



Salt, Leaven & Light

**HARDING**  
UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF BIBLE AND RELIGION

January 19, 2011

*The College of Bible and Religion of Harding University seeks to lead all students to know, live and share God's Word and to understand, love and serve God's world through and beyond their chosen vocation.*

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## Master of Ministry J-Mester 2011

More than sixty students from all over the United States are pursuing a Master of Ministry degree at-a-distance through the Center for Advanced Ministry Training. The majority of these students are full-time ministers who are continuing their academic training without leaving their ministry context. The program does require that they come to our Searcy campus on two occasions for a week of class. This allows them to get to know their classmates and faculty while receiving the lecture portion of a course that will be completed online.



This year, Drs. Cochran and Richardson instructed the M.Min. students in the Theological Foundations for Ministry course in what turned out to be our smallest J-Mester group ever. Enrollment for the course, at one point as high as thirteen individuals, shrank to six for the week. A couple of students withdrew their registration over the Christmas holidays, another dropped as a result of his concern for his expectant wife, while yet another was suddenly presented with the opportunity to adopt a child from Guatemala. Then, widespread snow and ice throughout the south central and southeastern United States made travel very difficult for others. While the class was small, it was composed of some outstanding students who benefitted from the week together.

Participants this year: **Ryan Chamblee** is a teacher and coach at Greater Atlanta Christian School in Atlanta, Georgia, where he has been employed for the past three years. Ryan is a graduate of Harding University with a degree in Business.

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## Changes in Freshmen & Sophomore Bible Classes

For the first time in decades, freshmen who enter Harding in the Fall of 2011 will not be taking New Testament Survey. Instead, they will take a new course, "The Life and Teachings of Jesus (Gospels)" in the fall and "The Faith and Mission of the Church (Acts-Revelation)" in the spring. Both classes will meet daily (as they do now). As sophomores the following year, they will study "Creation and Kingdom (Genesis-Esther)" in the fall and "Wisdom and Prophets" in the spring. Why the change after all these years? There are two reasons. First, we have become aware that today's freshmen come to Harding with less basic knowledge of the Bible than students in previous generations. (Our students reflect national trends of declining biblical literacy. See Stephen Prothro's *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn't*, Harper San Francisco, 2007.) That conclusion is confirmed



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**Travis Eslinger** is a graduate of Harding where he was the student body president. He has been serving as the youth minister at the San Jose Church of Christ in Jacksonville, Florida for the past four years.

**Brian Lewis** is the youth minister at the West Side congregation in Searcy where he has completed ten years of ministry. Originally from Mobile, Alabama, Brian is a Harding graduate.

**David Sweet** has a baccalaureate and masters degree from the University of Arkansas in Little Rock and currently preaches at the Lorance Drive Church of Christ in East End, Arkansas. David is involved in River City Ministries, Arkansas Foodbanks, prison and house evangelism, among other services.

**Dzicdzice “D. Z.” Washington** is the minister and evangelist at the Midtown Church of Christ in Orlando, Florida. He is a graduate of Florida A & M with an earned doctorate in Pharmacology. D. Z. serves as a minister and continues work as a Pharmacist, as well.

**Brent Wilhite**, from Sulphur Springs, Texas, is beginning his fourth year as youth and family coordinator at the College Church of Christ in Searcy. Brent is a Harding graduate.



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by evidence. Scores on the Bible Knowledge Exam, administered to all incoming freshmen, continue to drop. For many years now, the mean score on this test of basic Bible knowledge has not surpassed the 50% mark. We administer the same exam to a sampling of graduating seniors (not just Bible majors), with a goal of a mean score of at least 65%. For six years running, we have not met that goal. The good news is that the scores do improve—usually by about 15%—in the four years students are here. So they are learning. But we are not satisfied. Second, we believe that the pace of New and Old Testament Survey has been too fast. Too many students are reporting that Bible is their hardest class. We believe this is because they are not as familiar with basic biblical content as students were when the current curriculum was designed. So basically, we're slowing down and stretching out New and Old Testament Survey over the first two years instead of one.



The change is also requiring us to collaborate more on the content of each course. Committees of faculty are spelling out the "Desired Outcomes" of each freshmen and sophomore course and aligning all four with our mission statement: "to equip our students to know, live and share God's Word and to understand, love and serve God's world." Most of us would say that the process has been challenging and refreshing at the same time.

The redesign of freshmen-sophomore Bible is Phase One of a thorough curriculum overhaul in the College of Bible and Religion. Our hope is that the other changes that will follow will be built on a firmer foundation of Biblical literacy.

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