discerning a call
to Theological Education

what's discernment got to do with it?

There are a number of people who will seek a degree in theological education of purely academic inquiry. Most people considering graduate theological education do so from a deeper sense of call or vocation that is grounded in a faith experience or tradition. If this is the case for you, then you will want to engage in a process of spiritual discernment as this will be your life orientation no matter what work you engage in. Spiritual Discernment describes the process of coming to understand how the Sacred is calling you and inviting you to live your life. The process takes time, honesty, openness to challenge and new ideas, and a trusted community. The four years at Wooster offer an excellent span of time and a range of resources to help you discern. This brief guide lists some resources and opportunities as well as advice about your discernment process.
Theological Education

Completing your undergraduate degree at Wooster is a significant accomplishment. Your time at Wooster requires you to invest much time and energy into an academically rigorous course of study. Graduate studies in theological education will require similar motivation and effort from you. If your long-term academic or vocational goals are heading towards teaching in disciplines like religious studies and theology or toward ministry in the church or broader society, theological education can be beneficial to achieving these goals. There are many other ways in which theological education can be valuable, but each individual must determine if their interests, goals, and abilities lead them in this direction. Before applying to graduate programs in theological education it is important to consider whether it would be beneficial to gain experience in a working environment before applying and whether there are sufficient funds available.

Advice for using your time at Wooster for discernment

While at Wooster, there a several ways to begin exploring the possibility of graduate studies in theological education. Seminaries recommend that students gain academic knowledge of areas related to religious studies such as history, philosophy, and the liberal arts in general. The liberal arts model at Wooster has already given you a head start on this with its distribution requirements. The writing skills and understanding of literary and historical contexts that you gain from your studies at Wooster will be essential to the completion of a seminary education. If pursuing ordained ministry, you might consider majoring in another area of interest, such as sociology, anthropology, or psychology, with a minor in religious studies, as many graduate programs will include biblical and religious studies, but might not provide in-depth study in these related fields.

Another area that will be useful to explore at Wooster is foreign language study. Knowledge of ancient languages such as Hebrew, Greek, and Latin are helpful for a candidate preparing for theological education. Wooster provides course offerings in Biblical Hebrew through the Religious Studies Department and Greek and Latin through the Classical Studies Department. Modern languages are also helpful for students in their preparation for seminary since they could be useful for research or further Ph.D. work.

Students can also prepare for seminary by developing strong relations and personal growth within a worshipping community on campus or local church. It is within this context that one will best understand the characteristics and scope of a career in theological education or ministry. A personal faith life, knowledge of one’s tradition, and involvement with and commitment to a worshipping community are vital to preparation for seminary.

During summer breaks you may consider gaining some hands on experience in ministry or teaching through internships at churches or faith based organizations. Youth work, summer camps, and YMCA/YWCA are examples of seasonal opportunities for employment during the summer.
Groups and Opportunities to help you discern and equip

The Office of Interfaith Campus Ministry and the Lilly Project for the Exploration of Vocation offer a variety of experiences to help discern and equip one for theological education, ministry or service careers.

**Seminary Semester**- a semester-long, off-campus study program open to students of any major or religious background. The program provides an opportunity to study beyond the College campus, and seeks to further reflection, learning, and exploration around the relationship of faith, ethics, and vocational choices. For more info contact the Religious Studies Department Chair or visit: [http://www.wooster.edu/lilly/Seminary_Semester.html](http://www.wooster.edu/lilly/Seminary_Semester.html)

**Worthy Questions Program**- join other students and adult mentors who “ask questions worthy of the person you can become.” Students are matched with an adult mentor, and also meet weekly to reflect and discuss (3 times a month in a small group of fellow students, once a month with the whole Worthy Questions community of students & mentors.) Topics for whole community discussion have included: What constitutes a real and authentic human relationship? How do I honor the many and different aspects of my self? What do I fear? What prevents me from living the life I dream of living? Students are nominated by Faculty, or Student Affairs/ResLife Staff, and then apply for the program. For more info visit OICM or: [http://www.wooster.edu/campusmin/Worthy_questions.html](http://www.wooster.edu/campusmin/Worthy_questions.html).

**Service Work**- especially if you’re interested in working in the Non-profit world, or other service-related careers. The Wooster Volunteer Network is the umbrella organization for service opportunities on- and off-campus. For more information visit the WVN office in Overholt or contact AmericorpsVISTA Ryan Dowell Baum (rbaum@wo/x2563).

**Alternative breaks**- OICM and WVN offer International Breakaway Trips, and Domestic Service Trips during winter break and spring break. Past trips have gone to Costa Rica; The Dominican Republic; Rome; Botswana; Harlan, KY; Baltimore, MD; Dry Creek, West Virginia, New Orleans, LA. For more info contact Chaplain Linda Morgan-Clement (lclement@woo) or AmericorpsVISTA Ryan Dowell Baum (rbaum@woo).

**Montreat Collegiate Conference**- OICM takes a group of students each January to the Collegiate Conference in Montreat, NC. Not limited to only students considering a call to theological education.

**Azimuth**- offers students a summer of focused discovery within the United States, as they explore through service the integration of a deep individual passion with a deep community need. For more info visit the Lilly House or: [http://www.wooster.edu/lilly/Azimuth.htm](http://www.wooster.edu/lilly/Azimuth.htm)

**Representatives from Seminaries and Theological Schools**- check with Career Services and OICM to see when Representatives will be visiting the College. Often they table in Lowry, and sometimes they provide meals and other opportunities to learn about the school and its programs. There are also some funds available to support students’ visits to schools. Informational interviews can be extremely helpful, where the student is interviewing the school to see what the school has to offer and whether it would be a good match.

**Activity in Home Congregation/Denomination**- take advantage of opportunities and support, such as teaching or preaching in the summer or during breaks, sitting in on a church board meeting or regional meeting, talking with and/or shadowing ministers in your church, working internships or attending conferences in your denomination. Some denominations allow persons to start the process of exploring ordination while still in college. Conversations and feedback from people who have shaped your personal journey can be extremely helpful in thinking about your future and your call.
Groups and Opportunities continued...

**Spiritual Direction**- Meeting with a spiritual director can help to examine your spiritual life, awaken to the mystery called God in all of life, and to respond to that discovery in a growing relationship of freedom and commitment. Spiritual direction is different psychotherapy. It can be helpful in discernment. Spiritual Directors come to campus for the Busy Student retreat. And are available for brief individual sessions periodically. More info is available from OICM or at [http://www.sdiworld.org/find_a_spiritual_director.html](http://www.sdiworld.org/find_a_spiritual_director.html).

**Student Internships at OICM**- take advantage of one of the many student employment positions OICM offers, such as Student Assistants to OCIM, Intern for the Worthy Questions program, Protestant Music Coordinator.

**Pre-Ministry Group**- the first Sunday of each month, gather for dinner with other students considering working in a faith-based or faith-related job. Explore together employment options, educational requirements, possibilities for experiences now, how to talk to parents, questions that you SHOULD be asking and more.

**Conversations on Discernment**– the Chaplain and other OICM staff are also available to speak with you about individual discernment.