

ATS projects another year of overall stable enrollment

BY CHRIS MEINZER

Nearly 90% of member schools reported their enrollment numbers to ATS by the end of November. As a continuing trend during the last five years, total enrollment across ATS schools will change minimally while enrollment in underlying degree categories continues to shift.



The projected enrollment for fall 2022 is shown in the chart below alongside the reported enrollment for the previous four years.

MDiv enrollment projects to continue declining to about 28,000 students, which would represent a decline of about 4% from fall 2021 and a decline of 9% since fall 2018. MDiv enrollment remains a substantial proportion of enrollment in fall 2022 at about 35%, but this is a marked difference from even ten years ago when MDiv students represented 43% of total enrollment.

MA enrollment projects to be 27,900 students for the current year, which is an increase of 1% from fall 2021 and an increase of 5% since fall 2018. This means that—for the first time in the history of ATS schools—the enrollment of MA students would be on par with MDiv enrollment.

DMin and “Other Professional Doctoral” students continue to grow and are projected to be around 12,300 in fall 2022. This represents an increase of about 4% from fall 2021 and a 24% increase from fall 2018. ATS schools continue to experience growth in this degree category.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	Projected 2022
MDiv	30,848	30,803	30,455	29,100	28,000
MA	26,535	26,339	27,267	27,591	27,900
ThM/STM	1,833	1,242	1,250	1,333	1,350
DMin & Other Prof Doctoral	9,892	10,750	10,975	11,848	12,300
PhD/ThD	4,037	4,120	3,939	4,017	4,250
Non-Degree	4,835	4,422	4,348	4,746	5,050
	77,980	77,676	78,234	78,635	78,850

PhD/ThD enrollment has a projected increase of about 5% to around 4,250 students in fall 2022. Enrollment for non-degree students jumped up about 4% to just more than 5,000. Each of these fluctuations within degree categories interestingly leads to a projected small increase in total enrollment of about 0.3%. Given the changes and challenges facing theological schools, it is noteworthy that overall enrollment changes have been flat during the last five years.

Year-over-year changes

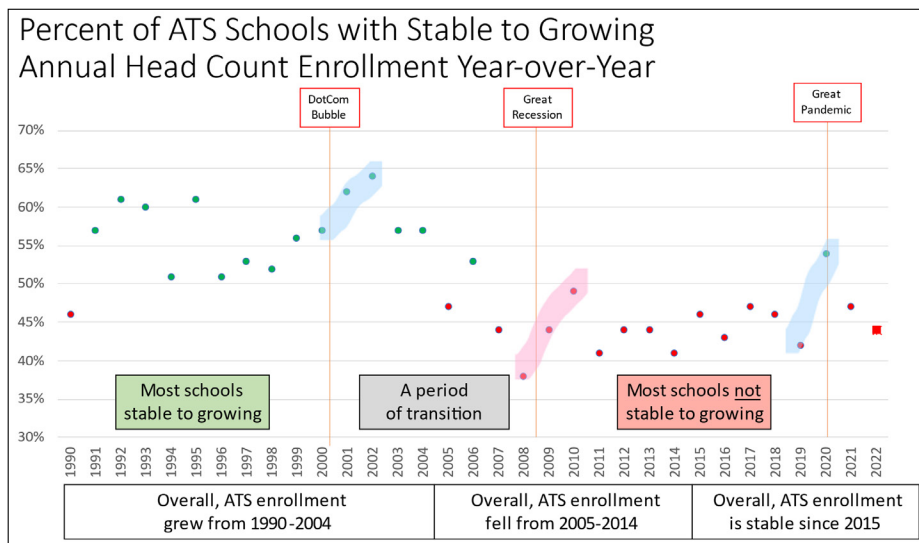
Even as the overall enrollment changes remain stable, changes within schools continue to mark some challenges. In a [Colloquy Online](#) article from last month, ATS reported 44% of schools had shown enrollment increases and 56% had shown enrollment decreases. As more schools have reported, the ratio is now 43% growing and 57% declining year-over-year. As a result, ATS schools are expected to continue the ratio

of about 45% of schools growing to 55% of schools declining year-over-year—a return to a trend that has been occurring since around 2006. As one can see in the chart, there were some bumps in this relative percentage just after the Great Recession of 2008–2009 and during the recent global pandemic. For example, in fall 2020, almost 55% of ATS schools showed year-over-year increases, but this bump was short-lived and the pattern headed back toward historic trends. In fall 2021, 47% of ATS schools had enrollment increases and 53% had enrollment decreases.

Resources for leaders

As a leader in a theological school, it is imperative that you analyze not only your year-over-year trends, but what has been happening with your enrollment and

mission during the last decade. Take the time to compare where you have been to where you are now so you can best discern where you need to go. ATS has tools to help you with external benchmarking, such as the [ATS Data Visualization Tool](#) and the [ATS Strategic Information Report](#).



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If you would like a tailored presentation of your enrollment and economic data that places your institution in the context of broader North American theological education, you should consider the [ATS 5-Phase Approach to Discovery](#) (see video below). Nearly 100 ATS schools have taken advantage of this opportunity as part of their strategic learning and planning for their administration, faculty, and board. If you are interested in undertaking this valuable process, email Chris Meinzer at meinzer@ats.edu.



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