

New program year brings new faces and changes to ATS staff

By LISA KERN

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is pleased to announce several additions and transitions to its staff to strengthen the Association and to better position it to fulfill its four strategic priorities: (1) equip leaders for effective change, (2) explore and encourage innovative financial and organizational models, (3) enhance adaptive work in schools' educational missions, and (4) engage the membership in its broad diversity.

During the last few years, the ATS Board of Directors has been identifying, iterating, and clarifying the Association's strategic priorities. In addition, through the generosity of Lilly Endowment Inc. and its own New Century Fund, ATS has been expanding programming and resources to its membership in support of these priorities. The following staff changes (along with those announced in [February 2022](#) and in [April 2022](#)) will further support ATS in continuing to focus on these strategic initiatives.

"These staff additions and transitions have been in the works for some time. By shifting existing staff and bringing in new staff, we are being intentional to maximize the skills and expertise necessary to face the current challenges and opportunities of our membership," said Chris Meinzer, senior director and COO at ATS. "We are really excited about the changes made over the last six months because we believe it will make an impact on our ability to offer, iterate, and expand our programming for the benefit of the member schools."



ATS office; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



New staff

Amanda Leavitt will join the staff as program assistant for initiatives. In this new role, she will support the work of the institutional initiatives that ATS administers on behalf of the membership—her initial priority being

the *Pathways for Tomorrow* coordination project. Leavitt brings significant organizational and administrative experience, most recently directing ministry programs in the Pittsburgh area.



Rosemary Vaccari will join the staff as the new executive assistant. She will support the work of the executive director and other executive-level functions such as the ATS Board of Directors, the ATS Biennial Meeting, and additional projects and programming

initiated from the executive director's office. Vaccari has extensive project management experience, advanced

administrative competencies, and expertise gained through past positions within the church and for-profit organizations.



Saren Williams will join the staff as program assistant for leadership development. She will support the ongoing and expanding work of leadership development for the ATS membership. As a recent graduate with a bachelor of arts degree in biblical and religious studies, Williams has already demonstrated administrative and organizational skills that will serve her and the membership well in her new role.



Staff in transition

Debbie Creamer has been promoted to senior director of design and organizational learning. In the last few years, she has been instrumental in engaging design principles across the work of ATS and in developing a design

team that encourages strategic curiosity, intentionality, and assessment throughout the organization. With this promotion, Creamer will expand her role to build intentional learning spaces for ATS staff and for the membership, to design new learning cohorts, to engage more fully the design principles across the organization, and to work more closely and intentionally with the ATS Board of Directors and in designing the ATS/COA Biennial Meeting.



Marissa Dechant has been promoted to communications coordinator. She has gained valuable experience at ATS from a broad range of leadership tasks and duties assigned to her in the executive office during the past few years. Dechant will now shift

her focus to assisting with expanding communication and engagement strategies across the ATS membership.



Monica Laughery has been promoted to program coordinator for initiatives and faculty development to fill a growing need within ATS programming. She has been instrumental in supporting various faculty programs incorporating education and scholarship, institutional initiatives—including the current *Organizational and Educational Models in Theological Education* project—and research projects.



Elsie Miranda has added director of diversity to her title in addition to director of accreditation. She will be spending half of her time continuing her work as an accrediting liaison and the other half transitioning into a focus on the work of the Committee on Race

and Ethnicity and Women in Leadership programs.

“The staff, both long-tenured and newer in their positions, are truly grateful to serve in our roles. Many of us are here because of the Association’s mission to serve theological education and the church,” said Meinzer.

“With staff changes, we are now even better prepared to serve the member schools as they navigate the challenges and opportunities in the years ahead.”



Lisa Kern is Manager of Member Engagement at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Visit the [ATS website](#) for staff department updates, bios, and contact information.