

# Carpenter grant to fund ATS research and 20th anniversary celebration for Women in Leadership

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) has received a grant of \$150,000 from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation in support of its Women in Leadership (WIL) initiative. The grant will fund a comprehensive evaluation of the first two decades of WIL programming as well as a critical assessment of the current status of women in theological education and a 20th anniversary conference.

The research effort will analyze the professional position personnel data that ATS collects and stores in its institutional database to identify the roles in which the presence of women is most prevalent as well as the roles in which the percentage of women has increased or decreased over time. Focus groups at regular ATS conferences will augment those data with reflections by current and former WIL program participants about their vocational trajectories, their habits and practices, their experiences with professional advancement, and the conditions that enabled them to enjoy a measure of success. In addition, a comparison of the experiences of participants with those of non-participants will indicate how WIL programming has made a difference in their career paths.

At the time that the Carpenter Foundation made the grant that inaugurated this program 20 years ago, a total of 30 women occupied the approximately 450 chief executive and chief academic officer positions across ATS member schools, or less than 7 percent. This past year, there were 73 women serving in approximately 580 such positions across a larger number of schools in the ATS membership, constituting 12.5 percent of all persons in these positions.



According to Jo Ann Deasy, ATS director, institutional initiatives and student research, “The story of the past two decades is that the participation of women has increased, particularly in settings that have no confessional barriers to their participation. But overall, indicators suggest that a ‘30 percent’ threshold tends to exist in theological education, even in areas where no gender-related confessional constraints would limit participation of women.”

Debbie Gin, ATS director, research and faculty development, will direct the WIL research. “The research funded by this project will help to determine the causes and the apparent tenacity of that threshold,” said Gin.

This is the fourth initiative that the Carpenter Foundation has funded in support of women in theological

school leadership. The program began with a grant funding activity from 1997 through 2000. A second grant provided continued funding for the conference programming for the next several years, and a third funded major research on women serving as chief executive and chief academic officers in ATS schools. The Women in Leadership program also received generous funding from Lilly Endowment Inc., who has provided support for most of the conferences and staffing since 2006.

An estimated 800 or more women have participated in WIL conferences, which have been designed to encourage and equip women in their roles as leaders and potential leaders in ATS institutions.

In early 2018, women will gather once again—this time to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the work of WIL—to discuss research findings and to strategize about next steps in WIL programming.