

MDiv enrollment declines while MA and DMin enrollments grow among ATS schools

BY CHRIS MEINZER

For the first time in the history of ATS, the MA enrollment of 27,790 students exceeded the MDiv enrollment of 27,634 students. There are some unique developments to report from the finalization of ATS enrollment numbers and from the production of the ATS Annual Data Tables for fall 2022.



MDiv enrollment in ATS schools has dropped below 28,000 for the first time in three decades. It first climbed above 27,000 in 1995, and it climbed to a peak of almost 35,000 in 2006. From that point forward, enrollment of MDiv students began a steady downward trend to about 28,500 in 2017. With a large new school joining ATS in 2018, the enrollment climbed back to 30,766 (see table on next page). In the last five years, however, MDiv enrollment began declining again to reach the fall 2022 figure of 27,634. This level is about the same number of students that was reported in fall 1995, when ATS schools numbered 221 (about 60 fewer schools). It is likely that the downward pressure of MDiv enrollment will continue into future years.

In contrast to the MDiv, MA enrollment has continued a steady climb—albeit at a slower pace—in more recent years. The 27,790 MA students reported across ATS schools in fall 2022 is the largest reported in ATS history. And, as has been anticipated for a few years, the number of MA students has now surpassed the number of MDiv students enrolled—a major milestone for ATS schools!

The MA has been a growth area across segments of ATS schools as the number of MA degrees offered has been increasing steadily. Of the MA enrollment, about 80% is found in evangelical schools, about 10% in mainline schools, and about 10% in Roman Catholic/Orthodox schools. MA degrees are more prevalent in evangelical schools, and this has likely helped a bit with their overall enrollment trajectory. It is likely that this upward trajectory of students enrolled in MA degrees will continue across ATS, but the rate of increase will continue slowing as it has during the last decade.

Another continued positive trend has been reflected in professional doctorate degrees, which include about 10,800 DMin students, or about 88% of this category. The total reported for professional doctorate students is 12,291 in fall 2022 and this, too, represents the largest cohort in ATS history. Additionally, the annual percentage growth of these degrees has been outpacing even MA degrees over the last five years. Of the professional doctorate enrollment, about 75% is found in evangelical schools and about 25% in mainline schools. ATS schools

Head Count Enrollment—All Member Schools

Year	Schools Reporting	MDiv	MA	ThM/STM	DMin/Other Prof Dr	PhD/ThD	Total Degrees	Non-Degree	Total Enrollment
2018	276	30,766	26,441	1,833	9,892	4,037	72,969	4,835	77,804
2019	274	30,725	26,238	1,242	10,750	4,120	73,075	4,422	77,497
2020	274	30,387	27,181	1,250	10,975	3,939	73,732	4,348	78,080
2021	271	29,035	27,509	1,333	11,848	4,017	73,742	4,746	78,488
2022	282	27,634	27,790	1,315	12,291	4,113	73,143	4,691	77,836

have been creative in enrolling students in this degree category, and it is likely that the upward trajectory will continue.

Total enrollment fell from 78,488 in fall 2021 to 77,836 in fall 2022—a decline of 0.8%. The decline was broad-based regarding total enrollment. In fall 2022, 57% of ATS schools had year-over-year decreases, which is slightly higher than our earlier projections. Within ecclesial family cohorts, 56% of evangelical schools, 70% of mainline schools, and 41% of Roman Catholic/Orthodox schools had a recent annual decrease. This differentiation indicates that there are wider trends within the church and society that are impacting enrollment. An ATS school would be wise to look beyond itself and toward the broader ecosystem as it seeks to understand its own enrollment trends.

Each fall, ATS collects significant amounts of enrollment information and other data. We report these statistics back to you as a way for you to consider how your institution is tracking with or going against broader trends. As you compare your school against outside benchmarks, it will likely raise very important questions. By creating and sending to each school its specific [ATS Strategic](#)

[Information Report \(SIR\)](#) or [Institutional Peer Profile Report \(IPPR\)](#), ATS is providing industry-wide benchmarks that have been determined to be the most relevant for theological schools. The SIR and IPPR will be sent to CEOs of member schools in early March. The [ATS Data Visualization Tool](#) allows a person to select individual schools and groups of schools to identify patterns that are emerging over the last three decades. The Data Visualization Tool will be updated soon with the newest data, offering you a way to explore enrollment, admissions, finance, personnel, and more.

So, across ATS schools, MDiv enrollment is declining and MA and DMin enrollment is growing. What do these trends mean for your institution? What does it mean for North American theological education? How do you compare to your peers? What questions does it raise for you? If you would like help interpreting your SIR or IPPR, seeing where your school fits in the broader landscape of ATS schools, or developing a strategic approach to using this data for your planning process, please contact [Chris Meinzer](#), who has developed a [framework](#) to engage your school.



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