ATS Annual Report Form Phase II Research Report
Data Collection and Use at ATS Schools
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Introduction

In 2019, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) initiated a project to revise the Annual Report Form. Phase I focused on making changes to the database architecture and to data collection procedures to accommodate the new *Standards*. Phase II began with ATS research staff reviewing the 20 forms that comprise the ARF to identify potential areas for improvement.

In late Fall 2021, ATS research consultants interviewed key informants at member schools to understand more about how the institutions collect and use data. Four research questions guided the inquiry:

1. What are the ways the schools currently collect data?
2. How do other accrediting agencies and national/provincial entities (e.g., NCES-IPEDS) collect institutional data?
3. What are ways that ATS could better align our data collection processes with those of the schools?
4. How does the Annual Report Form process need to change to better help the schools?

This report presents the finding of this study.

Methods

A team of four research consultants interviewed 79 individuals representing 64 ATS member schools. A de-identified list of the individuals and the institutions they represented is provided in the appendix. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded for transcription and data analysis. Most of the interviews were one-on-one, but some schools elected to have multiple individuals present for the interview. Those group interviews offered a more robust perspective on data collection and use at those institutions.

Sample

The sample consisted of 64 ATS member schools and represented the membership well, by various institutional characteristics. 83% were in the United States and 17% in Canada. 37.5% were Related institutions, and 62.5% were Stand Alone schools. According to ecclesial family, 39% were Evangelical, 38% Mainline, and 23% Roman Catholic or Orthodox. As to denominationality, 56% were Denominational, 20% Independent, and 23% Roman Catholic or Orthodox. 31% were small, 23% were mid-size, 28% were large, and 17% were largest institutions.

The original participants solicited were Chief Academic Officers (CAOs). Many of the individuals who participated in the interviews were CAOs, but some CAOs, particularly those in large or Related institutions, referred the researchers to individuals who worked in institutional research or institutional effectiveness. A few individuals in roles such as registrar and librarian also participated.

The researchers noted that approximately two-thirds of the interviews yielded substantive data about the institution's data collection and use. However, for several interviews, the researchers sensed that the person being interviewed was not the best informant for the institution, especially on the ARF. For example, one CAO at a Related institution talked at-length about data collection and use at her school but had very little to say about the ARF because the ARF process ran through the CEO's office and completely bypassed her. A CAO at a Stand Alone institution also noted being "out of the loop" on the ARF process because it was handled by the Office of Institutional Research.

The individuals interviewed occasionally conflated different reporting processes or forms in their responses. For example, in speaking about an ARF requirement, they may have been thinking about a component of a requirement from a federal entity or regional accreditor instead. (See Recommendations section for additional observations.)

The Role of Data in Decision-Making

In their book on workplace research, Zina O'Leary and Jennifer S. Hunt (2016) place organizations on a spectrum regarding how data-aware or data-friendly they are when it comes to decision-making.[1] For the purposes of analysis, we have adapted O'Leary and Hunt's spectrum to classify institutions into four categories with respect to how they use data.

Data-free institutions demonstrate ignorance of or apathy toward data. A representative of one institution admitted to being relatively data-free when it comes to much of what ATS requests on the ARF: "A lot of what ATS is asking for, it really is—it doesn't really matter to us in a lot of ways or we haven't—maybe it's not that it matters, but we have not used it" (Terry).

Data-curious institutions want to use data in decision-making but are not sure how. Roman Catholic institutions tended to be more data-curious than other types of schools. In a group interview, Ivan, Ira, and Israel representing a mid-size Roman Catholic institution noted,

> We were not using data to make decisions in my opinion very much... We are collecting data and are trying to use it more. I would say that still where we have to grow as an institution is really using the data to inform decision-making. I think we have data. We know the data, but I'm not sure if we're quite to the next step where it's informing strategic decisions that we are or are not making. I'd say that's where we have to grow as an institution.

James and Jacob, who represented another mid-size Roman Catholic institution, felt similarly: "I think it's important that we collect this data. I think the next step is—I think—using the data for an advantage. That's where the gap is and hopefully, we can fix that."

Data-informed institutions make decisions using data in addition to other considerations or motivations. *Data-driven* institutions rely most heavily on data for decision-making. Katherine and Kenneth from a largest-size, Stand Alone, Evangelical institution shared,

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[1] O'Leary and Hunt (2016). *Workplace research: Conducting small-scale research in organizations*. SAGE.

We've tried hard, as an institution, [to] let ourselves be data driven. Whether it's assessing everything from academic programs to enrollment things to almost every aspect of what we do as an organization, so we've done a lot of data collecting and compiling and creation of dashboards. It's a way we've not only communicated externally but also internally to all of our stakeholders. I would guess not a day goes by that we're not collecting some sort of a datapoint.

Another individual noted,

At this institution, data is king. Data is everything at this institution…. I sit on several committees, and I can't tell you how often I hear the question asked or posed, "Do we have data on that? What does the data say? Everything is data-driven…. we place a high premium on data. (Richard)

One researcher cautioned that some schools that claim to be data-driven may actually be data-informed or data-curious. For example, they may have spoken about using ATS data such as the Institutional Peer Profile Report (IPPR) to consider a course of action. But, the researcher noted, being data-informed or data-driven would require also considering other sources of data (like internal trend analysis) and using that data to develop plans and/or make institutional changes.

First-hand accounts. Some self-described small schools (small- and mid-size according to ATS classifications) noted that the data reported externally felt limited compared to the first-hand knowledge they have of their students. Mary, representing a Roman Catholic institution, shared, "We know very intimately the classes, the students, and the trends, and what we see, what we're going to need next year. I think we're closer to it than the data even allows us to be. It's not like we spend a lot of time pouring over data because we can see every day what we're working with here."

Trends

Small schools, including traditional Catholic seminaries, tended to be more data-free and data-curious. Related institutions tended to be more data-informed or data-driven. Because of their relatedness, these institutions often have more personnel dedicated to data collection and analysis, and the administration tends to rely heavily on data for strategic planning and decision-making.

Schools employing competency-based models seem to be more data-driven as well. Their non-traditional tuition and enrollment models force them to translate their numbers into traditionally recognized categories so that they can communicate them well to stakeholders, agencies, and accreditors.

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Data Collection and Use

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The institutions represented in this study tend to rely on two broad categories of data: (1) data collected internally and (2) data provided by external agencies or accreditors like ATS.

Schools use data collected internally for institutional planning, assessment of teaching and learning, program evaluation, and external reporting. Many institutions draw on this data for use in accreditation self-studies. If they use data provided by external agencies or accreditors, ATS institutions tend to use that data for self-reflection, comparison, making institutional adjustments, and strategic planning.

Internal Data Collection and Use

A primary way schools collect data is through their admissions and enrollment processes. Student information is entered into an institution's Student Information System (SIS)—whether homegrown or vendor-supplied—where it can be aggregated and accessed for analysis. Many schools use demographic data gleaned from the SIS to help faculty and other staff understand the student body. Schools often pull reports from the SIS for institutional planning and to complete report forms such as the ARF or IPEDS. That means that data provided in those reports could be limited by the quantity and quality of data in the SIS. For example, Meredith, who works at a small, Stand Alone, Mainline institution shared that, if a student selects "other" for race or denomination when enrolling, the school may struggle to report specifics on the ARF.

Some institutions rely on other internal data collection efforts such as course evaluations, student surveys, focus groups, and portfolios of students' work. Some schools use the ESQ, GSQ, AQ to gather information. A handful of schools noted using surveys or questionnaires to gather student feedback about online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. One mentioned hosting a series of community conversations to understand students' experiences.

Numerous schools mentioned that they collect data for the purpose of assessing teaching and learning. Charlotte, who is the CAO at a mid-size, Related, Evangelical institution, quickly recalled two questions ATS has given schools to help them think about assessment: "The first one is, what are your program goals, and are you doing a good job of meeting them? The second one is to ask, are your program goals good ones for the moment that your institution is in?" With those questions as a guide, she has developed and continued to refine an assessment program for her institution.

Other schools spoke explicitly about their "culture of assessment." Mason, from a largest, Related, Mainline institution said,

> I'd say we have over the last seven years really developed a culture of assessment. That is accreditation-driven. Even though it was driven by accreditation initially, it's become more the culture now. It's become something that we look at and that we do for ourselves as an institution, not for necessarily any external body. Which is good.

One school also described how they used OMED tables (Outcome, Measurement, Evaluation, and Decision) for assessment.

Annie, the CAO at a large, Stand Alone, Mainline institution described the myriad ways an individual can use data to make institutional decisions:

> I love to make data-informed decisions when I'm thinking about the size of the faculty, replacing adjuncts as faculty retire, thinking about how many adjuncts we do need in a given academic year, how many courses we should be booking in a given academic year,

how many to think about online versus face-to-face, so the modality of courses as well. Just about all aspects of my role, I think, engage data in some form or another from thinking about where to put resources in faculty development and/or in teaching because modality will influence what kind of investments we make in faculty development, what kind of investments we may make in the online or tools, pedagogical tools that we have available for faculty both in the online and in face-to-face arena. The size of the student body, the amount of money we're spending in various parts of the institution, the size of the facility, both the permanent full-time and the contingent, all of those things are data that we need to think about in terms of being able to serve the student populations that end up at [this institution].

Some institutions have keyed in on certain metrics that are relevant for their decision-making. The most popular metrics have to do with enrollment. Enrollment statistics often help with course scheduling and financial planning.

Lily and Lucas representing a Roman Catholic institution shared, "I think that the enrollment piece is really important. I use it for IPEDS reporting, and then at the end of the year, when we do our annual report, that's what I pull from in order to do student statistics and look at where—what our student body looks like." Edward, who works at a large, Stand Alone, Mainline institution, has started calculating enrollment per course to determine whether a course is viable and when to offer it.

Meredith, a CAO at a small, Stand Alone, Mainline institution, has started tracking total units sold because it offers a clearer enrollment picture than FTE. She explained,

I have been personally creating a data log and bank of total units sold because a lot of students have gone into that part-time status. We've essentially become a year-round school, right, so that whenever we do the FTE thing, I think it doesn't really tell our whole story because it looks—because the students are part time, any given semester, it looks like the FTE is very low. Even though they might do a full-time work over a period of 12 months, they are—it looks like we have half as many students sometimes as we actually do, and we have as many full-time students as we actually do.

She collects data on units sold year-round so that she can analyze the full picture of enrollment at her institution.

External Data Use: ATS Data

Consistent with the purpose of this study, this section will focus exclusively on how institutions use data provided to them by ATS. Based on data submitted in the ARF, schools receive two reports from ATS: the Strategic Information Report (SIR) and the Institutional Peer Profile Report (IPPR). ATS also publishes institutional data on its website. One research consultant observed that over half of their interviewees noted that they did not use ATS data. Schools that use ATS data tend to do so in a combination of ways, notably for (1) self-reflection, (2) comparison, (3) institutional adjustments, and (4) strategic planning.

Some schools genuinely appreciate the data they receive from ATS. Several appreciate having data focused specifically on theological higher education. Tyler, who works for a small, Stand Alone, Evangelical institution noted that, while ATS asks for more details than other entities do, the result is beneficial for the institution: "With ATS, you can be a little bit more granular on some of those things. I think that's ultimately very helpful. We have found it very helpful here to look at some of that data published by ATS in the overall seminaries of American data set."

At a large, Stand Alone, Mainline institution, the President and CFO have been relying heavily on financial data they receive from ATS. Ivan, who represents a Roman Catholic institution, described how his school uses the SIR and the data visualization tools on the website: "The strategic information report is—I mean when that comes out, many of us spend a long time going through that…there's probably really 10 or 15 [things] that we zone in on, and others aren't as relevant….the data visualization tool is helpful as well."

Brady, who represents a largest-size, Related, Mainline institution, described how they "go over the [ATS] data, analyze it, and then share insights, observations, recommendations with the faculty at the annual faculty retreat." The faculty then raise questions and offer suggestions to the administration based on the data.

Edward, who is the CAO of a large, Stand Alone, Mainline institution shared how his school uses ATS data for strategic planning:

> We have been using [ATS reports] in the last two years for our strategic planning and our conversations. We've had those statistical reports discussed at our last board of trustees meeting. So, the trustees were able to look at those and see statistical trends for the last 20, 50 years. Fortunately, we were able to get access to, not just [our institution's statistics], but how does [our institution] compare with the other [same-denomination] seminaries, all ATS? Those comparative data, we have had. We plan to have more conversations on those in February among the faculty and more recent ones.

The Value of the IPPR

Participants spoke at length about the value of the IPPR. Gary, who represents a largest-size, Stand Alone, Evangelical institution appreciates "any opportunity to have any kind of benchmark beyond ourselves that we can compare ourselves with similar schools." Wayne, who represents a largest-size, Related, Mainline institution, said of the IPPR, "The creation of the peer profile report is probably the single greatest value to us."

Peer comparison provides schools with a sense for trends in theological education overall and helps individual schools contextualize what's happening at their institutions. At times, peer comparison may serve as a catalyst for change as institution use data from peer schools in making institutional adjustments or strategic planning. The following interview excerpts exemplify why schools value the comparison report.

- "It's really important for us to look at those reports and be able to see we're doing okay all on our own. We feel really good about where we are and what we're doing. We're not worried that we're gonna be the next one on the chopping block. That has been very

beneficial to us, and that's what we look at the reports for. We look at the development piece of it to see what endowments look like. We look at admissions compared to the other schools. Are we the top recruiter? No, but we aren't the bottom either. We're in the solid third place, so we're okay with that." (Olivia, mid-size, Stand Alone, Mainline)

- I think the ARF turning into the substance of the Institutional Peer Profile Report probably helps us the most to understand comparisons and being able to deal with certain things, especially in areas where improvement or decision making for change has to take place, that that has helped us understand where we stand in places that are close to us and to really have a benchmark to say, 'This is doable. This is a stretch. This is probably where we should go for what we're doing.'" (Kai, small, Stand Alone, Roman Catholic/Orthodox).

Schools can also do some peer comparison on their own by using the Annual Data Tables provided on the ATS website. For example, Meredith described how her small, Stand Alone, Mainline institution used salary data to create a new pay scale for their faculty. She shared,

We often will go and search the ATS website when we are trying to answer questions related to something, as we think about what's best. We often go in and do comparative data. In fact, we used it quite a lot recently when we put together our current pay scale 'cause we—when our current president came in, our pay scale was not in a good place, basically, I think. It needed to go up, first of all, but then, also, it was uneven, like some departments were getting more attention than others. He created a committee, and it was mainly board members, who used the ATS data quite a bit to put together a pay scale for the whole institution.

Interestingly, one researcher noticed a pattern in how some interviewees discussed the IPPR. These institutions noted that their institution's uniqueness limited their ability to have meaningful peer comparisons. When asked if they interact with the IPPR, Mary, who works for a mid-sized, Related, Roman Catholic/Orthodox school said, "To be honest with you, I don't. I've been here 12 years. I've never really had occasion to go back and say, oh, what are the trends we're seeing? I just feel like we're such a niche school." Kyle, who works for a mid-size, Stand Alone, Mainline institution said, "I think we're an outlier seminary, and a lot of—maybe this pertains to the questionnaires more than the ARF, but we may not be representative of a lot of seminaries." Several of the schools that voiced their uniqueness were Roman Catholic or Orthodox institutions. Schools with competency-based programs also mentioned their uniqueness compared to more traditional seminary programs.

Other Entities Requesting Data

Schools indicated that they submit data to a variety of requesting entities including denominations, federal agencies, state or provincial entities, and accreditors. Denominations tend to ask questions regarding students' denominational affiliations. Some also request data on courses and faculty to ensure that degree programs adequately fulfill ordination requirements.

Many want to know enrollment data, especially in programs tied to ordination pathways. Larger denominations tend to use online forms for collecting data whereas some smaller denominations might collect data via email.

Schools located in the United States regularly complete Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reports for the National Center for Education Statistics. Schools also report to the Department of Veterans Affairs (GI Bill), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (international students), and the National Student Clearinghouse (student loans). Some schools in the United States also report to state boards of higher education. These boards typically require only data supporting institutional viability.

Canadian schools primarily report to provincial entities. Each province differs in its reporting requirements, and reporting requirements can even change within provinces as the provincial government transitions from one party's platform to another. Some Canadian schools mentioned needing to report data about international students to a federal entity. Schools that are members of the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada and the Association for Biblical Higher Education report to those entities.

Schools also report to other accreditors. Within the United States, common accrediting bodies include regional accreditors such as the Higher Learning Commission, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Within Canada, some schools report to the Association for Biblical Higher Education.

Data Collection Redundancies

Many schools, particularly those in the United States, experience redundancies in data collection and reporting. The most notable overlaps are between the IPEDS and the ARF forms. However, participants also noted redundancies in their reporting to regional accreditors and denominations.

Numerous schools stated that IPEDS and the ARF ask for much of the same information, but there might be subtle differences in what the forms ask, forcing schools to have to do different calculations. Liam shared,

> IPEDS doesn't go quite that granular, they're primarily looking at—well they use CIP codes basically, and so that's a big difference. Reporting within each CIP code, I can pull that very quickly through our SIS but grouping all that data together in different categories for ATS is a bit different. Then I don't remember whether ATS has reporting on age cohorts or something else like that, but it does take some time to reorganize and re-sort the data into different categories for ATS.

Key differences between IPEDS and the ARF, according to interviewees, is that IPEDS does not ask for information on denomination, personnel, salary, and development whereas the ARF does.

Some schools use data prepared for IPEDS for reports for their regional accreditors. In fact, Frank noted that the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) "just take [data] mostly from IPEDS." On reporting to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, representatives from one school shared,

Middle States draws information directly from IPEDS to fulfill the reporting requirements… They have the same data as IPEDS. However, ATS doesn't do that. ATS requires to fill out the form and to prepare a report, even when it's the same data, so having that connection with IPEDS administrators ensures that ATS receives the same information as all the other agencies require. Even though Middle States has some fields that have to be updated or brought up to date, the same thing ATS could do to have the basic data already provided to IPEDS, and updates as required.

Other schools can use their ARF data for their reports for regional accreditors and denominations. Reflecting on what his institution reports to The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), Horace shared,

Whatever I'm doing for ATS, however I report it to ATS, SACS has accepted that for the last 15 years. It's the same. What we've done with SACS is we use Tasktream. I put the data in Tasktream every May. We're an embedded seminary in a university so the university's provost office, their office of institutional effectiveness will make sure that I'm keeping Tasktream current. Then they pull from Tasktream to report to SACS.

One participant noted that the United Methodist Church encourages seminaries to use their ARF data on faculty for their report. Katherine and Kenneth, who work for a largest-size, Stand Alone, Evangelical institution noted, "It's not uncommon for the United Methodist Church to be like, 'Hey, what is your IPEDS FTE?'"

For some, the redundancies are a normal part of their institutional life. For others, they can be rather irritating. Helen, who works at a large, Related, Evangelical institution captured well the tension that some of these redundancies can create for some:

The only thing is, all three of them—and this is such a headache for our poor research analyst, bless his heart—they all three want something a little bit different. ATS says for graduation rates, use the length of the program, and then you have this formula to get the graduation rate. ATS allows you 200 percent. Well, [the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS)], on the other hand, just wants you to do like IPEDS and use the six years back. Each year for the TRACS report, we were looking at 2015 entering cohort. Some of 'em want first time fulltime. Some of 'em—just the way it's worded, the length of time, everyone's just a little bit different. Fulltime equivalence is the same thing. The formula that is used for fulltime equivalence a little bit different with them.

Aligning Data Collection

The best opportunity for aligning data collection processes capitalizes on the similarities between IPEDS and the ARF. Schools in the United States that receive Title IV funds—and Canadian schools that enroll U.S. students who receive Title IV funds—are required to complete IPEDS. In this study, U.S. schools consistently spoke of IPEDS whereas Canadian schools did not. Walter, who works at a largest-size, Stand Alone, Evangelical institution suggested that "mimicking IPEDS schedule and definitions" could be helpful to a certain extent. A few

participants also suggested that ATS might consider aligning the data collection process with what IPEDS offers through its portal. Walter shared, "The [finance office staff] especially are using the Excel import feature with IPEDS. They'd love to see that with ATS."

Improving the ARF Process and Form

To understand how the ARF process and form might be improved, it may be helpful to consider the process schools undertake to complete the ARF.[2] Institutions seem to follow a consistent process when completing the ARF. One research consultant likened the process resembled an assembly line. Someone at the institution receives an email from ATS signifying that it is time to complete the ARF. Typically, the individual who receives the email (or sometimes another designee) becomes the key holder and act as a de facto project manager. This key holder divides the form into parts and sends those parts to various individuals or departments to be completed. The key holder then receives all the data and submits the form. Occasionally the CAO or CEO reviews the data before submission.

Here are two examples of how the process works. Sylvia is a Vice President who oversees institutional effectiveness at a large, Stand Alone, Mainline institution. She said that the school's President receives the initial email from ATS. He forwards it to her. She becomes the key holder and farms the work out to the various departments. She compiles the data and submits the form. Sylvia noted that the Dean and President receive the compiled data but do not review it prior to submission.

Mason works at a largest, Related, Mainline institution. He shared,

I have a standard group of people that I send the email out to, five or six people who represent the different parts. The enrollment director, the registrar, the development guy, the finance officer for salaries and such and the other financial reports, and me. Oh, and the librarian, too. I give them a deadline usually a month before the ATS deadline 'cause I know they're gonna be slow and late. Also, I want to read over everything that they submit, and so does the dean. We look at all that stuff very carefully and finally submit it in December.

Participants noted three primary issues with the ARF process: First, the form does not initially go to the correct person. For example, the registrar may manage the entire process, but the form goes to the provost's office initially. Second, people who are new or who lack higher education experience struggle to understand how to complete the form. Two institutions spoke of new personnel in the finance office who needed additional support to complete their sections. Third, in many schools, the CAO or CEO does not review the data prior to submission.

The process schools use to complete the ARF provides a backdrop to attending to the ARF process and form from the perspective of user experience. What do schools find helpful? What critiques do they offer? Where would they like to see improvement?

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[2] At the time of this study, many schools were in the process of completing or had not yet completed the ARF for 2021; therefore, their comments about the ARF process may not reflect any recent changes to how ATS and schools administer the ARF.

What Schools Find Helpful

Many participants appreciated recent changes to the ARF process and form. Rachel shared, "I've observed a lot of improvement and agility throughout this pandemic process where I'm just like, "Wow, ATS is really on it. ATS is really on it." Participants noted that the refined process helps institutions better gather data from various departments. Several participants mentioned that they appreciated changes to the login feature and the ability to distribute data entry among various persons or departments.

Participants also commented positively about how much easier the form is to complete now and how much they appreciated the clarity of the instructions. Alicia, who works at a Large, Stand Alone, Roman Catholic/Orthodox institution shared,

> I think the instructions have been very helpful. When we enter our data, if something is not right you have to fix it, right? You can't close it until it's fixed. It's easier to fix, as opposed to in the past, where you were just, "What's going on? Why can't I fix this?" It's gotten better. I just think, in my opinion, it's just less stressful now.

Frank, who works at a Large, Stand Alone, Mainline school summarized the improvements this way: "The instructions are clearer, and it's not as complicated as it used to be." Eva, who works in a Large, Stand Alone, Evangelical institution, appreciated the definitions offered by ATS in the form. It helped her understand how to calculate the graduation rate and time to degree, for example.

Dennis, who works at a Small, Stand Alone, Roman Catholic/Orthodox institution, summarized his feelings about the ARF this way: "It's also really helpful that it's, more or less, the same data every year. They're not asking you to rethink it in a different way every year. That means people learn how to do it, and they know how to get the information, and they know how to fill out the form. There's a real usefulness to that."

Critiques of the ARF Process and Form

Three types of critiques emerged: (1) General critiques, (2) Critiques related to institutional characteristics and (3) Critiques related to aspects of the form. Critiques often emerged in tandem with suggestions for improvement.

Auto-Fill Previous History

One common general critique was the inability to have multiple years of previous history data auto-filled on the ARF when the schools receive it. Kai wanted to have all that previous history in one place for self-study. Mary noted,

> Well, I think a huge help would be if the annual reports populated year after year after year. When you sent mine, all you had to do was fill in this year 'cause that's not hard to get. Recreating the prior three years with all these potential criterion modifications, that's really tiresome. Then, I could see my numbers for ATS that I prepared would be very succinct, and it would be easier to just pop 'em into the [regional accreditor] report.

Consider the Timing

Some participants indicated that changing the timing of the ARF completion process could be advantageous. One participant noted that having it due in December near the end of the semester is particularly challenging from an administrative standpoint. Brady shared,

> From time to time [I wonder] why it's due in December. To me, moving it to the spring would be a little more helpful. That's just a personal opinion 'cause there's a lot of data collection that happens in the spring, and—so that would fit within the data collection period of a lot of other [agencies]. [If there could be] more cohesive definitions that match each other [that] can be helpful. We're collecting the same numbers from one report to the next. The same time frames could be helpful. Some reports want data for the whole year. Other reports want just the fall report, just people who were there that fall. I think there are some points of connection there that could be increased so that it's the same data. It looked very similar from year-to-year on the different reports.

Attend to Related Institutions

A substantial number of critiques revolved around institutional characteristics. First, those in related institutions struggle with completing the ARF. Sometimes university offices of institutional research or effectiveness will control the ARF process from beginning to end, but not always. One participant noted that the way development data are collected seems blind to their experience as an embedded seminary. Another suggested that it can be difficult to parse out what belongs to their school specifically versus the university more generally. One wondered, should the library count all volumes or only those considered "theological."

Some individuals in related institutions sensed that the ARF had been created for Stand Alone schools. Horace shared,

> In so many ways the ATS forms are designed around stand-alone seminaries. For us we're embedded into a larger university system. A larger university system is gonna hold me accountable in ways that make sense to the university system. All those are context dependent. How does ATS come along with 270 some odd seminaries and try to have something that is uniform? That's an impossible task because we're all so context dependent in different denominations, different university settings.

> A representative of a small, Related, Roman Catholic institution shared,
> I was just thinking if it might not be useful to have a separate template just for embedded schools because… Well, we know, for example, that what's irrelevant to us is questions about…the physical plant. That's okay. We can certainly be happy or not, but there's no—we have no control whatsoever with that. We have no control over, for example, campus security. We have no control over whatever the bursar's office does, whatever the registrar's office does. We have really no control over what the library's doing. We have no control over what development is doing. I think the questions about the physical plant are the ones that we just always skip because there's nothing to provide.

Mason expressed his frustration this way:

They want to know what percent of the board of trustees, not an advisory board, they say, gave money to the School of Theology. Well, the board of trustees at the university is not made up of people who know anything about the School of Theology, and they don't give money to the School of Theology. Fortunately… we always have one person in the board of trustees every year who gives, which makes our percentage look like three percent of our board of trustees, but the ATS is very clear. They don't want a percentage of advisory boards. All the schools within the university have a dean's advisory board. They are 100% givers, but you'd never know that. That's unfortunate. I don't know what to do about it. I don't know why the ATS only wants board of trustees and doesn't want an advisory board. What it does is it makes it feel like the ATS doesn't even get what's going on in embedded seminaries where none of us relate to our board of trustees directly.

Some schools also have unique affiliations with nearby institutions. They may contract student services or library services from the other school. They may allow cross-registrations. Further inquiry into the experience of these types of institutions may yield suggestions for improvement.

Attend to Denominational Distinctives

Roman Catholic seminaries (those training men for ordination to the priesthood) indicated that several metrics on the ARF are irrelevant to them because of their institutional culture. Students entering a Roman Catholic seminary have been recommended by a bishop and do not go through traditional admissions and placement processes. Even though some schools offer programs for the laity, Roman Catholic seminarians are exclusively male; therefore, data on gender is not relevant to them. Roman Catholic seminaries also track student progress and formation closely, reporting regularly to the sending diocese. Retention is less important to them.

One outlier was a Roman Catholic institution that catered explicitly to the laity. Representatives of this institution noted, "we really pay attention to the, especially, inflow and then also the retention of female students or non-gendered students who our department needs in order to strive in an environment where your clientele is the laity" (Jackson and Jessie). This institution resembles other Mainline and Evangelical institutions in this respect.

Attend to Cultural Differences

Ten of the participant schools were in Canada. Interviewees stressed repeatedly the differences between Canadian and U.S. contexts. They wanted ATS to understand that Canadians do not understand FTE and diversity the same way that these concepts are understood in the United States.

FTE in Canada. FTE is a foreign concept within Canadian higher education. Thus, Canadian schools must do extra work to figure out how to report it and don't find it very useful when it is reflected back to them or offered as a basis for peer comparison.

James and Jacob shared, "In terms of credit hours, that's what most people are because we don't do credit hours in Canada. That kind of throws us off in calculating things. That's

something that should be addressed sometime because that kind of – and the FTE is calculated from here. Credit hours, we don't deal with that at all."

Irene and Ian echoed this sentiment: "...we don't work by credit hours. Some educational institutions do work by credit hours, but at [our institution], we don't. That's why we had to come up with our own formula to get to what ATS was looking for as FTE. In that way, how we calculate the FTE for ATS is [not] how we calculate it for [our institution]."

Josiah expressed frustration with the request for FTE from ATS: "Every time I see that request for information [about FTE] from ATS or others, and every time I get a report back on it, I go, 'What am I supposed to do with that?'"

Diversity in Canada. When asked about differences in reporting requirements across different government entities and accrediting bodies, Charlotte responded, "I should say one of the things that's—it's a Canadian thing—is that we actually don't keep ethnicity data. That's a permanent difference between the U.S. and Canada is that we don't understand diversity in the same kind of way." Charlotte compared Canada to the United States by indicating the differences in how indigenous people were treated at each country's inception:

> In the States, from the beginning, it was almost always adversarial. We actually had 200 years of working together…added to that is the fact that from the beginning, as soon as there was a Canada, it was a bilingual country. I can't remember what year it was, but there was an official policy approved for multiculturalism. It means that the cultural and ethnic and racial categories are just understood differently."

Charlotte wondered how a more prominent Canadian seminary dealt with the diversity metrics ATS requests.

Gillian, who works at that more prominent Canadian seminary, shared with another research consultant about how her institution is wrestling with questions of diversity:

> [W]e're having a conversation about that because sometimes people assume that the evangelical denominations are homogeneous in relation to this, their position on gender and binary gender classifications. Age is quite a significant one in the sense that—I mean seminary, we are talking about graduate students anyway, but we've got quite an interesting profile of people who are still quite maybe nontraditional and coming later in life and for different reasons. Obviously, that's been really important for us. It's a meaningful classification. Now in terms they are able to self-identify their ethnicity. I can't remember how many categories we offer them and they're also able to—there's a 'prefer not to say' option because for us—well, one of the things that's a live conversation in Canada right now is that for indigenous and Métis people, even when they're given the option to disclose that they're indigenous and Métis, the common practice has been not to because of fearing discrimination.

These differences in how schools in Canada and the United States understand diversity make completing the ARF challenging for Canadian schools. One participant summarized the challenge this way: "Because of the diversity that we have in Canada, some of the questions about diversity on the ARF are not so helpful, not so relevant" (Roger).

Attend to Creative Formats

Institutions offering competency-based programs also struggle to complete the ARF. They count and track students differently than traditional seminary programs. Degree progress looks different. Meredith wondered how the ARF form might adapt to account for "creative formats" now being allowed by the revised *Standards*.

ARF Trouble Spots

Participants spoke about parts of the ARF form that caused trouble or confusion in their institution. Four trouble spots emerged consistently in the data: (1) student counts, (2) gender, (3) race/ethnicity, and (4) denominational affiliation. Some of these trouble spots relate directly to themes presented in the previous section on user experience.

Student Counts

Numerous participants spoke of the difficulty of accurately tracking enrollment and retention. First, because of the timing of the ARF and the data requested, some schools sense that the ARF does not offer an accurate picture of their enrollment. Mason summarized it this way:

> I do think that one of the problem areas in it is that it typically only takes a snapshot of the fall. You don't get the complexity of a school that has pretty significant spring enrollment. Course that'll always show up—well, typically it'll show up in the following fall. I don't see any way to get around that. You gotta have someplace where you just take a snapshot every year that seems right. The statistics I put together for the faculty try to capture more of a full academic year, and the university wants that, too. I mean, they wanna know not just simply fall enrollments. They wanna know every semester what's going on. You just don't get that with the ATS.

Meredith was also frustrated the way ATS tracks enrollment. She felt that the data collected in the ARF consistently undercounted their students because the ARF doesn't consider January and summer enrollment. That's when they offer their D.Min. courses. She said, "Then the numbers that come out from ATS are lower than the real number…. If [D.Min. students] don't get counted in the student head count, then you're losing all of those people. Actually, that is—it may be our largest program at this point."

Schools with creative formats like CBTE also struggle with how ATS collects data about enrollment. A representative of one CBTE institution shared that their open enrollment policy allows a student to begin their program any day of the year. He expressed his frustration this way:

> I think the point is that ATS, you are encouraging this kind of creativity and this kind of problem-solving academically to find new ways of equipping and training people for ministry. Okay, great. Then don't do that and disadvantage through assumptions that are good for reporting but horrible for the very models that you say you want to learn more about and then, as a result, it's like, "Wow, the statistics really aren't coming through on

that. We thought there'd be a lot better." Yeah, because you're not counting them right. (Isaac and Isaiah)

Second, schools struggle to report FTE. As stated above, Canadian schools do not track FTE because it's foreign to their educational models. Even some schools in the U.S. struggle with how ATS tracks FTE. Greg, who works at a small, Stand Alone, Mainline institution, reflected on his experience collecting data on FTE:

> I think this is maybe a change as far as how to calculate FTEs. I think this time the instruction was for MDiv to base it on 15 hours a semester, which I think that has been a school choice before. It may be better that it's clear that everyone's using the same bar to look at that. I mean, it's fine. Fifteen is fine, but our average is 4 years instead of 3, so 12 hours or so is still considered full time for us. Then the Doctor of Ministry, I think, gets head count divided by three. I've always questioned why we need an FTE related to D.Min. At least for the previous standard, it was by definition a part-time degree. A full-time equivalency for a part-time degree makes my head wanna explode. The part-time degree, I think, is taken out of the new standard, but it's still considered a part-time degree, so full-time equivalent just doesn't make sense for part-time degrees.

Third, some participants wonder how to account well for students who have changed degree programs. Timothy described the situation at his institution:

> We tend to have a lot of folks start out in our Master of Divinity program. I guess a good number of them do not complete the M.Div. A pretty low number graduate rate with our M.Div. However, about half of those that drop out do graduate with another degree, but the way it's asked, if they transfer to another degree, don't report them. In fact, they're never reported because they're not in the cohort of say an MA degree. They were in the M.Div. cohort, but maybe they did graduate with a MA. That's kinda frustrating to see. I mean, it's fair to ask that, but it might be nice to ask, "Did they graduate?

Fourth, participants stressed the need to account for an increasing number of part-time students and the slower pace of degree completion across many programs. They didn't offer concrete solutions for the ARF. However, they seemed attuned to this trend in theological higher education.

Finally, participants described how their schools tracked retention. No one consistent method emerged. Virtually every institution had its own formula or process for tracking it. Some smaller schools simply review their student list and consider leaves of absences and withdrawals when coming up with a figure. One individual who oversees institutional effectiveness, has developed a process that she believes has yielded exceptional retention data year over year.

Gender

While several mainline institutions appreciate that ATS has offered an "other" category for gender, some want the non-binary category to be clearer. Other schools struggle with how to provide data on students who do not want to identify themselves in the first place. Meredith has

observed this trend at her institution, which is in a major U.S. city, "People will just not answer [the gender question]. Even though they may self-describe as one gender or the other, they just won't answer it because they think they are being in solidarity with the rest of the population. It's interesting to see those kinds of trends now." Olivia described their solution: "We have quite a few non-binary students, but what we explain to them is we get it; we understand. The Department of Ed does not. We need you to pick one and its internal and it's anonymous and we report anonymously. Everyone has complied; no one has said, 'I refuse to do that.'"

Some schools want more, specific gender options. Some Roman Catholic seminaries want fewer. They offer male-only M.Div. programs, and therefore find the gender question irrelevant.

Race and Ethnicity

As previously mentioned, Canadian institutions find the race/ethnicity categories on the ARF troubling because of cultural differences between them and schools in the United States. However, some schools in the U.S. noted that this section of the form was challenging for them as well. Meredith, the CAO at an institution located in a major metropolitan area in the United States, said that people in her area are very sensitive to demographic questions. The area is already racially and ethnically diverse, and many people identify as biracial or multiracial. As a result, students may not share their racial/ethnic identity with the school. If the data doesn't get into their student information system (SIS), they can't report it to ATS.

Denomination

One research consultant noted that participants frequently said "the denominations section" as their first response to sections of the ARF that needed improvement. Some lamented its length. Greg described it this way: "[I]t's so voluminous: the denominational identity piece. That's the thing I always remember because it takes a lot of time to go through…. The list is long, and it may not be the most impactful, but it's the one that's the most memorable." He described having to track down students to ask for clarification on the denominational affiliation marked on their application to provide an accurate account to ATS.

Some participants wanted even more nuance. Mason wanted non-Christian traditions like Judaism included. Ian thought it would be helpful to offer a category for Mormon students as well as to parse out different Korean Presbyterian denominations. Gary wanted Evangelical subdivided. He said, "…[Evangelical] is a really large ecclesial family. I think that category could be divided. I don't like this language, but a conservative evangelical and a progressive evangelical." Aaron wanted a "Protestant, other" option. Roman Catholic institutions do not find this section of the ARF helpful.

The Pandemic's Impact

Participants were not asked to reflect on how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected their data collection and use. However, several participants mentioned or alluded to the impact the pandemic has had on their operations and consequentially their data. Specifically, the pandemic has impacted the learning modalities schools offer as well as student count and degree progress.

Numerous institutions had to pivot to online modalities during the pandemic. For some schools, this was their first time offering online courses. Many have chosen to adopt these online or remote formats permanently. A major challenge is determining how to label and count courses. Charlotte described the change this way: "In March of 2020, we had to pivot very quickly to being online. What that meant was that the categories we were previously using to distinguish online from face-to-face basically fell apart. Then what happened was as soon as— once students had experienced the flexibility that was possible, they didn't wanna give it up." Schools may offer residential, online, and hybrid courses. Some may offer hy-flex courses, which allow students to take a course in-person or online. Some schools offer their courses synchronously and others asynchronously.

Student counts and degree progress have also been impacted by the pandemic. Some schools have experienced a decrease in enrollment. Some students have slowed down their degree progress. Plus, with the changing learning modalities, it can be challenging to classify a student as purely residential or purely online. Rosemary noted that one of her institution's denominational affiliates requires students on its ordination pathway to take most classes in-person, but the shift to online during the pandemic required them to get approval for those courses.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study of 64 member schools, ATS should consider the following action steps.

Cultivate a Healthy Ecosystem of Data Collection and Use

A healthy ecosystem of data collection and use recognizes that better data collection and reporting will assist not only individual schools but also their peer schools that rely heavily on the IPPR. If even one school collects data poorly and reports inaccurate or incomplete figures to ATS, the integrity of other schools' IPPRs could be questioned. For example, if Fuller selects TEDS, Gordon-Conwell, Denver and Dallas as its peer schools, and one of those peer schools has subpar data, Fuller's data-driven decision making process may be compromised by that poor data.

To cultivate a healthy ecosystem of data collection and use, ATS should have schools self-identify with one of the four categories: data-free, data-curious, data-informed, and data-driven. Invite them to set growth goals based on their self-identification and aspirations. ATS should also educate schools on data collection, analysis, and use. This sort of training could be particularly helpful for smaller or Stand Alone institutions that do not have institutional research personnel. ATS could create training pathways for helping data-free and data-curious schools move toward becoming data-informed and data-driven.

Study IPEDS and Denominational Reporting Requirements

Participants indicated that the ARF is most similar to IPEDS; therefore, ATS should study the IPEDS reporting requirements to discover what IPEDS requests and how IPEDS asks

for certain data, particularly student counts like enrollment. Increasing the similarity between the ARF and IPEDS could reduce administrative burden on some institutions.

While noting these similarities and redundancies, ATS should keep in mind the uniqueness of graduate theological education when compared to other graduate schools. ATS may want to compare how IPEDS collects data for professional programs in business and medicine as well as academic programs in the humanities and social sciences with comparable graduate theological programs like the M.Div., M.A., and Th.M..

Some denominations ask for information similar to what is provided on other reports such as the ARF or IPEDS; therefore, ATS might consider reviewing denominational reporting requirements for some of the larger denominations such as United Methodist, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Southern Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Assemblies of God, and African Methodist Episcopal. Identifying areas of overlap and reducing redundancies could alleviate administrative burden on some schools.

Make Adjustments to the ARF Process

Even though several participants spoke positively about recent improvements to the ARF process, ATS can make further adjustments to help schools. First, ATS should ask schools who the initial request to complete the ARF should be directed to within the institution. Likely this individual will be the project manager for the ARF process.

Second, ATS should develop a mechanism for encouraging CAOs to review the data prior to submission. Numerous participants reported that the CAO never sees the data collected for the ARF prior to its submission to ATS. Perhaps ATS could require CAOs to initial or sign the report. Requiring CAO involvement could increase their awareness of data trends in their organization and help improve the culture of data collection and use within the institution.

Third, ATS should auto-fill more than one year of previous history on the ARF form. Some schools wish to print the completed form for self-study, and having multiple years of history in one place can help them more easily identify trends.

Fourth, ATS should consider the timing of the ARF. First, ATS can discover when other entities such as IPEDS, regional accreditors, and large denominations require their reports. Second, ATS can discover the cycles of administrative burden in schools. Synthesizing this data could help ATS understand the optimal time for schools to complete the ARF.

Make Adjustments to the ARF Form

First, ATS should evaluate the ARF's relevance for Related institutions—both those embedded in larger universities and those in consortia relationships. ATS could do additional study to determine which aspects of the ARF are most challenging for Related institutions to complete. Based on the findings, ATS might create special fields for Related schools or employ logic within the form to facilitate its completion and collect accurate and relevant data from Related schools.

Second, ATS should consider the challenges schools face when reporting student counts. Participants noted cultural differences in Canada regarding FTE, the timing of the ARF, CBTE, students changing degree programs, the increasing number of part-time students, and slowing

degree progress as challenges to providing accurate student counts. ATS might consider revising the definitions and instructions provided on the ARF or developing alternative ways to count and track students.

Finally, ATS should continue its ongoing conversations surrounding best practices for collecting information about students' gender, race, and ethnicity. While many Mainline schools appreciate ATS adopting a non-binary gender option in the most recent iteration of the form, they want ATS to go further still in specifying those non-binary options. Gathering data on students' race and ethnicity may be increasingly challenging without more nuanced options or pressuring schools to collect that data from their students.

Conclusion

ATS member schools vary widely in their approaches to data collection and use. They also vary widely in their opinions about the ARF. Some appreciate the ARF because it requires them to look at the data every year. Others find it a chore, another requirement to check off to maintain their accreditation.

While ATS has made numerous improvements to the ARF process and form in recent years, the findings of this study indicate that more could be done not only to ease schools' administrative burden but also to increase the accuracy and relevance of data collected. Continuously seeking to improve the ARF process and form is a critical component of cultivating a healthy ecosystem of data collection, analysis, and use within the Association of Theological Schools.

Appendix
Institutional Characteristics and Pseudonyms

Pseudonyms	Relatedness	Ecclesial Family	Denominationality	Country	Size
Aaron	Related	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Large
Alicia	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Large
Annie	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Large
Barbara	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Independent	United States	Large
Belinda	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Mid
Brady	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Denominational	Canada	Small
Carson	Related	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Small
Charlotte	Related	Evangelical	Denominational	Canada	Mid
Colin	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Independent	Canada	Largest
Darlene	Related	Evangelical	Denominational	Canada	Small
Dennis	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Small
Edward	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Large
Elaine	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Mid
Eva	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Large
Francis	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	Canada	Small
Frank	Stand Alone	Mainline	Independent	United States	Large
Gary	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Largest
Gillian	Related	Evangelical	Independent	Canada	Largest
Greg	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Small
Helen	Related	Evangelical	Independent	United States	Large
Horace	Related	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Large
Ian, Irene	Related	Mainline	Denominational	Canada	Large
Ira, Israel, Ivan	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Mid
Isaac, Isaiah	Related	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Mid
Jackson, Jesse	Related	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Small
James, Jacob	Related	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Canada	Mid
Josiah	Stand Alone	Mainline	Independent	Canada	Mid
Kai	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Small
Katherine, Kenneth	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Largest
Kyle	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Mid
Liam	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Large
Lily, Lucas	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Small

Mary	Related	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Mid
Mason	Related	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Largest
Meredith	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Small
Nicole	Related	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Mid
Noah	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Small
Olivia	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Mid
Owen	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Small
Paul	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Independent	Canada	Mid
Penny, Peter, Patricia	Stand Alone	Mainline	Independent	United States	Large
Rachel	Stand Alone	Mainline	Independent	United States	Large
Ralph	Related	Evangelical	Independent	United States	Mid
Randy	Related	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Largest
Raymond	Related	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Large
Richard	Related	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Small
Robert	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Large
Roger	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Denominational	Canada	Small
Rosemary	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Mid
Russell	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Largest
Samuel	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Small
Stephanie	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Large
Steven	Related	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Small
Sylvia	Stand Alone	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Large
Teresa	Related	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Largest
Terry	Stand Alone	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	Roman Catholic / Orthodox	United States	Small
Thomas	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Independent	United States	Large
Timothy	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Small
Tyler	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Small
Vincent	Related	Mainline	Denominational	United States	Largest
Walter	Stand Alone	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Largest
Wayne	Related	Mainline	Independent	United States	Largest
Willie	Related	Mainline	Independent	United States	Mid
Zachary	Related	Evangelical	Denominational	United States	Small

Interview Protocol

Introduction
1. As we begin our interview, could you please tell me a little about your role? I'm curious how long you've been in it and what your role is in collecting, disseminating, and using institutional data.

RQ 1 – What are ways the schools currently collect data?
2. What sort of data does your institution collects on an annual or semi-annual basis?
3. For what reasons does your institution collect that data?
4. What types of data are of most interest to your institution?
5. What sorts of data collection procedures do you use in your institution? (Examples: interviews, surveys, focus groups, records, database inquiry)
    a. Which personnel participate in collecting data in your institution?
    b. Which personnel regularly access and use the data?
6. In your data collection, what categories or classifications does your institution use to differentiate between various types of students (e.g., online students, language-specific students, non-degree certificate students, etc.)?
7. In your data collection, what categories or classifications does your institution use to differentiate between various types of instructional offerings (e.g., online, hybrid, low-residency, in-person)?
8. How does your institution track data on student retention?

RQ 2 - How do other accrediting agencies and national/provincial entities (e.g., NCES-IPEDS) collect institutional data?

9. I'm also curious about the data you collect for other accrediting agencies and national/provincial entities (e.g., NCES-IPEDS). Who besides ATS requires you to collect and report institutional data?
10. What sorts of data collection procedures or tools do those other accrediting agencies or entities use?
11. How much of the data collection work is duplicated/redundant across all required reports for accrediting agencies or other entities?

RQ 3 - What are ways that ATS could better align our data collection processes with those of the schools?

12. What are the differences, if any, between the data ATS requests from your institutions and what other agencies or entities request?
13. What adjustments could ATS make to the Annual Report Form (ARF) that would help your school with its other data collection and reporting tasks? (Follow up: Are there data that could do double duty for different agencies, including ATS?)

RQ 4 - How does the Annual Report Form process need to change to better help the schools?

14. As we wrap up today, I'd like to know a bit more about your perspective on the ATS Annual Report Form (ARF).
    a. What is your school's process for completing it?
    b. Which personnel help complete the ARF?
15. What does your institution appreciate about the ARF?
16. To what extent does your institution make use of ATS reports developed based on data supplied in the ARF?
17. What about the ARF does your school find frustrating?
18. What items on the ARF should remain, be added/expanded, or be retired?
19. What other changes would you recommend for the ARF?
    c. How might these changes help your school?
    d. What might be the implications of these changes for your school? (Follow-up: What might you be able to do with the data or understand better if these changes were made to the ARF?)