

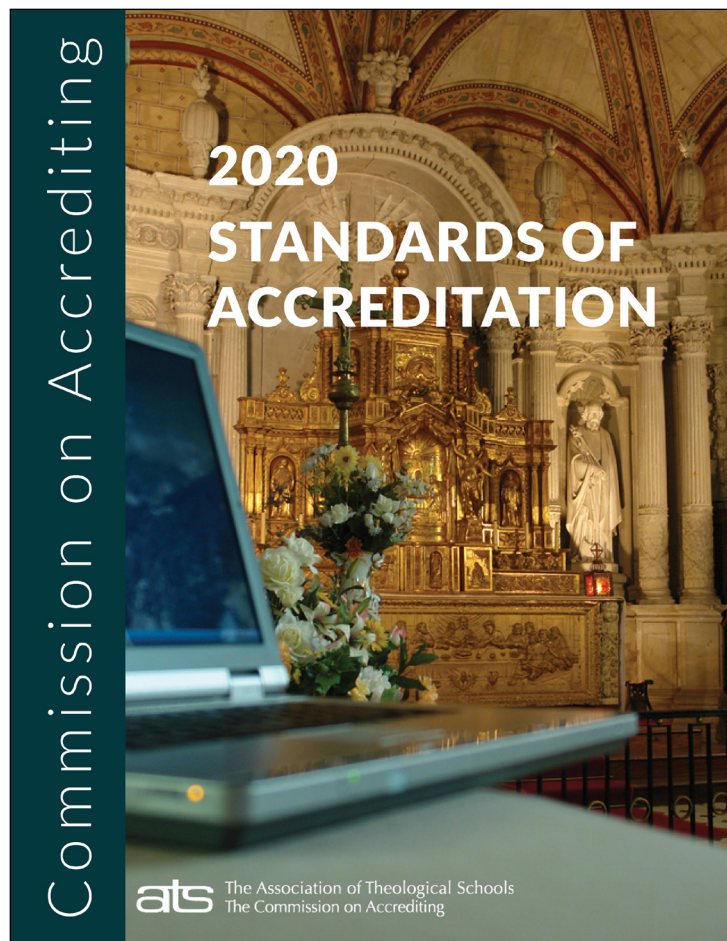
ATS Standards of Accreditation to undergo formal review process

BY BARBARA MUTCH

Four years of experience with the redeveloped ATS Standards of Accreditation create good conditions and timing for the membership to review or “look again” at both the Standards and the Policies. To this end, and in conformity with the Commission Policy on Board Responsibilities requiring periodic evaluation of the Standards and Policies, the Board of Commissioners has authorized a review process. Recommendations for any changes will be brought to Commission member schools (see [Policies and Procedures, V.A.](#)).

A working committee to oversee the review was appointed by the Board of Commissioners in February 2024. Commissioners Christopher Ciccarino, academic dean of Immaculate Conception Seminary, and Jim Thames, academic dean of Dallas Theological Seminary, represent the Board and will join the directors of accreditation from the ATS accrediting staff. The membership will be informed of the review process—its purpose, scope, timeline, sequence, and the multiple opportunities for input—beginning with this article and through future articles published in *Colloquy Online*, which is distributed to personnel at every ATS member school.

Every peer reviewer who has served on an evaluation committee since July 1, 2020, has received an electronic survey seeking input about their experience in working with the *Standards* and using them to evaluate member schools. The survey was distributed mid-April with a return date of early May.



A Public Call for Comments on the *Standards of Accreditation* and the *Policies* of the Commission on Accrediting will be issued May 1, with the invitation to submit responses to standardsreview@ats.edu from May 1 through July 1, 2024.

All representatives of member schools in attendance at the 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting in Atlanta will participate in a structured review of the *Standards* and *Policies* during lunch on Thursday, June 20. Facilitated by Commissioners and members of the working committee, attendees will review the *Standards* and the *Policies* for clarity, comprehensiveness, and helpfulness to the schools.

Data from the public call for comments, the peer review survey, and the Biennial Meeting review will be examined by the working committee and any proposed revisions will be brought to the Board of Commissioners in spring 2025. Any recommendations for revisions to the *Standards of Accreditation* and/or the *Policies* of the Commission on Accreditation will be communicated to the membership in fall 2025/spring 2026 through *Colloquy Online* and a formal communication to all schools. The membership will vote at the June 2026 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting, and an implementation period of any adopted revisions will occur from July 2026 through June 2027.

Approved by the membership at the 2020 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting in a resounding 198-1 vote, the *ATS Standards of Accreditation* articulate principles of quality for graduate theological education that all schools meet in various ways. The *Standards* have been affirmed by member schools for their clarity and helpfulness and have been described as asking “exactly the right questions to

help schools thrive.” New ATS Commission *Policies* to guide the accreditation processes were approved by the membership at the same time. The newly adopted *Standards* and *Policies* were the fruit of a two-year redevelopment process that was highly participative, grounded

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in significant membership input, and built on the previous work of the preparatory committee and the *Educational Models and Practices Project*.

The comprehensive process that led to the enthusiastic adoption of the 2020 *Standards of Accreditation* and the *Policies* of the Commission on Accrediting and the input of schools that have conducted institutional self-studies and received evaluation committees in relation to these *Standards* give every evidence that they are working well for ATS member schools in terms of quality assurance and ongoing improvement. Evaluation will enable the membership to know for certain and provide the opportunity, if needed, for fine-tuning and improvement.



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