



*decline that consumed more than 10% of total enrollment in ATS has stopped.* Enrollments are lower than they were in 2007, but they now have been stable for three years.

The number at the top—the total individual student enrollment—oversimplifies complex and substantive movements underneath. The enrollment in the MDiv has continued to decline, as has the enrollment of white students and students enrolled but not in a degree program. The number of students of color has been increasing as has the number of students enrolled in professional and masters' degree programs. The number of students attending mainline Protestant schools has decreased more than the number of students attending evangelical Protestant schools. The number of students in Canada has decreased more than students in the United States. The total enrollment in many schools has decreased, while it has increased or remained about the same in others. The total number reflects the increases of schools newly admitted to ATS membership. The total number of students, like a word, treats a multi-dimensional reality as if it were unidimensional.

Numbers don't lie: the total enrollment in ATS schools has ceased its decline and stabilized, at least over the past few years. Numbers, however, are never self-interpreting. People bring interpretations—informed guesses about meaning—to the numbers. Theologians know about interpretation just like they know about words, and ATS has more than +270 member institutions primarily because of different interpretations of the same ancient words! Numbers do not mean much until they are interpreted.

What does the number of total enrollment in ATS schools mean? Perhaps the most useful interpretation is that something is changing among the persons who choose to enroll in ATS member schools and the degree programs they choose to pursue. These changes likely have their roots in shifting religious practices, in the structuring of communities of faith, and in perceptions of ministry. These changes are influenced by institutional initiatives and innovations, but they are not caused by them. After examining numbers in theological education for many decades, I am not sure how to interpret the current churning underneath the total enrollment.

The most breath-taking interpretive leap I can make is that, perhaps, God is doing something very good in this day that differs from other days—and our task as theological educators is to discern what Providence is about. Unfortunately, I have no numbers to back up that interpretation.