

Starting seminary? How not to screw it up

By [Adam J. Copeland](#)

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Classes started this week at Luther Seminary following a service complete with presidential sermon and abounding in Harry Potter robes. Last week was “First Week” when we welcomed new students to campus and barraged them with orientation information until they begged to start classes and get started on their homework. On some seminary social media channel, an inquisitive person asked, “What’s your advice for our new seminary students?” I couldn’t fit my response in 140 characters. So, here it is. Three points—because, well, sermons and the Trinity.

First, cultivate friendships. I don’t remember most of what I was supposed to learn in lectures, but ten years after my own first week in seminary, it’s the relationships that have true sticking power.

So, consider that late night reading always goes better after long conversations with new friends. Study groups grow more than knowledge. Laughing with others helps. Always.

Second, if you leave seminary believing, thinking, understanding God and the world as you do now, you did it wrong. So, push yourself to explore new ideas. Follow novel, troubling concepts to their conclusion and be surprised.

Push back against that notion, reading, or professor that makes you uncomfortable while at the same time looking for the hidden wisdom that shocks you. Listen more than you speak. Ask good questions. Be made new.

Third, appreciate the privilege, and embrace the opportunity, to study this stuff in the first place. I think we should always be somewhat skeptical of the existence—and especially the formalized preparation process—of a professional clergy class. But, for those who are apparently called to seminary, the experience is both duty and delight.

So, please, welcome the joy of studying, the freedom to explore faith's curiosities, and the honor it is to think on these things.

I could write much more, but it's my first year teaching at a seminary, so I better not write too much that I'll regret in years to come. For now, I'm grateful school's finally in session—and embracing at least a few days of not needing to grade anything.

*Originally posted at [Copeland's blog](#)*