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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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# Perceived Influences on Occupational Choice of Seminarians

A comparative study of incoming students at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne; Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; and Seminex, St. Louis

William M. Cross

This effort is the result of an interest aroused a number of years ago when I was working on my doctoral thesis. An important source and inspiration of my study, which dealt with the influences felt by seminarians on their occupational choice, was Ross Scherer's thesis, *Ministers of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod*. Scherer emphasized a longterm contrast between students of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and those at Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois. My interest in this contrast was aroused partly by the synodical controversy arising several years ago which had as one of its results the exit from the St. Louis seminary of most of the faculty members and students and their incorporation into Seminex. I was intrigued by the question, "What now would be, if any, the contrast between the students at Springfield and those of the reconstituted seminaries at St. Louis"?

Personnel at all three schools were interested in my question. A shortened form of the questionnaire I used for my thesis in 1970 was administered in the fall of 1976 and 1977 to entering students. Some 65 instruments were completed and returned from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and 70 from Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield (now relocated at Ft. Wayne), in 1976, while 35 completed questionnaires were sent back from Seminex in the fall of 1977. The data portrayed in this presentation are identified by the numbers of items from the questionnaire which are especially relevant to the contrasts Scherer noted, and the influences which he found to be significant. Following the presentation and the analysis of the data, a summary is made and conclusions are presented. An attempt is also made to suggest limitations of the study and implications for future research. The author welcomes inquiries, questions, and opportunities for discussion with any persons so desiring. The numbering of the tables follows the numbering of items in the questionnaire.

**Table 2 Class in Seminary, by Seminary**

Class in Seminary	Seminex (N=69)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=35)
1	40%	31%	97%
2	33%	47%	3%
3	1%	0%	0%
4	26%	20%	0%
5	0%	2%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Over 70% of the students from all the schools were in the first and second years of their studies. Seminex had 97%, St. Louis nearly 80%, and Ft. Wayne, about 72% in these categories.

**Table 3 Age, by Seminary**

Age	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=70)
21-24	68%	67%	42%
25-29	17%	31%	37%
30/over	15%	2%	21%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Over two-thirds of both Seminex and St. Louis students were represented in the 21-24 age bracket, as compared with about 40% at Ft. Wayne. Only 17% at Seminex, but about one-third — nearly twice as many — of St. Louis and Ft. Wayne students were in the 25-29 age bracket. Over 20% of Ft. Wayne students and 15% of those at Seminex, as compared with only 2% of those at St. Louis, were in the 30-years-and -older group.

**Table 4 Racial Group**

All students at each school were Caucasian.

**Table 5 Sex**

While all students at St. Louis and Ft. Wayne were male, 25% of incoming Seminex students were female.

**Table 7 Number of Older Siblings, by Seminary**

Number of Older Siblings	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=70)
0	40%	45%	42%
1	26%	15%	24%
2	31%	11%	17%
3	0%	15%	9%
4	0%	8%	4%
5/more	3%	6%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%

The contrast between the seminaries can be seen more adequately when the numbers are consolidated.

Number of Older Siblings	Seminary		
	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=70)
0	40%	45%	42%
1	26%	15%	24%
2	31%	11%	17%
3/over	3%	29%	17%
Total	100%	100%	100%

There is only a 5% difference between the schools as to the number of first-born students. Both show a very high proportion (over 40%) of first-borns. Seminex and Ft. Wayne had about 10% more students having one sibling born ahead of them. Seminex had nearly twice as many students having two older siblings (31% to 17%) and nearly three times as many (31% to 11%) as St. Louis.

Number of Older Siblings	Seminary		
	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=70)
0-2	97%	71%	83%
3/over	3%	29%	17%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Seminex had almost 30% more seminarians in the 0-2 category than St. Louis (97% to 71%), and about 14% more than Ft. Wayne. St. Louis had nearly twice as many in the 3-and-over group as Ft. Wayne, and nearly ten times as many as Seminex.

**Table 9** Marital State, by Seminary

Marital State	Seminary		
	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=69)
Never Married	62%	42%	30%
Engaged	6%	6%	0%
Married	26%	50%	66%
Other	6%	2%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Almost two-thirds of Seminex students were never married — some 20% more than at St. Louis, and over twice as many as at Ft. Wayne. About two-thirds of the seminarians at Ft. Wayne and over 50% at St. Louis were married, but only about a quarter of the Seminex students. Engaged students numbered no more than 6% at any school.

**Table 8** Size of Place of Origin, by Seminary

Size of Place	Seminex (N=32)	St. Louis (N=64)	Ft. Wayne (N=70)
Farm, village, town	16%	25%	21%
2,500-24,999	31%	22%	20%
25,000-99,999	13%	25%	21%
100,000 / over	40%	28%	38%
Total	100%	100%	100%

About one-fourth of the students of the St. Louis seminary, as compared to about one-fifth of the Ft. Wayne men and only 16% of those at Seminex, came from rural or small town communities. Fewer Ft. Wayne and St. Louis seminarians—about one-fifth of them — as compared to Seminex students—not quite one-third — came from communities of 2,500 to 24,999 people in size. About 10% more (40% and 38%, as compared to 28%) Seminex and Ft. Wayne students came from cities 100,000 and over.

**Table 12** Political Preference, by Seminary

Political Preference	Seminex (N=34)	St. Louis (N=70)	Ft. Wayne (N=69)
<b>Democrat</b>			
Liberal	24%	4%	9%
Conservative	18%	16%	22%
<b>Republican</b>			
Liberal	29%	9%	14%
Conservative	3%	48%	32%
Other	26%	23%	23%
Total	100%	100%	100%
<b>Political Preference</b>	<b>Seminex</b>	<b>St. Louis</b>	<b>Ft. Wayne</b>
<b>Liberals</b>			
(Both parties)	53%	13%	23%
<b>Conservatives</b>			
(Both parties)	21%	64%	54%
Other	26%	23%	23%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Over half of the Seminex students are political liberals — over twice as many as those at Ft. Wayne, and over four times as many as those at St. Louis. Almost two thirds of the St. Louisans and over half of those at Ft. Wayne identified themselves as politically conservative; only about 20% of Seminex students did so.

**Table 13** Doctrinal Position, by Seminary

Doctrinal Position	Seminex (33)	St. Louis (63)	Ft. Wayne (69)
Liberal	30%	0%	0%
Conservative	12%	78%	94%
Middle of road	58%	22%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Liberals were present only at Seminex (30%). Moderates were strong at Seminex — nearly 60%, and thus nearly three times as many as those at St. Louis, and nearly 10 times as many as those present at Ft. Wayne. Nearly all Ft. Wayne students and almost 80% of St. Louisans were conservative doctrinally, as compared with slightly over 10% at Seminex.

**Table 20** Highest Grade Completed by Father, by Seminary

Highest Grade Completed	Seminex (N=34)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=70)
8th grade or less	9%	9%	24%
Some or all of high school	41%	43%	32%
Some college or completed college	35%	25%	30%
Post-graduate work	15%	23%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Over 40% of the students at all three schools had fathers who had done at least some college work. Those at Seminex led (50%), followed closely by St. Louisans. Over 40% of both Seminex and St. Louis students had fathers with at least some high school education — nearly 10% more than were in this category at Ft. Wayne. Nearly three times as many students at Ft. Wayne had fathers with 8 grades or less of education.

**Table 21** Highest Grade Completed by Mother, by Seminary

Highest Grade Completed	Seminex (N=65)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=70)
8th grade or less	6%	8%	4%
Some or all high school	53%	45%	73%
Some or all of college	38%	43%	20%

Post-graduate work	3%	4%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Nearly twice as many St. Louis and Seminex students had mothers who had done some college work (47% and 41% respectively, as compared to 23%). Almost three-quarters of the Ft. Wayne men had mothers with at least some high school. This percentage compared with 53% in the case of Seminex and 45% in the case of St. Louis. Fewer than 10% of the students at any of the schools had mothers with 8 grades or less of education.

**Table 25 Age of First Thought of Becoming a Minister, by Seminary**

Age of First Thought	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=64)	Ft. Wayne (N=67)
Before ten	32%	34%	24%
Between ten and thirteen	11%	25%	18%
During high school	17%	36%	15%
During college	17%	3%	31%
After college	23%	2%	12%
Total	100%	100%	100%

About 10% more students at both St. Louis and Seminex first thought of studying for the ministry before the age of ten. St. Louis led Ft. Wayne by 7% and Seminex by 14% in number of seminarians first considering the ministry between the ages of ten and thirteen. St. Louis had more than one-third, and over twice as many, with first thoughts on this matter occurring during high school. In contrast, nearly one-third of the Ft. Wayne students first considered the ministry during college — almost twice as many as those in this category at Seminex, and nearly ten times as many as those at St. Louis. Seminex led in those deciding after college, with nearly one-quarter — twice the number of students in this category at Ft. Wayne, and over ten times that at St. Louis.

**Table 25 Age of First Thought of Becoming a Minister, by Seminary.**

If we collapse the categories so that we have a two-by-two table, the contrast is even more evident. (See below.)

Age of First Thought	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=64)	Ft. Wayne (N=67)
Before/during high school	60%	95%	57%

During/after college	40%	5%	43%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Nearly all (95%) of the St. Louis students, as compared to less than two-thirds of those at Seminex (60%) and Ft. Wayne (57%), had first thought of becoming ministers before or during high school. About 40% of those from Ft. Wayne and Seminex (43% and 40% respectively) had such thoughts during or after college — about 8 times the number at St. Louis.

**Table 26 Age When It Was Definitely Decided to Study for the Ministry, by Seminary**

Age of Decision	Seminex (N=33)	St. Louis (N=64)	Ft. Wayne (N=66)
Before ten	6%	7.5%	4%
Between ten and thirteen	6%	11.0%	6%
During high school	12%	55.0%	8%
During college	46%	7.5%	44%
After college	30%	19.0%	38%
Total	100%	100%	100%

The number of seminarians deciding before the age of ten to study for the ministry varied little by seminary. No school exceeded ten per cent in this category. Only 11% of St. Louisans definitely decided between the ages of 10 and 13. This number was, however, almost twice as many as at Seminex and Ft. Wayne. Over half (55%) of the St. Louis students had definitely decided to study for the ministry during high school. This number was over 4 times that which obtained at Seminex, and 7 times that at Ft. Wayne. Nearly 50% of both the Seminex and Ft. Wayne students had definitely decided during college — nearly 7 times as many people as at St. Louis. Over two-thirds of the Ft. Wayne students (38%) and about 30% of those at Seminex made a definite decision after college — half-again to twice as many as those in this group of St. Louis.

**Table 26 Age When It Was Definitely Decided to Study for the Ministry, by Seminary**

Note the contrast when we go to the two-by-two table. (See below.)

Age of decision	Seminex (N=33)	St. Louis (N=64)	Ft. Wayne (N=66)
Before/during high school	24%	73%	18%



During/after			
college	76%	27%	82%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Almost 75% of the St. Louisans definitely decided to study for the ministry before or during high school. More than 75% of the students at both Ft. Wayne and Seminex had done so during or after college.

**Table 27 Feeling Sure the Ministry Will Be One's Life Work, by Seminary**

Sureness of Ministry	Seminex (N=34)	St. Louis (N=63)	Ft. Wayne (N=68)
Very sure	61%	81%	87%
Somewhat sure	24%	11%	6%
Undecided	9%	5%	4%
Somewhat unsure	3%	1.5%	0%
Very unsure	3%	1.5%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Over 60% of the students in each school were very sure. Ft. Wayne led, with nearly 90%, followed by over 80% at St. Louis, and less than two-thirds at Seminex. Almost one-quarter of the Seminex people were somewhat sure, which was over twice the number of St. Louisans, and about 4 times the number of those at Ft. Wayne. Almost 10% of the Seminex students were undecided — about twice as many people as at Ft. Wayne and St. Louis.

**Table 29a. Extent of Participation in Church Activities While in College, by Seminary**

Extent of Participation	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=63)	Ft. Wayne (N=69)
Very much	26%	11%	23%
Moderately	36%	38%	26%
Slightly	29%	46%	37%
Not at all	9%	5%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%

About one-quarter of both the Seminex and Ft. Wayne students participated very much (26% and 23% respectively) — over twice as many as at St. Louis. Moderate participation was the case for over one-third of seminarians at Seminex and St. Louis, some 10% higher than the number at Ft. Wayne. Slight participation was the pattern for St. Louis—almost 50%, as compared to over one-third for Ft. Wayne and under one-third for Seminex.

Greater contrast can be seen when we collapse our categories. (See below.)

Extent of Participation	Seminex	St. Louis	Ft. Wayne
Very much/ moderate	62%	49%	49%
Slightly/ not at all	38%	51%	51%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Almost two-thirds of the Seminex students participated very much or moderately. St. Louis and Ft. Wayne students were divided nearly evenly between the categories.

**Table 38** Extent to Which a Minister Influenced Decision to Enter Seminary, by Seminary

Ministerial Influence	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=62)	Ft. Wayne (N=69)
Most influence	54%	50%	42%
Moderate influence	29%	42%	44%
Least influence	17%	8%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Over 50% of the St. Louis and Seminex students, and over 40% of those at Ft. Wayne felt strong influence. Moderate influence was experienced by more than 40% of the seminarians at Ft. Wayne (44%) and St. Louis (42%) — as compared to under 30% at Seminex.

Ministerial Influence	Seminex	St. Louis	Ft. Wayne
Most/moderate influence	83%	92%	86%
Least influence	17%	8%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%

**Table 41** Extent to Which Father Influenced Decision to Enter Seminary, by Seminary

Father's Influence	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=69)
Most influence	11%	18%	14%
Moderate influence	46%	46%	38%
Least influence	43%	36%	48%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Over a third (about 35%) of the St. Louis students, as compared with nearly 48% of those at Ft. Wayne and 43% at Seminex, felt little influence. Some 8% more at St. Louis and Seminex felt moderate influence from this source — over one-third of all students in each school. Nearly one-fifth of those at St. Louis, as

compared with about 15% at Ft. Wayne, but only 11% at Seminex, felt strong influence from this source. All groups had over half the students feeling combinations of strong and moderate influence, with about two-thirds of the St. Louis students in this category.

**Table 42** Extent to Which Mother Influenced the Decision to Enter Seminary, by Seminary

Mother's Influence	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=70)
Most influence	14%	18%	11%
Moderate influence	46%	51%	41%
Least influence	40%	31%	48%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Slightly over half of the St. Louis seminarians, as compared to slightly under half of those at Seminex and about 40% of the Ft. Wayne men, felt moderate influence from this source. Over a third at St. Louis, two-fifths at Seminex, but 50% at Ft. Wayne felt little influence.

**Table 48** Extent to Which a Desire to Help People Influenced Decision to Enter Seminary, by Seminary

Desire to Help People	Seminex (N=34)	St. Louis (N=64)	Ft. Wayne (N=69)
Most influence	79%	67%	57%
Moderate influence	15%	25%	29%
Least influence	6%	8%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%

A majority of students at each seminary felt strong influence from this source. Almost 4 out of 5 at Seminex, over two-thirds at St. Louis, and nearly 60% at Ft. Wayne felt "most influence." About one-fourth of those at Ft. Wayne and St. Louis, but only about 15% of Seminex people perceived "moderate influence." "Least influence" did not exceed 15% at any school. Such influence was experienced about twice as much at Ft. Wayne as at St. Louis and Seminex.

**Table 49** Extent to Which Concern for Social and Community Problems Influenced Decision to Enter Seminary, by Seminary

Concern for Problems	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=67)
Most influence	63%	23%	16%
Moderate influence	31%	55%	40%
Least influence	6%	22%	44%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Students at all of the seminaries felt substantial moderate influence from this source, with those from St. Louis ahead of Ft. Wayne by about 15%, and in front of Seminex by nearly two-to-one. About one-quarter at St. Louis, 16% at Ft. Wayne, but nearly two-thirds at Seminex felt strong influence. Minimal influence operated for over 40% of the Ft. Wayne students. This number was twice the figure at St. Louis, and over 7 times that at Seminex.

**Table 50** Extent to Which a Feeling of Duty Influenced Decision to Enter Seminary, by Seminary

Influence of Duty	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=68)
Most influence	20%	18%	21%
Moderate influence	57%	54%	38%
Least influence	23%	28%	41%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Over half of the St. Louis and Seminex students but under 40% of those at Ft. Wayne felt moderate influence from this source. About the same number (around 20%) from all the schools felt strong influence. Nearly 50% more at Ft. Wayne felt only minimal influence.

Students from all seminaries felt a substantial amount of moderate influence from father, mother, and feeling of duty. St. Louis students tended to feel these influences to a stronger extent. The table below sums up this contrast.

Source of Influence	Seminex	St. Louis	Ft. Wayne
Feeling of duty	57%	54%	38%
Mother	46%	51%	41%
Father	46%	46%	38%

**Table 51** Extent to Which a Feeling of Divine Call Influenced Decision to Enter Seminary, by Seminary

Feeling of Divine Call	Seminex (N=35)	St. Louis (N=65)	Ft. Wayne (N=68)
Most influence	65%	74%	67%
Moderate influence	26%	25%	24%
Least influence	9%	1%	9%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Students of all seminaries felt very strongly an influence of divine call, with those at St. Louis being influenced more strongly by 17% to 19%. Students of this school felt moderate influence to about the same extent as did those of Ft. Wayne and Seminex.

**Summary Table of Most Felt Influence, by Seminary**

<b>Source of Influence</b>	<b>Seminex</b>	<b>St. Louis</b>	<b>Ft. Wayne</b>
Desire to Help People	79%	67%	57%
Divine Call	65%	74%	67%
Concern for Social and Community Problems	63%	23%	16%
Minister	54%	50%	42%

A considerable number of influences were perceived as having little or no effect. The extent of such influences varied considerably by school, up to about 10 percentage points. The summational table below shows the contrast.

<b>Perceived Influence (Minimal)</b>	<b>Seminary</b>		
	<b>Seminex</b>	<b>St. Louis</b>	<b>Ft. Wayne</b>
Scout Leader	100%	95%	92%
Brother	85%	82%	83%
Councilman	80%	77%	72%
Youth Leader	74%	63%	78%
Woman Companion	64%	70%	48%
Friend	44%	64%	64%
No Felt Alternate	60%	62%	56%
Teacher	66%	55%	63%

The present study, then, is based on the results of 135 questionnaires completed by incoming students in the fall of 1976 at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and at Concordia Theological Seminary, now in Ft. Wayne, and the results of 35 questionnaires completed in the fall of 1977 at Seminex, St. Louis. Over 70% of the students at each school were in the first two years of their studies. Seminex and St. Louis students were younger and of a narrower age range. All respondents were Caucasians. While all students at the Concordias were male, 25% of those at Seminex were females. Slightly over 40% at each school were first-borns. There was little difference as to size of place of origin. Two-thirds of Seminex students had never married — just the opposite of those at Ft. Wayne. St. Louis men were divided equally between these categories. Politically, over 50% of the Seminex students were liberals. Over half of those at Ft. Wayne and nearly two-thirds at St. Louis were conservatives. Doctrinally, nearly 60% of the Seminex students were moderate and 30% were liberal. Both Concordias were strongly conservative — over 75% at St. Louis,

and over 90% at Ft. Wayne. Fathers and mothers of Seminex and St. Louis students were better educated. Ft. Wayne students tended to think about the ministry for the first time during or after college, in contrast to the St. Louisans, who tended to do so much earlier. Seminex students were spread out in between these two poles. The definite decision to study for the ministry was made by nearly three-fourths of the St. Louisans before or during high school. In contrast, over three-quarters of the Seminex students and over four-fifths of those at Ft. Wayne decided to do so during or after college. Over 80% of the students at the Concordias, but only about 60% of those at Seminex were very sure that the ministry would be their life work. Students of none of the three schools were heavily involved in church activities while in college.

### Conclusions

The fact that Ft. Wayne students completing the questionnaire tended to be of a wider age range may account for the fact that more of them are married. Wives and girlfriends showed up as a moderate influence for Ft. Wayne men but not for those at St. Louis or Seminex. Such a situation may indicate that woman companions may be more of an influence, career-wise, for Ft. Wayne students. That one-fourth of Seminex students are themselves women gives evidence of a more liberal institutional attitude. It may be surprising to the reader to note that St. Louis students responding to the questionnaire were politically more conservative. This circumstance may be part of the "Seminex Effect." Perhaps the more politically liberal persons have left, and with them the tendency of St. Louis men to have been in the past possibly more liberal than their Springfield counterparts. At any rate, a small majority of incoming Seminex students are political liberals. This "Seminex Effect" cannot be seen, at least not as much, in the area of doctrinal position. Though over three-quarters of St. Louis men identified themselves as conservatives, some 22% or so still saw themselves as moderates. If the "Seminex Effect" occurred, perhaps some of the earlier contrast to Springfield remained. Note again that nearly 90% of incoming Seminex students identified themselves as liberals and moderates (30% and 58% respectively). The older contrast of St. Louis men as being those who thought much earlier of the ministry, and who also definitely decided early, seems to be evident. At any rate, these contrasts of early and late thought and decision concerning the ministry are quite clear. Incoming Seminex students, however, show a profile much like that of Ft. Wayne in this respect. Students in all three schools seem very sure that the ministry will be

their permanent career. It would seem to me that this circumstance is further evidence of the "Seminex Effect." I am presuming that the pre-Seminex pattern at St. Louis was that the St. Louis men were considerably less sure that the ministry, at least the parish ministry, would be their life-work, as compared to their colleagues at Springfield. Incoming Seminex students seem to reflect this St. Louis pattern.

Persons and influences affecting career choice were similar for all three groups. The strong and moderate influences, however, were felt to a greater extent by Seminex and St. Louis seminarians. This situation may be due to the fact that these students tended to be younger as a group and felt family influences to choose the ministry more intensely. Students at all three schools show the influence of pastor, mother, and father — in that order, as Scherer observed some fifteen years ago. People and considerations which Scherer found to be sources of little or minimal influence make a similar showing in my data. Teachers and brothers, among others, are felt by him to be far down in the list of influences. Concern for people was, according to both Scherer and my findings, a strong motivation. Concern for community and social problems was felt strongly only by incoming students at Seminex.

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