

Faculty perceptions about their work: Four snapshots of faculty in ATS schools

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The Association of Theological Schools conducted a three-part study on faculty, gathering their habits and engagement with professional development and exploring other hot topics. Among the numerous findings, the following four highlights emerged.

Perceptions of Importance of and Support for Faculty Roles

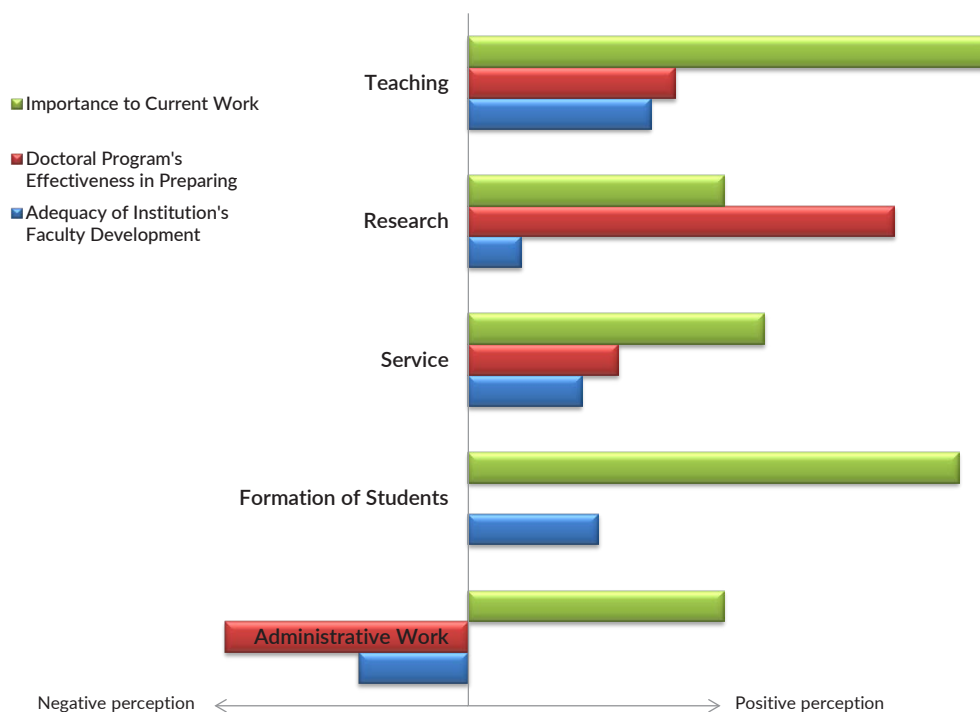


Figure 1: Gaps in Support of Faculty Roles

Source of motivation for engaging in faculty development

Faculty at institutions where professional development is *not* encouraged are those who participate in development only because it is tied to their professional evaluation. They spoke of how *demotivating* such top-down pressure can be to participate, yet they acknowledged that sometimes it's exactly this pressure that gets them to engage in something they would never have tackled otherwise (e.g., assessment, online teaching).

Level of institutional support for faculty development

When asked about support in their current work, their doctoral programs' effectiveness in preparing them for the work, and the adequacy of the institutions' faculty development in their areas of work, faculty reported professional support in all roles except for doing administrative work. The largest gaps between importance and sense of preparedness continue to be in the roles of doing administrative work and student formation for ministries. (See Figure 1.)

Two surprises regarding online teaching

While it was expected that most online teaching occurs in embedded schools where infrastructures would be more available to support such engagement, this was not so. In fact, 73 percent of those at embedded institutions have *not* taught online, and 53 percent of faculty at freestanding institutions *have*.

Further, it was expected that online engagement would be the highest among the newer faculty, assuming those newer to teaching were younger (and therefore technological natives). The study revealed, however, that most online teaching was, in fact, among faculty in midcareer, with 11–15 years of teaching experience. Online engagement was least reported among the newest and most veteran faculty.

Top two influences on scholarly pursuits

Eighty percent of the faculty named personal interest as one of their top two influencers in their consideration of research. Roughly half (56 percent) indicated the needs of the church as one of their top two influencers, and only 11 percent of the faculty reported the needs of the public as one of their top two. Figure 2 shows faculty profiles according to research pursuits.

Influences on Scholarship

Faculty who would say _____ is most influential when considering research:

Personal Interest	Guild	Church	Theological Education	Public
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenured • Most interested in sabbatical • Doctoral preparation not effective for student formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research is important to current work • Female • Anglo/White 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Doctoral preparation effective for student formation • Taught longer in theological school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research is less important to current work • Believes online technology is less important for theo educ • Taught online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Anglo/White • Has not taught online • Doctoral preparation effective for student formation

Figure 2: Profiles of Faculty Considering Research

The faculty today are motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically to engage in professional development, are (over?) prepared for research and underprepared for administrative work and student formation, are engaged in online teaching most likely if in their midcareer as a theological educator at a freestanding institution, and are influenced by personal interest when considering scholarly pursuits, which means they are most likely tenured, didn't have a PhD program that prepared them for student formation, and are most interested in sabbatical for professional development. And, most importantly, if given the opportunity, they overwhelmingly would choose this vocation again. (The study's full report will be available in the next issue of *Theological Education*.)



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