

Evangelism Training for the 21st Century: Complexities & Opportunities for Seminary Education
W. Jay Moon, Tim Robbins, Irene Kabeteⁱ

As John walked across the stage to grasp the paper that now declared him a “Master of Divinity,” he still had lingering doubts about his next step after graduation. In the back of his mind, he often asked himself, “Do I have the ability to rise up to the challenge that this first church appointment is asking of me?” The church was in decline and they needed help. Among the duties the church elders asked of John was to assist the church in evangelism. John muttered under his breath, “How can I teach others to evangelize if I do not know how to do it myself? The seminary prepared me to preach by giving me three preaching opportunities in class, but I never had three evangelism “practice sessions” in class!”

John’s angst could be echoed across seminaries around the country. Based on a two-year research project, this article describes evangelism training for seminary students by recognizing six fresh opportunities for evangelism arising from corresponding complexities in the twenty-first century.

Research: Knox Fellowship, under the leadership of Carl Lammers, partnered with Asbury Theological Seminary to conduct research on practical evangelism. The purpose was to develop and experiment with practical evangelism training for seminary students, like John, who will be pastoring churches after the completion of their seminary education.

We invited student volunteers to attend a meal and training session once a week for eight weeks during the semester. The groups¹ consisted of both male and female students in the PhD, Masters of Divinity, and M. A. programs of study. This was a very diverse ethnic group, coming from India, Indonesia, Korea, Malagasy, Nigeria, Taiwan and the U.S. Some students attended as

ⁱ W. Jay Moon is a Professor of Evangelism and Church Planting at Asbury Theological Seminary’s ESJ School of World Mission and Evangelism. Tim Robbins and Irene Kabete are both PhD students in Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary.

couples. Initially, several students voiced their lack of confidence to equip their congregations to evangelize or even practice personal evangelism through comments such as:

“I am not good at this thing called evangelism.”

“I have seen it done so poorly so often that I have disregarded it as a practice.”

“I wish the seminaries teach us how to do this.”

“How do you expect me to apply that which I was never taught?”

When asked if they knew how to practice evangelism in most contexts, 75% responded either definitely no, mostly no, or unsure. When asked if they *felt confident* to practice evangelism in most contexts, 70% responded the same way. All of these concerns pointed out the hunger yet inadequacy that students felt to practice evangelism and teach others to do so. To start the research, the professor invited students to a meal and a weekly one-hour training session. Since the students already attended evening classes, they were invited to arrive one hour early for this voluntary, co-curricular training that required no outside student preparation or assignments.

Two PhD students majoring in evangelism helped the professor lead the program and alternated the preparation and presentation of the weekly training. Both had practical evangelism experience and were able to understand the students' concerns to move beyond theory alone and offer pastors the skills needed to both practice and teach evangelism in their churches. The professor, himself a former missionary and church planter outside the U.S., assisted with the diverse understanding of evangelism among different contexts given that America has become more pluralistic. All three used the following research methods to collect data: participant-observation, focus groups, and surveys. The weekly observations from both the facilitators and the professor helped to adapt the subsequent lessons in order to continually learn and improve.

Observing and Responding to Complexities: The beginning of the 21st century reveals a very different cultural landscape than the beginning of the 20th century. These complexities can be summarized by the acronym SPIRIT: Secularism, Pluralism, Individualism, Relativism, Identity, and Technology.² The weekly sessions discussed one of these complexities each week, focusing on the opportunities they provided for evangelism.

1. Secularism: Narrative as an Alternate Plausibility Structure

David Kinnaman³ estimates 38% of people living in the continental U.S. are actually “post-Christian” and “essentially secular in belief and practice,” when adding the categories of “the unchurched, the never-churched and the skeptics” to those who report no religious affiliation. An even more alarming trend he notes is that “the younger the generation, the more post-Christian it is,” as follows:

- Millennials (born between 1984 and 2002) — 48 percent
- Gen X-ers (born between 1965 and 1983) — 40 percent
- Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) — 35 percent
- Elders (born in 1945 or earlier) — 28 percent⁴

For secularists, the scientific method is often the only valid basis for truth. Claims that cannot be supported by repeatable experiments with tight controls (i.e., the scientific method) are considered unscientific and invalid. As a result, the claims of Christianity are discarded or devalued, making evangelism to secularists more complex.

Lesslie Newbigin⁵ noted that the scientific method is simply one plausibility structure. Newbigin noted that there are significant areas of life, such as issues dealing with purpose and values, where the scientific method is not helpful or appropriate (e.g., simply because a scientific

experiment cannot prove that you love your spouse does not mean that this is untrue – other methods are needed to prove this). Newbigin suggests that narrative is another plausibility structure that is just as valid as the scientific method, and is actually more appropriate for areas of life dealing with purpose and values, which includes the realm of religion.

Young Life's "Three-story" approach appeared to resonate with many of the Millennial students as it involved using three different narratives,⁶ demonstrating the relevance of the Bible to unbelievers by linking personal experiences to biblical narratives. This approach is highly personalized for every encounter and does not require a tight script or memorized materials. This approach involves three narratives: their story, your story, and God's story.

a. Their story: During role-plays, students first practiced listening to the stories of the inquirers in order to find authentic points of contact. Rebecca Pippert⁷ likens this to rowing a boat around an island looking for safe places to land. These should be authentic places of empathy or familiarity between the listener and the inquirer. Listening to the other person's narrative is the starting point of the three-story approach.

b. Your story: After listening to the inquirer's story, the second part of the three-story approach focuses on the students sharing their own story. All students were paired up and asked to present their personal testimonies. Observing students then critiqued the degree to which they were engaged by the testimonies. One discovery from this exercise was that some students did not know how to make their testimonies brief and relevant for their audiences. Those who were more immersed in homiletics than in counseling or pastoral care were sometimes unaware when their audiences were losing interest. Several students refused to shorten their testimonies even after two prompts.

To assist students in forming concise and memorable stories, we introduced the Young Life Tool that consists of 3 balls connected on a leather string. The first ball is a cork, which represents their natural life, either before becoming a Christ follower or an issue that connects to the inquirer's story. The second ball is red (the largest and heaviest ball) to indicate that Christ's death and resurrection should be the focus of the story. The third ball is shiny to indicate that the goal is to reflect the story back to the listener with a question. Students were asked to practice their story in pairs so that they could learn how to balance their discussion in these three areas. Often, students would spend too much time on the cork ball (life before following Jesus) with a short discussion on the red ball and even less on the shiny ball. Students were encouraged to ask questions at the end, such as:

Is any part of my story similar to your own experience?

Have you felt, as I did, the need to move closer to God?

Are you moving closer or farther from God now? Would you like to draw closer to God?

This exercise led to a discussion about asking questions that are based on a centered set approach as opposed to a bounded set approach to evangelism.⁸

Among significant patterns emerging from the testimonies, several underscored how they had fallen away from the faith and later returned. One student who had watched his father struggle in an apparently unjust ministerial situation internalized the pain and consequently stayed away from active believers for many years. Others had embraced Buddhist or Hindu worldviews before considering the claims of Christ. Student critiques helped others to understand what aspects of their stories resonated most effectively with various audiences.

Immediately after observing role-play scenarios, participants and observers discussed their gut reactions to what they had seen. The students appreciated that the sessions focused upon how to

better engage people and to foster authenticity—not to develop polished presentations or to fulfill some subjective ideas of “success.” Feedback both by fellow students and by program leaders provided key insights into students’ self-discovery of their own strengths and foibles. Conversations they wouldn’t otherwise have participated in or observed became learning experiences that better prepared them for real world encounters. A university student recently explained that this type of evangelism training helps to “boost students’ confidence when they are presented with opportunities to share. The more chances a person is given to practice explaining the good news, the more prepared he or she will be to step out and share in the future.”⁹

c. God’s story: After listening to the inquirer’s story and then sharing their own story, the third part of the three-story approach is to share God’s story. In order to help students provide a basic outline of the biblical narrative, we taught them the approach advocated by James Choung¹⁰ and then compared this to the Four Spiritual Law approach (more about this later). Some students felt that the Choung approach provided a better starting point and was less offensive than the Four Spiritual laws. Even still, several commented that this still seemed formulaic and not individually crafted to peoples’ contexts.

Students were then asked to role-play evangelism sessions with the following questions in mind:

- a. What are the authentic points of contact with the inquirer’s story and my story?
- b. How can my story reveal God’s engagement in my life that is relevant to others?
- c. How can God’s story address the yearnings and concerns of the inquirer?

2. Pluralism: Gospel is Larger than One Culture

We asked students to role-play an encounter with a Muslim and then another encounter with a Hindu. It became readily apparent that the students felt inadequate to respond to the assumptions of these various faiths and cultures. This led to a more shocking discovery – the problem of sin and the answer in Christ is often perceived differently in various cultures. Where does one begin the evangelism process in various contexts?

New Testament theologian Brenda Colijn contends that there are various starting points to describe salvation in the New Testament:

The New Testament does not develop a systematic doctrine of salvation. Instead, it presents us with a variety of pictures taken from different perspectives... the variety of images attests to both the complexity of the human problem and its solution. No single picture is adequate to express the whole.... Each image is a picture of salvation from one perspective, posing and answering one set of questions. When seen together, they balance and qualify one another. We need all of them in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of salvation.¹¹

To identify the starting point for evangelism in various contexts, Colijn develops twelve images of salvation from the New Testament that are theologically appropriate for various contexts. If the context is not taken into consideration, though, students will likely start with the image of salvation that is most resonant with their own culture. For example, someone from a justice/guilt worldview will likely connect with the penal substitution image of salvation, which will likely fall on deaf ears, though, when evangelizing people from an honor/shame or power/fear worldview.

Craig Ott notes that “one can begin with a biblical analogy that has the most common ground with the hearer’s worldview, experience, and frame of reference.”¹² Ott identifies four starting points for four different cultural contexts. Jayson Georges simplifies this to three worldviews as he states, “Each cultural worldview is a unique blend of guilt, shame, and fear.”¹³ To address the

complexity of a pluralistic society, students need to be aware of and then address the worldview assumptions of these contexts, as summarized below:¹⁴

Worldview	<i>Justice/guilt</i>	<i>Honor/shame</i>	<i>Power/fear</i>
Typical Location	West (N. America, Europe)	East (M. East, N. Africa, Asia)	South (Sub-Sahara Africa, Tribal, Caribbean)
Sin's Result	Separation/Guilt	Shame	Fear/Curse/bondage
Solution	Payment/Substitute	Restore, cleanse	Deliverance
Image	Courtroom/Justice	Relationship, Cleansing	Power, Freedom

Georges recognizes that, “Although guilt, shame, and fear are three distinct cultural outlooks, no culture can be completely characterized by only one. These three dynamics interplay and overlap in all societies.”¹⁵ As a result, evangelists should be aware of all three cultural contexts and then be ready to adapt the Gospel response accordingly. Students now have the opportunity, for the first time perhaps, to understand how the Gospel is larger than they ever imagined, once they are willing to remove their own cultural limitations.

To give students confidence in addressing this complexity, the Digit-oral Publishing Services, LLC recently developed a card game to introduce a practical approach to various evangelistic encounters using different images of salvation.¹⁶ This “Faith sharing” game is meant to “remove the fear and return the story,” and it helped students to think about different images of salvation to address different cultural contexts. Students commented that this game was both enjoyable and it taught them how to think biblically to share God’s story. It helped them think about what the sin problem is and how to address it. It also forced them to think on their feet and share their faith in creative and different ways. Sometimes, we had to rein people in when they created stories that were too fanciful, but the game helped them to know and share the stories in the Bible.

Students were encouraged to take the lessons from the card game and then role-play an

evangelistic encounter with the following questions in mind:

- a. Which image of salvation addresses the assumptions of the person(s) I am encountering?
- b. How could this alter the starting point for evangelism in this cultural context?
- c. What misunderstandings may need to be corrected in order to convey the biblical image accurately?

3. Individualism: Hospitality in Community

Western culture has often been described as one of the most hyper-individual cultures on the planet. For example, they want to have their own individual choices in everything from personal license plates for their cars to personal preferences in sexual orientation. This has crept into the church as well. Guder notes, “Religious life in general and the churches in particular have increasingly been relegated to the private spheres of life. Too readily, the churches have accepted this as their proper place.”¹⁷ Evangelistic methods (e.g., Four Spiritual Laws, Evangelism Explosion, etc.) in the 20th century were often geared to the personal salvation of individuals, whereby individuals were invited to experience individual salvation. This focus on personal salvation has led to a large focus on methods that promote personal evangelism and personal discipleship.

In the 21st century, though, this hyper-individualism has left many postmoderns yearning for authentic community. Leonard Sweet notes, “The paradox is this: the pursuit of individualism has led us to this place of hunger for connectedness, for communities not of blood or nation but communities of choice.”¹⁸ This provides an opportunity for evangelism to be practiced more communally by hospitality in small groups. Christine Pohl, when discussing some of the reasons behind the spread of early Methodism, noted, “Shared meals, visiting, and conversation were

central to the spread of Methodism. In fact, it is noteworthy that Wesley recovered many of the distinctive aspects of the tradition of Christian hospitality.”¹⁹

One of the central aspects of the successful Alpha course has been a shared meal via a small group in order to have a more intimate space for faith discussions. Rick Warren described Alpha as “one of the most effective evangelism tools for the 21st century.”²⁰ Tim Keller noted, “The Alpha format is definitely a huge improvement and right for our time, because process is involved instead of a quick presentation and it is more communal.”²¹ The Alpha approach usually,

runs in churches, bars, coffee shops and homes all around the globe. Typically, Alpha has around ten sessions and includes food, a short talk and a discussion at the end where you can share your thoughts. Alpha is for anyone who’s curious. The talks are designed to encourage debate and explore the basics of the Christian faith in a friendly, honest and informal environment.²²

Hospitality offered to hyper-individualistic postmoderns that are yearning for community, then, is one of the grand opportunities for evangelism in the 21st century. It is noteworthy that seminary students were eager to share a meal together in order to learn about practical evangelism. 90% of the students volunteered to arrive at class one hour early in order to share a meal and learn together. In addition, they found it much easier to share their faith with a non-believer by inviting them to the classroom and meal than by engaging the person individually.

Since the hyper-individualist culture creates a yearning for community, this presents a unique opportunity to practice evangelism via hospitality in a small group. As a result, students were encouraged to consider the following questions to address this complexity:

- a. What relationships could I enhance by inviting them to meet a small group of my Christian friends?
- b. How may this small group express hospitality to “not-yet believers”?

- c. How may this hospitality lead to friendship evangelism that promotes a caring way to share your faith?²³

4. Relativism: Critical realist epistemology and epistemic humility

In the age of modernity, the scientific method sought bedrock laws and principles. This led to the rise of the historical Campus Crusade (aka Cru) “Four Spiritual Laws” model. Students in the pilot study were divided into groups of four such that each group had one person to examine each of the laws, assessing them for contemporary impact. Using the Four Spiritual Laws approach, all of the student responses were primarily negative. By and large, the inherent propositional approach was considered to be unpersuasive for those who had been raised in Western post-modern environments. Students native to regions where confrontational methods are practiced reported that they had seen this model reproduced and used to good effect. Most of the Americans were less generous in their critiques, though. Among their responses:

- Presenting verses of the Bible is like reading fortune cookies. It won’t make sense to the recipient.
- It’s an oversimplification of a dynamic story.
- To people in my age group—millennials—they wouldn’t particularly care.
- It takes the richness of the Scriptures and flattens them.
- It (salvation) doesn’t end with us—it’s too individualistic; it should end with the big picture.

A definite consensus emerged that standardized and memorized approaches to presenting the Gospel would not be embraced by today’s audiences, though the students’ critiques seemed thoughtful and fair-minded. Several expressed concern that the language in the Four Spiritual

Laws sounded too similar to modern “Prosperity Gospel” teachings. Others noted that its emphasis on the afterlife while ignoring contemporary issues would not resonate particularly well with today’s students. Students from the global South noted that the term “laws” is not necessarily perceived favorably in their cultures, but this approach might be more effective if it was substituted by another term such as “principles.”

Class discussions revealed that most of the Masters-level students adhered to postmodern worldviews on friendship, chiefly that aggressively imposing their viewpoints on other students could be seen as closedminded. The “targeting” of individuals for the purpose of bringing them to faith amounted to inauthentic engagement in their eyes. Some of the students argued that these friendships entailed having relational “strings attached” to them. The danger of this approach, though, is that people are often very hesitant to share their faith at all since they do not want to impose upon others or be seen as intolerant.

The above observations reveal underlying epistemologies of moderns and postmoderns.²⁴ In order to bring these underlying assumptions to the surface, the students were introduced to the discussion of epistemology (how we know what we know), and how this affects evangelism. Instead of using the technical terms for the various epistemologies, the terms “black and white,” “grey,” and “pinstripe” were used, which students were able to grasp readily. They were asked to listen to three songs and pick the underlying epistemology in each as follows:

Song	Epistemology	Assumption	Results
“Popular” from <i>Wicked</i> musical ²⁵	Naïve Realist	Gospel is all black or white (all objective)	Laws & Formulaic approaches used
“Whatever Gets You Through the Night” by John Lennon ²⁶	Instrumentalist	Gospel is all grey (all subjective)	No approach is used, Do not share faith
“God is God” by Steven Curtis Chapman ²⁷	Critical Realist	Gospel is ‘pinstripe,’ objective truth but our understanding is limited (objective and subjective)	Engage others with a bold humility (humble courage)

This critique of epistemologies provided an opportunity for students to consider how the critical realist position balances the extremes of the other two. This realization helps them to not get backed into a corner, trying to defend untenable positions in evangelistic encounters.

Students were then asked to role-play evangelism sessions with the following questions in mind:

- a. What underlying epistemology is this person demonstrating?
- b. How can I avoid being backed into the corner of “black and white” or “all grey”?
- c. How can I demonstrate a bold conviction of the gospel truth coupled with humility based upon my limitations of culture, historical period, and linguistics (i.e., pinstripe epistemology)?

5. Identity: New Bridges of God (Social media, circles of exchange, play space)

In the 20th century, Donald McGavran pointed out that people often come to faith through relational networks instead of individual encounters.²⁸ These networks were so pervasive and powerful that evangelists were encouraged to follow-up new converts by visiting their nearby family, friends, relatives, etc. since the one new convert was usually connected to a larger network of unchurched people. McGavran identified these relational networks as “Bridges of God” since they were natural relational bridges to bring people to God. In the 20th century, it was often assumed that these relational bridges were connected to someone’s geographical identity; therefore, evangelism approaches were advocated among neighbors or community members.²⁹ In the 21st century, however, students indicated less reliance upon geographical identity. Instead, their networks are more robust among people they know on social media, at the workplace, and

at recreational spaces. These new “bridges of God” require more attention for students and they were eager for help in how to evangelize in these contexts.

We conducted role-plays for students at work and play venues. In role-playing evangelistic encounters, students were asked to bring authenticity to the encounters by utilizing genuine problems from their lives rather than creating imaginary problems. Thinking “on their feet” is a critical skill they were able to develop accordingly. Students gained self-awareness by observing good questions to ask evangelistic candidates as well as questions that sounded inauthentic. During the first few weeks, the students were prone to acting out pat resolutions to proposed scenarios. In critiquing one another, they began to realize that role-playing artificially “successful” encounters didn’t serve them well, as this was not realistic. Students learned better by negotiating conflicts similar to those they will encounter in their real-world ministries. So, students learned to ask challenging questions and developed strategies to deal with resistant people they may meet in genuine evangelistic encounters.

An informal survey of students conducted during all three semesters failed to produce an example of anyone who had been brought to Christian faith by a person with whom they had *recently* become acquainted. Even the students from non-Christian backgrounds who had embraced Christ reported that they had sought out friends or relatives that they believed to be Christians when they began entertaining biblical worldviews. Although the *value* of ministering to new acquaintances was not denigrated, students were experientially led to consider that the most effective audiences for evangelism would likely be people with whom they were acquainted. It therefore appeared axiomatic that acquaintances, rather than strangers, provide more opportunities for evangelism.

Students were encouraged to pursue “unconditional friendships.” Evangelistic friendships may be considered similar to other friendships in that, if chosen friends don’t “live up” to students’ expectations (by embracing Christ within a designated period of time), the students are encouraged to continue to offer friendship and redemptive counsel regardless. Dr. George Hunter III has stated that it typically takes about 25-30 encounters before Americans typically turn to Christ.³⁰ With that knowledge, we were able to rationally discuss the evangelist’s preparations for the unbelievers’ next encounters—whether those encounters would involve the student or some other believer. Students were encouraged to seek multiple encounters, possibly with smaller fields of individuals than what may have seemed ideal in previous decades. “Doing life” together with people rather than hurrying them to “points of decision” about the Gospel appears to be consistent both with biblical models of hospitality, and with the prevalent worldview of American millennials.³¹

Students then were taught how to evangelize among their relational networks and follow-up on their bridges of God. Role-plays were done with the following questions in mind:

- a. Work place: What opportunities arise to demonstrate genuine concern for coworkers? Who may be open to meeting for discussions of faith during breaks (e.g., lunchtime, before work, during travel)? How can business concerns such as Corporate Social Responsibility or Impact Investing become opportunities to express your faith?
- b. Play place: What could you invite them to in order to learn more about them and move them closer to God? These could be events at home, church, or service in the community.
- c. Social Media: How can the church creatively use social media to connect with networks of existing church members? Examples include Facebook tagging, and reviewing social media daily (e.g., Facebook posts) to learn how to care for people in tension or transition

(when they are often open and responsive to faith), or the creative use of digital media such as podcasts or short video clips to create interest to relevant concerns of the unchurched or dechurched (cf: the “I am Second” videos³²)

6. Technology: Rise of Digit-oral Learning Preference³³

In the latter part of the 20th century, Walter Ong observed that technological advances, such as television, radio, movies and other media were changing the learning preference of Westerners.³⁴ He first identified this trend as a secondary oral learning preference, since this learning preference is secondary (*i.e.*, coming after) the literacy process. Ong noted that people could read and write, but they increasingly preferred to learn or process information by oral rather than by printed means.³⁵

Whereas previous generations assumed that print-based means of learning were the best way to transform students, 21st century students increasingly prefer to learn through oral means, aided by various digital media. Recently, Jonah Sachs observed that contemporary learners are now accessing information through digital means to the extent that they exhibit the characteristics of oral learners (as opposed to print learners). As a result, he described these secondary oral learners using the term “digit-oral,” as follows:

The oral tradition that dominated human experience for all but the last few hundred years is returning with a vengeance. It’s a monumental, epoch-making, totally unforeseen turn of events . . . our new digital culture of information sharing has so rejected the broadcast style and embraced key elements of oral traditions, that we might meaningfully call whatever’s coming next the *digital era*.³⁶

A nine-year research project among U.S. seminary students revealed that 53% have an oral learning preference.³⁷ Even more revealing was the observation that the student oral learning preference increased from 42% in 2005 to 62% in 2013. When students studying theology and

religion at LeTourneau University were assessed (to obtain a snapshot of a likely future incoming seminary class), they demonstrated a whopping 78% preference for oral learning! This is a significant shift in the manner that students receive, conceptualize, remember, and reproduce information³⁸ and it was also detected in the students observed for evangelism practice, as described in the table below.

	Receive Message	Conceptualize Message	Remember Message	Reproduce Message
Print	Words carry main meaning; therefore, evangelist carefully prepares and reads words.	Learners take notes on main points, principles, definitions.	Learners review notes, written handouts.	New evangelist refers to written outline.
Oral	Mental images, symbols, gestures carry meaning; therefore, evangelist paints mental pictures and creates an experience.	Learners see self & participate in metaphors, mental pictures.	Learners review mnemonic devices (story, music, proverb, symbol, object lessons).	New evangelist guides a journey using storyboard, Memory palace, "Chunk" information.

For example, students were not excited about reading another book on evangelism that contained points, principles, and definitions; however, they preferred instruction that was mainly practical and participatory. They were receptive to the storying approach to sharing their faith (as described above). They were also quick to accept testimonials, case studies, video samples, role-playing encounters, and group discussion with mentoring. Students were interested to share their testimonies and role-play evangelistic encounters in different contexts, and facilitators took advantage of case studies and video clips that were related to the topic of the day to illustrate how evangelism can be carried out in different contexts. At times, guest speakers with extensive practical experience were invited to participate in the class activities. The most important aspect was to keep the lesson focused on reflective practice.

Cru has developed several digital tools on the iPhone that can be used for evangelizing digital learners.³⁹ We asked students to view these apps, download some, and then try them out in pairs. For example, the “Voke” app provides short videos to stimulate thought-provoking conversations and the “Solarium” app uses a set of images to help people explain and discuss their faith journey.

To teach and practice evangelism with seminary students, the acronym CHIMES was developed, which summarizes some of the learning characteristics of digital learners.⁴⁰ The following questions should be considered when designing learning experiences for 21st century learners. These questions can also guide churches to formulate their teaching of evangelism to church members:

- a. **Communal:** How can you encourage the group to learn from each other? Consider ways to foster personal discussion/interaction, small group discussions, panels, visits, mentoring, rituals, etc.
- b. **Holistic:** How can you connect what they are learning to other areas of life so that you are adding onto and critiquing what they already know? Consider relating to relevant cultural events/people that help people connect to their ordinary life struggles.
- c. **Images:** What images, symbols, and concrete/relational object lessons can be used so that words are not the only communicator of meaning? Consider the use of metaphors, mental images, relevant gestures, video clips, and pictures.
- d. **Mnemonics:** What formulaic devices, genres, repetition, etc., can you use to “hook” the audience and then form memory “triggers” for later recall? Consider the use of object lessons, and short, pithy phrases/proverbs. Also consider oral art such as stories, music, dance, and drama.

- e. **Experiential:** How can learners experience something, particularly events associated with real struggles of life, instead of simply learning at a distance? Consider question/response, the Faith Sharing Game, and shared meals to foster discussion of relevant life issues.
- f. **Sensory:** How can the various senses be engaged to encourage deep learning? Consider the use of symbols like the Young Life Tool to help people connect the senses with an ideology to foster deeper learning.⁴¹

Summary: Since evangelism has become more complex at the beginning of the 21st century than at the beginning of the 20th century, it does not serve students well to diminish these significant challenges by providing simplistic formulas or approaches; instead, identifying and addressing these complexities provides students with more confidence and competence to practice evangelism and teach it in their churches. The acronym SPIRIT identifies some of the challenges to evangelism that 21st century witnesses should be familiar with to include: Secularism, Pluralism, Individualism, Relativism, Identity formation, and Technology shifts. At the end of the eight weeks, students were asked to play the “evangelism card game” again. This time, they were able to match the worldview problems to biblical solutions much quicker.

Based on the observations and experiments over three semesters, the following chart summarizes the eight-week evangelism lessons that students responded most favorably to:

Theme for Week	Opportunity	Topic	Activity	Outcome
Overview	New opportunities	21 st Century Complexities	Initial survey, 4 spiritual laws	Recognize complexities
Secularism	Narrative approach	Plausibility structures	3 stories, YL tool, Choung approach	Share gospel in narrative form
Pluralism	Gospel is larger than one culture	3-Dimensional gospel	Faith Sharing Card Game	Respond to other cultures/faiths
Individual	Hospitality	Community	Invite unchurched/ dechurched to meal	Hospitality in small groups
Relativism	Discover Critical realism	Epistemology	3 songs	Bold Humility
Identity	New bridges of God	Identities	Role plays	Bridges at work, play, & social media.
Technology	Oral Learning Renaissance	Learning shift	CHIMES	Utilize digital approaches
Conclusion	Listen & respond to complexities	Listening, conversing	Guest visitor, Final survey	Increased capacity for evangelism

This co-curricular approach had a significant impact on students' ability and confidence to practice evangelism. At the end of the eight-week sessions, 100% of the students affirmed "mostly yes" to the statement that they know how to practice evangelism in most contexts (compared to only 25% at the beginning of the eight week sessions). In addition, 62% affirmed "mostly yes" or "yes" to the statement that they *feel confident* to practice evangelism in most contexts (compared to only 30% at the beginning). The student self-evaluations represented a significant increase in both the students' ability (300% increase) and confidence (107% increase) to practice evangelism. In addition, students made comments such as:

- "The practical evangelism seminar was not only eye opening to various factors that come into play with evangelism, but helpful in providing some practical tools that may assist in sharing Jesus in this particular context."

- [The sessions] “made me aware of my own complacency when it comes to sharing the Gospel with a challenge to evaluate why.”
- “The training sessions were very helpful. I was very insecure about my ability to evangelize because I had very little practical experience and was never trained in evangelism before this class.”

In order to observe if the students really learned, however, they had to be placed in a “live” evangelism encounter to test out their learning. For the conclusion of the class, we arranged for this live evangelism encounter.

Conclusion of Class: Students were encouraged to invite an unchurched or dechurched friend to join our meal and discussion for the last night of the class. Jim (name changed), an African-American graduate student at the University of Kentucky, accepted the offer. When students asked about his religious journey, Jim described the life events that led him to Islam. When students asked him the questions or doubts that he had about Christianity, Jim explained his confusion on the Trinity, divinity of Jesus, and the Old Testament laws. A lively dialogue ensued with mutual respect and interaction. As the students conversed with Jim further, he admitted that he is basically not completely persuaded about the validity of Islam. Students were able to practice the lessons that they learned previously. One of the students affirmed Jim’s openness to truth and rational discussion, and they exchanged phone numbers for further discussions.

By the end of the meal, Jim explained that he would like to come back again to meet with the class. When Jim was asked, “How would you encourage Christ-followers to approach and interact with people of other faiths?” he responded, “Just be authentic and willing to listen and dialogue, just like you all in this class.”

Students exchanged glances and recognized each other's thoughts—their fears of engaging Muslims had been reduced and they now felt better equipped for future faith sharing encounters. While several more steps are needed for Jim to place his faith in Jesus, students now felt more confident and competent to take the next steps in that journey. When compared to their responses at the beginning of the semester, this was evidence that they now understood the complexities of the twenty-first century and that they now knew how to practice evangelism with these new opportunities.

¹ There were three research groups totaling over 35 students.

² These complexities and opportunities are discussed further in the following video-enhanced e-book called a “Digi-book” available on i-Books: Moon, W. Jay, Tim Robbins, Irene Kabete, *Practical Evangelism for the 21st Century: Complexities and Opportunities* (Nicholasville, KY: DOPS, 2017).

³ Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Secularism Grows as More U.S. Christians Turn ‘churchless,’” *Religion News Service*, October 24, 2014, <http://religionnews.com/2014/10/24/secularism-is-on-the-rise-as-more-u-s-christians-turn-churchless/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

⁶ The three narratives include: 1. The inquirer's personal narrative, which is likely to reflect perceived needs; 2. A biblical narrative demonstrating scriptural wisdom or authority; and 3. The evangelist's narrative, demonstrating personal application. See <http://www.gracewired.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Three-Story-Evangelism-Bill-Muir.pdf>

⁷ R.M. Pippert, *Out of the Salt Shaker & into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*, vol. Second (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, “The Category Christian in the Mission Task,” in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, ed. Paul G. Hiebert (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 107–36.

⁹ Rachel Terry, “Great Commission Congress Lacks Local Practicality,” *The Asbury Collegian*, November 18, 2016.

¹⁰ James Choung, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing in* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2008).

¹¹ Brenda Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2010), 14–16.

¹² Craig Ott, “The Power of Biblical Metaphors for the Contextualized Communication of the Gospel,” *Missiology: An International Review* 42, no. 4 (2014): 359.

¹³ Jayson Georges, “The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures” (Unpublished, 2016), 16, <http://honorshame.com/>.

¹⁴ Ott, “The Power of Biblical Metaphors for the Contextualized Communication of the Gospel,” modified slightly.

¹⁵ Georges, “The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures,” 15.

¹⁶ This card game is available at <https://digibooks.io/store/>

¹⁷ Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, vol. One, *The Gospel and Our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 78.

¹⁸ Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 109–10.

¹⁹ Christine Pohl, “Practicing Hospitality in the Face of ‘Complicated Wickedness,’” (Keynote Address, Wesleyan Theological Society's Annual Meeting, 2006), 3.

²⁰ <http://alphausa.org/endorsements>

²¹ Ibid.

²² <http://alphausa.org/our-story/>

²³ Arthur McPhee, *Friendship Evangelism: The Caring Way to Share Your Faith* (Harrisonburg, VA: Choice, 1978).

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- ²⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World*, ed. A. Neeley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).
- ²⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_uM8bUnlGQ
- ²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNNxeovdN5U>
- ²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCrBczelMwM>
- ²⁸ D. McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, vol. Second ed. (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 1981).
- ²⁹ B. Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994).
- ³⁰ Dr. George Hunter, Conversion Theory Seminar handout, 11-30-15.
- ³¹ This is not to downplay the need to challenge people to make a commitment to Jesus; rather, it recognizes that many millennials often need several conversations before they are ready. By gauging the spiritual interest and receptivity of the inquirer, evangelists are then sensitized to ask for a commitment at the right time so that inquirers can make a verbal commitment to Jesus (cf. Romans 10:9).
- ³² <http://www.iamsecond.com/>
- ³³ For further information, see: W. Jay Moon, “Re-Wiring the Brain: Theological Education among Oral Learners,” in *Reflecting on and Equipping for Christian Mission*. Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Vol. 27. S. Bevans, T. Chai, J. Jennings, eds. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).
- ³⁴ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London, UK: Routledge, 1982).
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.
- ³⁶ Jonah Sachs, *Winning the Story Wars: Why Those Who Tell (and Live) the Best Stories Will Rule the Future* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012).
- ³⁷ W. Jay Moon, “Re-Wiring the Brain: Theological Education Among Oral Learners,” in *Reflecting on and Equipping for Christian Mission*, vol. No. 27, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).
- ³⁸ Charles Madinger, “A Literate Guide to the Oral Galaxy,” *Orality Journal* 2, no. 2 (2013): 13–40.
- ³⁹ cru.org/digitalministry/apps-tools.html
- ⁴⁰ A rubric has been developed to use for teaching/training that incorporates these elements and provides suggestions based on the audience’s preference for oral vs. print learning W. Jay Moon, “Theological Education for the 21st Century: The Oral Learning Renaissance,” in *Orality and Theological Training in the 21st Century* (Nicholasville, KY: Digit-Oral Publishing Services, 2016), 4–19.
- ⁴¹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1995).