ventimiglia (1977) found that Catholic seminary students who continued their studies typically had four to six relationships that were positive and encouraging of their

decision. Those who dropped out of seminary typically had one strong advocate to remain in seminary—their mothers.

Li and Kerpelman (2007) found that daughters in particular are more heavily influenced on career choices, especially by their mothers. They wrote:

Discussing career goals with mother increased mother's influence, but decreased father's influence, on daughter's career certainty under conditions of father–daughter disagreement about career choice. The ability to separate her own feelings from those of her father was particularly important in reducing the daughter's willingness to change her career goals to fit maternal or paternal expectations. Collectively, these findings offer additional insights about the role of parent–adolescent relationships in understanding young women's career aspirations and note the importance of considering the distinct influences of mothers and fathers on their daughters' career goals and plans. (p. 105)

The positive influence of parents on the vocational plans of their children is well established by the research of Adamuti-Trache and Andres (2008), Bregman and Killen (2000), and Li and Kerpelman (2007). The seminary student was likely to be at a different life stage than the college student regarding dependence, or lack of it, on parents for material and/or emotional support while enrolled in seminary. Thus, data on parental encouragement for the seminary student population will add to the research of Ventimiglia (1977) and expand the research of Craig (1992).

Employment by the Student in a Non-ministry Position as a Career Choice  
Before Entering Seminary

Craig (1992) studied number of hours spent in paid non-church work as a predictor of church employment status four months after graduation using Christian Church Bible college graduates. Those paid for non-church work during college were less likely to become employed in professional ministry after college.

Hicks (1981) surveyed first-career and second-career Catholic priests, finding no significant differences in their plans to stay in the priesthood. Roughly 95% of both categories said they would remain in the priesthood while 70% said they would definitely make the same decision again. Of the second-career priests, 61% had jobs in business fields while 21% had worked in skilled or technical jobs. Approximately one-third of second-career priests held more than one job before joining the priesthood.

Hicks' (1981) research did show significant disparities among the reasons for joining the priesthood between the two groups. Those first-career priests cited a desire to serve others as the top reason for joining the priesthood. Those in subsequent careers were looking to add more meaning to their own lives.

As the age of the typical seminary student has risen, so too is the likelihood that he or she did not intend to pursue ministry immediately after college. Only about one-fourth decided while in college to attend a theological seminary (Wheeler, 2001). About 13% entered college with seminary in mind while more than 60% did not make a decision about seminary until after college.

It is also important to understand the paradigm shift within many mainline theological seminaries. Students who have no intention of pursuing a career in ministry

attend seminary to further their own understanding of their faith. Evans (2007) purports that while this type of student may remain in the minority, his numbers are increasing. Evans (2007) notes that “this person looks to the seminary as a resource that can help him make sense of his vocational journey” (p. 224).

As the age of seminary students has increased, the trajectory between seminary and advancement has decreased (Nesbitt, 1995). Traditionally, seminary students spent the first three to five years of employment in an “entry level” position. While those who were ages 35 to 45 at graduation did advance more quickly, they also peaked quickly. The advancement was limited while those who were ordained by age 30 had greater potential for continued career development.

The variable of employment by the student in a non-ministry position as a career choice before entering seminary is a modification of Craig’s (1992) variable since it defines the timeframe of the non-ministry work as before entering seminary and the status of the non-ministry work as a career choice. This means that the employment in a non-ministry position as a career choice could have occurred before, during, or even after the seminary graduate’s undergraduate experience. Since a majority of seminarians were employed in non-ministry careers before attending seminary (Hicks, 1981) and many decided to attend seminary after college (Wheeler, 2001), this variable will provide data on the impact of these non-ministry positions on perseverance in professional ministry.

### Summary

This review of the literature demonstrates that the variables used in this study have been established through prior research as worthwhile for use with seminary master’s degree graduates. The variables used in this study appear in the literature in

either direct form or in comparable form so that it is reasonable to conclude that they can provide meaningful data about seminary master's degree graduates. The variables used in this study were used in both ministry and non-ministry related research contexts so they have a wide scope of use in the research. Thus, the variables used in this research are well established as important components for studying the perseverance of seminary master's degree graduates in the professional ministry.

The timeframe for this study of nine years after receiving the seminary master's degree is within the parameters of previous research. The shortest timeframe reflected in the literature was four months (Craig, 1992) and the longest timeframe was 17 years (Mason, 1992). The timeframe of nine years provided data that clearly indicated perseverers and non-perseverers as well as collected data that were fresh in the minds of the respondents. These data were available to the researcher because nine years was the timeframe which was available to this researcher.

The variables used in this study provide data specifically related to the perseverance of seminary master's degree graduates in professional ministry. These data will be useful for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as well as other seminaries that desire to positively affect the perseverance of their graduates in professional ministry. Chapter III will develop the methodology that was used in this study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This study examined whether there is a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on selected variables. These graduates received a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary during the 1996-97 academic year. This chapter presents the research design, the population sample, the variables that were used in the study, the hypotheses for the study, the data collection procedures, and the statistical methodology that was used.

#### Research Design

This study involved ex post-facto rather than experimental research because the researcher did not have direct control over the variables. The data are archival data. The only data collected from the Seminary's Registrar's Office were the name, address and degree earned by the student. The remainder of the data for this study was collected by the researcher on a survey instrument designed for this study.

The researcher designed survey instrument is the Seminary Master's Degree Graduate Survey (Appendix A). This survey instrument was reviewed for clarity of content by the ministerial staff members of a multi-staff church with at least a seminary master's degree. These eight staff members represented a variety of ministry areas including pastoral, youth, children, education, missions and recreation. Their experience in professional ministry ranged from 5 years to 30 years. They made suggestions for improving the readability of the survey which were taken into account in the final version of the instrument that was used to collect the data.

### Population Sample

The population sample for this research was drawn from the students who received a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the United States during the 1996-97 academic year. The Registrar's Office of the seminary provided the name, address and degree obtained for each of the graduates.

The total number of students who received a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary during the 1996-97 academic year was 296. The data from the Registrar's Office indicated that nine different degrees are represented by the group as a whole and that the composition of the group by degrees is as follows:

Master of Divinity—56

Master of Arts in Religious Education—81

Master of Music—8

Master of Divinity with Biblical Languages—109

Master of Arts in Theology—3

Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Counseling—27

Master of Theology—6

Master of Arts in Christian Social Work—5

Master of Arts in Christian Education—1

The samples of those persevering in ministry and not persevering in ministry were identified through a researcher designed survey instrument that was mailed to each graduate. Each respondent indicated his or her ministry status of perseverance or non-perseverance on the survey instrument. A follow-up mailing was sent to those who did not respond to the first mailing.

## Variables

The ten independent variables investigated in this study were:

- the student's age at the time of receiving the master's degree from the seminary;
- the gender of the seminary graduates;
- the undergraduate major of the seminary graduates;
- the type of undergraduate institution;
- the relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation;
- the perceived quality of seminary education by the master's degree graduate;
- employment of the student in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary;
- employment of the student in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree;
- parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position; and
- employment by the student in a non-ministry position as a career choice before entering seminary.

## Hypotheses and Data Analysis

The hypotheses for this study were as follows:

H1: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of age at time of receiving the seminary degree.

H2: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of gender.

H3: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of undergraduate major.

H4: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of type of undergraduate institution.

H5: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation.

H6: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of the perceived quality of seminary education.

H7: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of employment in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary.

H8: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not

persevere in ministry on the variable of employment in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree.

H9: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position.

H10: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of employment in a non-ministry position as a career choice before enrolling in seminary.

Chi-Square analysis and *t* tests were used to test the hypotheses in order to establish whether there are significant differences between perseverers and non-perseverers on the selected variables. Chi-Square analysis was conducted on the nominal variables of:

- gender;
- undergraduate major;
- undergraduate institution;
- employment in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary;
- employment in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree; and
- employment in a non-ministry position as a career choice before enrolling in seminary.

*t* tests were conducted on the continuous variables of:

- age at time of receiving the master's degree;

- relevance of the master's degree to ministry positions held after graduation;
- the perceived quality of seminary education; and
- parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position.

Table 1 displays the hypotheses with the associated variables and associated items from the questionnaire:

Table 1

*Variables of the Study*

Hyp	Variable	Questionnaire Items Associated with the Variable
1	Age	2
2	Gender	3
3	Undergraduate major	9
4	Undergraduate institution	8
5	Degree relevance	1b
6	Quality of education	6
7	Ministry employment before seminary	5a
8	Ministry employment during seminary	5b
9	Parental encouragement	10
10	Non-ministry career	14

### Procedures

The data of this study were collected in the following manner. The Registrar's Office of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary provided the names, addresses and degrees of the students who graduated from the seminary in the 1996-97 academic year.

The researcher reviewed the degrees received by these students to determine which students received the master's degree during the 1996-97 academic year.

The data for the dependent variable of perseverance in ministry and for each of the independent variables were collected on the Seminary Master's Degree Graduate Survey. This survey was mailed with a cover letter explaining the project and a self-addressed stamped envelope to each of the students identified as subjects for this study. Each respondent was coded so that a second mailing could be sent to those who did not respond to the first mailing within a reasonable amount of time. The feasibility of offering a secure online response to the survey was investigated but not implemented.

CHAPTER IV  
ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study investigated the relationship between seminary master's degree graduates who persevered in professional ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who did not persevere in professional ministry on selected demographic, educational, personal and employment variables. The students were those who received a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the United States during the 1996-97 academic year.

Results of the Research

The results of the research are reported in this chapter. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. Ten hypotheses were tested using the Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .005 per test (.05/10):

H1: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of age at time of receiving the seminary degree.

Table 2

*Age at Time of Receiving the Seminary Degree*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
					Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differ- ence	Std. Error Differ- ence	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df				Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	.028	.868	.370	175	.712	.425	1.150	-1.844	2.695

Table 2 (continued).

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Upper	Lower
Equal variances not assumed			.360	87.796	.719	.425	1.180	-1.919	2.770

Group Statistics				
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Current professional ministry employment?	Yes	126	30.82	6.805
	No	51	30.39	7.228

Table 2 reports the results of the *t* test analysis on perseverance in professional ministry with the variable of age at time of receiving the seminary degree. Perseverers and non-perseverers were similar in age, ( $M = 30.82$ ,  $SD = 6.81$ ) and ( $M = 30.39$ ,  $SD = 7.23$ ) respectively. The test results do not indicate a significant difference for the age of the two groups at the time of receiving the degree on perseverance in ministry,  $t(175) = .370$ ,  $p = .712$ . Thus, the hypothesis was not rejected.

H2: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of gender.

A two-sample contingency Chi-Square was conducted to assess whether there was a difference among students who persevered in professional ministry and their counterparts across gender from what would be expected. The results of that test were

significant,  $X^2 (1) = 23.259, p < .001$ . The proportion of those who did and did not persevere across gender is reported in Table 3 below.

Overall, these results suggest that those who did and did not persevere were significantly different across gender, with males persevering at a significantly higher rate.

Table 3

*Proportion of Perseverance in the Professional Ministry across Genders*

Perseverance	Gender	
	Male	Female
Persevered	63.48%	7.87%
Did Not Persevere	16.29%	12.36%

H3: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of undergraduate major.

A two-sample contingency Chi-Square was conducted to assess whether there was a difference among students who persevered in professional ministry and their counterparts across ministry-related undergraduate majors and their counterparts from what would be expected. The results of that test were not significant,  $X^2 (1) = .06, p = .806$ . The proportion of those who did and did not persevere across undergraduate majors that were and were not ministry-related is reported in Table 4.

Overall, these results suggest that those who did and did not persevere across ministry-related undergraduate majors and their counterparts are relatively equal to what would be expected.

Table 4

*Proportion of Perseverance in the Professional Ministry across Ministry-Related Undergraduate Majors and Their Counterparts*

Perseverance	Undergraduate Major	
	Ministry-related	Not Ministry-related
Persevered	15.17%	56.18%
Did Not Persevere	5.62%	23.03%

H4: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of type of undergraduate institution.

A two-sample contingency Chi-Square was conducted to assess whether there was a difference among students who persevered in professional ministry and their counterparts across private undergraduate institutions and their counterparts from what would be expected. The results of that test were not significant,  $X^2(1) = .273, p = .601$ . The proportion of those who did and did not persevere across undergraduate institutions that were and were not private is reported in Table 5.

Overall, these results suggest that those who did and did not persevere across private undergraduate institutions and their counterparts are relatively equal to what would be expected.

Table 5

*Proportion of Perseverance in the Professional Ministry across Private Undergraduate Institutions and Their Counterparts*

Perseverance	Type of Undergraduate Institution	
	Private	Not Private
Persevered	40.57%	30.29%
Did Not Persevere	15.43%	13.71%

H5: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation.

Table 6

*Relevance of Degree to Ministry Positions*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	14.775	.000	3.699	167	.000	.640	.173	.299	.982
Equal variances not assumed			3.105	60.850	.003	.640	.206	.228	1.053

Table 6 (continued).

		Group Statistics		
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Current professional ministry employment?	Yes	123	4.36	.870
	No	46	3.72	1.294

Table 6 reports the results of the *t* test analysis on perseverance in professional ministry with the variable of relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation. Perseverers had a higher regard for the relevance of their degrees to ministry with a higher score ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = .870$ ) on a Likert scale of 1-5 than non-perseverers ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) with 1 indicating *no relevance* and 5 indicating *high relevance*. The test results indicate a significant effect for relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation on perseverance in ministry,  $t(60.85) = 3.105$ ,  $p = .003$ . Thus, the hypothesis was rejected.

H6: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of the perceived quality of seminary education.

Table 7

*Perceived Quality of Seminary Education*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	.555	.457	-.722	175	.471	-.093	.129	-.349	.162
Equal variances not assumed			-.693	85.086	.490	-.093	.135	-.361	.175

Group Statistics				
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Current professional ministry employment?	Yes	126	4.06	.756
	No	51	4.16	.834

Table 7 reports the results of the *t* test analysis on perseverance in professional ministry with the variable of perceived quality of seminary education. Both perseverers and non-perseverers had a high regard for their overall seminary education, ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = .756$ ) and ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = .834$ ) respectively, on a Likert scale of 1-5 with 1 indicating *low quality* and 5 indicating *high quality*. The test results do not indicate a significant effect for perceived quality of seminary education on perseverance in ministry,  $t(175) = -.722$ ,  $p = .471$ . Thus, the hypothesis was not rejected.

H7: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not

persevere in ministry on the variable of employment in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary.

A two-sample contingency Chi-Square was conducted to assess whether there was a difference among students who persevered in professional ministry and their counterparts across ministry-related employment prior to seminary and their counterparts from what would be expected. The results of that test were not significant,  $X^2(1) = 5.684$ ,  $p = .017$ . The proportion of those who did and did not persevere across employment prior to seminary that were and were not ministry-related is reported in Table 8 below.

Overall, these results suggest that those who did and did not persevere across ministry-related employment prior to seminary and their counterparts are relatively equal to what would be expected.

Table 8

*Proportion of Perseverance in the Professional Ministry across Ministry-Related Employment Prior to Seminary and Their Counterparts*

Perseverance	Employment prior to Seminary	
	Ministry-related	Not Ministry-related
Persevered	43.68%	28.16%
Did Not Persevere	11.49%	16.67%

H8: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of employment in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree.

A two-sample contingency Chi-Square was conducted to assess whether there was a difference among students who persevered in professional ministry and their counterparts across ministry-related employment while obtaining the seminary degree and their counterparts from what would be expected. The results of that test were not significant,  $X^2 (1) = 6.465, p = .011$ . The proportion of those who did and did not persevere across employment while obtaining the seminary degree that were and were not ministry-related is reported in Table 9 below.

Overall, these results suggest that those who did and did not persevere across ministry-related employment while obtaining the seminary degree and their counterparts are relatively equal to what would be expected.

Table 9

*Proportion of Perseverance in the Professional Ministry across Ministry-Related Employment While Obtaining the Seminary Degree and Their Counterparts*

Perseverance	Employment while obtaining Degree	
	Ministry-related	Not Ministry-related
Persevered	51.70%	19.32%
Did Not Persevere	15.34%	13.64%

H9: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not persevere in ministry on the variable of parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position.

Table 10

*Parental Encouragement to Pursue a Ministry Position*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	.926	.337	.799	173	.425	.196	.245	-.288	.680
Equal variances not assumed			.784	86.832	.435	.196	.250	-.301	.693

Group Statistics				
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Current professional ministry employment?	Yes	125	2.78	1.447
	No	50	2.58	1.513

Table 10 reports the results of the *t* test analysis on perseverance in professional ministry with the variable of parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position. Both perseverers and non-perseverers were similar on the percentage who received parental encouragement, ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) and ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ) respectively, on a Likert scale of 1-5 with 1 indicating *little encouragement* and 5 indicating *much encouragement*. The test results do not indicate a significant effect for parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position on perseverance in ministry  $t(173) = .799$ ,  $p = .425$ . Thus, the hypothesis was not rejected.

H10: There is not a significant difference between seminary master's degree graduates who persevere in ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who do not

persevere in ministry on the variable of employment in a non-ministry position as a career choice before enrolling in seminary.

A two-sample contingency Chi-Square was conducted to assess whether there was a difference among students who persevered in professional ministry and their counterparts across non-ministry related employment as a career choice prior to seminary enrollment and their counterparts from what would be expected. The results of that test were not significant,  $X^2(1) = .475, p = .491$ . The proportion of those who did and did not persevere across employment prior to seminary enrollment that were and were not non-ministry related as a career choice is reported in Table 11 below.

Overall, these results suggest that those who did and did not persevere across non-ministry related employment as a career choice prior to seminary enrollment and their counterparts are relatively equal to what would be expected.

Table 11

*Proportion of Perseverance in the Professional Ministry across Non-Ministry-Related Employment Prior to Seminary Enrollment and Their Counterparts*

Perseverance	Employment prior to Seminary Enrollment	
	Non-ministry related	Not Non-ministry related
Persevered	63.48%	7.87%
Did Not Persevere	16.29%	12.36%

#### Summary of Findings

The demographic variables of age and gender had differing results. Age was not found to be significant for perseverance in professional ministry with both perseverers

and non-perseverers having an average age of 30. Gender was found to be significant for perseverance in professional ministry, with males persevering at a higher percentage than females. Women persevered at a higher percentage within their gender group compared to their perseverance within the group of all perseverers.

The educational variable of relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation was found to be significant for perseverance in ministry. In comparison to the other educational variables, this variable was the only one that addressed the practicality of the master's degree for the graduates. In the context of all of the educational variables, the relevance of the degree as practical preparation for ministry was important. The other educational variables of undergraduate major, type of undergraduate institution, and perceived quality of seminary education were not found to be significant.

The personal variable of parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position was not found to be significant. In the context of family, parents were not an influence on the ministry aspirations or subsequent perseverance in ministry of their children. The employment variables were not found to be significant. Employment of the student in ministry prior to seminary enrollment or while obtaining the master's degree did not impact the perseverance of the graduates in professional ministry. Employment in a non-ministry career prior to seminary enrollment also did not impact the graduates' perseverance in professional ministry.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

This study investigated the relationship between seminary master's degree graduates who persevered in professional ministry and seminary master's degree graduates who did not persevere in professional ministry on selected demographic, educational, personal, and employment variables.

The dependent variable for this study was perseverance in ministry by the graduate nine years after receiving the master's degree. The independent variables for this study were:

- the student's age at the time of receiving the master's degree from the seminary;
- the gender of the seminary graduates;
- the undergraduate major of the seminary graduates;
- the type of undergraduate institution;
- the relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation;
- the perceived quality of seminary education by the master's degree graduate;
- employment of the student in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary;
- employment of the student in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree;
- parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position; and

- employment by the student in a non-ministry position as a career choice before entering seminary.

The population sample for this research was drawn from the students who received a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the United States during the 1996-97 academic year. The total number of students who received a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary during the 1996-97 academic year was 296. The sample consisted of 178 graduates who completed the Seminary Master's Degree Graduate Survey. Of these graduates, 127 (71.35%) were identified as persevering in professional ministry and 51 (28.65%) were identified as not persevering in professional ministry.

Chi-Square analysis was conducted on the nominal variables of gender, undergraduate major, undergraduate institution, employment in a ministry position prior to enrolling in seminary, employment in a ministry position while obtaining the master's degree, and employment in a non-ministry position as a career choice before enrolling in seminary.

The variables of age at time of receiving the master's degree, relevance of the master's degree to ministry position(s) held after graduation, the perceived quality of seminary education, and parental encouragement to pursue a ministry position were analyzed with the *t* test.

### Discussion

This section will draw conclusions based on the results of the data from this research for each variable. Following this discussion, recommendations for further research will be presented.

### *The Student's Age at the Time of Receiving the Master's Degree from the Seminary*

Hook (1992) found age to be a predictor of perseverance in ministry on selected MMPI scales. The graduate student population in the United States has been aging according to Glazer-Raymo (2005) and Newsome (2011). Staff, Harris, Sabates & Briddell (2010) have reported a consistent rate of career ambiguity among youth over a period of 10 years. The late twenties were described by Arnett (2000) as a time of uncertainty and exploration. It was reasonable to conclude from these findings that age might be a predictive factor in the perseverance of master's degree graduates.

In contrast to the conclusion based on the literature, this study did not find age to be significant for perseverance in professional ministry. Thus, the age of students does not need to be a focus of seminary officials regarding perseverance in professional ministry, even though they will need to be aware of student life issues that may arise due to the age range of seminarians while attending the seminary. Such life issues could include childcare, aging parents, and medical care related to the age of seminary students. Seminaries typically address the latter specifically by requiring students to have medical insurance, often offering a low cost program through the seminary.

### *The Gender of the Seminary Graduates*

Craig (1992) found gender to be a predictor of church employment for Bible college graduates with males more likely to find church employment than females. Research on ordination after seminary (Larsen, 1995; Wheeler, 2001) has shown that men are ordained at higher rates than women. Ordination does not always guarantee employment but typically precedes employment. This employment difference by gender is familiar throughout many professions (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser &

Robinson, 1997). The consistency of male employment and the lack of employment data on seminary graduates illustrated by the literature supported the inclusion of gender in this study.

Since gender was significant for perseverance in ministry with males persevering at a higher percentage than females, there may be needs and desires of women students that are not being addressed by the seminary. While seminaries may not actively recruit women students, they should pursue an understanding of their women students in order to better prepare them for professional ministry. An effective assessment and planning program might reveal that women leave professional ministry due to marriage or the addition of children to the family. Some women may never have intended to enter professional ministry and were obtaining a master's degree so they would have a comparable seminary experience to their husbands. Such an experience might help wives better understand the training of their husbands for professional ministry, providing a commonality of knowledge and experience to strengthen the marital relationship.

#### *The Undergraduate Major of the Seminary Graduates*

Hook (1992) found that seminary graduates who did not persevere in ministry held graduate degrees before entering seminary at a rate approximately three times higher than perseverers. Craft and Baker (2003) found that the undergraduate major of lawyers impacted their earnings with economics majors earning 18% more than political science majors. The current study would have provided similar data to Craft and Baker (2003) and more specific data than Hook (1992), but did not do so since ministry-related undergraduate majors and their counterparts were relatively equal in perseverance.

Therefore, undergraduate degrees of seminary applicants do not need to be a concern for seminaries regarding perseverance in professional ministry. A variety of majors, not all ministry-related, are typically represented among seminary students but this does not impact their perseverance in professional ministry. The only potential issue related to this variable is whether the student is academically qualified to be admitted to the institution.

#### *The Type of Undergraduate Institution*

Hook (1992) found that the type of undergraduate institution attended before seminary was not significant related to perseverance in ministry. The same study did identify a trend of higher perseverance by Bible college graduates than graduates of the other institutional categories in the study. Students at less selective colleges and universities persevered in their careers more than students who attended more selective institutions (Reitz, 1975). Dougherty (1968) found that the type of high school attended before seminary enrollment was a predictor of likelihood to be ordained into the Catholic priesthood. The type of seminary attended was also found to significantly affect the role preferences of pastors (Blanchard, 1981). This evidence suggested that the type of undergraduate institution in this study (private or public) could provide additional meaningful data regarding perseverance in ministry, but such data were not a result of the study.

Therefore, seminaries should not be concerned with the type of undergraduate institutions (private or public) of applicants. Students are not impacted regarding their perseverance in ministry by the type of institution they attend, similar to not being impacted by their type of undergraduate major. The consistency of the findings for these

two variables suggests that seminaries need only focus on the academic credentials of prospective students and not on types of undergraduate majors or institutions. Seminaries do not need to be concerned about how their students will persevere in ministry because of their undergraduate institutions or majors.

*The Relevance of the Master's Degree to Ministry Position(s) Held After Graduation*

Reeves (1982) identified areas for improvement in seminary education which would benefit Master of Religious Education students once they were employed in professional ministry (spiritual development, finances, filing systems, study techniques, personal libraries). Larsen (1995) found that seminary education did not prepare Master of Divinity students for the organizational and administrative aspects of their ministry. This evidence suggested that the relevancy of the master's degree might be a predictive factor for perseverance in professional ministry.

The fact that perseverers rated the relevancy of their degree to their professional ministry higher than non-perseverers shows that seminaries must provide master's degrees that are practical in their preparation of students for professional ministry. Seminaries should use continuous curriculum assessment and planning to develop and improve their curriculum at the degree and course levels so that a high level of degree relevance to ministry is maintained. The use of feedback from alumni as practitioners in the field would be invaluable for this process.

*The Perceived Quality of Seminary Education by the Master's Degree Graduate*

Brainard (1996) found a need for more practical seminary training of ministers including internships and mentors during their overall educational preparation for ministry. Pastors have identified formal seminary training as a key factor in their

professional development (McKenna et al., 2007). Those with advanced seminary degrees viewed their overall training more positively than those without advanced degrees (Lowery, 2010). This evidence suggested that seminary graduates' perception of their overall seminary education might be a predictive factor of perseverance in professional ministry.

While it would seem counterintuitive to conclude that seminaries should not be concerned about the perceived quality of the education they provide, that is the proper conclusion based on the data. That said, it is important to note that graduates would probably have been inclined to think about all of their seminary education experience for this response, including some of the non-educational aspects of attending seminary such as administration, food service, or housing. While seminaries should seek to improve the overall experience of students, they should be more concerned about their students' specific academic experience.

#### *Employment of the Student in a Ministry Position Prior to Enrolling in Seminary*

Employment in ministry prior to college enrollment was found to be a significant predictor of Bible college graduates in professional ministry (Craig, 1992). Bailey (1989) found persevering pastors to have a stronger career commitment than non-persevering pastors. Pastors determine their potential for success or failure in ministry based on previous experience which impacts their perseverance (Zondag, 2004). Armstrong (1984) identified experience in a particular field as an indicator of perseverance in that field. This evidence suggested that ministry employment prior to seminary might be a predictive factor of perseverance in professional ministry, but the results of this study did not provide such data.

Therefore, seminaries should not expect the employment of applicants in ministry prior to attending seminary to affect their perseverance in professional ministry. The practical implication of this would be not to expect or require ministry employment as a condition of attending the seminary. While seminaries could encourage prospective students to seek employment in ministry prior to enrolling, the practical reason for doing so would be to provide references for the student if he or she plans to seek ministry employment during seminary rather than trying to impact the perseverance of the student in ministry after graduation.

*Employment of the Student in a Ministry Position While Obtaining the Master's Degree*

Employment in ministry during college was found to be a significant predictor of Bible college graduates in professional ministry (Craig, 1992). Persevering pastors have been found to have a stronger career commitment than non-persevering pastors (Bailey, 1989). Internships can play a significant role in the career direction of students (Kardash et al., 2007). This evidence suggested that ministry employment while enrolled in seminary might be a predictive factor of perseverance in professional ministry, but the results of this study did not provide such data.

Therefore, seminaries should not expect the employment of applicants in ministry during seminary attendance to affect their graduates' perseverance in professional ministry. Seminaries typically require students to participate in some kind of ministry field experience while enrolled and also offer ministry placement services to enrolled students. These are worthy endeavors, but this study indicates seminaries should not have unrealistic expectations of their impact on students' perseverance in ministry. As with ministry employment prior to attending seminary, students can be encouraged to seek

ministry employment while attending seminary to provide references for the student for ministry employment opportunities after graduation. Of course, such employment would also provide financial resources for the student as well.

*Parental Encouragement to Pursue a Ministry Position*

Craig (1992) did not find parental attitude to be a predictor of perseverance in ministry of college graduates. However, the positive influence of parents on the vocational plans of their children has been established by Adamuti-Trache and Andres (2008), Bregman and Killen (2000), and Li and Kerpelman (2007). Catholic seminary students who dropped out of seminary typically had their mothers as the single strongest advocates for them to remain in seminary (Ventimiglia, 1977). This evidence suggested a need for data on parental encouragement to pursue ministry that would add to the research of Ventimiglia (1977) and expand the research conducted by Craig (1992). The results of the current study did not indicate parental encouragement as a predictive factor of perseverance in professional ministry.

Therefore, seminaries do not need to be concerned about whether their students received encouragement from their parents before attending seminary. Seminarians apparently have the personal resolve and commitment to pursue professional ministry regardless of their parents' perspective. This resolve may be related to the students' understanding of their calling to ministry which they are committed to fulfill regardless of parental perspective. In the context of calling to ministry, parental influence could be the most influential relationship for seminary graduates who experienced a calling to ministry at a younger age. Seminary students who experienced a calling to ministry at a later age would probably have less parental influence than their younger counterparts.

*Employment by the Student in a Non-ministry Position as a Career Choice before Entering Seminary*

Craig (1992) found that students who were employed in non-ministry work during college were less likely to persevere in professional ministry after college. A majority of seminarians were employed in non-ministry careers before attending seminary (Hicks, 1981). Many of them decided to attend seminary after college (Wheeler, 2001). Older seminary graduates have experienced less advancement in professional ministry compared to their younger counterparts (Nesbitt, 1995). The extent of second-career seminarians indicated by the literature suggested that non-ministry as a career before entering seminary might be a predictive factor of perseverance in professional ministry. However, this was not substantiated by the results of this study.

Therefore, seminaries should not be concerned about second career applicants regarding perseverance in professional ministry. These applicants' employment in non-ministry positions prior to attending seminary does not have a negative impact on their perseverance in professional ministry. Such employment may actually have a positive impact on perseverance in ministry if the graduate's work experience provided opportunities to develop leadership skills related to personnel, finances, and facilities. Students with this kind of background may actually be able to mentor younger students who may have had fewer opportunities to develop such leadership skills.

#### Recommendations

The following are some recommendations for further research and for use of these data by seminaries regarding the perseverance of master's degree graduates in professional ministry. The variable of gender would merit further research since women

persevered in ministry at a higher percentage within their gender group compared to their perseverance within the total group of perseverers. Research that investigates the predictors of female master's degree graduates in ministry would provide more specific data than found in this study. Such data would provide an opportunity for seminaries to better understand the needs and desires of women students which could then be addressed through appropriate programs and personnel. Even if seminaries do not actively recruit women students, they should attempt to provide educational opportunities that would positively impact the perseverance of women in professional ministry.

Since the relevance of the master's degree was significant for perseverance in ministry, the relevance of specific master's degrees for perseverance in professional ministry would merit investigation. Knowing whether specific degrees were significant for perseverance would allow seminaries to know which degrees would need to be addressed for relevance to ministry. Curriculum development and planning could focus on those degrees that needed to be modified in order to provide more practical training for students that would help them persevere in professional ministry.

This finding should be an encouragement to seminaries regarding the content of degrees offered in that persevering master's degree graduates apparently gained useful knowledge and skills for their professional ministry positions. This finding should also be motivation for seminaries to maintain, and implement as necessary, curriculum development and assessment processes that ensure the scholarly and practical nature of seminary education. Failure to do so can result in a decline of the relevancy of degree programs for graduates that could negatively affect the perseverance of graduates in professional ministry. In order for graduates to have the most impact as professional

ministers, the seminary curriculum must maintain its relevancy for the ministry positions that will be held by graduates.

The findings of this study illustrate the importance of degree programs that students recognize as being relevant to their professional ministry experience. Thus, seminaries should be sure that curriculum development and assessment policies and procedures are in place that focus on the implementation of degree programs that are relevant to the professional ministry experiences of their students. This will require that seminaries collect feedback from master's degree graduates as part of the planning and assessment process.

## APPENDIX A

## SEMINARY MASTER'S DEGREE GRADUATE SURVEY

Directions: Please complete this survey and return it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. This research is being conducted for a doctoral dissertation at The University of Southern Mississippi on the perseverance of seminary master's degree graduates in the professional ministry. Please see the enclosed informed consent page for contact information if you have questions. Thank you for participating!

1. a. Master's degree I received from the seminary: \_\_\_\_\_  
 b. Relevance of this degree to ministry positions held after obtaining it (please circle a number): Not at all— 1 2 3 4 5 —Very Much

2. Age at the time I received my seminary master's degree: \_\_\_\_\_

3. ( ) Male ( ) Female

4. Please list all ministry positions held after obtaining the seminary master's degree. Please include any form of ministry for which you received financial compensation:

Position Held

From (year)—To (year)

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5. I was employed in a ministry position:  
 a. prior to enrolling in seminary: ( ) yes ( ) no  
 b. while obtaining my seminary master's degree: ( ) yes ( ) no

6. The overall quality of my seminary education was (please circle a number):

Low— 1 2 3 4 5 —High

7. Financial aid contributed \_\_\_\_\_% to my educational expenses while obtaining my seminary master's degree.

8. Institution from which you received your **undergraduate** degree:  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Undergraduate major:\_\_\_\_\_
10. My parent(s) encouraged me to pursue a ministry position (please circle a number):  
Not at all— 1 2 3 4 5 —Very Much
11. My spouse encouraged me to pursue a ministry position (please circle a number or check 'Not Apply' if you were not married when you began pursuing a ministry position):  
Not at all— 1 2 3 4 5 —Very Much ( ) Not Apply
12. My parents were employed in a ministry position at some time before I decided to pursue a ministry position: ( ) yes ( ) no
13. I have participated in spiritual and/or personal renewal activities and/or events while holding ministry positions:  
Not at all— 1 2 3 4 5 —Very Much
14. I was employed in a non-ministry position as a career choice before I was employed in a ministry position: ( ) yes ( ) no  
If yes, please indicate career:\_\_\_\_\_ Years employed\_\_\_\_\_
15. Marital status at time of receiving seminary master's degree:  
( ) Never Married ( ) Married ( ) Divorced ( ) Spouse Deceased
16. My current annual salary range (including housing allowance if applicable) is:  
( ) less than \$25,000  
( ) \$25,001--\$45,000  
( ) \$45,001--\$65,000  
( ) \$65,001--\$85,000  
( ) over \$85,000
17. Current employment position:\_\_\_\_\_
- This position is: ( ) full-time ( ) part-time. If this position is not a ministry position, please indicate below your reason(s) for not being employed in a ministry position (e.g., job fit, change of interest, financial, burnout, family, marital, termination, etc.):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH  
(INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD) APPROVAL FORM

The University of  
Southern Mississippi  
Institutional Review Board

115 College Drive #5-47  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
Tel: 601.266.6657  
Fax: 601.266.5309  
www.usm.edu/irb

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE  
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.  
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 26081402

PROJECT TITLE: **An Analysis of the Perseverance of Seminary Master's Degree Graduates in Professional Ministry**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 03/01/06 to 12/15/08

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Steven T. Smith**

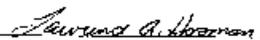
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & Research**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **09/05/06 to 09/04/07**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.  
HSPRC Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
9-06-06  
Date

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