ATS Student Questionnaires now available in four additional languages

By Christopher M. The

*ATS Student Data Services has introduced an exciting new feature to enhance student accessibility, increase participation, and expand the usability of the ATS Student Questionnaires (Qs). Approved onscreen translations for all three Qs instruments are **now available** in Spanish, Korean, Chinese Simplified, and Chinese Traditional. These enhancements are designed to address specific language barriers and encourage respondents from non-English linguistic backgrounds to engage in ATS membership-wide efforts to learn from, for, and with their students and alums.*

First things first

Perhaps the most important question to consider when deciding whether to use the Qs is, "Would our school benefit from learning about our students in light of what other ATS schools learn about theirs?" The best questions sometimes carry the simplest answers.

"In God we trust. All others must bring data," said American engineer and statistician W. Edwards Deming. The Qs are designed to provide a comprehensive view of graduate-level theological education in North America. Inviting more students to respond serves the impulse that we "must bring data," as Deming puts it, with the intent to drive insightful action. For example, aligning your Qs usage with the ATS Commission on Accrediting *Standards of Accreditation* is as straightforward as consulting the current Guide to Using Student Questionnaire Data in the Self-Study Process.

Offering translated Qs facilitates a posture of honor and hospitality toward the non-English speakers in your educational programs. ATS has observed a rapid adoption of these onscreen translations since their implementation last month. At the time of writing, 36 percent of all Qs batches created for the 2023–24 academic year carry at least one other linguistic option. The proportion will likely increase in time and with broadening awareness of the translations feature. For those considering their use, to follow are a few tips—along with a newly updated Administrator's Manual.

Prioritizing ease for administrators

Upon placing a Qs order—at no cost, thanks to generous funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.—your institution will be granted access throughout 2023–24 to create

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1

the questionnaire batches it needs. The default language for all Qs batches is English, but Qs administrators can choose as many or as few onscreen language options from the available list (see checkboxes in the image below):

Select and save your settings to get *immediate* access to the chosen onscreen translations. Students will see a language selection screen that corresponds to the checkboxes selected. On the other hand, if no selection is made by your Qs administrator, the instrument will default to English (no language selection screen appears).

With school administrators in mind, we expect these new onscreen Qs translations to impact student engagement and the variety of feedback your school receives. We hope this new feature eases the burden for student services personnel who would often facilitate informal translations on behalf of their students.

Honoring and welcoming more students

Providing students with the option to participate in their preferred languages gathers insights from a broader range of students and fosters inclusivity. By inviting your students and alums to select from a set of languages, you empower them to engage the Qs more fully. The image on the right is an example of the language selection screen, showing the maximum of all four available translation options:

After selecting an option, all prompts and responses will appear in the language the student selects. Wherever a prompt appears for written responses, students can still type any text they wish. These more qualitative, write-in responses will continue to be visible to Qs administrators and—while included in the raw data exports—are not visualized in the full-color reports meant for aggregating responses from multiple schools.

Whatever language they choose, students will be provided a completion receipt upon submission, and schools should consider making good use of the completion codes included on that screen. Does your school need a copy to verify participation and/or rule out duplicates? Is there an incentive offer you are running to promote participation? Are you using another instrument for which the code can function to link these surveys? The key is to communicate clearly to your students what they can expect to do with a code when they receive it, which will help to honor and welcome their participation.

Reminder about aggregated data

Once you have collected student responses, vetted these against duplication, and reported your batches, ATS will process responses and generate reports for your school. Responses to approved translations are tabulated the same as those in English, which helps with survey aggregation in publications like the Total School Profile.

Customizing any additional questions involves a thoughtful process to ask your students and alums up to 20 more items. Such additional questions, however, cannot be translated onscreen in the same way that the common sets of membership-wide questions can. Although responses to additional questions are excluded from all aggregated reports, well-designed use of custom questions can still be used to disaggregate responses in the raw data. Another approach to data disaggregation would be to establish custom cohorts, which may involve a fee.

Also unchanged is the effective limit of batches that you can create. Both the Entering Student Questionnaire (ESQ) and the Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) effectively allow up to five batches per instrument, per year. More batches than these can be created but will be visualized together according to fall, winter, spring, summer, or "full year" terms—all of which can be consolidated as yearly ESQ/GSQ reports and data exports.

Qs translations: why now?

For nearly three decades, both the ESQ and GSQ have proven to be essential tools for gathering feedback at key stages of students' educational journeys. In the years following the move from paper to online forms (2006), the Alumni Questionnaire (AQ) emerged in 2010 to extend information gathering beyond degree or program completion. These instruments were developed and revised in North American English, and many in the membership have long wondered when the ESQ, GSQ, and AQ would support non-English languages.

Now is the time. Knowing more of the theological education landscape will inform your strategic planning and institutional priorities. If you have not signed up this academic year, the first step is ordering access to the Qs. Contribute to the conversation in the "ATS Student Questionnaires" community on Engage ATS. Please email qmail@ats.edu for other Qs-related questions.

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3