

Assessing student formation: a new platform for gathering and sharing resources

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The third in a miniseries on student formation, this entry announces the new ATS Formation Repository, a curated, centralized hub of research and assessment tools designed to help member schools cultivate personal and spiritual formation across diverse traditions.

ATS Student Data Services, with guidance from the ATS Student Data and Resources Advisory Committee (SDRAC), is currently engaged in a phased, multiyear (2025–27) redevelopment of the ATS Student Questionnaires. During the current preparatory phase, ATS is soliciting feedback from survey design experts and student services professionals, especially those who administer the Entering Student Questionnaire (ESQ), Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ), and Alumni/ae Questionnaire (AQ) at member institutions.

A central priority in the revision process announced last winter is enhancing how the ATS Student Questionnaires evaluate student formation. Strengthening these measures reflects the membership's commitment to “the intellectual, human, spiritual, and vocational dimensions of student learning and formation” (Standard 3.1). For member schools gathering student information via the ATS Student Questionnaires—or any data-collection strategy—integrating more meaningful formation metrics will help sustain the vitality of this core dimension of theological education.

Establishing consistent and robust formation language across all three instruments supports longitudinal and cross-cohort comparisons throughout the student



experience. For matriculants, the ESQ can reveal incoming students' expectations regarding formation, enabling institutions to compare expectations to institutional strengths and refine program objectives, curricular design, and cocurricular offerings. For graduates, the GSQ invites students to assess whether their school met those expectations, allowing schools to determine if formation is occurring as intended. Finally, the AQ provides insight into the enduring influence of formation on vocational trajectories and personal well-being.

Ecumenical convening on formation and assessment

To inform the ongoing redevelopment of the ATS Student Questionnaires, particularly the effort to strengthen how student formation is defined, measured, and interpreted across institutional contexts, ATS convened the Student Data and Resources Consultation on April 3-4, 2025 at the ATS office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—a two-day gathering of 21 practitioners and researchers from member schools, parachurch organizations, and research groups. The participant-presenters represented a wide range of theological contexts—including Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, Protestant, Historically Black, Asian American and Native American Pacific

Islander-Serving Institutions, and Canadian institutions, as well as university-based divinity schools, wellness researchers, and seminaries serving Latiné and other ethnic communities. The gathering was designed 1) to appreciate the range of formation approaches already at work across (and beyond) the Association, and 2) to learn from emerging work as a collaborative, generative community, particularly during the multiyear ATS Student Questionnaires redevelopment process.

Across presentations, panel discussions, and small-group exchanges, attendee contributions clustered around four major thematic areas (Table 1). Notably, the Global Formation Project, a multi-institutional research team in collaboration with ATS over the past 10-plus years, presented empirical and longitudinal findings from student formation data collected by 18 ATS member

schools in North America piloting the *Seminary Formation Assessment* suite of tools described earlier this spring. Attendees also discussed the diverse dimensions of student formation—intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, vocational, emotional, moral, and environmental.

Institutional case studies illustrated the diversity of formation theologies and models currently in practice, ranging from hierarchical/priestly mentoring and systematic 360-degree reviews to retreat-based spiritual direction and capstone portfolios. Finally, a session on student flourishing revealed national and binational survey data identifying stress, anxiety, and depression as leading student concerns, reinforcing that formation assessment cannot be separated from the conditions of student well-being.

Table 1. Thematic Clusters, April 2025 ATS Student Data and Resources Consultation

Cluster	Focus	Representative Subtopics
1. Defining Formation: Dimensions, Language, and Frameworks	Establishing shared vocabulary and conceptual models for human and spiritual formation	Seven dimensions of well-being (intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, vocational, emotional, environmental); distinction between formation, education, and training; intercultural competence frameworks; moral formation and virtue integration
2. Empirical Approaches to Formation Assessment	Psychometric and research-based methods for measuring formation outcomes	<i>Seminary Formation Assessment</i> (SFA) instrument; relational spirituality model; humility and intercultural development measures; diverse student formation profiles and trajectories of change
3. Formation across Institutional and Tradition-Specific Contexts	Contextually grounded practices reflecting denominational, cultural, and institutional diversity	Roman Catholic four-pillar model (human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral); Orthodox hierarchical mentoring and liturgical formation; Jewish pluralistic and principle-based formation; Historically Black church formation for survival and community; Asian evangelical spiritual direction and retreat models; distance-learning formation strategies
4. Student Health, Well-Being, and Flourishing	Conditions that support or hinder formation, including physical, mental, and social wellness	National student health needs data (stress, anxiety, depression, nutrition, physical activity); clergy flourishing research; holistic well-being practices; food access barriers for international students; parachurch partnerships for seminarian wellness

Launch of ATS microsite repository of formation resources

The 2025 ATS Student Data and Resources Consultation made it clear that while significant work is being done within specific traditions and communities, that specialized knowledge often remains siloed. The SDRAC identified areas where one group's work complemented and extended another's, presenting an opportunity for mutual learning. On the anniversary of this convening, ATS is pleased to announce a tangible resource that attendees helped to curate: a new microsite repository of formation resources, ATSTFormationRepository.org, now available to the public. The repository will address a critical gap by providing a centralized forum for exchanging ideas and sharing formation resources, both existing and newly created. The goal is not to prescribe a single vision of formation, but the opposite: to offer opportunities for member schools to learn from each other how the task of formation for mature spirituality is uniquely defined, embodied, and cultivated across different historic traditions. The goal is also to support ongoing work within institutions to more robustly define, embody, and cultivate such dispositions within the context of their own tradition. A living repository, ATS invites submission of additional resources that help advance the conversation on student formation for years to come.

We wish to highlight four specific resources in the newly launched repository:

1. "Ecumenical and Traditioned Measurement: Measuring Christian Maturation Across Distinct Traditions of Christian Spirituality" (Porter et al. 2021): Explores challenges in measuring Christian maturation across five distinct traditions (African American, Anglican, Benedictine, Pentecostal, and Dutch Reformed).
2. "Spiritual Formation in Theological Education: A Multi-case Exploration on Seminaries and Spiritual Development" (Wang et al. 2023): A multicase exploration of institutional theories of change regarding student formation at four ATS member schools (Fuller Theological Seminary, George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University, Talbot School of Theology of Biola University, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School of Trinity International University).

3. "Student Spiritual Formation Assessment in Theological Education: An Overview of Approaches" (Sandage et al. 2025): An open-access overview of current approaches and best practices for the assessment of spiritual formation, drawing on published literature and field experience within the specific context of graduate theological education.
4. The Seminary Formation Assessment (SFA): a free-to-use set of evidence-based tools grounded in the Relational Spirituality Model (RSM) that evaluates key dimensions of student growth and well-being. An ATS Formation Repository exclusive, training on use of the SFA is available to member schools.

What insights can you offer?

As educators invested in the formation of future ministry leaders, we are better when we share our models, outcomes, and practices. ATS invites member schools to not only explore these resources, but also to contribute your own unique models to this growing collective. Nominate a new resource today at ATSTFormationRepository.org or reach out by email to [Christopher The](mailto:Christopher.The@ats.edu).

Consultation attendees generated a rich set of forward-looking recommendations for curated resources, faculty development frameworks, cross-disciplinary research partnerships, and customizable assessment tools—insights that are already informing ongoing Student Questionnaires redevelopment work. ATS plans to bring several products of the Student Questionnaires redevelopment process to the membership for public review at the 2026 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting, including draft question sets, report visualizations, and planned interface features.

Appendix

Attendee List, April 2025 ATS Student Data and Resources Consultation

Listed alphabetically by surname. ATS staff omitted.

- **Blevins, Dean G.** Professor of Practical Theology and Christian Discipleship, Nazarene Theological Seminary
- **Gauvain, Ignatius.** Director of Student Life, St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary

- **Goldstone, Matthew.** Assistant Academic Dean, Academy for Jewish Religion
- **Guns, John.** Dean, Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology of Virginia Union University
- **Hamrick, Laura.** Clergy Engagement Specialist, Duke University Divinity School
- **Harms, Arielle.** Assistant Professor of Theology, Director of MA in Pastoral Theology, Augustine Institute
- **Jankowski, Peter.** Associate Professor, Bethel Seminary of Bethel University
- **Kuhner, Matthew.** Vice President and Academic Dean, St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry
- **Liu, Anita.** Associate Professor of Counseling; Director of RSI, China Evangelical Seminary North America
- **O'Coin, Kevin.** Associate Director of Enrollment, Associated Canadian Theological Schools (ACTS) of Trinity Western University
- **Peloquin, Andy.** Head of Student Success, Western Seminary
- **Reed, Angela.** Associate Dean, George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University
- **Regan, Jacqueline.** Associate Dean, Student Affairs and Career Services, Boston College Clough School of Theology and Ministry
- **Sandage, Steven.** Albert & Jessie Danielsen Professor of Psychology of Religion and Theology, Boston University School of Theology
- **Thomas-Golden, Tammalyn.** Chief Operating Officer; Accreditation Liaison, Interdenominational Theological Center
- **Turnblom, Sarah.** Director of Assessment and Accreditation, Princeton Theological Seminary
- **Turner, Andrew.** President-Rector, Saint Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology
- **Wang, David C.** Professor of Spiritual Formation and Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary
- **Webster, Karen.** Co-Founder and Executive Director, Healthy Seminarians–Healthy Church
- **West, Nate.** Research Assistant Professor, University of Alaska Anchorage
- **Wong, Arch.** Professor of Practical Theology; Associate Director, Flourishing Congregations Institute, Ambrose Seminary of Ambrose University

David C. Wang is professor of psychology and spiritual formation at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.



Kevin O'Coin is associate director of enrollment at Associated Canadian Theological Schools (ACTS) of Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia.



Sarah Turnblom is director of assessment and accreditation at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey.



Christopher M. The is director of student data and research at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

