

# Committee on Race and Ethnicity completes 15 years of work

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As the ATS Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) marks its 15th anniversary, it can point to a rich legacy of activities and progress toward supporting racial/ethnic individuals, building institutional capacity to serve an increasingly multicultural society in North America, and setting agendas for future work. While these initiatives offer much to celebrate, including notable increases in racial/ethnic enrollment and faculty composition, there remains the need for continued vigilance and commitment.



## 1968–1999: EARLY ATS DIVERSITY INITIATIVES

CORE's work on diversity issues represents the latest manifestation of a commitment by ATS over the past five decades to championing issues of diversity. It builds on even earlier ATS initiatives begun in 1968—a tempestuous time across North America—with establishment of the Committee on Underrepresented Constituencies (URC). The committee was intended to provide guidance and counsel to ATS committees regarding issues of race and ethnicity. Although the URC had limited funding, it had unlimited notions about what ATS could do to assist those who often had served on the margins at member schools, and it served as the place for gathering information and initiating action. Perhaps most notable among its accomplishments were changes in the 1970s to the Standards of Accreditation in support of schools' efforts in affirmative action.

## 2000–2007: LAUNCHING THE COMMITTEE ON RACE AND ETHNICITY

The new millennium signaled a new phase of ATS diversity work with establishment of the Committee on Race and Ethnicity in 2000. The purpose of the committee reached beyond advocacy to include leadership development of racial/ethnic persons, programs for their nurture and support, and advocacy for consideration of issues of race and ethnicity in the agendas of all ATS committees and conferences. With generous funding from Lilly Endowment, Inc. the first seven years of CORE programming focused on the unique needs and issues of racial/ethnic faculty and administrators. Events provided education, and perspective, with the goal of encouraging and retaining these faculty and administrators in theological education.

## Highlights of 2000–2007 accomplishments

- At least 12 gatherings that brought together more than 500 participants to share experiences and learnings and to make recommendations for continued ATS work on behalf of racial/ethnic constituencies and the schools that serve them
- Creation of the Diversity Folio, a compilation of resources with many voices and perspectives including essays, faculty profiles, statistics on race and ethnicity in member schools, case studies, and “do and don’t” sheets, covering issues such as tenure, hospitality, isolation, hiring, and curricular revision
- Continued routine inclusion of racial/ethnic individuals on evaluation committees assembled by the Commission on Accrediting
- Racial/ethnic representation on all boards and committees of the Association and the Commission
- A 10.9% increase over seven years in racial/ethnic enrollment to 33.6% (12.5% African American, 7.8% Asian/Asian American, 4.7% Hispanic, .4% Native American, 8.2% Visa)
- A 23.8% increase over seven years in racial/ethnic faculty to 16.1% (6.4% African American, 5.1% Asian/Asian American, 3.4% Hispanic, .2% Native American, .1% Multiracial, .9% Visa)

## 2007–2014: A SHIFT IN FOCUS TO BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

The next seven years of CORE work refocused on building institutional skill and capacity related to racial/ethnic faculty and administrators. Based on the findings of a peer review, programming was developed to prepare schools, their graduates, and the communities they will serve for an impending demographic shift: By 2040, racial/ethnic persons will constitute the majority of the North American population.

## Highlights of 2007–2014 accomplishments

- Seven conferences, each one targeting a specific population and/or institution within theological education, gathering more than 350 participants
- A comprehensive peer evaluation of CORE programming
- Preparing for 2040: Intensive two-year engagements with 67 schools to develop Diversity Strategic Plans for enhancing institutional capacity to educate graduates for ministry in multicultural contexts
- Major revision by the ATS membership of the Standards of Accreditation in 2010–2012 to promote diversity and increase access for underserved populations
- Adoption by the ATS membership in 2010 of the Striving for Culturally Competent School Communities Policy Guideline to replace policies dating to 1976
- An additional 16.7% increase in racial/ethnic enrollment to 39.2% (13.9% African American, 8.5% Asian/Asian American, 6.3% Hispanic, .5% Native American, 10% Visa), representing a 29% increase over 15 years
- An additional 24.8% increase in racial/ethnic faculty to 20.1% (7.7% African American, 7% Asian/Asian American, 4.1% Hispanic, .8% Visa, .5% Multiracial, .1% Native American), representing a 55% increase over 15 years



*“Race and ethnicity have become more explicit talking points among faculty.”*

*“Faculty are more aware of racial/ethnic students and their contexts.”*

*“Our trustees have become more aware and more engaged with racial/ethnic diversity across the institution.”*

*“We have enacted a complete change of the entire curriculum to incorporate preparation for the artistry of cross-cultural and multiracial leadership as a core dimension of ministerial excellence.”*

*“The establishment of clear goals and a specific plan with measurable outcomes was the most significant. These drove faculty and administrative discussions and resulted in lasting change . . . ”*

*“Conversations about race are absolutely crucial as we move forward in a “multi-cultural, multi-racial” Canada. I am convinced that the conversations are still too muted, too difficult for most to grasp, but are needed if we are to prepare students to engage the culture around us in meaningful ways.”*

—comments from survey participants

## 2014–2015: RESEARCH

ATS paused its programming in 2014–2015 to conduct a major evaluation of work in this area and plan for future efforts. The evaluation included a major survey of all the persons who had participated in the 14 years of programming, a consultation with current members of the Committee on Race and Ethnicity and selected consultants, a conference of persons who had participated in the programming during previous years to review the survey results and consider next steps in this program area, and a conference of current racial/ethnic senior students and recent graduates to reflect on the survey results, their experience in theological education, and their perceptions of the adequacy of their education for the contexts in which they will serve or have recently begun to serve.

## NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, the Committee on Race and Ethnicity will continue its work as a central component of the ATS Leadership Education curriculum, following several avenues:

- The annual gathering of African American CEOs and CAOs
- Resources to help schools define and measure “success” in addressing issues of race and ethnicity
- A series of scholarly articles on diversity issues published in *Theological Education*
- A series of online resources identifying best practices and practical advice on issues such as identifying, employing, and retaining racial/ethnic faculty and administrators; strategic diversity planning and implementation; institutional support and effective educational strategies for racial/ethnic students; and patterns of institutional connection with racial/ethnic communities in a school’s own neighborhood

- A two-year project with 20 schools to develop and implement strategies for improving education of racial/ethnic students and preparing white students for ministry in a multiracial culture
- Collaboration around issues of race and ethnicity with the Hispanic Theological Initiative, the Forum for Theological Exploration, the Louisville Institute, the Hispanic Summer Program, the Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana, In Trust Center for Theological Schools, and the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

Supported by the wisdom and energy of more than 40 individuals who have served the URC and CORE committees and more than 1,200 who have participated in consultations and conferences over the years, this ongoing effort embraces the ATS commitment to diversity as one of its four core values, represents the work of a broad sector of the ATS membership, and honors the full spectrum of God's people in theological education. As ATS celebrates 15 years of CORE, gratitude is due to Lilly Endowment Inc. for its ongoing support for this work and to all who have moved this agenda forward.



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