

## Recommendations Regarding ATS Policy Guidelines

### Change in terminology

In order to better reflect the nonbinding nature of the policies it has developed to guide member schools beyond the requirements of the Standards of Accreditation, the ATS Board of Directors recommends formally changing the designation of all existing policies from *policy statements* to *policy guidelines*.

### Policy recommended for retirement

**Professional Ethics for Teachers (1966/72):** The ATS Board of Directors recommended at the 2008 Biennial Meeting that this policy statement be retired because the content is out of date and institutional faculty handbooks—in the context of individual schools, their traditions, and legal settings—can address these issues better than an Association policy statement. Through an amended motion, the membership voted to revise the policy. Upon further review, the board again recommends that the policy be retired.

### Proposed new policy guidelines

The following four policy guidelines have been developed by the ATS board and are recommended for approval by the membership:

#### **Proposed guidelines on Striving for Culturally Competent School Communities**

##### ***Background***

*The proposed policy guidelines combine provisions from two retired policies—Ethical Guidelines for Seminaries and Seminary Clusters and Goals and Guidelines for Women in Theological Schools—that addressed issues of race and ethnicity and women in theological education. More than thirty years after the adoption of the two policies in 1976, it is evident that the issues associated with creating a culturally competent community pertain to a broad spectrum of qualities ranging from racial/ethnic or cultural background to gender and age to faith tradition. Recognizing a convergence of interests, the ATS Board of Directors is proposing the combination of these two policies into one expanded policy.*

*The policy revision process was initiated by a vote of the membership at the 2008 Biennial Meeting. These proposed policy guidelines were drafted by the ATS board with staff support, vetted by ATS member schools during spring 2010, and approved by the board at its April 2010 meeting for presentation to the membership at its June 2010 Biennial Meeting. They are in full harmony and compliance with the mission and standards of the Association. It should be understood, however, that they are provided as suggestions for ATS member schools and do not represent a binding or normative expectation. Schools should seek legal counsel before adopting or implementing these guidelines.*

*The text of the proposed policy guidelines follows.*

#### **Striving for Culturally Competent School Communities**

##### **Rationale and goals**

The value of a culturally competent community lies in the benefits that accrue from experiencing a broad range of individuals with a broad range of perspectives and gifts. In the past four decades, higher educa-

tion has made significant strides in its thinking and implementing of policies supporting just and diverse academic communities. At the same time, shifting demographics in the United States promise to tip the scales of racial balance in the coming decades. Continued vigilance is therefore required to ensure that institutional policies provide opportunities for diverse populations, build capacity in schools to serve those populations, enhance the educational experience for all constituents, and equip graduates to embrace a commitment to diversity and inclusion—in all their forms—as they minister in their congregations and communities.

This policy views cultural competency as a strength in theological education and encourages ATS schools to live toward a vision of including and valuing the full spectrum of God’s people—with their multiplicity of characteristics—in theological education and ministry. It seeks to honor the ATS commitment to respecting diversity as a core value within the schools while at the same time respecting their different expressions of faith and varying understandings of theology, polity, religious leadership, and social commitments. The guidelines provided may be adapted to the particular situation of each school.

### Definitions

*Cultural competency* is proficiency in responding effectively and respectfully to a diverse cultural context. It is the process by which individuals and institutions become aware of and think theologically about assumptions, biases, and knowledge about themselves and others.

*Culturally competent communities* are communities that foster mutual respect and care for others and in which all individuals are recognized as persons loved by God. In a culturally competent community, members know how to relate to those qualities and conditions that are different from their own, how to manage the dynamics of difference, and how to benefit from the diversity around them.

*Discrimination* is any activity that creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others.

*Capacity building* is any activity that enhances an organization’s effectiveness (i.e., its resources, competencies, and ability) in fulfilling its mission and sustaining itself within the cultural context in which it operates.

### Guiding principles

1. Culturally competent communities create environments in which individuals enjoy mutual respect, cooperation, and caring.
2. Theological schools should hold themselves accountable to ensuring that they contribute in a positive way to a diverse and multicultural society.
3. Diversity has many dimensions and manifests itself in the uniquenesses of individuals, communities, and their identities.
4. Initiatives toward building a culturally competent community should take a comprehensive and institution-wide approach with the full support of institutional leadership.

5. Opportunities for interaction among all members of the school community will promote discovery of common ground in shared ideals, values, and principles.
6. A culturally competent community promotes freedom of independent thinking and civil discourse and creates a dynamic learning environment.
7. Students and the communities they will serve benefit from teaching, learning, and research born out of a culturally competent environment.
8. Personal, cultural, and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others.
9. Building capacity in the area of cultural competency enhances a school's ability to serve its mission, including education of graduates to function effectively in increasingly diverse societies.
10. A culturally competent theological school will regularly assess its mission and work to determine any areas in need of appropriate response.

### **Recommended practice**

With these goals and principles in mind, theological schools should conduct ongoing assessments of their institutional climates and practices with respect to issues of cultural competency.

### ***Mission and resources***

1. A theological school's mission and resources should be reviewed regularly to assess readiness and capacity for improvement in achieving cultural competency.
2. A theological school should develop a policy reflecting its aspirations and realistic goals for creating a culturally competent community.
3. A theological school should acquire, allocate and provide access to resources such as library, information technology, and student services, that reflect its commitment to cultural competency.
4. A theological school should develop steps to ensure that accountability structures are in place that will both lead to enhanced practices of inclusion and assist the school to identify and address ongoing areas of exclusion.

### ***Campus climate***

5. A theological school should endeavor to create a hospitable and welcoming culture.
6. A theological school should promote activities that foster interaction and discovery among all campus constituents.
7. A theological school should establish a procedure and a forum for discussion of any challenges or conflicts or any new initiatives related to cultural competency.

### ***Representation***

8. A theological school should strive to ensure that its communications and admissions processes, including recruitment and financial aid policies, maximize access to a full range of prospective students of varied identity and background, as appropriate to the school's particular expression of faith and understanding of theology, polity, religious leadership, and social commitments.

9. A theological school should strive to recruit, to hire, and to retain, through tenure and promotion activities, a qualified faculty and staff whose composition reflects and serves the particular identity and background of its student body.

***Curriculum, scholarship, and outcomes***

10. A theological school should make resources available to faculty, students, staff and administration for the purpose of enhancing educational effectiveness in the service of diversity.
11. A theological school, through its faculty, should develop pedagogies and curricula that make learning more effective for the diversity of the student body.
12. Curricular offerings should cultivate the capacity of leaders to respond to diverse populations in ministry, teaching, and congregational settings.
13. Evaluation of scholarship should consider the influence of societal diversity on scholarly inquiry.

***Relationships with church bodies***

14. A theological school should work cooperatively with church bodies to diagnose and correct conditions that inhibit the achievement of culturally competent congregations.

***Financial commitment***

15. A theological school should endeavor to reflect the above commitments in its budget allocations.

**Proposed guidelines on Faculty Reductions During Financial Crisis**

***Background***

*The current policy, ATS Guidelines for Retrenchment, was approved in 1976, when employment law was much less complex. Developments since that time required revision of the ATS policy statement.*

*The policy revision process was initiated by a vote of the membership at the 2008 Biennial Meeting. These proposed policy guidelines were drafted by the ATS Board with staff support, vetted by ATS member schools during spring 2010, and approved by the board at its April 2010 meeting for presentation to the membership at its June 2010 Biennial Meeting. They are in full harmony and compliance with the mission and standards of the Association. It should be understood, however, that they are provided as suggestions for ATS member schools and do not represent a binding or normative expectation. Schools should seek legal counsel before adopting or implementing these guidelines.*

*The text of the proposed policy guidelines follows.*

**Faculty Reductions During Financial Crisis**

**Rationale and goals**

1. Proactively leading institutions in making difficult yet necessary changes to the finances of theological schools may prevent them from reaching severe financial crises. When extreme financial crisis warrants, the following principles and practices may help guide an institution in making those difficult decisions to balance the survival

- of the school with the protection of its employees.
2. This policy statement is in full harmony and compliance with the mission and standards of the Association.

### **Definition**

*Financial exigency* is declared when an institution needs to take extraordinary action to reduce expenditures and preserve resources.<sup>1</sup>

### **Guiding principles**

1. Fundamental to the determination of the need for reductions of tenured faculty or contracted staff is a careful and credible statement of the nature and dimension of the financial exigency of the school. Appropriate constituencies of the school should be involved in understanding the facts if a declaration of financial exigency is to be deemed credible. Adopting a collaborative approach to this challenge may increase community-wide trust and support.
2. It should be understood that eliminating contracts of employment may be necessary for the long-term survival of the institution.
3. Institutions should focus on the viability, health, and integrity of the whole enterprise of education for ministry while balancing institutional survival with fair treatment of faculty and contracted staff members.
4. A flexible, equitable, and nondiscriminatory process that is consistent with the overall mission and values of the school should be adopted for making decisions about reductions of faculty or contracted staff members.
5. Appropriate amounts of time and resources should be spent on strengthening current revenue streams while developing new, sustainable revenue sources.
6. Mergers or redefining the institutional mission may be additional considerations.

### **Recommended practice**

1. Legal and human resource experts should be mobilized in this process as soon as possible.
2. A panel of outside and disinterested qualified persons could be invited to confirm the reality of the financial exigency and assist in designing documents that best communicate the financial realities. It is understood that costs may prohibit this approach; however, local experts may be willing to donate their time and expertise if requested.
3. Schools should develop and implement appropriate personnel policies and procedures in accordance with General Institutional Standard 9.1.3.

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1. In addition to the suggested guidelines from ATS, schools will find helpful a statement from the Association of American Colleges titled "Statement on Financial Exigency and Staff Reduction" and a statement from the American Association of University Professors titled "On Institutional Problems Resulting From Financial Exigency: Some Operating Guidelines."

4. At the earliest possible time, full and detailed information regarding the nature and extent of the financial exigency should be made available to all persons and groups potentially affected by the crisis. Compassionate transparency without violating confidentiality may prove useful.
5. Regular disclosure of appropriate information about the finances and financial health of an institution to its constituencies is the first step toward creating a climate of understanding when a school's finances may necessitate staffing reductions.
6. The processes used in reduction of tenured faculty or contracted staff and the announcement of those reductions with termination of contract or employment should be carried on in a compassionate spirit that results in the least damage of the sense of worth of those whose employment is terminated and provides as much transitional financial support as is prudent.
7. All legitimate and practical means of dealing with the financial crisis should be exercised before terminating contracts. This includes a careful analysis of increased endowment spending to eliminate deficits.
8. Any reduction in faculty employment should be done with a clear eye toward such reduction's impact on the quality and scope of education offered to students. Educational needs of the institution must be balanced against other values such as seniority in times of genuine financial exigency.
9. Alternate forms and places of service for those who suffer from reduction in numbers, either within the institution or elsewhere, should be explored.
10. Institutions may consider not increasing salaries or taking across-the-board reductions in salaries as a means toward meeting the exigency.
11. Institutions may offer incentives for early retirement for eligible faculty as a means toward achieving ongoing payroll reduction.
12. Members of a faculty and administrative staff may wish to modify their compensation from the school in order to continue their life and work together.
13. Those with adequate financial means may wish to offer contributed service for part or all of their employment costs for a specified period in order to prevent termination of employment of themselves or of colleagues.
14. The board and administration may consider asking current full-time faculty to serve on a part-time basis until the financial conditions improve.
15. The board, administration, and faculty may consider eliminating or temporarily suspending certain employee benefits (e.g., employer contributions to retirement or sabbaticals).

### **Proposed guidelines on Faculty Resignations, Leaves, and Retirements**

#### ***Background***

*The current policy, Institutional Procedures: Faculty Resignations, Leaves, and Retirements, was approved in 1960, when employment law and faculty status and roles were much less complex. Since that time, numerous changes in laws and practices have made it imperative that a new policy be created.*

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## **Faculty Resignations, Leaves, and Retirements**

### **Rationale and goals**

Faculty members are among the greatest resources of theological schools. Appropriate employment treatment of them is crucial for the financial and academic well-being of the schools. Both faculty members and the institutions that employ them need to follow guidelines for institutional procedures that protect the interests of both and contribute to the fruitful fulfilling of institutional mission and individual vocation.

### **Resignations**

#### ***Guiding principles***

1. Faculty considering resignation should provide sufficient notice so that the academic program of the school does not suffer unduly.
2. As appropriate, faculty considering resignation should conduct discussions sufficiently in the open that the school from which the resignation is made has an opportunity to enter into the conversations.

#### ***Recommended practice***

3. Tenured faculty members considering resignation should provide notice of a minimum of six months; for an untenured faculty member, the minimum notice should be three months.
4. A school may engage a faculty member at another school in conversation at any time regarding possible employment.

### **Sabbatical leaves**

#### ***Guiding principles***

1. A school is responsible for making provision of time and support for the continued intellectual and spiritual growth of faculty members.
2. A member of the faculty is responsible for taking and using the sabbatical as an opportunity for intellectual and spiritual growth to the benefit of the school and the church.

#### ***Recommended practice***

3. A sabbatical leave should be provided for each member of the faculty on indefinite tenure after an agreed upon period of full-time service, provided plans are made to make use of the leave in line with the conditions suggested below.
4. The minimum length of such leave with full salary should be six months, but where a longer leave seems desirable, salary adjustments should be arrived at through appropriate discussion.

5. Sabbatical leave should be conceived of by the faculty member and the administration as a time for deeper study, research, or writing. Where possible, location in another center of learning will add breadth to the faculty member's point of view.
6. Normally the faculty member will agree to return to the school that has granted the sabbatical leave and to remain at the school for a minimum of one year after the leave.

## **Retirement**

### ***Guiding principles***

1. The retirement policy and plan should be attractive to individuals engaged in educational work, increase the morale of the faculty, permit faculty members with singleness of purpose to devote their energies to serving their institution, and make it possible for them to enter retirement with a sense of security.
2. The occasion of retirement can offer the opportunity for institutional self-reflection about future needs.

### ***Recommended practice***

3. The retirement policy and plan of an institution should be clearly defined and be well understood by both the faculty and the administration of the institution.
4. Due to the complexity of federal and state or provincial laws regarding retirement policies and programs in higher education, the institution should engage the services of legal counsel, appropriate retirement consultants, and plan administrators in the development of retirement policies, plans, and procedures.
5. Institutions may find that a policy allowing for early retirement may be helpful to members of the faculty, even though such a policy may result in a theological school losing gifted faculty members.

## **Proposed guidelines on Student Financial Aid**

### ***Background***

*The current policy on financial aid was approved in 1976, when financial aid consisted almost entirely of institutional awards to needy students. Those institutional awards were funded by endowment earnings, annual scholarship gifts, and institutional awards/discounts. Currently these same sources provide aid to needy students, but most seminaries also award aid on the basis of academic merit as well as financial need. In addition, most seminaries are highly engaged in providing federal, state, or provincial loan alternatives for students, which pose myriad issues, including increased volumes of debt among theological school graduates, predatory lenders, and regulations to be considered by both the student and the institution in order to qualify for receipt of these government dollars.*

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## **Student Financial Aid**

### **Rationale and goals**

Historically, seminaries have been concerned with providing financial aid to those who evidenced financial need in pursuit of their theological studies. Though that is still a major concern, the current environment also demands recognition of academic achievement or other forms of merit. Theological schools need highly qualified students regardless of financial status. In addition, students, schools, churches, and judicatories have expressed growing concerns regarding the increased debt load of students graduating from theological school and entering ministry. These factors lead to the following goals for financial aid provided by ATS member schools:

1. Theological schools should take into account aid granted on the basis of both financial need and merit.
2. Theological schools should counsel students regarding the consequences of educational debt.
3. Theological schools must take into account the many federal, state, and provincial regulations required of institutions participating in government loan programs.

The Association recommends that schools consider the following definitions, guiding principles, and practices in their financial aid procedures.

### **Definitions**

*Financial aid* consists of scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study/institutional employment.

*Need-based aid* is defined as aid granted to a student to meet the difference between the total cost of attending a particular institution and the amount of resources available to the student.

*Merit-based aid* is defined as aid granted to a student on the basis of academic performance, cocurricular involvement, or other form of merit.

### **Guiding principles**

1. The student has the major responsibility for his or her educational and living expenses. The school's aid will augment the student's efforts.
2. A student's financial resources will include consideration of merit scholarships; funds available from church, judicatory, and denomination; earnings of student and spouse; savings; veterans' benefits; and outside gifts.
3. Financial aid is not an end in itself but should be administered in such a way as to affirm financial responsibility and integrity of both student and school.
4. The administration of financial aid should be individual, personal, pastoral, and confidential.
5. Theological schools should adopt a financial aid code of conduct to which it and all outside agents (lenders, loan servicers, etc.) must adhere.

6. Need-based financial aid should not exceed the amount of demonstrated student need.
7. Theological schools that are part of larger institutions should coordinate their financial aid policies with those of the larger institution.

**Recommended practice**

1. A common need analysis system (such as FAFSA for U.S. schools) should be used.
2. The estimate of a student's expenses should include tuition, fees, housing, transportation, food, medical care and insurance, recreation, and contributions to church and charities.
3. A flexible, equitable, and nondiscriminatory system should be developed for processing aid for all students.
4. In packaging aid, each school should take into account the total indebtedness of each student and spouse. Counsel should be given to all students seeking loans that indebtedness, by its very nature, affects ministry options.
5. A theological school must publish its procedures and policies to make certain they are available to students.
6. A theological school should review and change its procedures and practices to meet changing needs.
7. A theological school should provide for an annual review of each student's need.