

Go to the Head of the Class

Many women today are returnign to school for ministry training. Should you? Here's how to find the educational path that's right for you.

At the age of 56, Joyce Shankland went back to school. As a recently divorced grandmother, she didn't seem like a typical candidate. Two years earlier, her husband had left her for a 20-year old, and the following year had been a nightmare of pain as she worked through the grief of being abandoned by her husband of 36 years. During that time of grief, she endured a car accident, back surgery and internal bleeding.

But Joyce was undeterred. Ever since she had come to know the Lord at age 30, she had dreamed of being in full-time ministry. "I thought, Now is my chance, so in July of 1999 I came to Crossroads, a YWAM missionary training school on the island of Hawaii."

All across America women are going back to school. At Fuller Seminary, the largest non-denominational seminary in America, about 400 women are enrolled in their Long Distance Learning (LDL) program, and at least 400 are enrolled in the on-campus seminary.

Twenty years ago, there was only one way to get ministry training—go to school. You could either enroll in the local Bible college or move to the school of your choice, often hundreds of miles away.

Today you still have those options, but you can also take classes online, through local extensions or through correspondence courses. You can eschew traditional education altogether and opt for a YWAM Discipleship Training School in Hawaii, like Joyce, or take an 11-day intensive program on Women in Ministry from Cindy Jacobs through the Wagner Leadership Institute (WLI).

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

Trying to choose among all these options can be daunting, but there is sure to be a program that's right for you. Here we give you the tools to investigate any school, and we've covered a range of programs to get you started. Where to begin? Start by asking these four questions.

1. Do I want to take a class purely for personal enrichment, or do I want to earn a degree? Some people want to earn a degree or finish a degree they started earlier, and others just want to improve their ministry skills. Traditional undergraduate degrees include a two-year associate's degree or a four-year bachelor's degree. Beyond that there is graduate school or seminary, where you can earn an advanced degree such as a master's or a doctorate.

Not all schools offer all degrees. Bible schools offer undergraduate degrees, and seminaries offer graduate degrees. Universities usually have both undergraduate and graduate programs, but each school varies. Some, such as Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College, have both undergraduate and graduate programs, but others, such as Fuller Seminary or Regent University, offer only graduate degrees.

In addition, some schools offer either graduate or undergraduate certificates. At Fuller Seminary, for example, you can earn a certificate through its LDL program after taking just six classes in a particular area of concentration.

Some students have no interest in earning a degree. They may want to take a class purely for personal enrichment or the sheer love of learning. Many schools have extension programs that offer university-level classes at sites away from the main campus. Moody offers classes in Florida, Ohio, Michigan and Washington in addition to those at the main campus in Chicago.

Some of these extension classes confer credit and some don't,

so be sure you understand your options and make your choice clear. Courses taken for personal enrichment are often called “continuing education classes” or “audited classes,” but many colleges have their own terms for non-credit classes.

2. Do I want to attend a school that is accredited? Most traditional schools are accredited, but many alternative schools are not. According to Marilyn Chappell, Director of Admissions of The King’s Seminary, accreditation means that an independent organization has evaluated the school’s facilities, faculty and curriculum to make sure they are up to standard. Classes from an accredited institution can usually be transferred to another accredited school.

Many alternative programs are not accredited and don’t want to be. They want the freedom to offer classes without the restrictions of accreditation. Peter Wagner left Fuller Seminary to start WLI so he could offer training without grades, exams or even a college campus. In its literature, WLI clearly states that it has “an educational paradigm so different from traditional seminaries and Bible schools”...that “in certain ecclesiastical circles, diplomas from WLI may not be recognized as legitimate credentialing for ministry.”

What if you aren’t sure of your goals? Karl G. Wolfe, Ed.D., Director of Distance Learning at Fuller Seminary, notes that many students who start taking classes simply for the love of learning end up wanting to get a degree. He advises students who are unsure of their educational goals to pursue educational options that will give them the freedom to earn a degree later.

He also warns that some schools are accredited by little-known independent groups. “That may give a school their blessing, even though no one else may recognize the school,” he says. “Traditional seminaries are accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.”

3. How much time will I need to spend on campus, and how much of my program can be completed at home? There is a lot to be said for the traditional college experience. Many find it easier to focus on their studies when they are surrounded by fellow students and can interact with their professors face-to-face.

However, if you are a parent of young children or have a full-time job, you might need to do your entire program at home. Today there is a complete range of programs, from those that allow you to work on your degree at your kitchen table to those that require your presence on campus the whole time you are enrolled.

At World Harvest Bible College (WHBC), Rod Parsley asks all students to take their first two years of classes on campus because "the vision of WHBC is to take the anointing on my life and ministry and impart it into your life and ministry." Steve Gray of World Revival School of Ministry feels much the same way: "We want you to be here to experience revival."

In contrast, Berean/ICU Global University System and Trinity Christian College offer their entire programs online. And WLI has no campus—just different conference locations throughout the country. Other schools, such as Asbury Seminary, will allow you take up to half your classes at home before coming on campus to complete your degree.

WHBC does offer an optional third year of training called the Advanced Pastoral Leadership Program that requires only one day a week on campus. Even Fuller Seminary and the graduate school at Wheaton College will let students take some of their classes through LDL programs, utilizing correspondence or online courses.

Correspondence courses have a workbook and usually, a pack of cassette tapes. You need just a pencil and a tape player.

To take online classes you'll need a computer and an Internet

service provider. Assignments are given and turned in over the Internet.

Be sure to ask if the LDL class you are considering has a fixed start and stop date. Some classes begin on a fixed date so that everyone in the class is working on the same assignment at the same time. That way students can interact with each other through chat rooms or e-mail.

Other classes let you work at your own pace. But even self-paced classes often have deadlines—usually six months or a year after you start.

Many schools offer intensive, concentrated or modular classes in which you can take an entire quarter or semester of material in one to three weeks.

According to Dr. Wolfe, all of the ATS- accredited theological schools require students to be on campus for at least one year (or its equivalent) because they believe that spiritual formation should take place in community, not in isolation.

4. Do I want a program that emphasizes classroom instruction or hands-on practical instruction? At YWAM Discipleship Training School, half the program takes place in the field. For three months, Joyce Shankland traveled to Taiwan and India. In India, she ministered to Christians who were abandoned by their families when they came to Christ.

Asbury Seminary requires practical, on-the-job ministry experience as part of their degree program, so students can put the concepts they are learning in the classroom to work immediately.

Some schools give credit for life experience. At The King's Seminary you can get credit for expertise obtained through life experience, on-the-job training, or community or ministry service.

What about that leadership development class you took or the program you developed to feed the homeless? You may be able to get credit for the skills you learned if you can demonstrate that your expertise is equivalent to a college course. Other schools have similar programs. You may be closer to your degree than you think.

5. *Is cost a factor?* Make this a matter of prayer, then talk to the school of your choice to learn about your options. Many schools offer financial aid in the form of scholarships, grants and loans.

Students who enroll in YWAM DTS typically raise support from friends, family and their local church since their training is considered missions experience. Moody doesn't charge undergraduates for tuition, though they still have to pay room and board.

Do you sense that God is calling you back to school? You may be a laywoman eager to minister in power, a college graduate who always wanted to go to seminary or a new Christian, hungry to know more of God's Word. Not everyone can move to Chicago or Los Angeles, but we can all get the training we need to be the person God is calling us to be.

Joyce is glad she sold everything and went to Crossroads. "I love it here. I am so fulfilled in the Lord. For me, life began again at age 54."

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MINISTRY EDUCATION OPTIONS

Asbury College
800-888-1818

Asbury Theological Seminary
800-2ASBURY

Berean/ICI Global University System
800-443-1083

Evangel University
417-865-2815
1-800-EVANGEL

Fuller Seminary
800-238-5537
800-235-2222

The King's College and Seminary
888-779-8040

Lee University
800-LEE-9930

Moody Bible Institute
800-955-1123

Pastoral Care Ministries, Inc.
630-510-0487

Regent University
800-373-5504

Southeastern University
800-500-8760

Trinity College of the Bible

800-457-5510

Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry
800-874-8754

Wagner Leadership Institute
800-683-9630
719-262-9920

Wheaton
800-888-0141 grad
800-222-2419

World Harvest Bible College
800-940-9422

World Revival School of Ministry
877-804-LIFE

YWAM University of the Nations
808-326-7228
800-383-4572