

Theological Education: A Radical Reappraisal

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ATS Targeted Areas of Work 2004-2010¹

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I. ATS: Overview

Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada

The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) is a membership organization of more than 250 graduate schools that conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines.

Mission

The mission of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada is to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.

Membership

There are three categories of membership in the Association: Accredited Membership, Candidate for Accredited Membership, and Associate Membership. The 254 member schools include Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox graduate schools of theology that reflect a broad spectrum of doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and theological perspectives.

Commission on Accrediting

Accreditation is conducted by the Board of Commissioners on behalf of the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools. The Commission accredits institutions and approves degree programs offered by

¹ All information in this presentation is from ATS website. For the details, see www.ats.edu.

accredited schools. The Commission is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and by the nongovernmental Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) for the accreditation of graduate, professional theological schools in the United States. The Commission, through its Board, works cooperatively with regional accrediting associations in the U.S., other professional associations, state departments of education, and other allied organizations in Canada and the United States.

History

The Association began in 1918 as a conference of theological schools that met biennially. In 1936 it became an Association, adopted standards for judging quality, and in 1938 established its first list of accredited schools. In 1956 it incorporated and secured a full-time staff. From its beginning, the Association has been representative in membership of both the United States and Canada. In 1964 it began publication of the journal, *Theological Education*. The *Fact Book on Theological Education* has been published annually since 1969. In 1990, the Association moved from Ohio to its present offices in Pittsburgh. In 1996, the Association adopted new accrediting standards.

Member Schools

- 252 member schools: 217 in the United States and 35 in Canada
- 65% freestanding schools
- 35% related to a college or university
- 56% Protestant denominational schools
- 22% Inter/nondenominational schools
- 20% Roman Catholic schools
- 1% Orthodox schools
- 232 accredited member schools
- 7 candidates for accredited status
- 13 associate member schools

Students

- 81,063 enrolled (**total head count**)
- 50,583 full-time equivalent enrollment
- 66% men, 34% women
- 59% of total enrollment white, 10% Black, 7% Asian, 4% Hispanic, 20% other (international or not reported)
- 50% enrolled in the **Master of Divinity** degree program
- 69% men, 31% women enrolled in the MDiv
- 63% of MDiv enrollment white, 13% Black, 6% Asian, 3% Hispanic, 15% other (international or not reported)

Faculty

- 3,622 full-time faculty
- 78% men, 22% women
- 83% white, 6% Black, 5% Asian, 3% Hispanic, 3% other (international or not reported)

II. Targeted Areas of Work 2004-2010

1. Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation
2. Technology and Educational Practices
3. Theological Schools and the Churches
4. Women in Leadership in Theological Education
5. Race and Ethnicity in Theological Education

1. Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation

This effort is helping schools to develop greater institutional understanding about the kind of learning that religious vocation requires and increased skill in the methods of assessing this kind of learning.

In 2006, the Association completed this four-year program that addressed the ability of theological schools to understand the character of learning that religious vocation requires and the schools' ability to develop the resources and skills needed to assess the attainment of such learning. Program elements included five research studies and **school-based efforts** that developed patterns, models, and resources for use by other ATS member institutions. The project, funded by Lilly Endowment, generated helpful **assessment resources**.

2. Technology and Educational Practices

The Association is assisting schools in making the transitions necessary to accommodate and maximize the use of information technology to enhance educational practices and institutional administration.

In 2002, ATS initiated a major project to

- identify best practices in the use of educational technology in theological education,
- conduct educational events that provide information about and skill development in the use of educational technology, and
- create resources about education and technology for use by theological schools.

A principal resource for the project is the work that has been completed by seventy-one theological schools that received planning and implementation grants from Lilly Endowment in its Information Technology for Theological Teaching program.

This ATS project will organize and exploit the valuable repository of knowledge and best practices of educational and information technology in theological education that has developed as a result of the Endowment's grants to theological schools since the mid-1990s. The schools that received these technology grants are, among ATS schools, the most experienced and now best equipped, with regard to educational technology, and they offer the most promising resource for learning by other schools.

The project is identifying the range and varieties of learning that have accrued in these schools, synthesizing best practice models for the educational use of technology in theological learning, and implementing strategies to inform and to lead ATS schools toward these best practices. The project will achieve its purpose through a combination of information gathering and analysis, seminars and workshops, and essays—all delivered through both technologically mediated delivery systems and more traditional approaches.

3. Theological Schools and the Church

ATS contributes to the renewed attention of member schools to the fundamental patterns of relationship between theological schools and their respective religious communities.
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In 2000, The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada adopted as one of several targeted areas of work to give **“renewed attention to the fundamental patterns of relationship between theological schools and their respective religious communities.”** The need for this area of work was first identified in regional meetings with senior officers of ATS schools in 1999 and was subsequently included in the Association’s work plan for 2000-2006. This “renewed attention” represents a critically important area of work for theological schools. These schools depend on a viable relationship with ecclesial communities for several reasons. Likewise, churches need theological schools to advance their missions as communities of faith.

Ecclesial communities provide a variety of institutional resources that theological schools require. Congregations and denominations are important in the process of identifying potential candidates for ministry whom the seminaries then recruit for admission. The schools are dependent on the church for placement of graduates. Almost 60% of all students in ATS schools are in the Master of Divinity (MDiv) and professional master’s degree programs, and

congregations and church-related agencies are the principal employers of graduates of these programs.

Increasingly, the **revenue needed for theological education** comes from individual donors. These donors are seldom graduates of the schools; they are most typically persons in the church who care about faith and the quality of leaders for the church. Theological schools need constituent communities of faith from which they can identify the individual donors required to fund theological education.

Theological schools also need meaningful connections to ecclesial communities to discern an important part of their **scholarly agenda**. While scholarly work is pursued with reference to academic guilds and the work of other scholars, theological scholarship needs living traditions—with their hopes, struggles, and controversies—as context for scholarly inquiry. Theological schools simply do not have a viable future apart from communities of faith.

Project Goals

This project has three goals that, together, will provide a perspective about church-theological school relationships and prescriptions for strengthening them. to cultivate a broad-based conversation about the institutional relationships between theological schools and church bodies.

1. to define the current patterns of relationship between seminaries and their respective communities of faith.
2. to develop proposals for strengthening and renewing institutional relationships that benefit both the church and theological schools.

Project Activities

To explore these fundamental issues and to inform these specific goals, the project is undertaking several activities from 2004 to 2007.

1. The first activity was to focus on this issue as the major programmatic emphasis of the Association's 2004 Biennial Meeting.
2. The second involves a study that identifies patterns of church-seminary relationships and documents the ways in which these relationships have changed across the past several decades.
3. Throughout the duration of the project, ATS is convening a group of theological educators, pastors, and denominational leaders to engage in a sustained discussion that is addressing issues about the church-seminary relationship, identifying patterns of work that seminaries can engage to strengthen various patterns of relationship, and determining ways to advocate those patterns of work to member schools.

The project will conduct a **study of the patterns of institutional relationships** that theological schools maintain with their respective ecclesial communities. ATS will

survey presidents of member schools to identify characteristics of their schools' current relationships with denominations and congregations and will ask them to reflect on the ways those relationships have changed over the past forty years, as well as their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses in the current relationships. While this research would be limited in focus, it would provide a very useful resource for assessing the changing patterns of relationship and for identifying ways in which church-seminary connections can be strengthened.

The **principal assumption** of this project is that viable relationships between seminaries and church bodies are absolutely necessary for the institutional vitality and educational integrity of theological schools. While the relationships are good in many areas, they appear to be strained in others. Schools are institutions designed to change slowly while congregational realities can change rapidly. The differences between these two institutional realities, and the differing perceptions that emerge from each about the other, require a context in which thoughtful engagement can occur among theological educators, denominational executives and officers, and congregational leaders.

Toward the conclusion of the project, ATS will host a **consultation** on the seminary-church relationship. The consultation will gather approximately 100 people to review the findings of the project's research and recommendations developed by the project's Task Force in its more sustained attention to these issues. The consultation will result in recommendations to ATS schools about ways to enhance the relationship between them and church bodies. This consultation will include participants from a broader array of denominations and schools than those that participated in the prior structured discussion. This project's consultation would be structured in such a way that participants develop the proposals and recommendations for a broad community of theological schools.

4. Women in Leadership in Theological Education

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The Women in Leadership in Theological Education program has three principal activities:

Annual Conference: The annual conference focuses on professional development, including attention to distinctive skills needed by women to function effectively in theological schools. It provides a focused educational setting as well as the opportunity to network with others. Participants are selected on the basis of applications from women faculty and administrators in ATS schools, and preference is given to women in mid-level administrative positions, junior-level faculty, and racial/ethnic applicants. Each conference generally has 30 to 40 participants.

Senior Administrator Retreat: ATS hosts an annual retreat for women currently serving as presidents or deans in member schools. These are the most influential roles in ATS schools, and they bring both the greatest opportunity to guide the course of an institution and the greatest amount of stress. The retreats are informal in structure, with limited plenary presentations, and they are designed to provide time for problem-solving, peer support, and encouragement. The retreat usually has 20 to 25 participants.

Conference-based Research: The Association is using the Women in Leadership conferences in a research effort to gain information about institutional practices from participants and, combined with other forms of data gathering, to develop informed perceptions about institutional practices that enhance more gender-inclusive faculties and administrative staffs.

Events

Women and Men in Leadership Together: Opportunities and Challenges October 26-28, 2007, Pittsburgh, PA

This seminar will provide women opportunities to enhance leadership skills, identify resources for effective leadership, and develop relationships with other women leaders. Each participant will prepare a case vignette of her institution, relating a personal or professional issue of concern. Time also will be provided for individual mentoring. By application from women faculty and administrators at any stage of their careers; limited to 40 participants.

Retreat for Senior Women Administrators April 18-20, 2008, Baltimore, MD

This retreat consists of guided conversations for the weekend, along with planned times of rest and replenishment. *By invitation* for all women CEOs and CAOs of ATS schools.

5. Race and Ethnicity in Theological Education

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ATS supports racial/ethnic faculty and administrators in theological schools and helps schools to enhance their capacity to meet the needs of diverse racial/ethnic communities in North America. ATS provides venues for gathering and supporting racial/ethnic faculty and administrators and facilitates mentoring networks among these constituents. It also helps schools develop greater capacity to educate students more effectively for ministry in multicultural contexts and realize the benefits of increasing racial/ethnic diversity in the schools.

Seminars

The Association is planning three annual seminars (in 2007, 2008, and 2009) on **Building Multiracial Capacity in Predominantly White Theological Schools**. The seminars will be designed to help predominantly white schools develop employment and educational practices that serve racial/ethnic constituents. The seminars will address topics such as developing strategies for hiring, retention, and promotion of racial/ethnic faculty; fostering a healthy campus climate for multicultural engagement; and addressing the particular needs of racial/ethnic students.

Events

Second ATS Asian/Asian North Americans Consultation

December 7-9, 2007, Dallas/Fort Worth, TX

The second ATS consultation for Asian/Asian North Americans will focus on issues unique to theological education for Asian North Americans and the religious communities that they serve. *By invitation; limited to 50 participants.*

Enhancing Ethnic Diversity in Theological Education: Consultation B

September 26-28, 2008, Pittsburgh, PA

This second consultation builds on Consultation A (Dismantling Institutional Racism and White Privilege) and is intended to consider peer cases involving strategies that result in theological schools becoming more reflective of their theological mission within the surrounding culture.

Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CORE)

The work of the ATS Committee on Race & Ethnicity in Theological Education (CORE) addresses both the concerns of racial/ethnic persons in theological education and institutional practices. The purpose of the committee includes meeting annually to plan programs for leadership development of racial/ethnic persons, as well as programs for their nurture and support; collecting data on the hiring, retention, and promotion of racial/ethnic persons at ATS schools; and emphasizing mentoring by and for racial/ethnic persons to ensure their retention and enhance their well-being.

III. Proposed Plan for the Work of ATS 2008-2012

The mission of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada is to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.

The Association seeks to implement this mission with attention to four key values:

- 1. Diversity**—ATS values the different expressions of faith that are represented by member schools and seeks to respect the varying understandings of theology, polity, religious leadership, and social commitments.
- 2. Quality and Improvement**—ATS schools value quality in the practice of ministry and in educational practices. Quality is always linked to improvement; even schools that have achieved a high degree of quality can improve. The Association encourages schools to advance in quality.
- 3. Collegiality**—ATS values the contributions that schools make to one another. Regardless of differences in theological perspective, organizational complexity, or institutional size, ATS schools, as peer institutions, can learn from one another, cooperate on common tasks that benefit the broader community of theological schools, and hold themselves accountable to common practices and quality.
- 4. Leadership**—ATS values leadership and considers it essential for schools to attain their missions. ATS is committed to developing the skills and capacities of administrators, faculties, and boards of member schools.

In addition to these core values, the Association values formal education for ministerial leadership and advocates on behalf of its benefits for religious leaders, religious institutions, and the work of religion in broader publics; values justice in society and institutions and seeks to embody justice in its organizational life; values accountability for student learning; and both values and advocates for quality in the practice of ministry.

In support of this mission and these values, the Association has three core functions that it performs on behalf of graduate, professional theological education in the United States and Canada: leadership education, issues and initiatives, and communications and data. The Association maintains a plan that identifies strategies and relates those strategies to the core functions of the Association. The plan of work extends for six years and is revised biennially; the current plan is based on, and updates, the 2006 version of the plan of work.