

# Lilly Endowment awards \$5.95 million to ATS for Educational Models Project

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Contacts: Stephen Graham, Senior Director of Programs and Services

[graham@ats.edu](mailto:graham@ats.edu)

412-788-6505, ext. 251

Eliza Smith Brown, Director, Communications and External Relations

[brown@ats.edu](mailto:brown@ats.edu)

412-977-3939

PITTSBURGH—Lilly Endowment Inc. has awarded a grant of \$5.95 million to The Association of Theological Schools for a project entitled Educating Religious Leaders in the Twenty-first Century: Educational Models and Practices of Theological Education. The four-year project is designed to assess current and developing educational models and practices of theological education, identify the most promising aspects of these models for the education and formation of religious leaders, assist member schools in implementing new and innovative models, and integrate models that offer promise into the work of the Association and its related Commission on Accrediting.

The Educational Models project will examine a comprehensive array of activities and practices, including educational program design, teaching and learning strategies, curriculum design, delivery methods, locational arrangements, educational goals, and assessment of learning.

The project will engage member schools of the Association to pursue six different areas of work simultaneously:

**1. *A comprehensive study of educational program developments in ATS schools***

A mapping survey and meetings of peer groups of schools will gather information on the variety of educational practices that have developed over the past several decades, often to address new constituencies, to increase accessibility of theological education, or to address patterns of ministry that have been underattended by the dominant educational models.

**2. *A comparative study of other patterns of graduate professional education***

A team of educators will conduct a comparative study of changes and concerns that have been identified in other patterns of graduate professional education—especially legal education, business education, and other human service professions like social work and counseling—to determine lessons learned and best practices that might apply to theological education.

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**3. *A study of the religious workforce***

A mapping survey of graduates from a representative sample of ATS schools will track their career placements to identify the range of positions graduates obtain in a variety of congregational and other ministry settings upon completion of their degrees and to determine potential or unmet educational needs in those settings.

**4. *A study of learning outcomes-based curricular development***

A study will examine programs that have demonstrated particular expertise in assessing achievement of learning outcomes, including online programs, programs of competency-based education, and other experimental programs.

**5. *Grants to schools to develop and expand innovative models***

A call for proposals will invite ATS member schools to apply for grants to launch or expand upon innovative ideas. Between 30 and 50 grants of \$25,000 to \$50,000 each will be awarded. In addition, the project will provide grants of up to \$15,000 for as many as 30 schools to implement faculty development programs related to new educational models.

**6. *Integration of project outcomes into initial redevelopment of accrediting standards***

The project will have created a new baseline about theological educational practice, and that baseline will provide normative support for a substantive redevelopment of the Commission on Accrediting's Standards of Accreditation.

According to Stephen R. Graham, senior director of programs and services for ATS and the director of the Educational Models project, this is the most comprehensive project the Association has ever undertaken. "We are delighted by the collaborative opportunities this grant will provide for schools across the Association to strengthen their work of providing effective theological education for the next generation of religious leaders," he said.

Daniel O. Aleshire, executive director of ATS, offered additional perspective on the importance of this project. "It is very clear that economic stability and sustainability are inextricably linked to educational models," he said. "Without significant modifications to educational patterns and practices, financial sustainability might not be possible for many schools. This project will ensure that those necessary modifications are identified, tested, and put into practice."

An advisory committee will counsel ATS staff in the implementation of the project.

The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) is a membership organization of more than 270 graduate schools that conduct postbaccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines. The Commission on Accrediting of ATS accredits the schools and approves the degree programs they offer.