

ATS offers new resource for university and college presidents with embedded schools

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A Resource for Presidents with Embedded Schools was recently developed in conversation with a subset of leaders in embedded ATS schools. It was designed to provide a basis for conversation when new leaders take the helm of colleges and universities and when insight about academic units is helpful to ongoing operations.

As academic units within colleges and universities, embedded schools both contribute to and benefit from a larger institutional ecosystem. The resource provides both new and longstanding college and university presidents (as well as other senior leaders and board members) information about theological education with the aim of productively integrating theological schools into the overall institutional mission.

In 1990, 20 percent of ATS schools were embedded institutions; as of 2024, 43 percent of member institutions sit within college or university structures. This shift means that ATS member schools may more frequently have occasion to explain their missions, visions, constituents, degree programs, and scholarly communities to those with limited familiarity with graduate theological education. In addition, embedded theological entities—be



they seminaries, divinity schools, schools of theology, or departments of theology—will benefit from sharing information about the nature and shape of ATS accreditation to their host institutions.

Aimed at helping theological schools—and the institutions in which they are embedded—thrive, the resource for university and college presidents addresses questions including:

- What are The Association of Theological Schools and the Commission on Accrediting?
- What sort of schools comprise the ATS membership?
- What are the benefits of ATS accreditation?
- What resources are available through ATS?
- How are theological schools like (and unlike) other academic units?

- What do productive relationships between theological schools and their host institutions look like?
- How can university and college presidents support theological schools?

Theological entities hold unique positions both within and outside of colleges and universities. In *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education*, former ATS Executive Director Daniel O. Aleshire explains that “theological schools are derivative institutions; they do not exist for their own purposes; they do not do their work only in the ways they decide to do it; they do not have a mission apart from the religious communities they serve; they are not masters of their own fates; instead, they are inextricably bound to the fates of religious communities.”

Each embedded school is unique, not only in light of the type of institution in which it is embedded, but also in terms of its origins, governance, organization structure, connections to the larger institution, centrality to the larger institutional mission, and the communities it serves.

Notwithstanding the particular context of each school, embedded graduate theological schools exist with

connections and dependencies to their host institutions and building fruitful relationships between theological entities and their broader institutions is crucial. Though necessarily connected to communities beyond higher education, theological schools support the larger academic institution in ways that enrich the overall college or university mission, including by extending the institution’s reach to external constituents, expanding avenues of scholarship and pedagogy, and providing a wise voice in wrestling with complex societal issues.

Leaders of embedded theological schools will find this new resource useful in introducing theological education to new college and university colleagues. The resource can also help structure periodic and ongoing assessments of the relationships within college and university structures, for example, in seasons of strategic planning and institutional evaluation. Deepening knowledge and enabling productive conversations creates a foundation for the flourishing of institutions and their constituent parts.



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