The History of the Technology in Theological Education Group

Dr. Charles Willard, theological education consultant and former director of institutional evaluation and accreditation at The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), secured a grant from ATS in March 2008 to bring together thirty-five technology professionals from as many seminaries for a conference designed to allow participants the opportunity to present projects they were doing at their institutions. The conference intended to form an affinity group of faculty and staff at ATS member schools that could help ATS interpret the changes occurring due to the technologies that were then available for their use.

The following steering committee members formed the first Technology in Theological Education Group (TTEG) in March 2008:

1. Charles Willard, ATS Staff
2. Christopher Olsztyn, ATS Staff
3. Sebastian Mahfood, TTEG Chair
4. Julie Lytle, TTEG Vice Chair
5. Anthony Cook
6. Brian Eastman
7. Jay Endicott
8. John Kahler
9. Alice Loddigs
10. Michael Porterfield
11. Myrna Sears
12. Kris Veldheer

The steering committee sent an invitational letter to all ATS member schools and used a social media site as a container for its membership. It also received a file of technology recommendations for amendment to the General Institutional Standards and began the task of updating the recommendations in preparation for the June 2010 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting of presidents and rectors of ATS member schools.

Sebastian Mahfood and Mary Hess gave a presentation titled "i-Seminary: Exploring New Vistas" at the June 2008 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting. The session demonstrated the difference between the technical and adaptive changes that the ATS member schools would undergo during the next four years of the ATS standards revision process.

TTEG presented its proposed revisions to the technological requirements of the General Institutional Standards to the Standards Revision Task Force, chaired by Melody Mazuk, in December 2008. The changes were adopted at the June 2010 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting, and integrated into the revised General Institutional Standards.

TTEG also honed its mission statement and goals:

Mission Statement

The Technology in Theological Education Steering Committee (TTESC) aims to facilitate the development of teaching and learning environments that use communicative media.

Goals

1. To facilitate interaction and collaboration among ATS accredited theological institutions with a focus on technology.

2. To provide knowledge of available technical tools and learning theory models to faculty of ATS accredited schools for enhanced instruction.

3. To provide online learning for pastoral growth.

4. To advise The Association of Theological Schools related to the revision of standards concerning technology in theological education and the development of benchmarks for distributed and distance learning programs.

5. To research and publish on our various areas of expertise within the publications of our various affinity groups and share projects within our own group.

6. To offer insights to the ATS Commission on Accrediting during its revisions of technology standards, specifically concerning the use of technology in theological education at extension sites and distance education.

Eighty-three schools had representatives in TTEG by January 2009. In addition, TTEG prepared to publish its first of many articles—Julie Lytle's "Tertullian Meets Technology: Online Communities and the Ecology of Formation Fears"—in *Colloquy*, the ATS newsletter. From 2009 to date, TTEG has had an article in either the printed *Colloquy* or the new electronic format—*Colloquy Online*.

TTEG began planning its first webinar, hosted by Greg Bourgond of Bethel Seminary who spoke about on ministerial and spiritual formation in cyberspace, in spring 2009. The second webinar was held the following spring and hosted by Eileen Daily of Loyola on the topic of spiritual formation in cyberspace. This idea of hosting webinars took hold and it was determined that the TTEG would convene a WebEx meeting every month—alternating its topics from network technologies to educational technologies and issues affecting online educational programming.

In the fall of 2009, Sebastian Mahfood attended the annual meeting of the Chief Financial Officers (CFOS) to plan a joint meeting of TTEGs and CFOs in the fall of 2010. TTEG planned and prepared three joint and six independent conference presentations for the joint meeting that attracted thirty-five members during 2010. One of the items on the agenda at that meeting was a discussion of the revisions to the General Institutional Standards (which received approval in June of that year). TTEG adopted a subcommittee structure, where all steering committee members took cochairmanships over the following committees:

1. Faculty Development
2. Tools
3. Community
4. IT Administration
5. Ethics

The non-steering committee members of TTEG in attendance at the conference were encouraged to join one of the five subcommittees so the subcommittee structure could increase membership. Finally, both the chair and vice chair were re-elected to serve a second term.

TTEG began working on a strategic planning initiative, in spring 2011, that would enable it to cultivate a sense of direction in preparation for the post-June 2012 ATS world. It also began working on special task forces with the Standards Revision Committee for the adaptive changes to the degree program standards to occur at the June 2012 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting. It was at this Biennial gathering that the TTEG's labors bore fruit for the adoption of fully online MA programs. By fall 2013, ATS would also approve three completely online MDiv degree programs. In the meantime, the five-year TTEG strategic plan received approval with an end year of 2016.

John Klinger was elected to the TTEG Committee in fall 2011 to replace Anthony Cook as Concordia Seminary's representative on the steering committee. He attended the annual meeting of the CFOs to plan the joint conference for the fall. That second conference, attended again by about thirty-five members of TTEG, had a similar presentation structure.

At the fall 2012 meeting, it was decided that TTEG would expand into two tracks in recognition of the growing number of network technologists and the necessary disparity in interests they had with the educational technologists and those with whom they affiliated (namely, academic deans, faculty, and reference librarians). Phyllis Ennist became cochair of the Educational Technology track, and John Klinger became cochair of the Information Technology track. In addition, Chris Olsztyn, who had been ATS's advisor to TTEG, became advisor to the information technology track while Janice Edwards-Armstrong became advisor to the educational technology track.