

Association of Leaders in Lifelong Learning for Ministry offers valuable resources for ATS members

In this Q&A with ATS and Josh Lunde-Whitler, adjunct professor of religious studies at Rivier University and interim president of the Association of Leaders in Lifelong Learning for Ministry (ALLLM), Lunde-Whitler highlights the developing partnership between ATS and ALLLM to best serve the Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative grantees and describes the renewed focus on lifelong learning for ministry since the start of the pandemic.

Q: What is ALLLM?

ALLLM is a diverse network of program directors, educators, consultants, coaches, and others who are advocates for lifelong learning for ministry (LLM)—“continuing education”—at their respective institutions.

Q: What are some of the recent ways ALLLM has provided support for lifelong learning in graduate theological schools?

In 2022, ALLLM offered webinars on the basics of evaluation, innovation, and design thinking, and shifting from a storefront to a digital approach to lifelong learning. [Recordings](#) are available on YouTube.

This fall, we launched a coaching cohort for early and midcareer lifelong learning personnel, and we completed a large research project surveying directors of lifelong learning in theological schools. We hope to have a report published in the next few months.

ALLLM also served as a collaborator on the new book [Caring for Clergy: A Field Guide](#) by Thad Austin and Katie Comeau. Through their research, the authors recognized the significant ways that lifelong learning programs, particularly those in graduate theological schools, contribute to clergy health and well-being.

Q: How has life-long learning changed since the pandemic?

The pandemic highlighted the power and possibilities of online adult learning on an entirely new scale. LLM directors and educators were there to answer the call when institutions and organizations began looking for help on how to better teach online. With the additional financial and existential pressures the pandemic has placed on denominations and theological institutions, LLM has received renewed focus as a viable means of fulfilling its mission with respect to both schools and denominations. Vibrant LLM programs are vital to supporting and resourcing ministers during the course of their work, as clergy burnout is at a crescendo.

Then, there is our rapidly changing present-day cultural and environmental context that requires ministers and other faith leaders to respond in new ways. This, in turn, requires mechanisms for ongoing education and a commitment to lifelong learning. In the redeveloped *ATS Standards of Accreditation*—particularly Standard 3.5—theological schools are now being asked to provide LLM opportunities in light of viewing “learning and formation as lifetime pursuits.” Seeing these changes



Josh Lunde-Whitler

and awareness of need, ATS is leading the way toward a paradigm shift in the way LLM is being understood—not as a side endeavor apart from the rest of a theological institution, but as integral to an institution’s mission and to the whole of what it does.

Q: How long has ALLLM been in existence?

ALLLM was historically known as the Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry (SACEM), officially founded in 1967 in response to a growing “movement” to provide quality educational opportunities to active clergy. This movement surged and ebbed many times over the years, depending on funding and institutional attitudes toward these programs, but SACEM/ALLLM has served as a consistent resource and community for those involved in this necessary and important work.

In the 1960s, the stated goals of the organization were: (1) to network and share ideas, (2) to identify common issues and strategies, (3) to advocate for the importance of LLM, and (4) to conduct and encourage research in the field. These remain central goals for ALLLM today.

Q: Who can join ALLLM?

Anyone who is interested in promoting or researching LLM, who directs a LLM program, who teaches in a LLM setting, and/or who seeks to innovate within the LLM space, is welcome to join! Note that our membership not only includes directors from LLM programs in theological institutions, but also those who work in adjudicatory settings, at retreat centers, or at other nonprofit institutions as independent consultants, coaches, etc. ALLLM is the only organization we know of that seeks to build meaningful networks across all these areas. We also have a growing international membership in addition to the US and Canada.

Q: What benefits do ALLLM members receive?

The current benefits include: (1) reduced membership rates for both ALLLM and the Religious Education

Association should you choose to join it, (2) learning first about webinars and other resources ALLLM provides and having the chance to participate in ALLLM projects, (3) an invitation to connect with our network of LLM leaders who are happy to share resources and to provide friendship and support, and (4) having the satisfaction of knowing that your support is helping to sustain and advance the organization and the field as a whole.

Members are welcome to join our annual meeting at 3:30 p.m. ET, on Tuesday, November 15, conducted via Zoom. You will receive an invitation to the meeting in

early November upon registering to become a member.

Among other things, we will elect several new leaders at this meeting. I have served as interim president of ALLLM for the past year following the tenure of Sarah Erickson, director of lifelong learning at Columbia Theological Seminary. I am thrilled that Helen Blier, director of continuing education at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, has been nominated to take on this position.

She has a heart and vision for LLM that combines clarity with passion, and I am excited to see where we go next together with ATS!

Q: Are there any upcoming events ALLLM is hosting for the general public?

We’ll be hosting a webinar with ATS at 2 p.m. ET., Thursday, December 8 to share more findings from our research, including what we learned about creating sustainable LLM programs at theological schools. Registration will be coming soon.

Q: Can you tell us a little more about the new partnership between ALLLM and ATS to create a support network for Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative grantees?

ALLLM hosted a resource table at the 2022 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting. Many of the *Pathways for Tomorrow* grantees in attendance were working on creating or



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reinvigorating LLM programs in some way. Throughout the event, it became apparent that many of these grant recipients were energized by the idea of participating in a network that would help develop, resource, and sustain their work.

ATS and ALLLM are exploring a potential partnership that would include:

1. Strengthening our support system for leaders in lifelong learning in ministry to provide mutual support, resources, and advocacy for the needs of LLM programs

2. Creating peer learning opportunities for *Pathways* grantees
3. Building on research conducted by both ATS and ALLLM to evaluate changes in the field and the impact of the *Pathways Initiative*

We are also discussing a possible summit that would bring together organizations from within the broad ecology of lifelong learning for ministry.