

ATS launches project on intercultural sensitivity and global awareness

By MARY H. YOUNG

This year, ATS began work on an intercultural sensitivity and global awareness training project in conjunction with its member schools. The project focuses on using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment tool, which aims to help schools equip their faculty and administrative leaders to become more interculturally sensitive and competent.

About the project

The redeveloped ATS *Standards of Accreditation*—reflecting both the actually-existing and aspirational landscape of accredited graduate theological education—underscore the principles and values of quality, diversity, and contextuality as well as global engagement, intercultural competence, and educational formation. The value of intercultural competence (and/or sensitivity) is reflected in the growing interest in and commitment to “race and diversity training” among an increasing number of ATS member schools. For these schools, intercultural competence is part of their institutional and educational practices in the context of rapid social, political, and cultural change and the “browning” of student demographics. These values and practices are shaped, understood, and attended to *differently* based on one’s gender, racial, ethnic, ecclesial, national, and global contexts.

Several ATS staff members and a project advisory team are in year one of a five-year project that exposes schools to intercultural and global awareness training and provides specific guidance on using the IDI assessment tool in relevant ways for theological education. This project invites schools to discern new ways of living into their respective missions amid cultural and global changes.



With its four-fold structure, this project will: (1) develop a framework for understanding the complex character of race and diversity in the context of educational formation and in the area of faculty intercultural competence and sensitivity, (2) conduct research to identify, map, and determine how the IDI assessment tool might be best suited for or can be appropriately deployed in the theological formation contexts of ATS member schools, (3) pilot a multi-year experiment with member schools to ascertain how the IDI can be deployed to address the widening gap between changing student demographics and faculty/administrator preparation to serve racially diverse student populations, and (4) publish the results of the three elements of the project’s structure, including how the IDI assessment tool was used in the pilot phase of the project, for the purpose of establishing the foundation for future work in intercultural sensitivity and competence.

One underlying assumption that has often been undervalued or undertheorized—that the project seeks to explicitly and systematically introduce and test—is that

intercultural sensitivity and global awareness and/or intercultural competence and global engagement are inextricably related, if not co-constitutive, by virtue of their shared rootedness in the diversities and contexts of self, other, and world. While the Association's Global Awareness and Engagement Initiative addresses, albeit in a different way, the concerns with which its Committee on Race and Ethnicity and this project are also concerned (e.g., diversity, contextuality, and intercultural competence), there is a strong sense that intercultural sensitivity needs to be accompanied by global awareness—and global awareness cannot avoid the need for intercultural sensitivity. Race, diversity, and inclusion—particularly in the United States and Canada—cannot fully be understood apart from the global context in which they are embedded. Global awareness and engagement are also deepened by one's understanding of the nature, character, and demands of race, diversity, and inclusion.

Examining current uses of the IDI among ATS member schools

Many ATS member schools have expressed the conviction that “race and diversity training” are critical to the educational mission of their institutions. In fact, many theological schools are deploying intercultural assessment tools like the IDI and similar instruments for equipping their faculty and administrative leaders to become more interculturally sensitive as part of their vocational, professional, and academic identities.

Responses to a recent discussion thread on Engage ATS suggest that the IDI is being deployed at member schools in a variety of ways and with varied constituencies:

- Schools have used the IDI with a plethora of constituencies, including board members, faculty, staff, administrators, and students.
- The IDI is used with MDiv students as a pre- and post-cultural assessment tool that is administered during the first and final years of their academic programs.
- On average, schools have been using the IDI for around three years, and they are still collecting data

to determine impact and relevance for longitudinal purposes.

- There are mixed reviews from some faculty and staff about the IDI's effectiveness to assess self-understanding of institutional culture and personal bias.
- Some initial review of the instrument questions its viability for use with indigenous populations.
- Schools are determining that the IDI is used most effectively when intercultural awareness is a thread that runs throughout the curriculum (e.g., contextual education classes, student formation/reflection activities, other wrap-around curricular and co-curricular experiences).
- Several schools have IDI-qualified administrators on staff and have determined that a follow-up meeting with the qualified administrator is key to the effectiveness of the IDI, as he/she can ensure that participants leave their follow-up meetings with an individual cultural assessment development plan.

Member schools are invited to click the discussion thread link and share their experiences with the IDI or connect with others about it to keep the conversation going.

Involvement of schools in this project

ATS staff believe that, through this project, schools will gain the capacity to educate faculty and administrators about issues of intercultural and global awareness, and train them in intercultural sensitivity and global engagement, with particular attention given to educational formation (i.e., learning, teaching, research, and advocacy). The project will provide both the context and encouragement for schools to examine student data in a longitudinal format; develop interculturally appropriate curricular and co-curricular experiences; and evaluate and change institutional structures in ways that reflect a commitment to quality, diversity, and contextuality as well as global engagement, intercultural competence and sensitivity, and educational formation.

While only a limited number of schools will pilot the IDI as part of this project, ATS anticipates a variety of

ways that schools will assist in expanding the learning around intercultural sensitivity and global awareness. ATS encourages member schools that have used the IDI to participate as wisdom partners in the ongoing conversations around the viability of the instrument as a cultural assessment tool for theological educators and audiences.

Opportunities for engagement around this project will include:

- Schools being selected to pilot the IDI for the first time at their institutions
- IDI veteran/early adopter school meetings with an IDI consultant/expert, ATS staff, and the project advisory team to share their experiences
- Schools connecting through peer and/or affinity groups to share IDI learnings and experiences
- Veteran IDI school meetings with institutions selected for the pilot

Next steps in the project

ATS staff and members of the project advisory team will continue their work during the next few months with some specific actions:

- Developing and making available a framework paper that will more fully articulate the working definitions and the links among cultural sensitivity, intercultural competencies, and global awareness
- Identifying an outside IDI consultant/researcher to help begin conversations with early adopters of the IDI and representatives of the project advisory team to determine current practices with the instrument focusing on:
 - o attention to faculty intercultural competence and sensitivity and global engagement
 - o identifying effective practices in using the IDI as an assessment instrument in the context of theological learning, teaching, and research (formation)
- Inviting 20 schools to pilot the IDI
- Organizing peer groups for shared learnings around uses of the IDI

As ATS partners with, supports, and learns from schools in this intercultural sensitivity and global awareness work, questions can be directed to ATS staff members Mary Young and Lester Ruiz.



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