

STANDARDS REVIEW

Report to the Membership

March 2026





TIME TO “LOOK AGAIN”

at the 2020 Standards and Policies



Required by COA Board Policy & USDE

BOC working committee Feb 2024
2 Commissioners & Commission staff

Peer review survey
Public call for comments
Biennial mtg structured review
BOC June 2025/February 2026
Webinars: June 2025/March 2026

Analysis of data
Proposal of amendments
Responses to input from schools/BOC



Significant Initial Input

Input from approx 600 individuals

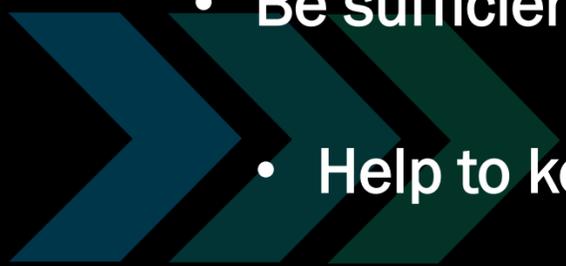
106 peer reviewers
6 individual letters
400+ individuals from member schools
60+ post-webinar comments
20 Commissioners
Commission staff



STRONG AFFIRMATION

For the ability of the Standards to:

- Promote the improvement and enhancement of theological education
 - Recognize and respect member schools' missions and theological commitments
- Be sufficiently flexible to allow schools to respond creatively in pursuit of educational missions
- Help to keep schools focused on key principles such as mission and student outcomes



EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED

Including:

- Strengthening schools' capacities in planning & evaluation
 - Supporting faculty in the work of student formation
- Understanding and implementing shared governance
- Gaining deeper understanding of CBTE & Standards
 - Deepening understanding of Standards – individual and collective
 - Many additions to Self-Study Ideas



SIX BIG TOPICS (1-3)

Emerging from changing educational/technological landscape

GLOBAL AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

“What does global awareness mean?”

“...global awareness is essential for fostering empathy, tolerance, and collaboration...”
Ruiz

CBTE

Creative Elements:

Students: learning outcomes, individual pathways

Faculty: generalists, mentors

Structures: data, finances, student services

BOC: Guidelines, webinars, petition

EMBEDDED SCHOOLS

Much attention present in Standards and Self-Study Ideas; more is added

Offering guidance that is attentive to the uniqueness of each embedded relationship

Clarifies shared governance

SIX BIG TOPICS (4-6)

Emerging from changing landscape: educational/technological

GENERATIVE AI

Focus is *Generative AI*

Standards accommodate GenAI

Transparency is crucial

Many Self-Study Ideas added to support schools

Visitor education module added

PHD RESIDENCY

BOC is attending to growth of data via reports on educational experiments

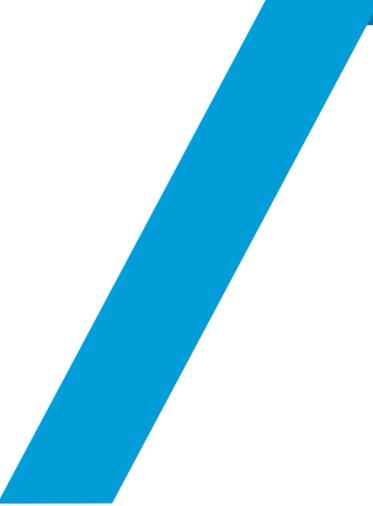
"...schools are experimenting with a variety of models searching for a correct mix of flexible delivery and meaningful interaction."

DIGITAL LEARNING

Standards are "modality neutral"

"How does this work for a school that utilizes a digital library exclusively?" (Std. 6)

A SEVENTH BIG TOPIC: DIVERSITY



In response to spring 2025 Executive Orders, sub-regulatory guidance,
and a subsequent risk assessment commissioned by ATS

*The recent attention to diversity invites:
Consistent defining of the ATS core value of
diversity throughout the Standards
Careful refining of diversity demographics
where appropriate*

SPRING 2026 USDE RECOGNITION PROCESS

In response to February 2026 review of the COA

*Amendments to 2 Bylaws,
1 Standard,
2 Commission Policies*

STANDARDS REVIEW TIMELINE 2024-2025

Appoint committee
Design process
Gather data

Spring
2024

Fall
2024

Analyse data
Big Topics 1-3
Std's/Ideas
Education:
Colloquy Std's 1-3
Webinar CBTE

Continue analysis
Big Topics 4-6
Colloquy Std's 6-8

Winter
2025

Spring
2025

Colloquy Std's 4-5,9/10
Big Idea 7
Draft I – BOC
**Draft I –
Membership
Webinar I June 20**

STANDARDS REVIEW TIMELINE 2025-2026

Input from membership
Sept 15 deadline
Review & revisions

Fall
2025

Winter
2026

Final draft to BOC for
authorization

Webinar II
Member Input by
April 2

Authorized Draft to
Membership May

Spring
2026

June
2026

Vote by Membership at
Biennial June 24

FINDINGS

The **Standards/Policies** largely meet current needs of schools.

Expanded **Self-Study Ideas** will help schools respond to changes in landscape.

New educational opportunities will support schools.



STANDARD 1

1.5 The school acts with integrity by valuing, defining, and demonstrating diversity within the context of its mission, history, constituency, and theological commitments. The school has a publicly available stance on diversity that describes its understanding of and commitment to this membership-wide shared value, and the school uses that stance to enhance its diversity appropriate to its mission, history, constituency, theological commitments, and context.

STANDARD 3.12 USDE REQ

3.12 The school has and follows a public transfer of credit policy that clearly identifies the criteria by which it evaluates transfer credits from other graduate schools and the maximum amount of transfer credits it accepts for its degree programs, which may not exceed two-thirds of the program's total credits. The school's transfer of credit policy also contains written criteria used to evaluate and award credit for prior learning experience including, but not limited to, service in the armed forces, paid or unpaid employment, or other demonstrated competency or learning.

STANDARD 4

4.11 The Master of Theology degree has clearly articulated student learning outcomes that are appropriate to an advanced degree in theology and consistent with the school's mission and resources. The degree has appropriately rigorous coursework, at least half of which is ~~at least half of the coursework in courses~~ designed for students in advanced, academically oriented degree programs (i.e., ThM/STM or PhD/ThD).

STANDARD 5

5.3 The Doctor of Ministry degree has clearly articulated student learning outcomes that are consistent with the school's mission and resources and address the following ... (d) *personal and spiritual maturity* that enables graduates to ~~reinvigorate~~ **confirm** and deepen their vocational calling.

5.4 The degree culminates with a written project that explores an area of ministry related to the student's vocational calling, utilizes appropriate research methodologies and resources, **is appropriately rigorous for a doctoral degree,** and generates new knowledge regarding the practice of ministry.

5.15 The Doctor of Philosophy degree requires at least half of the coursework to be completed on the school's main campus. For appropriate reasons, the school may petition for an exception to residency that replaces on-campus coursework with synchronous online courses **and/**or with courses offered at additional locations...

STANDARD 6

6.7 The library curates and organizes a coherent collection of resources sufficient in quality, quantity, currency, and depth to support the school's courses and degree programs, to encourage research and exploration beyond the requirements of the academic program, and to enable interaction with a wide range of theological, cultural, and global perspectives. ~~including theological and cultural diversity and global voices.~~

STANDARD 7

7.3 The school has clearly defined admissions policies appropriate to each degree program it offers and to the school's mission and vision. These policies are fairly implemented and encourage diversity appropriate to the school's mission, history, constituency, context, and theological commitments.

7.5 The school has appropriate, reliable, and accessible support services and programming for all students. These services are regularly evaluated to ensure they are appropriate and adequate for the school, its degree programs, its delivery modes, and diversity the specific needs of its entire student community.

7.11 Admissions policies and curricula are regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure that students have sufficient opportunity ~~are adequately prepared to serve in~~ their particular vocational contexts.

STANDARD 8

8.2 The composition of the faculty is sufficient in number, ~~and diversity,~~ and educational preparation - ~~demographically and educationally~~ - to achieve the school's mission, in light of the number and nature of its degree programs, the size and composition of its student body, and the scope of its theological commitments...

8.3. The qualifications of the faculty are appropriate to graduate theological education, typically demonstrated through each faculty member having an appropriate doctorate (collectively representing a variety of institutions) relevant to specialization or discipline and relevant professional/ecclesial/denominational experience...

8.8 The faculty role in teaching and learning includes faculty sharing their expertise with students, using effective pedagogies, being available to students, providing regular and prompt feedback to students, respecting and engaging the diversities various backgrounds and experiences that students bring to their educational experiences pursuits, and enhancing students' capacities to serve in a religiously diverse, multicultural, and globally interconnected world.

STANDARD 9

9 Opening Paragraph Governance is based on a bond of trust among boards, administrators, faculty, staff, students, ecclesial or denominational bodies, and related institutions when applicable, where shared governance is clearly defined and appropriately implemented.

9.3 The school has clear and current documents that describe its governing body's authority, responsibilities, composition, and governance processes. ~~Common responsibilities include~~ Normally, the governing body ensures the school's mission is met; ~~set~~ing priorities for the school through strategic planning; ~~select~~ing, ~~care~~ing for, ~~evaluate~~ing, and, when necessary, ~~dismiss~~ing the school's chief executive officer; ~~delegat~~ing appropriate authority to school administrators and faculty; and ~~manage~~ing the school's finances and other assets by approving budgets, entering into contracts, preserving endowed funds, and ensuring annual independent audits.

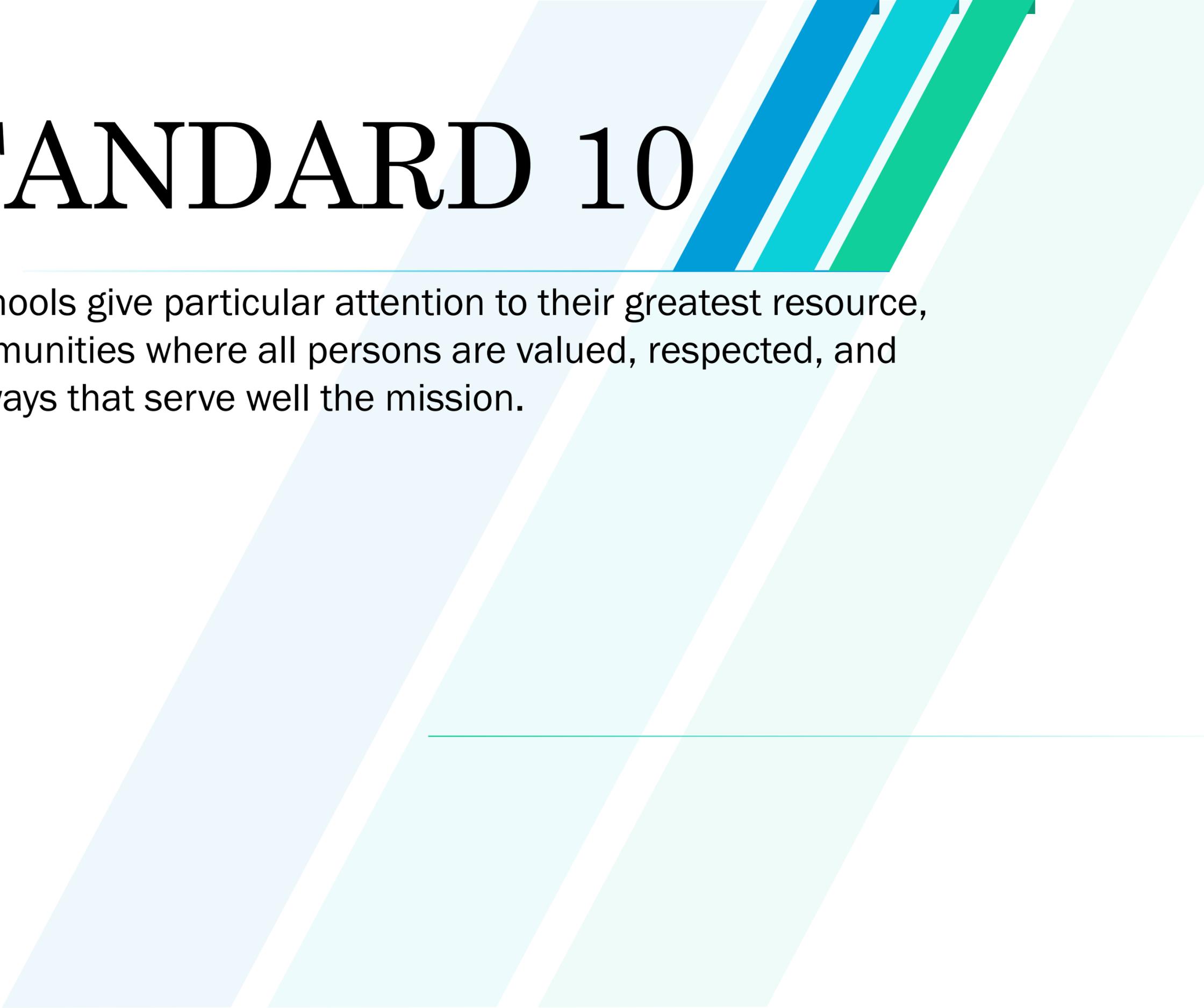
STANDARD 9

9.6 ... The school recognizes the appropriate roles and expertise of key constituencies. ~~Shared governance~~ The school understands that institutional stewardship is a shared responsibility and that decisions of the governing body are enhanced by seeking the wisdom of the community in collaborative ways, where that is feasible and appropriate, especially decisions impacting the school's educational quality and financial sustainability.

9.7 The school's governing body delegates to the administration the authority to administer ~~board~~ policies and decisions of the governing body and to manage the school's resources and operations within any ~~appropriate guidelines~~ set by the governing body.

9.9 ... The administration is representative of ~~the diversity reflected~~ the school's mission, ecclesial or denominational commitments, and constituencies...

STANDARD 10



10 Opening Paragraph ... Schools give particular attention to their greatest resource, **their** people, by building communities where all persons are valued, respected, and enabled to use their gifts in ways that serve well the mission.

COMMISSION BYLAWS USDE REQ

Section 3.2 Number and Term There shall be a minimum of sixteen (16) and a maximum of twenty (20) Commissioners. No fewer than three (3) and no more than five (5) of the Commissioners shall be Public Commissioners. The remaining Commissioners shall be Institutional Commissioners. Institutional Commissioners are individuals who, at the time of their elections as Commissioners are employed by a Member of the Commission. Public Commissioners are individuals who, at the time of their election or reelection, are not (1) an employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, an institution or program that either is accredited by the Commission or has applied for accreditation; (2) a member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the Commission; or (3) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in paragraph (1) or (2) of this definition. ~~(a) enrolled as a student in, or employed by, or a member of the governing board of, or a consultant to an institution that holds Accredited Member status by the Commission or (b) a member of the governing board of, or employed by, ATS or (c) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of any individual identified in (a) or (b). Ministry Practitioners are persons who, at the time of their election or reelection, are active in vocational ministry.~~

COMMISSION BYLAWS USDE REQ

Section 5.8 Appeals Panel

The Appeals Panel shall be composed of five (5) persons who are former Commissioners or former Directors of ATS, at least one of whom shall have been a Public Commissioner or Public Director. Appeals Panel members shall be elected by the Members and shall serve two-year terms. The Appeals Panel membership shall include at least one person in each of the following primary roles: an institutional academic representative a faculty member, an institutional administrative representative, a ministry practitioner, and a public member...

COMMISSION POLICY IV.G USDE REQ

IV.G Commission Policy on Changes Related to Experiments (Innovation):

Whenever an accredited member school seeks to develop an innovative educational program or approach that is not addressed or not allowed in the *Standards*, that is considered a substantive change requiring prior approval. Such changes will be treated by the Board as experiments that, if approved, must be evaluated over several years to determine their effectiveness and ongoing status. In its petition, the school must demonstrate that the experiment ensures educational quality, congruence with the school's educational mission, and coherence with the values of theological education. **The school must also demonstrate the need for the educational experiment, that students will receive equivalent benefit, and that students will not be harmed through the educational experiment.** Offering any educational program not based on courses or credits would be an example of a substantive changes requiring approval as an experiment.

COMMISSION POLICY V.B USDE REQ

V.B Commission Policy on Board Composition: The Board consists of “a minimum of sixteen and a maximum of twenty Commissioners. No fewer than three and no more than five of the Commissions shall be Public or ~~Ministry Practitioner~~ Commissioners. Remaining Commissioners shall be Institutional Commissioners” (*Commission Bylaws*, 3.2). Public Commissioners are persons who are not (1) an employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, an institution or program that either is accredited by the Commission or has applied for accreditation; (2) a member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the Commission; or (3) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in paragraph (1) or (2) of this definition. ~~students, employees, board members, or consultants at an accredited member school at the time of their elections...~~ Public or ~~Ministry Practitioner~~ Commissioners serve two-year terms, renewable once.

FINAL SUBMISSION DEADLINE

APRIL 2, 2026

FINAL DRAFT ON WEBSITE MAY 2026

<https://www.ats.edu/StandardsReview2025>

standardsreview@ats.edu

**Proposed revisions of the Standards, presentation slides,
webinar recording, & input form located at:**

<https://www.ats.edu/StandardsReview2025>

Membership Vote Biennial June 24, 2026 Chicago