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***This article first appeared in the April 2013 issue of the Orthodox Observer, the official publication of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.***

**The Operation of Saint Athanasios Seminary**  
**By Dr. William H. Samonides assisted by Dr. Regine Johnson Samonides**

The curriculum for St. Athanasios Seminary, the first Greek Orthodox theological school in America, was ambitious. Eight instructors taught a curriculum to prepare students spiritually, linguistically, and culturally to serve the Church in America. The school included a two-year Preparatory Department for those who did not meet entrance requirements in addition to the three-year Seminary. In its two academic years of existence (1921-1923), the Seminary tried to do too much with too little money, too few faculty members, and too small a physical plant.

As head of St. Athanasios, Archbishop Alexander, Primate of the Church in America, was responsible for faculty appointments. There were several changes during the 1921-1922 academic year, but by September 1922 the faculty had stabilized. With limited funds, he was able to assemble a small but distinguished group of instructors, including a Greek Orthodox priest, a theologian, a classicist, an Episcopal minister, and a medical doctor.

Dean of the Seminary was Father Philaretos Ioannides, a graduate of the University of Athens who came to this country in 1919 on scholarship to study at two Midwestern theological schools. He served briefly at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in San Francisco before his selection as Dean. Michael Galanos, who came to America in December 1921, was at age 65 the senior faculty member. Former Envoy of the King of Greece to the Holy Synod of Athens, Galanos had taught for a number of years at the University of Athens Theological School. Called "one of the great lay theologians of the early 20th century" by Dr. George Bebis, Galanos was undoubtedly the star of the faculty and taught the widest range of subjects. Callistrates Canellopoulos, who held degrees from the University of Athens and Oxford University, was responsible for everything from classical Greek to child psychology. Reverend Arthur W. Brooks, an Episcopalian minister, taught the Old and New Testaments and homiletics, all in English. These four did most of the teaching.

Father Methodios Kourkoulis had studied at the University of Athens and Theological School of the Holy Cross at Jerusalem. Perhaps the preeminent Greek Orthodox cleric in America at this time, he had served as priest of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church (later Cathedral) in Manhattan since his arrival in America in 1904. Because of his parish duties, he taught only the Old Testament. He was also the sole faculty member on the Seminary Board of Trustees. In the Preparatory Department, Alexander Alexiou, an M.D. from the University of Athens, taught hygiene, and two student instructors taught English, American geography, and music.

The Seminary curriculum was divided into the departments of dogmatic theology, Old Testament, New Testament, ecclesiastical history and patrology, philosophy and psychology, English and Greek homiletics, ecclesiastical polity and canon law, apologetics, and liturgics. A tenth department of religious pedagogy in which third-year seminarians would study the history, administration, and methods of Sunday School instruction was planned, but a suitable American instructor was not found.

The Church focused on training young men with a command of both Greek and English and who were familiar with American methods. Seminarians had to be between the ages of 20 and 32. A diploma from either an American or Greek high school was required. Each applicant was required to take a physical examination and submit one letter of recommendation from his parish priest and one from a financial guarantor. There was also an entrance examination.

Those without a high school diploma could enter the Preparation Department, where they studied classical and New Testament Greek, English grammar and composition, Biblical, American, and ancient history, music, and hygiene until they were able to pass the entrance examination. The Preparation Department was taken seriously, and the entire faculty taught these students.

The academic year extended from September 15 to June 1 with a fifteen-day Christmas vacation and a seven-day Easter break. Annual tuition was \$300, half payable at the beginning of each term. This included room and board, health care, utilities, and laundry. All operations of the Seminary were under one roof, a 3-story Tudor Revival mansion purchased in February 1922 in the Astoria section of Queens, New York. After extensive renovations, the Seminary included a Chapel, the office of the Dean, classrooms, a dining room, and library. There were eighteen residential units for students and two others used by the Dean and a faculty member. There were plans to build a Dean's residence and a small Church on the half-acre property when funds became available.

The building could accommodate more students than were enrolled. There was no lack of applicants, but requests for scholarships exceeded the available funds. According to its May 1923 report, the Seminary was "compelled to turn away a number of worthy young men who have both the ability and the inclination, only because we cannot accept them on the scholarship plan." Nine of the twenty applicants were accepted the first year, and six were added the following year. Twelve of the fifteen students completed the 1922-1923 academic year.

At the end of the second academic year, Father Ioannides was elected first Bishop of Chicago and stepped down as Dean. In May 1923, Archbishop Alexander made an urgent appeal to donors for an additional \$100,000 to discharge part of the debt on the building and to keep the Seminary operating for another three years. Expenses for maintaining the building and operating the Seminary continued to mount, and it was unclear whether the Seminary could survive.