

Round Table Conversations  
FTESEA Consultation on Faculty Development and Formation in Asia and the Pacific  
September 25-28, 2022  
Manila, Philippines

Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, PhD  
Director of Accreditation and Global Engagement  
Association of Theological Schools  
10 Summit Park Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15275 USA  
[ruiz@ats.edu](mailto:ruiz@ats.edu)

“In what way does your organization accompany the promotion and strengthening of contextual faculty development and training in Asia and the Pacific?”

## Introduction

Thank you for your hospitality by including ATS in this important and timely consultation on doctoral education in Asia and the Pacific, including how institutions that partner with schools in theological education in Asia and the Pacific, such as those represented on this roundtable conversation, can accompany these schools in the promotion and strengthening of contextual faculty development and training in their specific locations.

## Institutional and Organizational Context

The mission of [ATS](#) is “To promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.” In addition, ATS’ Commission on Accrediting is mandated to (i) contribute to the enhancement and improvement of theological education through the accreditation of schools that are members of (ATS) and (ii) collect data from all member schools for use in accrediting and to provide the data resources supporting applied research undertaken by ATS.

The 280 member schools of ATS are post-baccalaureate seminaries, schools of theology, and departments of theology, that educate persons for the practice of ministry, for a range of church-related or faith-based professions, and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines. They include historic Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish seminaries, graduate schools of theology, and university departments of religion, and reflect a broad spectrum of doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and theological perspectives. At least 171 of these schools offer professional, research, and academic doctoral degrees and approximately 38 disciplinary areas. As of fall 2021, total enrolment by non-repeating head count for all post-baccalaureate degrees was 78,835 (72%); 15,865 of which were doctoral students (18%). [See [Data Visualization](#) for other data]

In order to be accredited ATS member schools must meet the expectations of the [Standards of Accreditation](#), one of which is for the institution to *act with integrity*. Standard 1.4, for example, states:

The school acts with integrity in its interactions with internal constituents (faculty, staff, students, and others) and external constituents (including the broader public). The 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. *Institutional integrity also includes how the school attends to global awareness and engagement within the context of its mission, theological commitments, and resources.*

For ATS one of the markers of quality and integrity is being globally aware and engaged—hence, the [ATS Global Awareness and Engagement Initiative \(GAEI\)](#) where accompaniment such as has been described by others at this roundtable, is “nested.”

GAEI serves both ATS and the Commission as they fulfill their mission and mandate. The overall goal of the GAEI is to define, embody, and cultivate global awareness and engagement among ATS member schools and their publics and constituencies.

GAEI has six strategic directions: (1) understanding effective partnerships, (2) global engagement within North America, (3) cultivating scholarly and programmatic “trade routes,” (4) contributing to a pan-Christian conversation on theological education, (5) educational and degree programs of study, and (6) continuing research and care.

GAEI is based on the three-fold value proposition that (1) quality of and accountability in accredited graduate theological education “includes how [schools] attend[s] to global awareness and engagement within the context of its mission, theological commitments, and resources” (See Standard 1.4); that (2) global awareness and engagement in learning, teaching, and research is demonstrated “by helping students respect, engage, and learn from global perspectives and sources, understand the global connectedness and mutuality of theological education, and increase their capacities for service and learning in globally interconnected contexts” (See Standard 3.4); and that (3) the future(s) of “good” theological education in North America, at least in the context of ATS, requires that member schools commit to a mutual process of educating each other about what global awareness and engagement means for and in their respective and shared contexts.

Some illustrations of ATS programmatic accompaniment efforts

Over the past five years, at least, GAEI has engaged in the following programs as part of the implementation of at least four of its six board-approved strategic directions. These four *integrated* areas are: (a) understanding effective partnerships, (b) global engagement within

North America, (c) cultivating scholarly and programmatic “trade routes” (exchanges), and (d) contributing to a pan-Christian conversation on theological education.

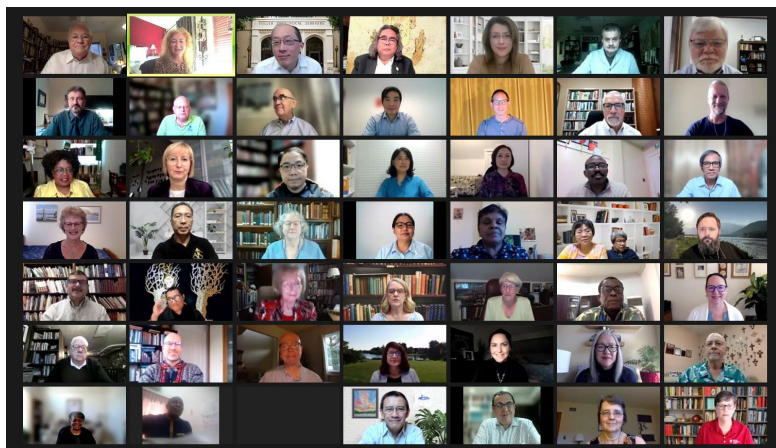
- 1) As part of its collaborative work with the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), the GAEI over the years has arranged for resource persons from ATS member schools for ATESEA’s Teachers’ Academies, ATU methodology seminars and doctoral colloquia, other special themed webinars, and accreditation visits (see for example, [Doctoral Colloquium](#)).
- 2) The GAEI has also collaborated with the Temple Foundation-funded Biola Seminary Formation Project by co-organizing its second webinar on spiritual formation partnering with St. Andrews Theological Seminary in Quezon City serving as host and attended by faculty from ATESEA member schools.
- 3) In collaboration with other ATS program staff and other ATS member schools, the GAEI organized informal conversations with selected resource persons from different parts of the world, on topics of interest related to global awareness and engagement. The first [webinar](#) (held in 2021) for ATS presidents and deans, and members of both the ATS Board of Directors and the Board of Commissioners, was hosted by ATS and Western Theological Seminary, with the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and the pastor of Sutton Vineyard Church in London, as resource persons. These resource persons addressed the theme: The future(s) of global theological education and the challenges of global leadership, including faculty.
- 4) As a major partner of the [Global Forum of Theological Educators \(GFTE\)](#), ATS through the GAEI provided leadership and support for the Global Forum of Theological Educators’ conferences, the last one held virtually in 2021 on the theme “Theological education as formation: Conversations on practices, contexts, futures.” The event was well-attended, with participants from at least 40 countries, representing all five ecclesial family constituencies of the GFTE (Evangelical, Pentecostal, Historic Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Independent Chinese and African Churches).
- 5) GAEI and Leadership Education (of ATS Programs and Services) have a joint ongoing five-year NCF-funded project entitled [Intercultural Sensitivity and Global Awareness Training](#) especially for faculty which explores the intersections of race, global awareness and engagement, and intercultural competencies assuming that diversity is constitutive of these areas of life and work.
- 6) ATS and the International Council of Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) has a joint agreement known as the ["Playa Bonita Affirmations"](#) to pursue joint educational activities and support each other’s programs and educational resources, including in learning, teaching, and research. They also agreed to, explore the possibility of strengthening cooperation in the areas of accreditation and quality assurance, including

the creation of a degree program equivalency form and process to assist member schools in determining and documenting the equivalencies of degree programs/credits offered by their respective constituencies.

The activities listed above are examples of how the GAEI engages both its member schools and global partners in the work of theological education, in order to:

- deliver educational content to intentionally diverse audiences within and without North America through webinars, consultations, lectures, and publications around such themes as formation and contextualization, global engagement, partnerships, and relationships, models of educational delivery, and cross-cultural quality assurance (see, for example, [Proper planning can lead to effective online accreditation visits across the globe](#)).
- identify, build, and strengthen institutional partnerships with current global partners that focus on shared concerns (e.g., ATESEA, GFTE, ICETE), focusing on the cultivation of reciprocal scholarly and programmatic “trade routes” (exchanges) (see, for example, [New ATS Standards provide framework for global sustainability among theological libraries](#)).
- share resources, based primarily on requests from partners around the world, particularly in the areas of learning, teaching, and research, librarianship, governance and financial expertise, and accreditation provided by ATS staff, as well as by resource persons associated with ATS member schools (see, for example, ATESEA’s webinars on [Risk Management](#), [Theological Librarianship](#), and [Assessment](#)).
- create networking opportunities, cultivate relationships, and engage in occasional issue-based collaboration with theological-, educational-, and faith-based organizations within and without North America (see, for example, [Association for Theological Education in South East Asia met in Philippines for General Assembly](#)).

- 7) continue convening strategically planned global gatherings in various modalities, intentionally diverse ecclesially, nationally, regionally—in cooperation with the *Global Forum of Theological Educators* (GFTE)—contributing, thereby to a pan-





Christian conversation on theological education. (See, for example, GFTE Virtual 2021, “Theological education as formation: Conversations on practices, contexts, futures” in which Evangelical, Pentecostal, Historic Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Independent Chinese and African Churches, ecclesial families from over 40 countries participated).

### What GAEI is learning

As a result of these activities, and in the context of their implementation, ongoing planning, and evaluation, the GAEI is learning more fully the following:

- 1) a growing conviction expressed by those involved in these programs that accredited graduate theological education is not only now thoroughly and undeniably “global” in character, but that any future for theological education particularly in the global north may depend on how ATS comprehends and addresses the challenges posed by its current global engagements, particularly in the context of effective partnerships, strategic global engagement within North America, intentional cultivation of mutual scholarly and programmatic “trade routes,” and, participation in a pan-Christian conversation on theological education.
- 2) an increasing consensus among participants in these activities that global awareness and engagement now must be understood more fully not only as geographical reach or extension, but also as cultural, educational, and theological *practice* which are directly related to diversity, intercultural competence, contextuality, and change.
- 3) an acknowledged need to embrace theological education, both formal and informal, as a gathering, sharing, and mutual “learning together” among the member schools and their publics—local, national, regional, global; at the same time that attention is given to the unevenness of certain resources for theological education, whether physical, financial, technological, and their consequences for quality education and participation in the sharing of resources.
- 4) a need among those who exercise leadership of the GAEI to rethink in a major way the meaning of (ATS) “global engagement,” including the desirability of diversifying its modalities of engagement in the light of the wisdom and practices of its global partners

and ATS' recognized need to be a hybrid-learning organization where "learning together" and documenting and disseminating more widely that learning, have become acknowledged institutional values.

### Some next steps

In light of what it has been learning, the GAEI is organizing a number of programmatic activities, directed towards the accompaniment of its existing global partners, as well as other possible strategic partners, and framed by GAEI strategic directions, especially with increased attention to the cultivation and resourcing of new and diverse scholarly and programmatic "trade routes," including:

- creating regularized opportunities for information-sharing and their documentation regarding the activities related to global awareness and engagement initiative through already existing sharing mechanisms of the organization, organizing occasional issue-focused discussions with GAEI global partners (see for example, [Global Theological Conversations](#)), sharing of resources—digital and otherwise, in the context of the more recent affirmation of the institutional values of ATS as a hybrid learning organization, including the strategy of "learning together" and "doing things better together."
- developing sustained and sustainable processes of formal and informal consultation, education, and training regarding globally-shaped theological education—and how it may be enhanced and/or improved through the contributions not only of member schools, ATS staff, and existing ATS and COA programming, but of ATS' global partners as well, and informed by context-specific values, commitments, and dispositions of global awareness and engagement, intercultural competencies, and diversity (see, for example, [ATS Engage](#)).
- increasing intentional, structured, coordinated, and principled mechanisms of program planning within the organization and global partners for the purpose of exploring, on the one hand, how the values, commitments, and dispositions of global awareness and engagement, intercultural competencies, and diversity can be incorporated into the different existing programs of the Association and the Commission, and on the other hand, how these existing programs may be leveraged to strengthen collaboration among program partners, with increased attention to the cultivation of and resourcing of new and diverse scholarly and programmatic "trade routes" —including in the areas of faculty development and formation, and,
- developing and implementing a larger, more intentional communications strategy consisting of documentation, production of materials for use and re-use, and their dissemination. While modest steps have been taken in the past in this area, there remains a need to regularize these efforts. A digital, curated, resource hub on global awareness and engagement that includes materials from global partners and Global South sources, is being contemplated.

Conclusion: “The fullness of the earth is the glory of God”

In its most straightforward form, the ATS strategy for accompaniment given its institutional, statutory and self-imposed limitations, involves primarily the strengthening of the normative grounds for and encouragement of “good theological education” offered by its member schools to ensure that these schools attend to the expectations of the Standards of Accreditation in the general development and implementation of their programs offered both at locations beyond and within their national borders (see [Guidelines for Global Awareness and Engagement](#)). Such accompaniment is understood within the context of an educational ecology that includes human, financial, physical, technological, and shared resources that carefully attends to missional, cultural, educational, and global partnership issues.

The goal, which is part of a school’s institutional integrity, is to be responsible and accountable for our own *educational* house, fully understanding that it can only be done by acknowledging the right of others to their own homes, and accepting our shared obligation to create, nurture, and defend an equitably shared, if not common educational οἰκουμένη (*oikouménē*). The wager, if one might put it metaphorically, is that “good fences make good neighbors.” Or, perhaps, theologically put, not only that “*the whole earth is full of God’s glory,*” but also that “*the fullness of the earth is the glory of God*” (Isaiah 6.3).