

GUIDELINES FOR GLOBAL AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

(Approved by the ATS Board of Commissioners, June 7, 2022)

Introduction: Global awareness and engagement in international theological education

International theological education—defined primarily as credit- and non-credit-bearing programs offered beyond national borders—is a significant expression of global awareness and engagement, though not their only expression. The 2020 [Standards of Accreditation](#) allow such programs to be offered by accredited theological schools in the US and Canada. Both programs and locations must meet all the applicable standards and be approved by the Board prior to their implementation based on the relevant [Policies and Procedures](#) of the Commission [e.g., on degrees (IV.D and IV.D.1) and on locations (IV.E and IV.E.1).] Where such approvals are required, the Commission prescribes a uniform [petition process](#) regardless of program, location, or modality.

The Board understands that the *Standards* articulate principles of quality for graduate theological education that all member schools meet in various ways as communities of faith and learning bound together by a shared mission. Moreover, the Board understands that the *Standards* expect that a member school will “act with integrity in its interactions with internal constituents (faculty, staff, students, and others) and external constituents (including the broader public).” A school’s integrity is “grounded in its identity and theological commitments... is demonstrated through policies and practices that highlight fairness, honesty, and accountability... [and] is manifested in a healthy institutional environment with effective patterns of leadership, transparency, and communications.” The Board also understands that institutional integrity “includes how the school attends to global awareness and engagement within the context of its mission, theological commitments, and resources.” (Standard 1.4)

Issues, value propositions, and areas recommended for reflection and action

Commission member schools will need to demonstrate how they define, embody, and cultivate global awareness and engagement as part of the structure, process, and criteria for accreditation, quality assurance, and improvement.

Issues

Regarding international theological education, the Board evaluates petitions for programs of credit-granting theological education in locations beyond the national borders of the US and Canada based on the applicable standards in the context of a historic concern, a contemporary reality, and a substantive theme in the *Standards*.

Historically, efforts by US and Canadian schools to introduce theological education beyond the boundaries of their communities of accountability and their national borders have had uneven results—if sometimes unintended consequences. At best, some schools have been sites of learning, teaching, and research that have contributed to enlarging world views, global interdependence, and intercultural competencies; at worst, some schools have been sites of uncharitable, even destructive practices that have prevented the fullness and richness of shared human thinking, being, and doing to flourish. The unevenness of these results, already discussed by the ATS Task Force on Globalization in the 1990s, is often legitimized by deeply rooted historical inequities—among them racism, androcentrism, and classism—and by resolutely held North Atlantic assumptions not only about theology and education, but also of contradictory, not to mention arbitrary,

understandings of power, community, and identity.¹ This unevenness is exacerbated by the marginalization of many faith-based communities and by the long, quiet withdrawal of some religious institutions from societal influence. These guidelines identify areas of reflection and action through which the dilemmas brought about by these historical realities might be addressed—including the evaluation of the cultural appropriateness of a school’s educational programs offered beyond its national borders.

Contemporarily, US and Canadian higher education—including international theological education—has been experiencing a period of rapid change and redefinition, marked, for example, by profound reconfigurations in political power, economic instabilities, and climate change. In the context of these pervasive—if unpredictable—changes, the already difficult tasks of definition, design, and management of educational programs and locations offered within and without US and Canadian national borders have become even more complex. These guidelines invite schools to give thoughtful attention to the US and Canadian character of the educational programs they are currently offering—including their global consequences—and for which they are seeking approval in the context of international theological education.

Substantively, the *Standards* reflect a persistent theme regarding the normative and practical importance of global awareness and engagement in and for international theological education. While this theme has more than one meaning among Commission member schools, and while by definition and experience “the global” cannot be reduced merely to territorial reach beyond national borders, the Board expects that schools articulate their understandings and practices in international theological education. Member schools should do this with careful attention given to the expectations of the *Standards*, not only as they relate to mission and integrity (Standard 1), diversity (Standard 1.5), intercultural competency (Standard 3.3), and mutuality (Standard 3.4), but also to degree programs—e.g., the MDiv (Standard 4.3)—library (Standard 6.7), faculty (Standard 8.8), and shared resources (Standard 10.10). The Board of Commissioners is equally concerned, perhaps more so, that member schools ensure that planning and evaluation (Standard 2), student learning and formation (Standard 3), and student services (Standard 7) provide sustained attention in the conduct of international theological education.

In this regard, theological schools in the US and Canada must attend to the experience and voices of individuals, communities, and institutions beyond their national and cultural borders to ensure that learning communities are educated wherever they are in contextually appropriate, adequately resourced, and genuinely empowering ways. Moreover, the Commission’s emphasis on global awareness and engagement is not only about developing educational programs beyond US and Canadian national borders, but also for educating US and Canadian communities of faith and learning within their particular locations in ways that help them more fully understand and appreciate how theirs and others’ cultural contexts and identities are valued and are inextricably related.

¹ See especially, [Theological Education, Autumn 1993, Vol. 30, Supplement 1, “Globalization: Tracing the Journey, Charting the Course”](#); but also [Theological Education, Autumn 1993, Vol. 30, No. 1, “Globalization and the Practical Theological Disciplines”](#); and [Theological Education, Spring 1993, Vol. 29, No. 2, “Globalization and the Classical Theological Disciplines.”](#)

Value propositions

The Board has identified three value propositions that shape global awareness and engagement and urges Commission member schools to attend to these assumptions in the general development and implementation of their programs and in offering programs both at locations beyond and within their national borders.

DIVERSITY AND COLLABORATION. The Board has determined that in various parts of the world like the US and Canada, theological education takes many forms and serves a variety of purposes. US and Canadian graduate-professional and academic approaches to theological education represent only one of these forms and serve some of these purposes. Neither the Commission nor the Association assumes that US and/or Canadian credit-granting theological education is singularly normative for other forms of theological education or that it is educationally effective in, or desirable for, other (cultural) contexts. Hence, the necessity for honoring both the structures and processes of diversity, cultural contexts, and collaboration in the educational task.

If a member school and its non-US or Canadian partners or counterparts conclude that a US and/or Canadian credit-granting program is the most appropriate form to be offered at an international location, then the Board and the Commission member school must ensure that the program and location meet both the relevant standards for US and Canadian theological education and explicitly attend to appropriate sensitivity to the contexts in which the program is being offered. Consequently, the Board expects that the design of a proposed program or the choice of an additional location will reflect consultative and/or collaborative work between the member school and its non-US and/or Canadian educational partners or counterparts.

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND INSTRUCTION. The Board has determined that language and the culture in which it is embedded often represent reciprocal challenges for international theological education—in the language used to describe the program, in the language of instruction used in the program, in the adequacy of language-specific resources, and the culture-shaping consequences of the language.

The *Standards* are written for theological education located in a US and/or Canadian context and, while the *Standards* require a program offered beyond its national borders to be culturally appropriate to the setting in which it is offered, the language the Board uses with reference to the degree is US and Canadian. Commission *Standards* do not require the language of instruction to be English, but they do expect the faculty of the school offering the program to be able to oversee the academic quality of the program that will require skills in the language of instruction due to the written and verbal specificities of the theological disciplines. Resources in and for these programs, including for learning, teaching, and research—as well as the importance of local languages for professional and academic theological education, both formal and informal—at all levels are to be valued.

That said, the Board also has determined that because languages reflect their own cultures, identities, and ecologies, member schools offering degree programs in locations where English is not the primary means of communication or engagement must be attentive to the language needs of the educational communities in those locations. This could include, for example, ensuring that both faculty and students have shared language competencies, guaranteeing attention to cultural sensitivities and dispositions related to curriculums, instruction, pedagogies, evaluation, and contextual relevance, including language equity.

INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES. The Board has determined that quality theological education depends on member schools having sufficient and stable institutional resources to implement their educational programs. Such resources include human, financial, physical, technological, and shared resources. At their best, such resources are understood as an ecological whole that links an institution's past, present, and future. For example, a school's theological library that provides "the historical resources of the tradition, the scholarship of the academic disciplines, and the wisdom of communities of practice" illustrates this foundational meaning of the place and ecological function of resources in theological education. The Board also has acknowledged the unevenness of these resources among member schools and their educational partners elsewhere in the world, affecting the quality of the programs being offered. More importantly, such resources inevitably embody cultural values and assumptions that shape the structure, process, and content of curriculums, pedagogies, and, ultimately, human identities. Such resources and their uses also influence institutional and educational priorities, strategies, and preferences that often have a bearing on who benefits from such resources—or what counts as important resources for quality education. In other contexts, for example, sustainability may not be guaranteed only by a significant endowment but rather by historical (non-monetized) social capital.

For this reason, in addition to the responsibility of stewardship and sustainability, the Board is insistent that member schools attend to the culture-shaping consequences of resources. They should ensure that their use in international theological education refuses the temptation of marketization or commodification of learning, teaching, and research, and instead reflects the mutually reciprocal contextualities of the collaborating schools and the values of global awareness and engagement as described in the *Standards* (e.g., mutuality, shared resources, appropriateness, collaboration, accountability).

Areas recommended for reflection and action²

Global awareness and engagement—where the latter is not limited only to geophysical reach—are best served when a program and its location are aligned with all areas of the *Standards* and the relevant *Policies and Procedures* that are appropriate to the program and/or location being implemented or proposed. In this context, member schools are strongly urged by the Board to pay careful attention specifically to: (1) missional issues, (2) cultural issues, (3) educational program issues, (4) global partnership issues, and (5) other considerations.

1. Missional issues

One of the distinct features of the 2020 *Standards* specifically—and of ATS accreditation and quality assurance more generally—is the emphasis on defining, orienting, and delimiting the character and the function of a member school's mission for its life and work.

- a. *The importance for member schools to articulate the institutional and educational correlations between the institution's mission and international theological education, especially how the mission of the school informs, supports, and strengthens its programs beyond its national borders, how these programs serve the school's mission, and how global awareness and engagement provides the necessary normative orientation for the school's existing and proposed programs beyond their national borders. How does the*

² See also the relevant sections in the [2020 Standards of Accreditation with Self-Study Ideas](#).

program correlate with the institution's mission regarding international theological education, global awareness, and engagement? What evaluation measures will be used to demonstrate adequate support of the school's mission through the program or location?

- b. *The need to identify the ways in which the Commission member school will be affected by offering a program collaboratively with a constituency outside US and Canadian national borders.* How does the institution anticipate that it will be changed as a function of its partnership and the offering of an educational program internationally?

2. **Cultural issues**

For purposes of these guidelines, "cultural issues" refer to the sum of a nation's, peoples', and/or communities' concrete and specific patterns of behaviors, thoughts, dispositions, and values that give expressive form to their social and material life experiences, including but not limited to a school's institutional and educational practices.

- a. *The need to engage in some prior cultural analysis of the appropriateness of the educational goals and objectives of the program or location being proposed for the specific contexts and locations in which the program will be offered.* How do these educational goals and objectives apply and/or meet the criteria of relevance to the cultural contexts of both faculty and students who will be part of the school's international theological education programs or locations?
- b. *The need for involving a national constituency in the locations where the program is to be offered, especially in evaluating the cultural capacity of the US and/or Canadian school to offer the program in contextually and culturally appropriate ways.* Does the institution have the skills, capacity, and dispositions to function transculturally, including in such areas as competencies related to ethnic, linguistic, and cultural ethos and identities?
- c. *The need for collaboration with the school's non-US and/or Canadian constituencies in carefully evaluating the impact of offering a US and/or Canadian degree—in whatever modality—on the educational efforts of other, location-specific theological education institutions.* Will the financial resources or possible prestige of a US and/or Canadian graduate program negatively affect the ecology of theological education in the host country? Will the national/US and/or Canadian partnership unduly hurt programs of national institutions that do not have similar partnerships? Does the school's financial model for its international programs reflect both integrity and mutuality, especially how it influences the flow of funds and patterns of revenue generation and financial support for the international program? Will the Commission member school derive income from the international program or will it be a financial contributor to the program as offered internationally?

3. Educational program issues

While international theological education is more than credit-bearing or degree-granting education, such programs require attention because they are major sites that call forth the value of global awareness and engagement.

- a. *Acknowledging the limits of offering degree-granting theological education beyond national borders.* Historically, Commission member schools have three options regarding the offering of degree-granting theological education beyond their national borders. One option is to support a partner institution in the offering of a non-US and/or Canadian degree—a degree that conforms to the educational conventions of the country where the program is offered. In this case, the Board has limited approval responsibilities. The second option is to offer US and/or Canadian degrees internationally to non-US and/or non-Canadian citizens, following the *Policies and Procedures* for degree programs and additional locations previously noted. In this case, international theological education is best served if the Commission member school has a clear justification for offering its degrees in locations within or outside its national borders. Thirdly, a member school may offer a [joint degree](#) with a non-US/Canadian partner and is required to follow the *Policies and Procedures*, as in the second option. In all three, it would be important to ask what does a US and/or Canadian degree positively contribute to a non-US and/or non-Canadian setting?
- b. *Ensuring the clarity of the rationales for offering US and/or Canadian degree programs internationally.* If sufficient justification exists for a US and/or Canadian degree to be offered beyond their national borders, then the school's mission is best served if the school can demonstrate how the degree program being offered at a particular location meets the school's mission, theological commitments, and resources to ensure it is contextually appropriate. How does the institution deal with language, culture, and institutional resources so students truly have the benefits of a degree earned at a Commission member school—whatever those benefits may be?
- c. *Attending to the ways in which the ethos of the US or Canadian school is appropriately present in an educational program offered internationally without being purveyors of colonialism and neo-colonialism.* How is the unique character and ethos of a particular Commission member school evident in the program it offers internationally? How are they related to the contexts in which the program is being offered? Does the school's economic model for its international programs reflect both integrity and mutuality, especially how it influences the flow of funds and patterns of financial support for the international program? Will the Commission member school derive income from the international program, or will it be a financial contributor to the program as offered internationally?
- d. *Ensuring that learning, teaching, and research are attentive to issues of context, accountability, integrity, and resource adequacy.* How do schools attend to issues of context for their curriculums? Do they have the administrative, faculty, and student

protocols in place that are culturally responsive to local ministerial contexts? Additionally, how are adequate educational and technological resources, learning strategies, and pedagogies provided to strengthen the flow of scholarly information and to ensure a mutual exchange of knowledge? What criteria should govern such flows? How does the school use its resources and platforms to enhance the mutuality of such flows of knowledge and resources? What role should the educational partners and their publics and constituencies play in identifying, evaluating, and sharing this information and other resource flows? Regarding library services, how are adequate and appropriate print and digital library resources made available for the modalities, contexts, and languages of the school's degree programs? How does the school ensure cultural sensitivity, contextual relevancy, and equitable access in the library services and resources provided? How do schools ensure that students are not rendered invisible but are appropriately involved in the shared enterprise of theological education?

- e. *Demonstrating that the educational goals and objectives of the specific elements of international theological education are being achieved.* How will educational effectiveness be determined especially across national borders and cultural contexts? Does the school deploy appropriate, context-specific, and culturally sensitive evaluation tools, methods, and strategies attentive to the specific areas of their educational programs?

4. **Global partnership issues**

Global awareness and engagement are particularly concerned with the creating, nurturing, and improving of partnerships—within and without national borders—where partnerships are not only experienced as pluriform but also as diverse patterns and dispositions of mutuality, accountability, and belonging that aspire towards creativity, flexibility, and sustainability.

- a. *Collaborating with educational partners beyond national borders.* Many Commission member schools work with local and global partners. These partnerships take many forms, including degree programs and joint degree programs offered at locations other than their main campuses, student and faculty exchanges, and other organizational patterns of partnership. Within the school's national borders, networks of scholars and researchers from other parts of the world who are affiliated with Commission member schools have been working to establish partnerships among themselves. How does the school deploy its partnerships to strengthen its international theological education programs? How are these partnerships informed by the standards related to global awareness and engagement? Does the school have ways to evaluate the effectiveness of these partnerships? How do these partnerships genuinely embody mutuality, accountability, and belonging as well as creativity, flexibility, and sustainability?
- b. *Attending to the multidimensional landscapes and contexts of international theological education and their consequences and implications for a school's educational mission.* These multidimensional landscapes and contexts include, for example, degree-granting institutions, non-degree-granting organizations with substantial interests in theological

education, other (non-theological) institutions of higher learning (accredited or not), and other faith-based institutions of learning. Also included are local, regional, non-US or Canadian accrediting and quality assurance agencies that can be sources of programmatic insight. How has the school engaged with these multidimensional landscapes in contextually appropriate ways?

5. Other considerations

- a. *Identifying the practices and policies that will ensure that international theological education students are appropriately resourced and supported, and that their safety and well-being are protected.* As a matter of contextual accountability, how does the school ensure that its practices and policies are contextually sensitive and appropriate for the communities they aim to serve and adequate to the statutory requirements of the institutional authorities to which they are accountable? How does the school deal with language, culture, and institutional resources to serve students appropriately?
- b. *Providing evidence that the US and/or Canadian school has the necessary and appropriate authorizations to operate proposed locations beyond their national borders.* Has the school determined if they have met the statutory requirements for cross-border education?
- c. *Attending carefully to the concerns related to the different delivery modalities deployed in the school's international theological education programs, including [competency-based theological education](#).* For example, do member schools have guidelines for conducting degree programs in a distance learning format? How do changing delivery modalities of theological education affect the patterns of relationship among the member school's educational partners? How are the different modalities evaluated regarding quality, relevance, and appropriateness?
- d. *Focused evaluation visits of locations beyond US and/or Canadian national borders.* The Board generally requires a focused evaluation visit to a location at which half or more of a degree is offered (*Policies and Procedures* IV.E.1). As appropriate, the Board may invite a representative of a duly-recognized quality assurance agency in the region of the proposed program to participate as a member of the evaluation committee.
- e. *Visit fees.* Commission member schools are responsible for reimbursing the Commission for all costs incurred in conducting a focused evaluation visit, including travel, meals, lodging, immunizations required for travel, and the Board visit fee (see ATS [website](#)).