

ATS Annual Report Form revision project continues

BY DEBORAH H. C. GIN

The information gathering phase of the ATS Annual Report Form (ARF) Comprehensive Revision Project is making great progress.

Several components comprise this phase, including the first meeting of the project's advisory committee in December, review of the existing ARF by [ATS research staff](#) and the [ATS Research and Data Advisory Committee](#), a research project to identify how data are being collected and used at ATS schools, and the formation of focus groups to gather input on the kind of data that should be collected on respective forms as well as why certain data should/should not be collected.

As mentioned in the project's [introductory article](#), finding ways to streamline reporting that would also increase data consumption is a priority for the project. To this end, the advisory committee discussed how the ARF could be simplified, while remaining useful to both individual schools and the industry.

In the research project on data collection and use, key informants at 60 ATS schools provided their perspectives on why they collect data, including for institutional planning, program planning and evaluation, grant applications and reporting, and compliance with various agencies. Many stated using the [Strategic Information Report](#) and the [Institutional Peer Profile Report](#) regularly, while some reported relying on ATS salary information to update compensation plans for employees.

Themes regarding necessary changes emerged during initial analysis of interviews, and the project's advisory



committee engaged in robust conversation around several of these themes at its first meeting. The following is a list of those themes, annotated with summary comments and rationale that schools provided on areas of potential need for change:

- **Delivery options**—difficulty in accounting for multiple types of programs and courses (e.g., remote/online, face-to-face, hybrid and synchronous, asynchronous, and combinations of these)
- **Denomination**—too long or not nuanced enough
- **Enrollment/retention/student success**—difficulty in tracking part-time students, differences in calculating FTE (as well as academic load and average cost for a degree), and slowing pace of degree completion
- **Gender**—increasing number of “other” in schools’ internal data
- **Race/ethnicity**—differences between US and Canadian understanding and reporting of these constructs, as well as an increasing number of “other” in schools’ internal data.

To ensure information gathered during this phase reflects the broad membership, careful attention has been paid to representation at each step, at the school level (ecclesial family, size, structure, country, Carnegie classification, predominant racial composition, and whether formally affiliated with a denomination), and at the individual level (administrative role, race/ethnicity, and gender). In addition, the project's advisory committee includes representatives of the ATS Board of Directors and the ATS Board of Commissioners, ATS staff, and the ATS Research and Data Advisory Committee to reinforce connection to the organization's mission and strategic priorities.

For the next portion of this information-gathering phase, the committee recommended both role-specific (e.g., admissions/registrars, CEOs/CAOs, CFOs, librarians) and mixed-role focus groups so that the revised ARF reflects both strategic needs of member schools and departmental implications of comprehensive changes. The focus groups will meet this spring via Zoom, and a draft of the revised ARF should be available to the public by early fall. We welcome input on the ARF comprehensive revision—please use arfmail@ats.edu at any time. Stay tuned for additional updates in coming months!



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