

ATS members discuss balance between remote and residential faculty on Engage ATS

BY LISA KERN

The trend in graduate theological education has been shifting toward a greater acceptance and integration of remote and online teaching methods, especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the specific balance between remote and residential faculty can vary widely depending on the institution, its resources, and its mission. Several ATS school leaders recently discussed the topic on Engage ATS, asking questions and sharing what their institutions have been trying.

One leader shared that faculty are expected to live in the local area even though her school is not a residential campus. She said faculty are generally required to be on campus one day a week and for committee meetings that may arise. They are also expected to attend in-person monthly faculty meetings.

Being mostly a residential campus, one ATS school is considering hiring a fully remote full-time faculty member for the first time. That new employee would only be required to attend important staff meetings and graduation in person. Similarly, another ATS school just hired its first remote faculty member who teaches entirely online, requiring that she be in person only for a few special occasions during the year. Many local faculty members at that school currently only come to campus for those



same events. Because the school's regular committee meetings and faculty meetings are held via Zoom, that arrangement seems to be working so far.

One ATS seminary has had distributed faculty on its staff for a few years. It has had much success so far largely due to the staff's ability to communicate frequently via Teams (messaging is a constant activity of the day), and to have all its meetings on Zoom.

Other ATS schools have experienced some challenges with trying to hire remote faculty. One school's remote faculty members taught mostly online, participated in monthly Zoom meetings, and only taught hybrid courses on campus occasionally. The school's faculty who are always on campus grew resentful, questioning fair distribution of committee work and feeling a loss of faculty collegiality throughout the year.

Several school leaders mentioned the issue of availability, regardless of faculty members being remote or residential. Those who work on campus sometimes find cohesion to be an issue—not with the distributed faculty,

but with their local colleagues who aren't always in their offices or available online. Another leader agreed, saying that faculty cohesion is not as much about physical proximity, but about a willingness to be available. One leader said her school has a professor who teaches remotely whom students experience as more accessible than some professors who teach on campus.

One school leader posted about the logistics involved on campus. Several remote faculty preferred to attend various committee meetings in person due to lengthy commutes, but that required some additional staff time to set up the room and be attentive to the remote attendees' needs. They could move the entire meeting to Teams or Zoom but would have to make creative use of space, as some of their staff and faculty members share offices. The school is now trying to schedule meetings for the days that all faculty are teaching in person.

Another leader offered logistical points an institution should consider for remote faculty: (1) receiving tax IDs from each state that your faculty members will work in (taxes are according to where the work is done, not

where the institution exists) and (2) complying with each state authorization for online delivery unless your state is part of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA).

Like some ATS schools, one school will be shifting from a residential and hybrid model to a hybrid only model in the future, and considering what faculty workload might mean in the new arrangement. To start planning accordingly, the school is beginning to ask questions like: *What will faculty community look like once we go remote? How will we continue to form and foster collegiality among ourselves now for then? Does moving to remote mean more Zoom meetings to keep community among the faculty? How do we build/keep our trust now with one another that our commitment to our seminary project and work is honored and respected? How many in-person gatherings do we schedule per year for faculty when we're remote?*

Important discussions about topics like the balance between remote and residential faculty are happening among your peers on Engage ATS every day. Log into the community and join the conversation!



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