

2020

# STANDARDS OF ACCREDITATION

*(with self-study ideas)*



The Association of Theological Schools  
The Commission on Accrediting

# ***Standards of Accreditation*** **for The Commission on Accrediting** **of The Association of Theological Schools**

NOTE: This copy of the *Standards of Accreditation* includes “Self-Study Ideas” that are described on page 4 of the Preamble below. A 2024 revision includes updates to the “ideas” for Standard 3.1 and 10.10, and minor editorial changes. The February 2025 revision includes updates to the “ideas” for Standard 3.6.

## **Table of Contents**

	<u>Page</u>
<b>Preamble</b>	2
<b>1. Mission and Integrity</b>	5
<b>2. Planning and Evaluation</b>	9
<b>3. Student Learning and Formation</b>	12
<b>4. Master’s Degree Programs</b>	18
<b>5. Doctoral Degree Programs</b>	23
<b>6. Library and Information Services</b>	29
<b>7. Student Services</b>	32
<b>8. Faculty</b>	36
<b>9. Governance and Administration</b>	40
<b>10. Institutional Resources</b>	44

## Preamble to Standards of Accreditation

### Standards and Accreditation

Accreditation is about quality assurance for various publics and ongoing improvement for theological schools, especially regarding student learning and formation. It is a voluntary process through which schools mutually assure one another's educational quality with an eye toward ongoing improvement, based on standards. Through self-review, a school has regular opportunities to reflect intentionally on its distinctive strengths and its areas of desired growth in light of its unique mission and distinct context and in light of the standards. Self-review then supports the school's efforts in planning, evaluation, and imagination. Through peer review, an accredited school is endorsed by its peers as one of quality and integrity, which affirms the school's value to society, as well as its trustworthiness.

Within the context of graduate theological education, accreditation is an ongoing way to live into the intersections of faith and learning. It involves giving close attention to the histories that ground us and the visions of the future that draw us forward. It is grounded in care for people, communities, and schools, now and in the future. It emphasizes stewardship and responsibility, while also holding space for grace and interdependence. It acknowledges the centrality of the unique mission of each individual school, while also recognizing that there is more that brings us together than separates us. Accreditation helps schools improve—not simply for their own sake, but primarily for the benefit of others, including the religious communities and other constituencies who serve and are served by their students. For all these reasons, accreditation is a deeply theological act with a focus on students, especially on student learning and formation.

### Standards and Membership Priorities

Since 1936, the ATS Commission on Accrediting has maintained standards for its member schools, developed and approved by the membership—always with a focus on how those standards can help member schools improve in educational quality for the sake of their students. The current standards, approved in 2020, are based on the following membership priorities:

- A. The standards seek in all ways to embody the ATS mission: *“to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public”* and the ATS Commission purpose: *“to contribute to the enhancement and improvement of theological education through the accreditation of schools.”*
- B. The standards recognize and respect member schools' unique missions and distinctive theological commitments, while upholding common understandings and aspirations that draw us together as a community amidst our diversity.
- C. The standards are based on a bond of trust between member schools and peer reviewers, including the ATS Board of Commissioners and the ATS staff. Integrity and transparency, along with reliable evidence and professional judgment, are crucial to the accreditation process.
- D. The standards ensure through evidence (qualitative and quantitative) that schools are effectively accomplishing their educational missions and continually seeking to improve in the achievement of those missions.
- E. The standards focus primarily on the quality of graduate theological education, attending to how well student learning and formation is achieved, however and wherever students are engaged.
- F. The standards focus on the health of both schools and the individual degree programs they offer.

- G. The standards seek to simplify the task of accreditation in ways that support member schools and their publics, including students and the communities they seek to serve, with an emphasis on accountability, creativity, flexibility, and sustainability.

### **Standards and Their Purposes**

These standards emphasize a return to first principles: why does the school exist and in what ways does it contribute to the betterment of faith communities and society. They articulate the shared understandings and accrued wisdom of the ATS membership over many decades, while also attending to the diversity and variety of our schools today. As such, the standards reflect agreed-upon educational principles that help each member school better achieve its distinctive mission in light of its particular context. They assure the public of each school's educational quality—based on the professional judgment of peer and public members. They also foster flexibility and innovation. In all these ways, these standards help schools embody their missions, grow in light of their missions, and be transparent about their missions.

These standards are designed to be used in the following ways: (1) by a school in a self-study process to evaluate how well it meets the standards, culminating in a self-study report; (2) by a group of peer evaluators who review the self-study report and visit the school to verify how well it meets the standards, culminating in an evaluation committee report; and (3) by a representative and publicly recognized accrediting body of peers and public members (called commissioners) who review the school's self-study report and the evaluation committee's report in light of the standards, culminating in a decision to grant or renew (or not) the school's accreditation for a specified period of time, with any specified conditions. Standards are also used by a school seeking approval for a substantive change outside of its current accreditation scope (e.g., initiating a degree at a new level) and by commissioners in determining whether to approve any such change. Beyond all these formal outcomes, these standards also attempt to describe graduate theological education in ways that serve our schools and students now and help them grow into the future.

### **Standards and Their Interpretation**

These standards articulate *principles of quality for graduate theological education that all schools meet in various ways*. “*Principles of quality*” means these statements focus on principles that the membership collectively views as characteristic of quality. “*For graduate theological education*” means these standards focus on quality for graduate schools of theology, not the entire enterprise of theological education. “*That all schools meet*” means these are standards, not suggestions, and all schools are held accountable to them. “*In various ways*” means each school has flexibility in how it meets them, which reflects a clear commitment in these standards to contextualized accountability. “*In various ways*” also means that every school can find room for improvement, which reflects their “aspirational” nature. These standards are founded upon and framed by ten educational principles listed in the *Self-Study Handbook*.

Because these standards focus on principles, they do not assume one particular type or structure of school to be “the norm.” For example, previous versions of the Commission standards assumed that most schools were freestanding, and that any other type of school must then explain how it differed from that norm. These standards attend to the reality that a majority of member schools are in significant relationships with other partners, whether a university/college, a denomination/ecclesial body, another ATS school, a consortium of schools, or some other model. At times, the term “embedded school” is used in these standards to highlight issues that might be particularly significant to schools that

are organized around such partnerships. However, these standards do not have a separate set or subset of standards for embedded schools; instead, all schools are held accountable to all standards—within the context described in these standards.

These standards are all stated as simple declarative sentences (e.g., “planning focuses on...”), rather than as “shall” or “should” or “must” statements. They are also stated in ways that allow for a range of responses (not a simple “meets/doesn’t meet”) and in ways that reflect the “highest (not lowest) common denominator.” They frequently use words like “appropriate” and “in ways consistent with the school’s mission.” That is intentional, to underscore that written standards must be interpreted—first by the school in its context, next by a group of peer evaluators with their professional judgment, and finally by a Board of Commissioners who are elected by and act on behalf of the membership. The importance of interpretation does not mean that these standards can mean whatever a school or an evaluation committee or the Board wants them to mean. The structure and style of these standards speak to that issue in three important ways:

- (1) Each standard has an opening paragraph that provides a clear and concise summary of that standard and introduces essential elements of that standard.
- (2) Each summary standard is followed by a series of numbered statements, all of which are considered part of that standard, that clarify and amplify that standard’s essential elements.
- (3) The numbered statements in this version are followed by Self-Study Ideas (in shaded boxes) that are meant to give schools *ideas* about how they might engage the standards in their self-study reports. These *ideas* mostly use the word “might” to indicate that these are not the only ways schools can demonstrate that they meet the standards—which they must do in some way—nor are these necessarily the best ways for all schools. Some *ideas* use the word “should” to describe common expectations that derive directly from the standards or that address specific Commission requirements. Seven *ideas* use the word “must” to highlight regulatory requirements for Title IV schools—summarized in 1.6 (see 3.2, 3.11, 3.12, 7.5, 7.9, 7.11, and 10.7; see also Appendix B in *Self-Study Handbook*). Schools, however, should focus on the standards, not the *ideas* nor nuances between “might” or “should.” The *ideas* are mostly optional and to be used only if they are helpful. In no sense are the *ideas* to be viewed as subsidiary standards, which they are not. The Board and evaluation committees will review schools on the basis of the *Standards* and *Policies*, not the *ideas*.

[NOTE: The Board has developed a new [Self-Study Handbook](#) that provides further information about the self-study process, including how schools that are dually accredited can use evidence for both agencies and how self-study reports (up to one-half shorter than now) can be streamlined in ways appropriate to each school’s context and resources.]

Finally, the standards are written to be read holistically, with other standards often providing broader context or more specific nuance to a particular standard. An issue raised in one standard may be raised in other standards with additional perspectives. For example, mission is introduced in Standard 1 but is raised again in every other standard, emphasizing the centrality of that issue. For another example, diversity is raised initially in Standard 1.5 from a broad perspective but is raised in several other standards (e.g., Standard 7.3 on students and Standard 8.2 on faculty) with more specific emphases. Standards are best interpreted in light of all the standards as a whole.

## Standards of Accreditation

### Standard 1. Mission and Integrity

**1. Mission and Integrity:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning guided by theological missions that are achieved with institutional integrity. Schools have missions appropriate to graduate theological education and to their own contexts. Missions are clearly and publicly stated, widely accepted, broadly used, regularly reviewed, and changed as needed. In achieving their missions, schools conduct their activities with institutional integrity, especially in areas related to human interactions, diversity, legal obligations, and Commission responsibilities.

#### *Mission*

**1.1** The school's mission is appropriate to the purposes and values of graduate theological education and to its own context and constituencies. The mission is clearly and publicly stated and articulates the school's primary purpose(s), institutional identity, and key constituencies served. However expressed, student learning and formation are central to the school's mission.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by identifying its mission statement (as well as any companion statements, such as a statement of purpose, core values, or institutional commitments) and discussing how the mission statement is both appropriate to graduate theological education in general and particular to the contexts and constituencies the school wishes to serve. The self-study might describe how the school makes this statement readily available to internal and external stakeholders (for example, citing where this statement is published). The self-study might also reflect on the meaning of its mission statement, including how the statement emphasizes the education and formation of students (using whatever language is most appropriate to the school), how it identifies and serves the school's primary constituencies (including, if appropriate, particular faith communities, geographic areas, types of students, and/or preferred vocational outcomes), and how this mission captures the unique identity of the school. Embedded schools or schools that exist primarily in collaboration with other entities might reflect on the ways in which the statement of mission or purpose of the theological school relates to the mission or purpose of the partner entity, including some indication of how the mission of the theological school is consistent with and complementary to the mission of the other entity.

**1.2** The school's mission is widely accepted by key constituencies—internal and external—and is used broadly by the school to guide its institutional and educational activities, including planning, evaluation, resource allocation, and decision-making.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by presenting data (e.g., survey results) indicating that key groups (e.g., governing body, faculty, staff, students, graduates, donors, supporting organizations) understand and support the mission, referencing documents (e.g., board minutes, faculty minutes, course syllabi, strategic plan, evaluation plan) that reflect how the mission is used as a guiding statement. This might include discussion of how the mission is enacted in distinctive and appropriate ways by various stakeholder groups. The self-study might demonstrate how the mission statement not only helps the theological school select which activities to engage but also which ones to let go. The self-study might also describe how staffing patterns, annual budgets, and/or other resource allocations reflect priorities consistent with this mission. Embedded schools might also demonstrate how the mission statement helps the related entity or partnering institution understand the value and distinctive focus of the theological school.

**1.3** The school's mission statement is regularly reviewed by the appropriate governing body and other key leaders to ensure that it continues to reflect the school's current realities and future hopes.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the school's recent practices, as well as its future plans, for reviewing the mission statement. If the statement has been recently reviewed (e.g., within the most recent period of accreditation), the school might describe this process and reference documents (e.g., minutes of meetings) regarding the last review of its mission statement, indicating key constituencies involved and narrating what changes (if any) were made, why changes were made, and how the school evaluates the effectiveness of those changes. If the mission statement has not been recently reviewed, the school should include a specific plan for how it will engage in such a review, including a timeline for the review and the identification of key constituencies that will be part of that review. In either case, the self-study might reflect on how the mission statement serves both realistic and aspirational functions, with attention to the school's current situation and emerging possibilities.

## **Integrity**

**1.4** 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.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how its sense of institutional integrity is grounded in the school's identity and theological commitments. It might also cite policies and practices that highlight fairness, honesty, and accountability in its interactions with employees and students. It might further discuss how the school's public communications (its website, catalog, and promotional materials) are accurate and fairly represent the school to its various publics, including prospective students (see *Policies and Procedures*, VII.A.6, on how a school communicates its accreditation status to the public). It might present information that indicates a healthy working environment (e.g., employee survey results, stable employment trends, fair and equitable compensation patterns). The self-study might include examples of effective patterns of leadership, such as practices of clear and regular communication, and might also reflect on how it has responded to challenges within its institutional environment. Some schools might have particular ways to address issues of institutional integrity and accountability; for example, a Canadian school might describe how it is attending to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (See Standards 7.6 and 10.2 for additional policies and practices related to addressing student grievances and employee grievances.) A school might demonstrate how it attends to global awareness and engagement by discussing why and how it seeks to connect institutionally with the larger theological world, appropriate to its mission, theological commitments, and resources. That might include such avenues as international partnerships, participating in global associations, and networking with others outside North America (see Standard 3.4 for demonstrating global awareness and engagement in educational programs).

**1.5** The school acts with integrity by valuing, defining, and demonstrating diversity within the context of its mission, history, constituency, and theological commitments. The school has a publicly available stance on diversity that describes its understanding of and commitment to this membership-wide shared value, and the school uses that stance to enhance its diversity.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing what diversity means in its context and how it embodies its commitments to diversity in practice. The self-study might identify the school's stance (e.g., statement(s) or policy) on diversity and discuss how it attends to such areas as gender, race and ethnicity, nationality, religion, and nondiscrimination in ways appropriate to its context. This might include the school's understanding of the theological and educational importance of diversity, and how that relates to its partners (e.g., college/university, faith tradition, heritage). The self-study might demonstrate how the school has developed, publicized, evaluated, and revised (as needed) a clear and public stance on diversity, as well as how key groups (e.g., board, faculty, staff, students, graduates) understand and engage that stance. This might include both an emphasis on transparency (how the school is clear to its stakeholders and wider audiences regarding its stance) and on how the school continues to grapple with identified issues. The self-study might refer to documents (e.g., board and faculty minutes, strategic plan,

evaluation plan) that demonstrate how the school's stance on diversity is used for institutional and educational planning and evaluation (including resource allocation). If a school does not yet have a clear and public stance on diversity, it might use the self-study process as a time to develop a diversity stance, and then, in the self-study report, to describe how this stance is being implemented and how it will be evaluated. The self-study might demonstrate that the school has policies and practices (such as those related to employment or recruitment) that demonstrate the value of diversity in ways consistent with its mission, history, constituency, and theological commitments. The self-study might also describe how the school's stance on diversity commits the school to improvement in these areas, as well as reflect on the impact of its stance by offering concrete evidence of improvements (e.g., those achieved during the last period of accreditation) and identifying continued areas of needed growth, including a concrete plan for how to address these needs. As part of this, the self-study might find it helpful to review the school's enrollment and employment trends (including faculty and administrative leadership), in addition to the other documents named above (see also Standards 3.3-4, 7.3, 8.2, 9.2, 9.9, and 10.1 for other references to diversity related to learning and formation, students, faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees).

Within its self-study and/or diversity stance, the school might articulate how it attends to the Commission's educational principle on diversity, that "Graduate theological education values and demonstrates diversity in its many manifestations, including attention to intercultural competencies, global awareness and engagement, and underrepresented and marginalized groups" (from the introduction to the *Self-Study Handbook*). The school is particularly encouraged to reflect on its own history and trajectory as it relates to diversity in its own context. For example, under earlier Commission Standards (former 2.5 and 2.6), schools were asked "to enhance participation and leadership of persons of color" and "promote the participation and leadership of women." This new standard no longer assumes one experience to be the norm and anything else as "other." Rather, this standard asks each school to consider its own legacy and values, in light of overall Commission expectations. A Historically Black Theological School would likely engage this differently from a predominantly white school; a Canadian school, differently from a US school; and both might differ from a school with teaching locations outside of North America.

**1.6** The school acts with integrity by following all applicable laws and regulations, beginning with documents that demonstrate its authority to operate and confer degrees wherever it does so. Any school that participates in US federal student aid programs meets all governmental regulations for those programs.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its authority to operate and grant degrees, including any necessary legal and ecclesial or denominational authority, and by citing appropriate documents where such authority is established (e.g., charter, articles of incorporation, bylaws, etc.). This might include the legal authority to operate in whatever locations it provides educational programs (e.g., schools operating in the US have appropriate state authorizations to operate physical locations or to enroll out-of-state students in online programs).

Schools that participate in US Title IV federal loan programs (whether US or Canadian) must not only demonstrate that they meet all applicable *Standards and Policies and Procedures*, but also comply with any additional Title IV responsibilities. Those responsibilities include these seven issues: federal definition of a credit hour (Standard 3.2), Satisfactory Academic Progress policy (Standard 3.11), articulation agreements (Standard 3.12), Clery Act on campus security (Standard 7.5), student loan cohort default rates (Standard 7.9), use of placement rates for marketing or recruitment (Standard 7.11), and federal financial aid audits (Standard 10.7). Theological schools embedded in a college or university typically rely on information from that entity to demonstrate compliance.

**1.7** The school acts with integrity in its Commission membership responsibilities by following all applicable *Standards and Policies and Procedures* and by responding accurately and punctually to accreditation-related requests from the Board of Commissioners.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by showing its timely and appropriate responses to all accreditation-related requests from the Board of Commissioners during its most recent period of accreditation, including submission of any required reports (*Policies and Procedures*, III.E), petitions for approval of any substantive changes (*Policies and Procedures*, IV), responses to monitoring requests (*Policies and Procedures*, III.M), and completion of the ATS Annual Report Form (*Policies and*



*Procedures, III.A*). Schools may request a copy of their “accrediting history” from the Commission for a summary of their accreditation-related actions. If the school has failed to meet Commission expectations in any of these areas, it should include a plan for timely and appropriate responses in the future. Schools might also demonstrate engagement with this standard by describing (in the introduction to the self-study report) an overall institutional self-study process that is participatory, comprehensive, thoughtful, and effective, as well as by ensuring that evaluation committees are provided accurate and complete information regarding any reasonable accreditation-related requests made in conjunction with an accreditation visit. The school’s completed self-study report, itself, also serves as evidence in support of this standard.

## Standard 2. Planning and Evaluation

**2. Planning and Evaluation:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning guided by institutional visions that inform thoughtful planning grounded in ongoing evaluation. Planning is a mission-guided and broad-based process that focuses on strategic priorities in light of current realities, resulting in a plan that is appropriately resourced, actively implemented, regularly reviewed, and periodically updated. Evaluation is a simple, systematic, and sustained process that helps schools understand how well they are achieving their missions and then helps schools use that information to better achieve their missions, especially regarding student learning and formation.

### *Planning*

**2.1** Planning is a mission-guided process that seeks appropriate ways to better achieve the school's purpose(s) amidst changing circumstances. It is a broad-based process that engages appropriate constituencies to develop a plan that is widely owned.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the intentional and ongoing processes that it uses for strategic thinking and planning. The self-study should describe the school's most recent strategic planning process, demonstrating how this process involved relevant stakeholders (including the governing body) and describing how the plan has been disseminated. A school related to another entity (e.g., embedded in a university) might demonstrate ways in which its own strategic planning (e.g., at the department or school level) integrates with or builds upon the strategic planning process of the related entity. It might also describe ways in which personnel from the theological school participate in strategic planning processes of the broader institution and/or how the broader institution attends to the purpose and role of the theological school as it engages in strategic planning. A school that is closely connected to a denomination, faith community, or other entity might show how the school's strategic planning aligns with and is informed by the mission and strategic planning efforts of its partners.

**2.2** Planning focuses on priorities that are most strategic for achieving the school's mission and vision and that recognize both the school's current realities and future possibilities.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by reflecting on how and how effectively the plan helps the school prioritize its actions, allocate its resources, and attend to both short- and long-term institutional viability, in light of the changing nature of graduate theological education and the religious landscape, all in service to the school's mission and context.

**2.3** Planning results in a written plan that articulates the school's strategic priorities in ways that clarify how each priority will be achieved, including appropriate human, financial, physical, and technological resources needed for that priority.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by evaluating whether its strategic plan is clear and specific enough for all appropriate stakeholders to understand how the plan is to be implemented, to recognize the resources needed for implementation, to identify the people or groups responsible for implementing each priority, and to articulate a timeline for implementation and evaluation. The school's current strategic plan should be included in the appendices to the self-study report.

**2.4** The school's plan is actively implemented, regularly evaluated, and revised as needed, attending not only to individual priorities but also to the plan's overall ability to help the school advance its mission.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the school's most recent strategic plan was engaged after it was adopted, including how the school's leadership and/or governing body reviewed the progress of implementation. It should show how the school attended not only to the achievement of specific goals or outcomes but also the extent to which the plan as a whole has been effective, with examples of how the school has revised the plan as needed. The self-study report should also discuss how the school intends to engage in strategic planning in the near future (e.g., 2-4 years), including how it intends to utilize the learnings from the self-study process in the service of strategic planning.

## Evaluation

**2.5** Evaluation is a process that engages appropriate constituencies to discern how well the various aspects of the school's mission are being achieved and how its educational and institutional outcomes could be maintained if met or improved if not met. Evaluation attends to all functions, personnel, and programs of the school. Evaluation also informs the school's planning and budgeting processes.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school should demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its overall understanding of the role of evaluation in the life of the school, and particularly how it engages in such processes not just for the sake of external review (e.g., accreditation) but also for self-understanding and continuous improvement. It should show how it engages in evaluation at various levels of the school (including degree program effectiveness, program review, personnel evaluations, department/unit effectiveness, and the review of the school as a whole) and explain how the information gained from evaluation processes is utilized to improve and implement the school's educational and institutional outcomes. It should describe which stakeholders are involved in various evaluation processes, identifying their roles and responsibilities in each stage of the process, and describe how the results of evaluation are then integrated into institutional decision-making more broadly (see also Standard 3.7). In the self-study, the school might also indicate where it intends to discuss evaluation more deeply in light of particular standards and contexts (e.g., student learning assessment should be discussed under each degree program, evaluation of the library should be discussed within the library standard).

Standards 2.5-8 use the word "evaluation" to address both institutional evaluation and student learning assessment (something the earlier Commission Standards treated separately). While the stakeholders involved in these two types of evaluation may differ (e.g., the faculty may take primary responsibility for evaluating student learning, whereas other types of institutional evaluation may be coordinated by administrators or trustees), the ultimate goal is same: achievement of the school's mission, for the sake of the school's students. Schools are encouraged to consult the Commission's *Reflective Guide to Effective Evaluation for Theological Schools*, with examples of successful evaluation strategies. ATS also provides numerous resources for evaluation, many of which may be helpful in the self-study process. Schools are also reminded that evaluation is a theme woven throughout the Standards (and that, in a way, the entire self-study process is an invitation to participate in broad and deep institutional evaluation).

**2.6** Evaluation is a simple, systematic, and sustained process that (a) identifies key educational and institutional outcomes (including learning outcomes for each degree program); (b) systematically and regularly gathers evidence related to each outcome (with a mixture of direct and indirect measures and quantitative and qualitative data); (c) engages appropriate stakeholders (especially faculty for educational outcomes) on a sustained basis to analyze and reflect upon how well the evidence indicates that each educational and institutional outcome is being achieved; and (d) uses those analyses and reflections for educational and institutional improvement.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by showing how it engages and "closes the loop" as it evaluates its educational and institutional programming, both by explaining how the full cycle of evaluation is embedded in the school's evaluation plan(s) and by giving recent examples of how the cycle has been enacted, such as curricular improvements that have followed a review of how well students are achieving the learning outcomes of each degree. Attention should be given to each step of the process (items a-d in the standard), as well as to how the overall evaluation process is appropriate to the context of the school and how it supports ongoing improvement. While some levels of evaluation may be guided by or happen apart from the school itself (e.g., at a university-wide institutional effectiveness office for an embedded school), the self-study should still review the ways in which the school holds itself accountable for its institutional and educational program, how it connects the evaluation process to its own mission and degree learning outcomes, and how it engages in institutional learning and continuous improvement.

As this standard indicates, at its best, evaluation is a simple process—meaning it is intentionally focused and does not try to look at everything the school does; it emphasizes high-priority goals and outcomes, not measuring only things that are easy to measure. It is implemented in ways that are appropriate for the size and resources of the institution, considering various factors (e.g., size of student body, number of degree programs, and number of faculty/staff). It attends to a variety of types of evidence (quantitative and qualitative, direct and indirect) in order to create a full picture of the activity or program. It also leads to

findings that can be readily articulated to stakeholders, so that evaluation contributes to self-understanding and can be utilized for planning and growth. Developing a “simple” plan can be a challenging process, and schools are encouraged to consult the Commission’s *Reflective Guide to Effective Evaluation for Theological Schools* and other resources for support. Evaluation of each degree program is also discussed under Standards 4 and 5. The *Self-Study Handbook* includes a description of how a school might differentiate between its general discussion of evaluation here and its specific discussion of evaluation under each degree program.

**2.7** Evaluation is formalized in one or more brief, cogently written plans that identify the parties responsible for evaluation and include a list of artifacts or instruments used to measure each outcome, a timeline that indicates how those artifacts or instruments are used, and clear benchmarks for evaluating success. Evaluation plans also indicate how often and by whom the evaluation plan is updated.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school should demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its plan(s) and including the plan(s) in the appendices to the self-study report. For most schools, this would include a plan that attends specifically to student learning (in particular, how well students meet the learning outcomes identified for each degree program) as well as one or more plans that attend to the effectiveness of relevant institutional processes (e.g., evaluation of the strategic plan, evaluation of various departments or programs, evaluation of personnel). A small school might have a single plan (perhaps with sections that focus on each element of the school), but attention should still be given to the specific learning outcomes of each individual degree program and to sources of information that best support the essential task of making decisions about educational effectiveness. Similarly, while an embedded school or a school that exists primarily in collaboration with another institution may be largely covered by plans that are outside of the theological school itself, it should still have a document that clarifies how it intends to live out its mission, including (but not limited to) how its degree programs align with its student learning outcomes in ways that focus on both direct and indirect indicators of educational effectiveness (and not, for example, just on student satisfaction/course evaluation data or on indicators such as retention or graduation rates). Whether a school has numerous plans or just a few, the self-study should also discuss how these evaluation plans are implemented (including by whom and how often), how they reviewed and updated (including by whom and how often) and how the various plans are aligned with each other as well as with the mission and resources of the school.

**2.8** Evaluation is concerned with both educational quality and institutional effectiveness, though the primary focus for any theological school is on students—how well they are learning and how that learning helps them achieve appropriate personal and vocational goals. In the interests of public transparency, the school publishes a statement of educational effectiveness, giving evidence of educational quality by documenting appropriate areas of student achievement for each degree program (e.g., student learning outcomes data, graduation and placement rates, student satisfaction survey results) and by regularly updating that evidence with current information.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school should demonstrate its engagement with this standard by citing its current statement of educational effectiveness, indicating where this statement can be found on its website and describing its practice for reviewing and updating the statement. The self-study might also reflect upon how the school’s statement reflects the values and characteristics of its specific approach to graduate theological education in ways that are attentive to the school’s distinctive mission and context and might discuss how the statement functions in support of institutional integrity and transparency. A strong public statement of educational effectiveness includes some or all of the following information for each degree program: data from the school’s evaluation of degree learning outcomes, ratings from student satisfaction surveys and/or exit interviews, alumni/ae and/or employer feedback, graduation rates, placement rates, time to completion rates, and other relevant data regarding educational effectiveness. Information from the ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire and Alumni/ae Questionnaire could also be helpful, as well as student and alumni/ae testimonies. The public statement of educational effectiveness should be available in an easily accessible location (e.g., in a prominent location on the school’s public website) and should be reviewed and updated regularly (see *Policies and Procedures*, VII.B.1). See Standard 7.11 for a discussion of placement rate data.

## Standard 3. Student Learning and Formation

**3. Student Learning and Formation:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning centered on student learning and formation. Consistent with their missions and religious identities, theological schools give appropriate attention to the intellectual, human, spiritual, and vocational dimensions of student learning and formation. Schools pursue those dimensions with attention to academic rigor, intercultural competency, global awareness and engagement, and lifelong learning. Schools support student learning and formation through appropriate educational modalities and policies.

SELF-STUDY NOTE: Standard 3 focuses on school-wide attention to student learning and formation, across the curriculum and co-curriculum. While the self-study section on Standard 3 might include examples from specific degree programs (e.g., “this is demonstrated in the MDiv by ... and in the MA by ...”), the focus in this standard is on the school’s overall approach to student learning and formation. Details about particular degree programs are covered in Standards 4 and 5.

### *Components of Student Learning and Formation*

**3.1** The school gives attention to the intellectual, human, spiritual, and vocational dimensions of student learning and formation in its institutional goals and its curricular and co-curricular offerings in ways that are consistent with the school’s mission and religious identity.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by reflecting on the ways in which the school as a whole contributes to student learning and formation, in direct and indirect ways, and by discussing the relationship between the school’s mission and context and its approach to student learning and formation. Any school-wide goals for student learning and formation that apply to all students regardless of degree should be discussed here, noting how these were developed, what function they serve, and how the school embodies and reflects on these. A school that is embedded in a college/university or that is deeply connected to an ecclesial or denominational partner might describe how the school’s approach to learning and formation aligns with that of its partners, while also noting any distinctive features. If a substantial part of a particular dimension of student learning and formation is provided by a partner organization(s) (such as a religious order), the school might document the agreement between the partners to verify that appropriate attention is being given to that dimension. The self-study might describe where, when, and how curricular decisions are made (for example, explaining the structure and role of a curriculum committee or faculty senate), including a discussion of when and how curricular revision is engaged (giving recent examples, if applicable; see also Standard 3.7). A school might also describe here how it communicates its approach to student learning and formation to other stakeholders (governing body, denominational officials, donors), both so that these stakeholders understand the school’s approach to student learning and formation and also so that the entire community may be understood as learners and supporters of learners.

NOTE: The terms “intellectual, human, spiritual, and vocational formation” are intentionally not defined in these standards. Each school should define these terms in ways that best fit its mission and religious context. Some schools may prefer to use other terms, e.g., “personal formation” or “psycho-social formation” rather than “human formation” (see section (c) of Standard 4.3), or “pastoral” rather than “vocational” formation.

**3.2** The school demonstrates academic rigor in student learning and formation, with qualified instructors, scholarly research and resources, and graduate-level expectations appropriate to each degree it offers.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how it ensures that its academic offerings are sufficiently rigorous for graduate study (e.g., review of syllabi or audit of reading lists). It might also discuss how it thinks about “rigor” as it relates to each dimension of student formation (see Standard 3.1) and how it understands and evaluates rigor in light of its mission, context, degree programs, and students. Syllabi from all courses should be available to the evaluation committee (on site or via hyperlink) for review. The school might also refer to demonstrations of academic rigor in the self-study sections in Standards 4-5 (degree programs), 6 (library and information services), and 8 (faculty, especially how it ensures that faculty are appropriately qualified for the courses they teach), attending not only to

intellectual development but also to scholarly understandings of human, spiritual, and vocational formation. The school might also discuss examples of student research.

If the school participates in US Title IV programs, it must describe here how it meets the federal definition of a credit hour. The school must provide the evaluation committee copies of course syllabi that represent all types of courses, course lengths, degree programs, and delivery modalities. The committee will review a sampling of syllabi of each type to verify that the school meets the federal definition of a credit hour, i.e., that its course offerings demonstrate appropriate academic rigor.

**3.3** The school demonstrates intercultural competency in student learning and formation by helping students understand, respect, engage, and learn from diverse communities and multicultural perspectives, inside and outside the classroom.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the school understands and approaches intercultural competency (and, how this connects to or differs from the school's understanding of "global engagement" as described in Standard 3.4). It might identify the competencies that the school seeks to instill in its students and describe how these are embedded in the school's curricular and co-curricular offerings. It might give examples of how the school prepares students to learn from diverse communities, as well as how these learnings are enacted (for example, by citing examples from course syllabi showing readings with multicultural perspectives or activities that equip students to engage communities that are different than their own), noting which of these are required by the school and/or a particular degree program (e.g., coursework, internship experiences) and which are optional (e.g., workshops, guest speakers). It might also describe some of the school's resources for gaining intercultural competence (faculty, library, events, etc.). It might also discuss how the school's efforts in this area have been evaluated and enhanced. Various other aspects of intercultural competency are covered in Standards 3.4, 4.3, 6.7, and 8.8.

**3.4** The school demonstrates global awareness and engagement in student learning and formation 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.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the school understands and engages in global engagement (and, how this connects to or differs from the school's understanding of "intercultural competency" as described in Standard 3.3). It might identify the competencies that the school seeks to instill in its students and describe how these are embedded in the school's curricular and co-curricular offerings. It might give examples of how the school prepares students to engage and learn from global perspectives as well as how these learnings are enacted (for example, by citing examples from course syllabi showing readings with global perspectives or activities that equip students to serve in globally interconnected contexts), noting which of these are required by the school and/or a particular degree program (e.g., coursework, travel experiences) and which are optional (e.g., workshops, guest speakers). It might also describe some of the school's resources for increasing student capacities (faculty, library, events, etc.). It might also discuss how the school's efforts in this area have been evaluated and enhanced. Various other aspects of global engagement are covered in Standards 4.3, 6.7, and 8.8.

**NOTE:** This standard does not require schools to enroll international students, nor does it require their students or graduates to serve in international settings. The focus of this standard is to require schools to help all students (regardless of where they come from or where they go) understand how to engage "the world at their doorstep," whether domestically or internationally, physically or digitally, religiously and relationally.

**3.5** The school demonstrates an understanding of learning and formation as lifetime pursuits by helping students develop motivations, skills, and practices for lifelong learning.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing any aspects of the school's mission and/or institutional goals that address lifelong learning. A school connected with a particular faith tradition might note how the school sees its graduate degrees fitting into its faith tradition's broader concepts of formation and/or education. A school that is embedded in a university or college might

consider how it understands its graduate degrees in relation to those broader educational offerings. The self-study might note occasions where faculty and other stakeholders have reflected on how the school's graduate programs fit into a student's longer trajectory of education (such as a discussion of how the programs affirm the distinctive needs of adult learners, honor and build upon students' earlier academic and professional work and encourage continued learning after the completion of the graduate degree). The self-study might also identify how the school's curriculum and co-curricular offerings support lifelong learning (for example, noting skills and practices incorporated into the degree programs themselves, as well as any continuing education programs offered by the school). It might also discuss how the school's efforts in this area have been evaluated and enhanced.

### ***Educational Modalities Supporting Student Learning and Formation***

**3.6** The school demonstrates sound pedagogy in student learning and formation, utilizing effective instructional designs and employing educational modalities that (a) are appropriate to its mission and capacities, (b) meet all applicable *Standards* and *Policies and Procedures*, and (c) help students achieve the learning outcomes for a given degree.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school should demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the instructional designs and educational modalities it uses, beginning with a general overview of how the school encourages and fosters sound pedagogy across all of its degree programs in ways that align with the school's mission and context. After a broad introduction, it might engage this standard as follows:

Schools that utilize one or more additional locations beyond the main campus (formerly called "extension sites") identify the locations used (including full mailing address), indicate the degrees (or portions of degrees) offered at each site, and describe the distinctive features of each site (including, for example, how the physical resources facilitate teaching and learning, which faculty participate at the site, how library and student services are provided to students, and so on). If the school offers half or more of a degree at any location beyond the main campus, it shows that it has Commission approval for each location (see *Policies and Procedures IV.E*).

Schools that utilize online learning (also called "distance education") or hybrid learning (combining online and onsite modalities) describe the style of online learning (such as synchronous, asynchronous, or blended), identify the technologies used (e.g., learning management system and other key tools), and describe the technical and instructional design support for this modality. If the school is still relatively new to online learning or utilizes faculty who do not have a background in online teaching, it might describe how faculty are oriented to this modality and how the school ensures that courses are designed in ways that appropriately foster student learning and formation. If the school offers blended courses that may be taken by both onsite and online students at the same time, it shows that the design of these courses allows and encourages the full participation of all students regardless of modality. If the school offers online courses for any of its degree programs, it demonstrates that it has Commission approval for distance education and meets all other requirements for online students (see *Policies and Procedures IV.F.1-3*).

Schools that utilize intensive courses (where students come to a location for just a few days) or other teaching modalities might describe these modalities and describe the distinctive features of these programs. Schools that emphasize residential learning on a school's main campus might describe the distinctive features of this approach (with particular attention to services and resources not described elsewhere in the self-study, such as worship, dining, housing, and community events). Schools that are embedded or that share a campus with another entity might describe here the benefits and challenges of this approach.

**3.7** The school demonstrates an intentionally collaborative approach to student learning and formation by developing a cohesive and holistic curriculum, regardless of modality, that involves faculty and, as appropriate to the school's context and degree programs, librarians, student services personnel, field educators, and others—both in designing and in evaluating the curriculum.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by discussing how the school engages in a collaborative approach to student learning and formation. It might describe committee structures that involve a range of appropriate stakeholders or discuss how communication about student learning and formation is fostered among various personnel (including those named in this standard as well as

others who might be appropriate and significant given the context of the school, such as instructional designers, mentors, or formators). It might give specific examples of how curricular revision has involved a range of stakeholders, as well as give examples of ways in which appropriate personnel have been involved in curricular evaluation. It might also discuss how the school's efforts in this area have been evaluated and enhanced. See also Standard 8.1 on faculty responsibilities.

**3.8** The school demonstrates that instructors and students have appropriate training and resources to engage well in each modality that it utilizes and that all necessary physical or technological resources are readily accessible, equitably available, adequately staffed, and appropriately maintained.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by evaluating the design and implementation of each educational modality it uses. Schools that utilize additional locations might describe how faculty are selected for the offsite location(s), describe and evaluate the adequacy of resources at each location (including human, library, and physical resources), assess how communication works between the main campus and the additional location(s), and discuss how student services are available to students at the offsite locations. Schools that utilize online learning might describe how faculty and students are equipped to engage this modality effectively, how information technology or instructional design staff support such programs, and how library and student service resources are made available to students. When a school offers a degree program through more than one modality, the self-study might show how these modalities demonstrate equitable (although not necessarily equivalent) program design, instructional support, library services, student services, and learning outcomes. In all cases, the self-study should demonstrate how the school evaluates the effectiveness of each modality it utilizes (including onsite, offsite, online, and blended).

**3.9** The school demonstrates, in all courses leading to a degree, regular and substantive interaction between qualified instructors and students and among students, regardless of modality. Such interaction includes the following components: (a) instructors are appropriately qualified; (b) instructors initiate substantive, course-related interactions with students, including evaluating student work; and (c) those interactions occur on a regular basis between instructors and students, as well as among students, in a sufficiently viable community of learning. The school may offer individualized instruction, such as independent studies or individualized field education, provided it meets the first two components and is limited to meeting appropriate student needs or particular degree program requirements, but not an entire degree (*Policies and Procedures*, IV.F, prohibits correspondence education).

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** For all its modalities, the school should describe its policies and practices for regular and substantive interaction. A school might note any policies and practices related to class size (such that classes have enough students to allow for a viable community of learning but not so many that faculty are unable to engage all of them). It might also note any guidelines it offers in relation to availability and frequency of faculty interaction with students (e.g., responses to student questions or online posts, availability for advising or office hours) or feedback on student work (e.g., time to respond and depth of response expected). It might also note ways in which peer learning is incorporated into the curriculum, and how students are encouraged to engage each other beyond formal class time. It might reflect on how it gathers feedback from students on these issues (e.g., through course evaluations or exit interviews) and how it responds to this feedback. Schools that offer independent studies on a regular basis might describe the policies and practices regarding those courses here. Smaller schools, or schools that offer degree programs with a small number of students, might reflect here on how they ensure a viable community of learning. If a school utilizes teaching assistants, team-teaching, or other instructional models, it might note here how this design helps to fulfill the expectations of this standard. While a discussion of faculty qualifications can be reserved for Standard 8.3, the school might also clarify here that it does not offer courses with "talking heads" (e.g., taped lectures of qualified faculty where no credentialed faculty interact with students), as well as note any other policies and practices that ensure that there is regular and substantive interaction between qualified instructors and students and among students.



**3.10** Any school considering any other educational modality that does not address all three components described in Standard 3.9, including any modality not based on courses, is required to petition for approval of an experiment (see *Policies and Procedures*, IV.G).

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: Most schools do not offer the sorts of educational modalities described here, and so the self-study can simply indicate that Standard 3.10 is not applicable. If a school offers a competency-based theological education (CBTE) program that is not course-based or credit-based, it should demonstrate here that it has met Commission expectations regarding such programs (see *Policies and Procedures*, IV.G and Board-approved *Guidelines on Competency-Based Theological Education*). If a school offers some other sort of experimental program, it should demonstrate here that it has met Commission expectations regarding such programs.

### ***Educational Policies Supporting Student Learning and Formation***

**3.11** The school states publicly, follows consistently, and reviews regularly various policies for its degree programs, including tuition and fee charges, refund and withdrawal policies, grading policies, grade appeal policies, degree program requirements, graduation requirements, and whether any of the requirements for a degree program are to be completed within a specified number of years.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing briefly where these policies are published (including links to the catalog or handbook where the policies may be found) and discussing how such policies are adopted, how often they are reviewed, and any challenges in implementing any of these policies. If there have been any significant changes to these policies during the last few years, these can be described here. Embedded schools might clearly identify which policies are set by the theological school and which are developed by the broader institution, indicating how the school makes sure that students know how to find both types of policies. Schools participating in Title IV financial aid programs must address not only the policies listed above, but also a “satisfactory academic progress” policy.

**3.12** The school has and follows a public transfer of credit policy that clearly identifies the criteria by which it evaluates transfer credits from other graduate schools and the maximum amount of transfer credits it accepts for its degree programs, which may not exceed two-thirds of the program’s total credits.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the school’s transfer credit policy and noting where it can be found (e.g., a link to its public website or an easily accessible catalog). A school might also describe how it implements this policy and, if the policy has changed in recent years, how this change was initiated and how it has been evaluated. If the school has any articulation agreement(s) with one or more accredited schools that document transfer policies for specific degrees, it must describe the nature of the agreement(s) and provide access to the document(s).

**3.13** Any school with reduced-credit options for master’s degrees (through some form of advanced standing, shared credits, or combined undergraduate/graduate degrees) has clearly stated policies with appropriate criteria for doing so in ways that ensure the integrity and learning outcomes of the degree program. Advanced standing may not exceed one-third of the degree being sought; shared credits between degrees may not exceed two-thirds of the degree receiving those credits; and combined undergraduate/graduate degrees may generally not count undergraduate credits as graduate credits. A school utilizing any combination of these reduced-credit options requires that at least one-third of any degree it grants be from credits earned at that school in that degree (see *Guidelines for Reduced-Credit Master’s Degrees*; this standard does not prohibit schools from offering a one-year academic MA degree for students with extensive undergraduate studies in religion or related areas, per pre-2020 Standards).

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing whether or not the school allows advanced standing and/or other credit-sharing practices for its MDiv or MA degree

programs, and, if so, by describing the practices that it allows, indicating the degrees to which these apply, and citing where a full description of these practices can be found (e.g., a link to a student handbook or catalog). Such a school should show that these advanced standing and/or credit-sharing practices function to ensure the integrity of each degree program, including how the school has evaluated these practices to ensure that student learning outcomes are successfully achieved. Such a school should also describe the limits that it places on these policies (e.g., a maximum number of credits, limitations to specific subject areas or courses) and describe how specific requests for advanced standing or shared credits are addressed (e.g., admissions committee, program director). If the school participates in a combined undergraduate/graduate degree program, it should describe the nature and design of this program, the role of the graduate theological school in program oversight and implementation, how it ensures that the graduate theological degree has appropriate rigor and integrity, how it determines whether any undergraduate courses may count for graduate credit (e.g., biblical languages), and how it evaluates this combined degree program. For further assistance regarding any reduced-credit offerings, see *Guidelines for Reduced-Credit Master's Degrees*.

**3.14** The school has and follows clearly stated policies regarding the ethical and appropriate use of technology and research resources, including appropriate guidelines for research with human participants that meet all applicable laws and regulations.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the school's policies, indicating when and by whom these were most recently reviewed (citing where these can be found, e.g., link to handbook or catalog), and how they meet any applicable laws and regulations. A school might give examples of how these policies have been discussed (e.g., at doctoral student orientation, during on-boarding of new full- or part-time faculty) and implemented, or in courses where research includes human participants. For example, the school might describe how often an Institutional Review Board or Research Ethics Board meets and what sorts of requests it considers. A school might also describe any challenges it has faced in implementing these policies, including any revisions it has made to its policies or practices in light of such challenges.

### ***Educational Policies for Non-Degree Programs***

**3.15** The school may offer non-degree programs (e.g., certificates) without credit for personal enrichment or with graduate credit for potential use in a graduate degree program, though the Commission approves and records only graduate degrees. If non-degree programs are offered for graduate credit, the school admits students with an accredited baccalaureate degree or its educational equivalent. The school may admit other students if it documents through rigorous means that those students are prepared to do graduate-level work.

**NOTE:** Students in non-degree programs (e.g., certificates) at schools participating in US federal student aid programs are typically not eligible for Title IV funds, if their school designates the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools as its primary (gatekeeper) accrediting agency, since the Commission's scope of recognition is limited to graduate theological degrees. Schools should consult current government regulations to be sure.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing any certificates or other non-degree programs offered by the school and discussing how these programs support and enhance the school's mission. If any non-degree programs are offered for graduate credit, a school should indicate how many students are enrolled in each program and describe how the school determines "appropriately rigorous means" for any non-baccalaureate students it admits (see also Standard 7.4).

## Standard 4. Master's Degrees

**4. Master's Degree Programs:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning offering master's degrees that are appropriate to their missions, constituencies, and capacities and that meet all applicable degree program requirements. Master's degrees have clearly stated student learning outcomes that are regularly evaluated, with the results used to improve student learning and formation.

SELF-STUDY NOTE: Within Standard 4, schools should describe and evaluate each of their master's degree programs. If a school has more than one degree in a category, such as more than one Master of Arts degree, it may describe and evaluate these degrees together or separately, depending on the degree structure (see the note for Standard 4.6 as well as the *Self-Study Handbook* for more information). If a school does not offer a certain type of master's degree, it can simply indicate that a given grouping of standards does not apply (e.g., "The school does not offer the ThM, so Standards 4.10-12 are not applicable").

### Master of Divinity

**4.1** The Master of Divinity degree prepares people for religious leadership or service in congregations and other settings, as well as for advanced degrees. This degree requires a minimum of 72 semester credits or equivalent units.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by briefly describing the degree program and its overall purpose. A summary of the degree program requirements might be provided, including the number of credits required for the degree (and whether these are semester or other units), and a link to the catalog or handbook where the degree program requirements are described in more detail (including a list of course offerings). If the degree includes specializations or tracks, these might be identified here, noting any curricular implications. If the school offers this degree program at more than one location or through more than one teaching modality, it might describe each of these approaches here. The self-study might also include a brief profile of the number and characteristics of students enrolled in the program (current enrollment as well as enrollment trends over the past five years), including attention to any specializations, tracks, or differences in modality, and demonstrating how this constitutes a sufficient community of learning (see Standard 3.9). If the school has any specific admissions requirements or recruiting strategies for this degree, it can describe those here (see also Standard 7.4). If the school offers any shared/reduced credit options for this degree program, it can describe those here (see also Standard 3.13).

**4.2** The Master of Divinity (abbreviated as MDiv) is the standard nomenclature for this degree. The school may offer this degree with specializations or tracks and use those names in official publications, but the Commission recognizes and records this degree only as Master of Divinity. Any school using a different nomenclature for historical or theological reasons has Commission approval.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: Most schools can simply indicate that they use the standard nomenclature for this degree. If a school uses a different nomenclature, it demonstrates that it has Commission approval. Any specializations or tracks are discussed under Standard 4.1.

**4.3** The Master of Divinity degree is broadly and deeply attentive to the intellectual, human, spiritual, and vocational dimensions of student learning and formation in ways consistent with the school's mission and theological commitments. The degree has clearly articulated learning outcomes that address each of the following four areas, though the school may use different terms for these areas: (a) *religious heritage*, including understanding of scripture, the theological traditions and history of the school's faith community, and the broader heritage of other relevant religious traditions; (b) *cultural context*, including attention to cultural and social issues, to global awareness and engagement, and to the multifaith and multicultural nature of the societies in which students may serve; (c) *personal and spiritual formation*, including development in personal faith, professional ethics, emotional maturity,

moral integrity, and spirituality; and (d) *religious and public leadership*, including cultivating capacities for leading in ecclesial or denominational and public contexts and reflecting on leadership practices.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by stating the specific student learning outcomes (SLOs) for this degree program and discussing how these outcomes relate to the school's understanding of the overall goals and purpose of the degree. The school might describe how these learning outcomes and curricular requirements were developed, when they were last reviewed, and how the school has confidence that these are appropriate outcomes for this program. The school might explore how these SLOs are addressed in the required curriculum (e.g., a curricular map or a description of how degree-level SLOs are part of faculty conversations about course design and pedagogy), how the SLOs and curricular requirements address the four content areas described in this standard (including any interpretation of what these four areas mean for the school), and how the SLOs and curricular requirements relate to and embody the distinctive mission and context of the school. See also Standards 3.3 and 3.4 regarding intercultural competence and global engagement (area b), and Standard 4.4 regarding practical experience and field education (area d). Note that this standard focuses on the design, content, and anticipated outcomes of the desired program; Standard 4.5 focuses on the ongoing evaluation of this degree program (including how SLOs are used to facilitate degree program evaluation). See also Note in Self-Study Ideas for Standard 3.1 concerning the term "personal and spiritual formation."

**4.4** The Master of Divinity degree requires supervised practical experiences (e.g., practicum or internship) in areas related to the student's vocational calling in order to achieve the learning outcomes of the degree program. These experiences are in settings that are appropriately chosen, well suited to the experience needed, and of sufficient duration. These experiences are also supervised by those who are appropriately qualified, professionally developed, and regularly evaluated.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by discussing and evaluating how the school approaches contextual education, attending to each of the items named in this standard. It might begin by describing the requirements of the experience (including number of credits, length of placement, and expected number of hours on site per week) and indicating where the full description can be found (e.g., link to catalog, handbook, or guide). It might note how sites are selected and evaluated. It might describe how students are matched with or assigned to sites, and how their work at the sites is designed to enhance their vocational goals and the student learning outcomes of their degree program, including how the internship/practicum experience is integrated into the overall curriculum or degree program. It might also describe how supervisors are selected, oriented, and evaluated, as well as more generally how communication flows between supervisors and the school. The self-study might evaluate the school's overall approach to contextual education and reflect on any recent changes that have been made to this program.

**4.5** The Master of Divinity degree program as a whole and each of its specific student learning outcomes are regularly evaluated, with the results discussed by faculty and used to improve student learning and formation.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: In this final section of this degree standard, the school should show how it evaluates and seeks to improve this degree program. Building upon the broader description of evaluation from Standard 2.6 (but focusing specifically here on this degree program), the school should give examples of how and when the degree is evaluated, briefly describing both the school's evaluation *plan* for this degree program (e.g., how often does it intend to evaluate each SLO and the degree as a whole, what benchmarks have been established, what artifacts and rubrics are to be used) and also describing the recent *process* for evaluating this degree (e.g., when was the last time each SLO and the degree as a whole was reviewed, who was involved, how did it occur). As part of this, a school should indicate both whether results related to the individual SLOs seem to be meeting the school's expectations and also whether the results for the SLOs as a whole offer an appropriate and comprehensive view of the degree program as a whole. A school might also reflect on whether, when, and how it intends to revise its learning evaluation plan and/or process (as a whole or in part), based on what it has learned. While the self-study report ought not include the assessment tools or raw data themselves, it might reference where these can be found (e.g., indicating what might be found in the supplemental resources for the self-study and what offices at the school keep the rest of the data).

While these descriptions of the plan and process will help an evaluation committee and the Board of Commissioners understand the school's approach to the evaluation of student learning and formation, this section of the self-study primarily focuses on how this work of evaluation has helped the school better understand its own strengths and needed areas of growth in relation to student learning and formation in this degree, and how this has led to improvement, with particular emphasis on strengthening this particular degree program. A school might cite minutes from faculty meetings or assessment events to show how the evaluation process has led to generative conversations about learning and formation, or it might note ways in which a curricular revision was grounded in what was discovered through this work of evaluation. The school might note distinctive strengths it seeks to maintain (e.g., in the midst of faculty searches or teaching through multiple modalities) as well as those areas where it seeks to improve. It may also include here information from alumni/ae (e.g., describing their satisfaction with the degree and how the degree prepared them for their current work) and might also discuss what the school has learned about this degree from the self-study process, including any next steps it plans to take (with timelines and responsible parties as appropriate).

### ***Master of Arts***

**4.6** The Master of Arts degree prepares people in one of three ways: (a) primarily *academically* for graduate study of one or more theologically related disciplines, including personal enrichment; (b) primarily *professionally* for some form of religious leadership or other kinds of service; or (c) both *academically and professionally* with each receiving similar attention. Each Master of Arts degree offered by a school has a clear purpose statement that indicates which of these ways is primary. The degree requires a minimum of 36 semester credits or equivalent units.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by briefly describing the degree program and its overall purpose. The school might identify whether it understands this program to be primarily academically oriented, primarily professionally oriented, or equally academically and professionally oriented. A summary of the degree program requirements might be provided, including the number of credits required for the degree (and whether these are semester or other units), with a link to the catalog or handbook where the degree program requirements are described in more detail (including a list of course offerings). If the degree includes specializations or tracks within an approved degree program, these might be identified here, noting any curricular implications. If the school offers this degree program at more than one location or through more than one teaching modality, it might describe each of these approaches here. The self-study might also include a brief profile of the number and characteristics of students enrolled in the program (current enrollment as well as enrollment trends over the past five years), including attention to any specializations, tracks, or differences in modality, and demonstrating how this constitutes a sufficient community of learning (see Standard 3.9). If the school has any specific admissions requirements or recruiting strategies for this degree, it can describe those here (see also Standard 7.4). If the school offers any shared/reduced credit options for this degree program, it can describe those here (see also Standard 3.13). If the school offers more than one Master of Arts program, refer to the *Self-Study Handbook* regarding how to address Standards 4.6-9 for each of its relevant degrees in the self-study report.

**4.7** The Master of Arts degree has various nomenclatures, depending on its purpose and on certain provincial, state, or ecclesial or denominational regulations. The most common nomenclature is Master of Arts (abbreviated as MA), but the school may choose other appropriate nomenclatures that suit the degree's purpose and setting. Other common names for this degree are Master of Theological Studies (MTS), Master of Arts in Religion (MAR), Master of Religious Education (MRE), Master of Church Music (MCM), Master of [specialization], Master of Arts in [specialization], and Master of Arts [(specialization)]. The school may use any appropriate nomenclature, but it may not change that nomenclature without notifying the Commission (see *Policies and Procedures*, IV.D.1) so an accurate record of all approved degrees can be maintained.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by clearly identifying the nomenclature (and any abbreviations) it utilizes for this degree program. In addition to Master of Arts

(abbreviated as MA), other common nomenclature for this degree category include Master of Arts in Religion (MAR), Master of Religious Education (MRE), Master of Theological Studies (MTS), Master of Arts in \_\_\_ (insert specialization), or Master of \_\_\_ (insert specialization), although the school is not limited to this list and is welcome to consult with their ATS Commission staff liaison about other nomenclature options. The nomenclature the school is using for its degree program (e.g., in its academic catalog, website, promotional materials, and self-study report) aligns with the list of approved degree programs found in the school's ATS membership directory and the school's accrediting history. If the school has changed the nomenclature for this degree program since its last comprehensive evaluation visit, the self-study should demonstrate that it notified and received approval for this change according to the Commission *Policies and Procedures*.

**4.8** The Master of Arts degree has clearly articulated student learning outcomes that are appropriate to a graduate theological degree (including any specializations in that degree) and are consistent with the school's mission and resources. A degree that is primarily academically oriented typically has some form of capstone research project (e.g., thesis or extended research paper), while one that is primarily professionally oriented typically has some form of supervised practical experience that meets the requirements in Standard 4.4. Master's degrees that are oriented both professionally and academically have appropriate options (e.g., practicum, thesis, or other).

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by stating the specific student learning outcomes (SLOs) for this degree program and discussing how these outcomes relate to the school's understanding of the overall goals and purpose of the degree. The school might describe how these learning outcomes and curricular requirements were developed, when they were last reviewed, and how the school has confidence that these are appropriate outcomes for this program. The school might explore how these SLOs are addressed in the required curriculum (e.g., a curricular map or a description of how degree-level SLOs are part of faculty conversations about course design and pedagogy) and how the SLOs and curricular requirements relate to and embody the distinctive mission and context of the school. Schools are reminded that each approved degree program is to have distinctive SLOs.

If the degree is described above (in Standard 4.6) as having a primarily academic orientation, the self-study might show that the degree includes content areas that are most appropriate to the academic discipline(s) specified, and that it includes a capstone project that allow students to demonstrate successful engagement with this content. If the degree has a primarily professional orientation, the self-study might show that the degree addresses all four areas content described under the Master of Divinity degree (see Standard 4.3), though it may address those areas in either broader or deeper ways, and that the degree includes a practical experience that meets the expectations described in Standard 4.4. If the degree is equally oriented toward both professional and academic goals, the self-study might show that the degree content is consistent with that dual emphasis, and the degree includes an appropriately relevant professional and/or academic summative project. The self-study might also show that the degree program has sufficient library resources, faculty, and curricular offerings to support both the content and the academic/professional orientation of the program. Note that this standard focuses on the design, content, and anticipated outcomes of the desired program; Standard 4.9 focuses on the ongoing evaluation of this degree program (including how SLOs are used to facilitate degree program evaluation).

**4.9** The Master of Arts degree program as a whole and each of its specific student learning outcomes are regularly evaluated, with the results discussed by faculty and used to improve student learning and formation.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** See prompt for Standard 4.5.

### ***Master of Theology (Master of Sacred Theology)***

**4.10** The Master of Theology degree (or Master of Sacred Theology) is an advanced, academically oriented, master's degree for people who already have a Master of Divinity degree or other graduate theological degree providing equivalent academic background. This degree prepares people to study more deeply a theologically related discipline, often in preparation for doctoral studies. Since it builds

upon a previous master's degree, this degree may require as few as 24 semester credits or equivalent units. The only nomenclature normally allowed for this degree is Master of Theology (abbreviated as ThM or sometimes MTh) or Master of Sacred Theology (abbreviated as STM).

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by briefly describing the degree program and its overall purpose and might indicate which nomenclature it utilizes for this degree. A summary of the degree requirements might be provided, including the number of credits required for the degree (and whether these are semester or other units), with a link to the catalog or handbook where the degree program requirements are described in more detail (including a list of course offerings). If the degree includes specializations or tracks, these might be identified here, noting any curricular implications. If the school offers this degree program at more than one location or through more than one teaching modality, it might describe each of these approaches here. The self-study might also include a brief profile of the number and characteristics of students enrolled in the program (current enrollment as well as enrollment trends over the past five years), including attention to any specializations, tracks, or differences in modality, and demonstrating how this constitutes a sufficient community of learning (see Standard 3.9). If the school has any specific admissions requirements or recruiting strategies for this degree, it can describe those here (see Standard 7.4). If a school admits students who do not have a Master of Divinity degree, it describes how it determines "equivalent academic background" and whether it makes any curricular changes for students without the MDiv (e.g., a longer degree program). Note that some regional accreditors for US schools require a minimum of 30 credits for any master's level degree.

**4.11** The Master of Theology degree has clearly articulated student learning outcomes that are appropriate to an advanced degree in theology and consistent with the school's mission and resources. The degree has at least half of the coursework in courses designed for students in advanced, academically oriented degree programs (i.e., ThM/STM or PhD/ThD). If the degree has language requirements, these are appropriate to the field of specialization. The program typically culminates in a thesis demonstrating scholarly research.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by stating the specific student learning outcomes (SLOs) for this degree program and discussing how these outcomes relate to the school's understanding of the overall goals and purpose of the degree. The school might describe how these learning outcomes and curricular requirements were developed, when they were last reviewed, and how the school has confidence that these are appropriate outcomes for this program. The school might explore how these SLOs are addressed in the required curriculum (e.g., a curricular map or a description of how degree-level SLOs are part of faculty conversations about course design and pedagogy) and how the SLOs and curricular requirements relate to and embody the distinctive mission and context of the school. The self-study might also show that the degree program has sufficient library resources, faculty, and curricular offerings to support this degree program. If coursework is shared with other degree programs, the self-study should demonstrate that at least half of the coursework is designed for students in advanced academic programs and also identify how much, if any, of the ThM/STM program shares courses with PhD/ThD programs. Note that this standard focuses on the design, content, and anticipated outcomes of the desired program; Standard 4.12 focuses on the ongoing evaluation of this degree program (including how SLOs are used to facilitate degree program evaluation).

**4.12** The Master of Theology degree program as a whole and each of its specific student learning outcomes are regularly evaluated, with the results discussed by faculty and used to improve student learning and formation.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** See prompt for Standard 4.5.

## Standard 5. Doctoral Degrees

**5. Doctoral Degree Programs:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning that may offer doctoral degrees appropriate to their missions, constituencies, and capacities and that meet all applicable degree program requirements. Doctoral degrees have clearly stated student learning outcomes that are regularly evaluated, with the results used to improve student learning and formation.

SELF-STUDY NOTE: Within Standard 5, schools should describe and evaluate each of their doctoral degree programs. If a school offers more than one degree in the category of Other Professional Doctoral Degrees (Standards 5.7-10), it should address each of these degrees separately (see the *Self-Study Handbook* for more information). If a school offers more than one Doctor of Philosophy/Doctor of Theology, it may address these programs together if they share a similar purpose and structure. If a school does not offer a certain category of doctoral degree programs, it can simply indicate that a given grouping of standards do not apply (e.g., “the only doctoral degree the school offers is the DMin, so Standards 5.7-16 are not applicable” or “the school does not offer doctoral degrees, so Standard 5 is not applicable”).

### Doctor of Ministry

**5.1** The Doctor of Ministry is an advanced, professionally oriented degree that prepares people more deeply for religious leadership in congregations and other settings, including appropriate teaching roles. This degree requires a minimum of 30 semester credits or equivalent units.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by briefly describing the degree program and its overall purpose. A summary of the degree program requirements might be provided, including the number of credits required for the degree (and whether these are semester or other units), with a link to the catalog or handbook where the degree program requirements are described in more detail (including a list of course offerings). If the degree includes specializations or tracks, these might be identified here, noting any curricular implications. If the school offers this degree program at more than one location or through more than one teaching modality, it might describe each of these approaches here. The self-study might also include a brief profile of the number and characteristics of students enrolled in the program (current enrollment as well as enrollment trends over the past five years), including attention to any specializations, tracks, or differences in modality, and demonstrating how this constitutes a sufficient community of learning (see Standard 3.9).

**5.2** The Doctor of Ministry degree (abbreviated as DMin) is the only nomenclature allowed for this degree. The school may offer this degree with specializations or tracks and use those names in official publications, but the Commission recognizes and records this degree only as Doctor of Ministry.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: Most schools can simply indicate that they use the standard nomenclature for this degree. If a school uses a different nomenclature, it demonstrates that it has Commission approval. Any specializations or tracks should be discussed under 5.1.

**5.3** The Doctor of Ministry degree has clearly articulated student learning outcomes that are consistent with the school’s mission and resources and address the following four areas: (a) *advanced theological integration* that helps graduates effectively engage their cultural context with theological acumen and critical thinking; (b) *in-depth contextual competency* that gives graduates the ability to identify, frame, and respond to crucial ministry issues; (c) *leadership capacity* that equips graduates to enhance their effectiveness as ministry leaders in their chosen settings; and (d) *personal and spiritual maturity* that enables graduates to reinvigorate and deepen their vocational calling.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by stating the specific student learning outcomes (SLOs) for this degree program and discussing how these outcomes relate to the school’s understanding of the overall goals and purpose of the degree. The school might describe how these



learning outcomes and curricular requirements were developed, when they were last reviewed, and how the school has confidence that these are appropriate outcomes for this program. The school might explore how these SLOs are addressed in the required curriculum (e.g., a curricular map or a description of how degree-level SLOs are part of faculty conversations about course design and pedagogy), how the SLOs and curricular requirements address the four areas described in this standard (including any interpretation of what these four areas mean for the school), and how the SLOs and curricular requirements relate to and embody the distinctive mission and context of the school. Note that this standard focuses on the design, content, and anticipated outcomes of the desired program; Standard 5.6 focuses on the ongoing evaluation of this degree program (including how SLOs are used to facilitate degree program evaluation). See also Note in Self-Study Ideas for Standard 3.1 concerning the term “personal and spiritual maturity” in (d) above.

**5.4** The Doctor of Ministry degree provides a variety of student learning and formational experiences that include peer learning, self-directed learning, research-based learning, and field-based learning. The degree culminates with a written project that explores an area of ministry related to the student’s vocational calling, utilizes appropriate research methodologies and resources, and generates new knowledge regarding the practice of ministry. An oral presentation and evaluation follow the completion of the written project to reflect mastery of the project and achievement of the program’s outcomes. If any courses in this degree are shared with other degrees, doctoral-level outcomes and assignments specific to students in this professional degree are made clear.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the design and content of the program supports the goals of the program. It might reflect on the relationship between the background of the students being admitted to the program, the personal/professional/vocational goals of these students, and the overall program design. It might discuss the ways in which the content of the program is intended to enhance each student’s professional work while also attending to the specific mission and context of the school. It might describe any courses required of all students in the degree program, including those that support a student’s ability to engage in research that culminates in an appropriate written project. If part or all of the degree is offered via intensive experiences or other modalities where students are not regularly together, it might describe how the school works to foster a sustained and ongoing community of practice among students as well as between students and instructors. If the degree involves courses that are shared with other degree program, a school might describe how many courses are shared and how it demonstrates that these courses have doctoral-level outcomes and assignments specific to students in this professional degree.

**5.5** The Doctor of Ministry degree is an advanced professional doctorate that builds upon an accredited master’s degree in a ministry-related area and upon significant ministry experience. Students without an accredited Master of Divinity degree may be admitted, provided the school has publicly stated admissions criteria that address the following six areas and provided the school documents how each applicant meets each of these criteria: (a) the ability to thoughtfully interpret scripture and the theological tradition of one’s ministry context, (b) the capacity to understand and adapt one’s ministry to the cultural context, (c) a basic self-understanding of one’s ministerial identity and vocational calling, (d) a readiness to engage in ongoing personal and spiritual formation for one’s ministry, (e) an accredited master’s degree (or its educational equivalent) in an area related to one’s ministry setting or vocational calling, and (f) significant ministerial experience that enables the applicant to engage as a ministry peer with other students in this advanced professional doctorate.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** While the general admissions criteria for doctoral degrees is discussed in Standard 7.4, this section gives a school opportunity to reflect on the distinctive features of admission into a DMin program. A school might note here how its own admissions criteria meet the expectations described in this standard, with attention to both a prospective student’s academic background and ministry/leadership experience. If the school admits students without an MDiv degree, it notes here how it evaluates that such students meet the six criteria listed here. If the school admits students with the “educational equivalent” of a master’s degree (e.g., international students), it describes how it determines educational equivalency. It also indicates how many

DMin students without an MDiv are currently enrolled. See also Note in Self-Study Ideas for Standard 3.1 concerning the term “personal and spiritual formation” in (d) above.

**5.6** The Doctor of Ministry degree program as a whole and each of its specific student learning outcomes are regularly evaluated, with the results discussed by faculty and used to improve student learning and formation.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** In this final section of this degree standard, the school should show how it evaluates and seeks to improve this degree program. Building upon the broader description of evaluation from Standard 2.6 (but focusing specifically here on this degree program), the school should give examples of how and when the degree is evaluated, briefly describing both the school’s evaluation *plan* for this degree program (e.g., how often does it intend to evaluate each SLO and the degree as a whole, what benchmarks have been established, what artifacts and rubrics are to be used) and also describing the recent *process* for evaluating this degree (e.g., when was the last time each SLO and the degree as a whole was reviewed, who was involved, how did it occur). As part of this, a school should indicate both whether results related to the individual SLOs seem to be meeting the school’s expectations and also whether the results for the SLOs as a whole offer an appropriate and comprehensive view of the degree program as a whole. A school might also reflect on whether, when, and how it intends to revise its learning evaluation plan and/or process (as a whole or in part), based on what it has learned. While the self-study report ought not include the assessment tools or raw data themselves, it might reference where these can be found (e.g., indicating what might be found in the supplemental resources for the self-study and what offices at the school keep the rest of the data).

While these descriptions of the plan and process will help an evaluation committee and the Board of Commissioners understand the school’s approach to the evaluation of student learning and formation, this section of the self-study should primarily focus on how this work of evaluation has helped the school better understand its own strengths and needed areas of growth in relation to student learning and formation, and how this has then lead to improvements in the school’s curricular or co-curricular offerings, with particular emphasis on strengthening this particular degree program. A school might cite minutes from faculty meetings or assessment day events to show how the evaluation process has led to generative conversations about learning and formation, or it might note ways in which a curricular revision was grounded in what was discovered through this work of evaluation. The school might note distinctive strengths it seeks to maintain (e.g., in the midst of faculty searches or teaching through multiple modalities) as well as those areas where it seeks to improve. It may also include here information from alumni/ae (e.g., describing their satisfaction with the degree and how the degree prepared them for their current work, if applicable) and should also discuss what the school has learned about this degree from the self-study process, including any next steps it plans to take (with timelines or indication of responsible parties as appropriate).

### ***Other Professional Doctoral Degrees***

**5.7** Other professionally oriented doctoral degrees (besides the Doctor of Ministry) prepare people more deeply for religious leadership or other kinds of service in a variety of settings, such as education and intercultural studies. These doctoral degrees require a minimum of 36 semester credits or equivalent units.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by briefly describing the degree program and its overall purpose. A summary of the degree program requirements might be provided, including the number of credits required for the degree (and whether these are semester or other units), with a link to the catalog or handbook where the degree program requirements are described in more detail (including a list of course offerings). If the degree includes specializations or tracks, these might be identified here, noting any curricular implications. If the school offers this degree program at more than one location or through more than one teaching modality, it might describe each of these approaches here. The self-study might also include a brief profile of the number and characteristics of students enrolled in the program (current enrollment as well as enrollment trends over the past five years), including attention to any specializations, tracks, or differences in modality, and demonstrating how this constitutes a sufficient community of learning (see Standard 3.9). If the school has any specific admissions requirements or recruiting strategies for this degree, it can describe those here (see also Standard 7.4). If a school offers more than one

approved degree program within this category, it should address each degree program separately (repeating Standards 5.7-10 as many times as needed).

**5.8** These professional doctoral degrees use a variety of nomenclatures, depending on the discipline, such as Doctor of Education (abbreviated as EdD), Doctor of Educational Ministry (DEdMin), Doctor of Intercultural Studies (DICS), Doctor of Missiology (DMiss), Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA), or Doctor of \_\_\_\_, with the name of the specialization inserted. The school may use any appropriate nomenclature, but it may not change that nomenclature without notifying the Commission (see *Policies and Procedures*, IV.D.1) so an accurate record of all approved degrees can be maintained.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by clearly identifying the nomenclature (and any abbreviations) it utilizes for this degree program. The nomenclature the school is using for this degree program (e.g., in its academic catalog, website, promotional materials, and self-study report) aligns with the list of approved degree programs found in the school's ATS membership directory and the school's accrediting history. If the school has changed the nomenclature for this degree program since its last comprehensive evaluation visit, the self-study should demonstrate that it notified and received approval for this change according to the Commission *Policies and Procedures*, IV.D.1.

**5.9** These professional doctoral degrees have clearly articulated student learning outcomes that are consistent with the school's mission and resources. The outcomes focus on the degree discipline in areas related to advanced understandings of, and competencies in, appropriate theological disciplines, behavioral sciences, social sciences, research methodologies, and the integration of those areas in a well-designed doctoral dissertation, written project, culminating report on field-based research, or other summative exercise. If any courses in this degree are shared with other degrees, doctoral-level outcomes and assignments specific to students in this professional degree are made clear.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by stating the specific student learning outcomes (SLOs) for this degree program and discussing how these outcomes relate to the school's understanding of the overall goals and purpose of the degree. The school might describe how these learning outcomes and curricular requirements were developed, when they were last reviewed, and how the school has confidence that these are appropriate outcomes for this program. The school might explore how these SLOs are addressed in the required curriculum (e.g., a curricular map or a description of how degree-level SLOs are part of faculty conversations about course design and pedagogy) and how the SLOs and curricular requirements relate to and embody the distinctive mission and context of the school. If coursework is shared with other degree programs, the self-study should describe what other programs are involved and demonstrate that these courses have doctoral-level outcomes and assignments specific to students in this professional degree. Note that this standard focuses on the design, content, and anticipated outcomes of the desired program; Standard 5.10 focuses on the ongoing evaluation of this degree program (including how SLOs are used to facilitate degree program evaluation).

**5.10** These professional doctoral degree programs as a whole and each of their specific student learning outcomes are regularly evaluated, with the results discussed by faculty and used to improve student learning and formation.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: See prompt in Standard 5.6.

### ***Doctor of Philosophy or Doctor of Theology***

**5.11** The Doctor of Philosophy degree is an advanced, academically oriented degree that prepares people for theologically related vocations of teaching and research in theological schools, in colleges and universities, or in other settings appropriate to the degree. This degree requires a minimum of 36 semester credits or equivalent units.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by briefly describing the degree program and its overall purpose. A summary of the degree program requirements might be provided, including the number of credits required for the degree (and whether these are semester or other units), with a link to the catalog or handbook where the degree program requirements are described in more detail (including a list of course offerings). If the degree includes specializations or tracks within an approved degree program, these might be identified here, noting any curricular implications. If the school offers any portion of this degree program at more than one location or through more than one pedagogical design, it might describe each of these approaches here. The self-study might also include a brief profile of the number and characteristics of students enrolled in the program (current enrollment as well as enrollment trends over the past five years), including attention to any specializations, tracks, or differences in modality, and demonstrating how this constitutes a sufficient community of learning (see Standard 3.9). If the school has any specific admissions requirements or recruiting strategies for this degree, it can describe those here (see also Standard 7.4). If the school has Commission approval for more than one PhD/ThD program, it might choose to describe and evaluate these programs together, particularly if the overall structure of the programs is similar. However, if the programs are structured differently, the school may wish to repeat Standards 5.11-16 for each one (see the *Self-Study Handbook*, as well as Standard 5.12).

**5.12** The Doctor of Philosophy degree (abbreviated as PhD) is the standard nomenclature for this degree, though some schools may use Doctor of Theology (ThD). The school may offer this degree with specializations or tracks and use those names in official publications, but the Commission recognizes and records this degree only as Doctor of Philosophy (or Doctor of Theology)—unless the school specifically requests approval only for a particular specialization, in which case that specialization is included in the Commission approval and records.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** Most schools can simply indicate that they use the standard nomenclature for this degree (Doctor of Philosophy). If a school uses the nomenclature of Doctor of Theology, it should indicate this here. If the school only has Commission approval for one or more particular specializations with the PhD/ThD, it should indicate the specific degree names here. The nomenclature the school is using for its degree program (e.g., in its academic catalog, website, promotional materials, and self-study report) aligns with the list of approved degree programs found in the school's ATS membership directory and the school's accrediting history. Any other specializations or tracks within an approved degree program should be discussed under 5.11.

**5.13** The Doctor of Philosophy degree has clearly stated student learning outcomes that are consistent with the school's mission and resources. The outcomes address such issues as gaining a comprehensive knowledge of the discipline(s) studied; developing competence to engage in original research and writing that advances theological understanding for the academy and for communities of faith; and demonstrating capacities for the vocation of theological scholarship in research, teaching and learning, and formation.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by stating the specific student learning outcomes (SLOs) for this degree program and discussing how these outcomes relate to the school's understanding of the overall goals and purpose of the degree. The school might describe how these learning outcomes and curricular requirements were developed, when they were last reviewed, and how the school has confidence that these are appropriate outcomes for this program. The school might explore how these SLOs are addressed in the required curriculum (e.g., a curricular map or a description of how degree-level SLOs are part of faculty conversations about course design and pedagogy) and how the SLOs and curricular requirements relate to and embody the distinctive mission and context of the school. The self-study might also demonstrate that the school provides access to sufficient library resources to support the depth of research required by this degree program, including attention to each specialization (see also Standard 6.7). Note that this standard focuses on the design, content, and anticipated outcomes of the desired program; Standard 5.16 focuses on the ongoing evaluation of this degree program (including how SLOs are used to facilitate degree program evaluation).

**5.14** The Doctor of Philosophy degree requires appropriate training in the research methods relevant to the area of specialization, the ability to use languages germane to the specialization, and opportunities to develop competence in teaching and forming students. The degree requires coursework, comprehensive examinations, a written doctoral dissertation that demonstrates original and scholarly research, and an oral defense of the dissertation. If any courses in this degree are shared with other degrees, outcomes and assignments consistent with advanced research doctorates and specific to students in this degree are made clear.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** Building on the general description of the curriculum in Standard 5.13, the school might show here how its curricular design attends specifically to the items detailed in this standard. For example, the self-study might discuss what the school understands as “appropriate training” for research methods, including how particular research methods are selected, how students are introduced to the selected methods (whether through required coursework or other means), and what personnel (such as librarians or faculty from other departments) are involved in this work. The self-study might describe the program’s language requirement, including which languages are required (and why) and how competency is assessed. The self-study might also describe the efforts the school makes to equip PhD/ThD students to be effective teachers, including any curricular (e.g., courses on pedagogy), co-curricular (e.g., workshops or training activities), or practicum opportunities (e.g., mentored teaching experiences) – noting whether these are required or optional for students – and might also discuss other areas of intentional focus that are highlighted within the degree program (such as ones that would enable graduates to thrive in professions outside of traditional faculty roles). The self-study might also describe the program’s expectations related to comprehensive examinations, doctoral dissertation, and oral defense, including how the school evaluates the effectiveness of these elements in preparing doctoral students for their future work. If the PhD/ThD shares courses with any other degree program, the self-study demonstrates how the school ensures that coursework for PhD/ThD students is at an appropriate academic level and effectively supports the goals of the degree program.

**5.15** The Doctor of Philosophy degree requires at least half of the coursework to be completed on the school’s main campus. For appropriate reasons, the school may petition for an exception to residency that replaces on-campus coursework with synchronous online courses or with courses offered at additional locations (see *Policies and Procedures*, IV.E-G). The Commission does not approve PhD/ThD programs that offer most or all of their courses asynchronously, since teaching students to engage others orally and to respond to questions immediately and thoughtfully are key values for this degree.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its policies and practices related to residency for its academic doctoral programs, recognizing that the Commission understands residential courses as those where faculty and students are in person on the main campus. If the doctoral program includes required courses offered in other modalities (e.g., online or offsite), the school should describe those modalities and indicate what percentage of required courses are offered in modalities other than on the main campus, how it ensures these courses continue to meet the goals and outcomes of the degree program, and how the school ensures that students do not take more than half of their coursework online or at a location other than on the school’s main campus. If a school allows students to take more than half of their coursework online or at a location other than the main campus, the school demonstrates in its self-study that it has received Commission approval for this experiment (see *Policies and Procedures*, IV.G) and that it continues to meet Commission expectations regarding such offerings. Any petition for an exception to the residency requirement for the PhD (or to any of the requirements listed under this degree standard) documents that the exception achieves the student learning outcomes for the degree and the expectations associated with an advanced research degree. The Commission does not approve PhD/ThD programs that offer most or all of their courses asynchronously. If schools offer any PhD/ThD courses asynchronously, it should describe the nature and extent of those courses (e.g., those focused on research methodologies).

**5.16** The Doctor of Philosophy degree program as a whole and each of its specific student learning outcomes are regularly evaluated, with the results discussed by faculty and used to improve student learning and formation.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** See prompt for Standard 5.6.

## Standard 6. Library and Information Services

**6. Library and Information Services:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning grounded in the historical resources of the tradition, the scholarship of the academic disciplines, and the wisdom of communities of practice. Theological libraries are curated collections and instructional centers with librarians guiding research and organizing access to appropriate resources. Libraries and librarians partner with faculty in student learning and formation to serve schools' educational missions and to equip students to be effective and ethical users of information resources.

### *Library Purpose and Role*

**6.1** The library has a clear statement that identifies its purpose and role in the school and the ways it contributes to achieving the school's educational mission. The library's purpose statement forms the foundation for evaluating library and information services.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its purpose statement and explaining how (and by whom) it was developed, adopted, and distributed. It might explain how this statement connects with the overall mission and context of the school and its stakeholders. The self-study might also discuss how this statement serves as a foundation for the library's evaluation processes. If the library serves more than just the graduate theological school (e.g., a university library or a consortial library), the self-study might show how the statement helps the library give sufficient attention to the graduate theological program and the specific needs of its students and faculty.

**6.2** The library is understood by the school's leadership and stakeholders as a central academic resource that enhances the school's educational programs. Library and information services personnel play a significant and collaborative role in curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the library is understood to be integrated into the work and mission of the school. The self-study might describe how library personnel serve on institutional committees, including how they are involved in curricular development and implementation (see also Standards 6.4 and 6.6). It might also note the ways in which the school's institutional and educational evaluation processes demonstrate clear and positive outcomes as a result of a well-resourced library (e.g., that students are equipped to do research, that faculty are supported in their scholarship, that members of the community see the school as an information resource).

### *Library Staffing and Evaluation*

**6.3** Library and information services personnel are of sufficient number, have appropriate qualifications and expertise, and are supported by adequate resources and opportunities for ongoing professional development.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the number (full- or part-time), qualifications (academic credentials, certifications, or work experience), and expertise of library staff who give primary attention to the graduate theological program. The self-study might evaluate how the current staffing model is appropriate to the needs of the school and to professional responsibilities of each member of the library staff (for example, it is common for a collection development librarian to have subject matter expertise as well as facility with the languages of the collection, and for a library director to have graduate degrees in library science and in theological studies or another pertinent discipline; if the school expects different qualifications, it might indicate so here and describe how it evaluates its model). If the library utilizes student workers, it might indicate how these are selected, trained, and supervised. If the theological library is part of a larger institutional library, it might describe how library staff are appropriately qualified and resourced to give attention to the theological collection and the needs of the school's students and faculty. The self-study might also discuss the school's process and budget for professional development of library personnel, including recent examples.

**6.4** Library and information services personnel are appropriately integrated into the school's leadership, faculty, and decision-making structures, including budgeting and strategic planning processes.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: In addition to broader reflections on shared governance (Standard 9) and specific concerns about curricular and degree program development (Standards 6.6-7), this section of the self-study might reflect on the ways in which library and information personnel support and participate in the leadership and administration of the school. A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the library's role in various decision-making processes of the school. It might discuss how the needs of the library are prioritized and how library and information services personnel participate in the school's budget decisions, including any mid-year adjustments. It might reflect on how both the short- and long-term needs of the library are incorporated into the strategic planning processes of the school, and on how the library's planning is aligned with that of the school. It might discuss how library personnel are integrated into the school's faculty (e.g., participation in faculty meetings, involvement on a curriculum committee, regular meetings with a faculty liaison or library committee). It might describe other leadership roles played by library personnel, including committee responsibilities or other service to the school. It might discuss how library personnel, particularly the library director, have appropriate rank or status to fulfill these roles effectively.

**6.5** Library and information services personnel regularly evaluate the adequacy and use of services and resources, including those provided contractually or collaboratively, documenting that the information needs of the school's students and faculty are met in ways that are appropriate to the school's educational mission, degree programs, and educational modalities.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the library engages in evaluation of its services and resources, including a summary of (and link to) recent evaluation results, and a discussion of how these results are used to improve or enhance library and information services. The self-study might describe how the library is able to demonstrate that it meets the information needs of its faculty and students, with attention to the school's various degrees and educational modalities (see also Standard 6.9). For libraries that depend on resources or services provided by other entities, it might demonstrate that the library regularly evaluates the ways in which these resources or services meet the curricular and research demands of the school, and how the library compensates for any gaps or unique needs of the school.

### ***Library Services and Resources***

**6.6.** The library offers services that enhance student learning and formation and partners with faculty in teaching, learning, and research. Librarians provide reference services, help users navigate research resources, teach information literacy skills, support the scholarly and educational work of the school, and foster lifelong learning.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by providing examples of the library's programs or initiatives related to these skill areas (e.g., workshops, subject guides, participation in courses, library links in online courses, etc.). It might also describe additional services offered by the library or by librarians, such as providing bibliographic instruction, assisting faculty in instructional design, modeling scholarly innovation, supporting writing skills and critical thinking, or nurturing intellectual curiosity and collaboration. The self-study might include evidence of student engagement with library staff for effective and meaningful theological research or describe course assignments that demonstrate effective student research on both academic and professional subjects utilizing materials beyond required course readings. The self-study might describe how a faculty library committee and/or other regular or formal processes of faculty consultation help inform and enhance the library's support of student learning and formation.

**6.7** The library curates and organizes a coherent collection of resources sufficient in quality, quantity, currency, and depth to support the school's courses and degree programs, to encourage research and exploration beyond the requirements of the academic program, and to enable interaction with a wide range of perspectives, including theological and cultural diversity and global voices.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the library's strategies for collection development, including how it attends to the curricular needs of the institution and how it understands its resources to play a broader role than just support of current course offerings. It should attend to both physical and electronic resources as appropriate to the school's mission and context. It might discuss how library personnel are kept up to date about the school's curriculum and degree programs (e.g., serve on the curriculum committee, review course syllabi), including how they get to know new faculty and how they are informed of potential new degree programs or concentrations. It might also discuss the ways in which the collection is designed to support faculty research as well as the needs of any other identified stakeholders. It might describe the library's strategies for attending to the breadth of its collection, including its acquisitions strategies and ways in which it solicits input from its users and other stakeholders. If the library maintains a collection of rare materials or supports an archive, it might describe here the purpose, status, needs, and strengths of these resources and discuss how they enhance the library and serve the mission of the school. The self-study might also indicate how it grants library personnel appropriate freedom of inquiry to fulfill these responsibilities (see also Standards 8.6 and 9.4).

**6.8** The library has a collection development and access policy that is consistently used, regularly evaluated, and periodically updated to ensure it meets the current and future needs of the school.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the library's collection development and access policy, including a discussion of when this policy was developed and when it was last evaluated. The policy itself should be provided in the supplemental materials to the self-study (see *Self-Study Handbook*). The self-study should show how the policy supports the acquisition and de-acquisition (weeding) of the library's collection (print and/or electronic), how it helps the library prioritize its subscriptions and annual expenditures, how it actively curates and evaluates access to free or consortial resources, and how it attends to both current and future needs of the school. It should demonstrate how the policy provides adequate research resources for students in all modalities and teaching locations. If the library's collection development policy serves more than just the graduate theological school (e.g., a university library or a consortial library), it might show how the policy gives sufficient attention to the graduate theological program.

**6.9** The library has sufficient financial, technological, and physical resources to accomplish its purpose and to give equitable attention and access to all the school's degree programs and modes of educational delivery.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the library's budget and discussing how the school evaluates the adequacy of its financial support of the library, with attention to both the current and long-term needs of the library. The self-study might describe the technological resources used by the library, including a navigable electronic portal and catalog for effective discovery and access of the collection's print and scholarly e-resources. It might briefly describe the library's physical facilities and might demonstrate that it provides adequate physical facilities, technological infrastructure, and hours of operation to support students and other library users. Schools that offer multiple degree programs and/or more than one mode of educational delivery (onsite, offsite, online) might demonstrate that library resources are appropriate for each program or mode of delivery.

**6.10** The library provides environments conducive to learning and scholarly research, with appropriate agreements for its contracted or consortial resources.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the library's approach to preservation and security, with attention to both onsite and online resources. The self-study might describe the library's physical facilities (e.g., space for study and collaboration, adequate shelving, appropriate technology, climate control, security) and/or its virtual environment (e.g., online catalog, web portal, LibGuides, virtual helpdesk). If the library supports additional locations, it might describe the facilities and services of each location. If the library manages archival collections, digital repositories, or rare materials, the self-study might describe security and preservation strategies here (see Standard 6.7). The self-study might also discuss the library's involvement in contracted or consortial resources (e.g., coordinated collection development, reciprocity for distance learners, contracts for electronic resources) and demonstrate that these include appropriate safeguards for the integrity of the library's collection and services. The self-study might also demonstrate how these contractual agreements are appropriate to the mission and curricular needs of the school and describe the process by which such written agreements are made and regularly reviewed.



## Standard 7. Student Services

**7. Student Services:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning with a central focus on students and on serving them well. Student services personnel share responsibility with faculty, administrators, staff, and students themselves for creating the conditions under which students engage appropriately in educationally purposeful activities. Student services personnel help foster supportive learning environments, bridge organizational boundaries, and form collaborative partnerships to enhance student learning and formation. These services contribute to the school's overall mission and consider the specific needs of students pursuing graduate theological education.

### *Student Services Personnel*

**7.1** The school has or has access to a sufficient number of qualified student services personnel to meet the needs of students. These personnel receive adequate resources and professional development to accomplish their work effectively, participate in institutional decisions affecting student services, and advocate for the particular needs of students in their context.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its current student services personnel (number, role, qualifications) and evaluating the effectiveness of its staffing model in light of its context, including attention to the responsibilities for student services as described in Standards 7.2-11. The self-study might show ways in which student personnel staff are supported in their work and integrated into the larger school, noting particularly ways in which their engagement with students can inform curricular and institutional planning and evaluation. Embedded schools or those that use student services resources from other institutions might evaluate how well these partnerships meet the distinctive needs of their students and how well communication happens among service providers, students, and the schools.

### *Student Recruitment and Admissions*

**7.2** The school has recruitment policies and practices that are consistent with its mission, resources, constituencies, and educational offerings. Those policies and practices accurately represent the school and the vocational opportunities related to its degree programs.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its policies and practices of student recruitment and demonstrating how it evaluates the appropriateness and effectiveness of these strategies. It might also note ways in which it seeks to improve or enhance these strategies, as needed. An embedded school that utilizes a centralized recruitment office through a university might reflect on the ways in which it helps recruitment personnel understand the nature and distinctive features of the theological school. When direct recruitment of students is beyond the scope of the school (e.g., when students are sent by religious communities), the self-study can reflect on the ways in which the school collaborates with these partners to ensure that the expectations and descriptions of the school are accurately communicated to potential students. As part of the site visit, the evaluation committee will want to see samples of recruitment materials and will review the school's website to make sure it accurately portrays the context of the school and outcomes for each degree program.

**7.3** The school has clearly defined admissions policies appropriate to each degree program it offers and to the school's mission and vision. These policies are fairly implemented and encourage diversity appropriate to the school's context and theological commitments. Policies are reviewed regularly to ensure the overall quality of the student population, as well as a sufficient community of learning in each degree program.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the admissions policies and practices that apply across the school as a whole, as well as within each degree program. The self-study might describe more generally how admissions personnel help prospective students (and any sending bodies, e.g., vocations directors or denominational representatives) understand the nature

of each degree program to ensure alignment between the specific degree and the student and to ensure a sufficient community of learning in each degree. The self-study might also describe how admissions personnel share their perspectives and learnings with faculty and others involved in curriculum and academic support. If the school utilizes an enrollment management plan, the self-study might describe and evaluate the plan here, including a discussion of how the school understands its enrollment goals to be realistic and appropriately resourced. For schools where some or all admissions process are handled outside the school (e.g., embedded schools or schools where admissions is dependent upon a religious authority), the school might show how it ensures that these practices ensure the integrity of each degree program and the school overall. The school might also evaluate how well its admissions policies and practices encourage a diverse student body appropriate to its context and theological commitments (see Standard 1.5).

**7.4** The school admits students to master's degrees who have an accredited baccalaureate degree or its educational equivalent and meet any other requirements specified for that master's degree. Students without an accredited baccalaureate degree or its equivalent may be admitted to a master's degree if the school documents through rigorous means that those students are prepared to do master's-level work. Students admitted to doctoral degrees have an accredited master's degree or its educational equivalent in a field deemed appropriate by the school and meet any other requirements specified for that doctoral degree.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the school's overall approach to admissions, including how it ensures that the specific admissions requirements for each degree are met. For example, it might discuss how admissions and recruitment personnel are in conversation with degree program directors or faculty so they can accurately describe the distinctive features and requirements of each program, and how the school's accreditation liaison officer (ALO) helps other stakeholders clearly understand admissions requirements for each degree from the Commission Standards (as well as those by any other agency or body). A school might also reflect on how it has developed its general admissions strategy in light of its mission, context, and stakeholders. A school that admits non-baccalaureate students to any MDiv or MA degree programs should describe the "rigorous means" that it uses to ensure that these students are ready for graduate-level work and cite what percentage of such students it admits each year to its MDiv and/or MA programs. **NOTE:** Additional information on admissions criteria for DMin programs is covered in Standard 5.5. The standards do not detail any specific admissions requirements for any other degree program, beyond what is described here. However, a school may choose to describe any particular admissions requirements or recruiting strategies for a specific degree when it describes the purpose of each degree program (Standards 4.1, 4.6, 4.10, 5.7, and 5.11).

### ***Student Support Services***

**7.5** The school has appropriate, reliable, and accessible support services and programming for all students. Services and programs are designed to create an environment in which student learning and formation is fostered, retention is strengthened, and student safety is addressed. These services are regularly evaluated to ensure they are appropriate and adequate for the school, its degree programs, its delivery modes, and the diversity of its student community. A school that utilizes student services of another entity demonstrates the effectiveness of those services for its theological students.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the services that are available to students and by evaluating how effectively they meet their needs. The self-study might also describe the school's retention trends and strategies. Schools that share student services with other institutions might describe how it evaluates the effectiveness of such services. When a school utilizes non-residential or commuter-based modes of education, it might describe how it ensures students have access to the support services that they need, even if it does not provide certain services directly. The focus should be on how well students are served in ways that enhance their ability to succeed and how information about and access to resources and services is shared equitably. The self-study might also indicate areas in which the school seeks to improve its student support services in the future (see also Standard 7.3). The self-study might also describe how the school ensures a safe environment for students, whether physically onsite or digitally online (see also Standard 10.2). Schools that participate in Title IV federal loan programs must document that they meet the Clery Act for campus security (see Standard 1.6).

**7.6** The school communicates clearly to all students their rights and responsibilities, the school's code of conduct, and appropriate procedures for making formal complaints. The school publicizes a defined process for responding to complaints raised by students, and it maintains records of formal complaints related to the *Standards* and *Policies*, the process followed, and the decisions made.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by identifying where it publishes such requirements and how students are made aware of this information (e.g., through student orientation or readily accessible and well-organized student handbook; see also Standards 3.11-14 regarding educational policies). Embedded schools might describe ways in which it helps students locate both institution-wide and school-specific policies (e.g., through a website or learning management system page providing links to various documents or departments). The school shows that it has a formal complaint policy that enables grievances to be addressed fairly, consistently, and in a timely manner, including options for how and where complaints may be reported. Schools might describe the ways in which it has evaluated its policies (including grievance processes), such as comparing these with peer institutions or having them reviewed by human resources or legal counsel. The self-study describes the number and nature of formal student complaints (i.e., those related to an accreditation standard or policy) that have been processed during the most recent period of accreditation and evaluates the effectiveness of that process. During the site visit, the evaluation committee may review specific examples of student grievances related to the Commission's *Standards* and *Policies*.

**7.7** The school adequately maintains student records related to admissions, coursework, and other areas as determined by its programs and policies. These records are appropriately secured from loss or unauthorized access. The school maintains the privacy of student information in ways that meet all applicable laws and regulations, including, as necessary, those from ecclesial or denominational bodies.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its process for maintaining student records, including how it ensures the security of such records. It should describe how physical records are protected from natural disaster (fire, flood) and identify how access to these records is limited to authorized personnel. Schools that maintain electronic files might indicate the frequency of and strategy for backups and might describe other ways in which electronic data is secured from loss or unauthorized access. Schools might describe both their short- and long-term strategies for records management (e.g., describing their records retention policy and noting when student files transition from "active" to "storage"). The self-study might describe how the school protects the privacy of student information, including how it complies with any applicable provincial, federal, or ecclesial or denominational regulations.

### ***Student Financial Aid and Borrowing***

**7.8** The school has equitable and nondiscriminatory systems for processing financial aid that meet all applicable laws and regulations. Financial aid policies and processes are published, available to all students, regularly reviewed by the school, and updated as needed.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its system for processing financial aid (if relevant) and by evaluating the ways in which this meets expectations of all appropriate regulatory bodies, including how it stays current with changing requirements (see Standard 1.6). It might describe the types of aid it offers and how students or prospective students are made aware of that information. It might note how it reviews these activities and include examples of the process and outcome of the most recent review. If a school does not offer financial aid, it can simply state that this standard does not apply.

**7.9** The school regularly reviews student educational debt and, as necessary, develops strategies to minimize borrowing, explores alternative funding, and communicates to students the potential consequences of educational debt.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the processes by which it gathers data on student educational debt, where and with whom it discusses its findings (e.g., senior leadership, governing board, faculty, students), and how it develops, implements, and evaluates

strategies for addressing student educational debt. In addition to documenting how these conversations have transpired (e.g., citing minutes), it might give examples of initiatives it has adopted based on these conversations (e.g., workshops offered to students or resources made available to prospective students). The self-study might evaluate whether the average percentage of recent graduates who incurred debt while in school and whether the average amount of that debt is appropriate and comparable to data from peer institutions (see e.g., ATS Graduate Student Questionnaire). Schools that participate in Title IV federal loan programs must provide their most recent student loan cohort default rate (or for an embedded school, the related entity's most recent default rates); see also Standard 10.7.

### ***Student Career and Placement Services***

**7.10** The school ensures that students have access to appropriate vocational counseling and placement guidance or services that are relevant to their degrees and consistent with the school's mission and religious context.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing and evaluating strategies it provides for vocational counseling and placement (e.g., career center or placement office, though such centers or offices are not required). Here, the word "placement" is understood not simply as placing a student or graduate in a position of employment but also as partnering with the student and other stakeholders to understand how a student's vocational journey continues beyond their graduate degree. Schools that rely on other entities for placement (e.g., denomination) or that enroll students already placed (e.g., DMin students) or not seeking placement (see note for Standard 7.11) might indicate that this is the case and also describe how the school provides support to students who might fall outside that pattern (e.g., students who change vocational direction or who may not be able to secure the employment they seek). The self-study might describe ways in which the school helps students understand realistic vocational options that follow from particular degree programs (attending, for example, to employment rates, salaries, and necessary qualifications for particular professions) and might also discuss ways in which the school has helped to educate or advocate on behalf of groups that have been disadvantaged in employment because of their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and/or other factors that are consistent with the school's mission and theological convictions. Embedded schools might indicate whether and how effectively its students utilize any resources of the related institution (e.g., a university career office), including how the theological school augments these services as necessary.

**7.11** The school monitors the placement of graduates and regularly gathers feedback on the school's educational effectiveness from graduates and the places where they serve. Admissions policies and curricula are regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure that students are adequately prepared to serve in their particular vocational contexts.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its placement data from recent ATS Annual Report Forms and evaluating whether its placement data and trends are appropriate to its context. Even if the school is not directly involved in the placement of students, it should still track whether and where its graduates have been placed (i.e., how they have continued their vocational journey after graduation). As a reminder, the Commission understands "positive placement" to include three categories: (1) vocational placement for graduates in positions for which the degree prepared them, regardless of whether those positions are compensated or volunteer, including graduates in their placements prior to graduation, at graduation, or after graduation; (2) non-vocational placement for graduates who received degrees in programs which they sought for non-vocational reasons, such as personal enhancement; and (3) further study for graduates pursuing additional education at any level. The self-study might reflect on any "negative placement" data related to graduates who are still seeking placement and reflect on any implications for vocational counseling and placement in Standard 7.10. If a school discovers that the placement status of a significant number of graduates is low or unknown, it might present its plan for remedying that. Schools are reminded that the Board may take action with any school where overall (positive) placement rates are below 50 percent or for which at least 50 percent are reported as unknown (*Policies and Procedures*, III.M.1). Schools participating in Title IV federal loan programs must not advertise placement rates as a marketing or recruitment strategy unless those placement rates have been verified by an external entity. See also Standard 2.8 for making placement rates public as part of the school's statement of educational effectiveness, which is not considered a marketing or recruitment strategy.

## Standard 8. Faculty

**8. Faculty:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning dependent upon a qualified, supported, and effective faculty of sufficient size and diversity to achieve schools' educational missions and support student learning and formation. Faculty responsibilities, composition, and qualifications are clearly defined and appropriate to graduate theological education. Faculty are supported and provided ongoing opportunities for professional development. Faculty roles in teaching and learning, scholarship, and service are clear and consistent with schools' missions and are fulfilled effectively by the faculty.

### *Faculty Responsibilities, Composition, and Qualifications*

**8.1** The responsibilities of the faculty are clearly defined and appropriate to graduate theological education. A key ongoing responsibility for the faculty as a whole is to design, implement, evaluate, and improve the school's educational programs in collaboration with other appropriate parties. Faculty meet collectively and regularly to discuss and implement that curricular responsibility.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by offering an overview of how the faculty as a whole understands its role within the school, including how often it meets and how it structures its work together (e.g., faculty senate, curriculum committee). It might give particular attention to the faculty's crucial and substantive role in relation to the school's educational programs, describing the defined responsibilities of the faculty (citing the faculty handbook or other documents as appropriate) and giving examples of how the faculty has performed this role in recent years. Depending on the school's institutional context, this may also be an occasion to reflect on some of the faculty's distinctive responsibilities in shared governance. Schools that are embedded in other institutions might describe the relationship between the school's faculty and the faculty and governance structures of the other institution, including curricular oversight and assessment. The school provides the onsite evaluation committee access to faculty minutes. In its response to this standard, the school might also reference Standards 2.5 (the faculty's role in educational and institutional evaluation), 3.7 (the faculty's role in student learning and formation), and 9.8 (the faculty's role in shared governance). NOTE: These standards use the word "faculty" to include anyone who is so designated by the school, whether full-time or part-time, including any administrator with faculty status (e.g., the chief academic officer). The ATS Annual Report Form defines "full-time faculty" as any individual working full-time for an institution, who has faculty status, and who devotes at least half of his or her time to teaching and/or research (see Standard 8.2 for a definition of "core" faculty).

**8.2** The composition of the faculty is sufficient in number and diversity—demographically and educationally—to achieve the school's mission, in light of the number and nature of its degree programs, the size and composition of its student body, and the scope of its theological commitments. Faculty classifications (e.g., full-time/part-time, tenured/non-tenured, ranked/non-ranked, etc.) are clear, fair to those faculty affected, consistently applied, and appropriate to the school's mission, context, and academic offerings. The school has a stable core of faculty.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by listing the members of the school's faculty, indicating rank, length of time at the institution, teaching field, full/part-time status, and significant administrative roles or dual appointments. The self-study might discuss how the faculty demonstrates educational diversity (with degrees from a variety of different graduate institutions) and demographic diversity (gender, race/ethnicity, etc.) as appropriate to the school's mission and context (see also Standard 1.5 on diversity). The self-study might reference documents that outline the school's faculty classifications and advancement policies and describe how these are aligned with the school's mission and context. It might also discuss how the school engages in short- and long-term planning for faculty needs, including how it addresses faculty vacancies and how it engages in practices of cultivation and recruitment of new faculty (see also Standard 8.5). The self-study should reflect on the adequacy of the school's faculty in light of the programs offered, giving particular attention to faculty expectations for mentoring and advising students, indicating any areas of needed growth (with timelines, as appropriate). If the school offers degrees with specializations, it should show that those specializations have an appropriate number of qualified faculty.

The self-study should discuss how the school understands and defines its “core faculty” and describe its retention patterns for its core faculty. If the school utilizes part-time faculty (e.g., adjunct or affiliate) or faculty who are shared with other programs (e.g., undergraduate teaching) or schools (e.g., dual appointments), it should describe their role, including what percentage of courses each year are typically taught by them, how they are hired and evaluated, how they are supported and developed (see Standards 8.6-7), and how they are involved in typical faculty roles (see Standards 8.8-11). NOTE: This standard uses the term “core faculty” to identify those persons with primary responsibility for teaching in and overseeing the school’s graduate theological degrees, which typically means that at least half of their teaching load is in the graduate school of theology (see also Standard 8.1).

**8.3** The qualifications of the faculty are appropriate to graduate theological education, typically demonstrated through each faculty member having an appropriate doctorate and relevant professional/ecclesial/denominational experience. Any school employing faculty without a doctorate documents that such faculty have suitable qualifications. All core faculty (with their names and qualifications) are published in a readily accessible location.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by listing the names, titles, and qualifications of each core faculty member (including, but not limited to, academic degrees earned and names of granting institutions). It might discuss what the school understands as the necessary and desired qualifications for all faculty members (including credentials, skills, and experiences), in light of its mission and context, giving attention to the subjects that faculty will be teaching and the roles they will be fulfilling (e.g., advising, mentoring, administering). It might describe the school’s process for evaluating faculty qualifications, citing institutional documents (e.g., faculty handbook) and including examples from recent hiring or advancement processes if appropriate. The self-study might also indicate where a public list of core faculty names and qualifications can be found (e.g., school website or academic catalog). Full CVs of all faculty members (full- and part-time) should be available to the evaluation committee during a comprehensive visit, as well as official graduate degree transcripts for full-time faculty (see the *Self-Study Handbook*).

### ***Faculty Support and Development***

**8.4** The school supports faculty (whether full-time or part-time) in a variety of ways, including adequate compensation, appropriate workload, suitable working conditions, and sufficient support services.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its structures and practices for faculty compensation, including how the school’s practices compare to those at peer schools (e.g., using ATS comparative data), with attention also to compensation policies and practices for part-time faculty. When compensation is established outside the theological school (e.g., at an embedded school or for members of religious communities), describe the school’s role in ensuring that faculty compensation is appropriate. The self-study might describe faculty workload (e.g., average teaching load per year, committee assignments, advising expectations), indicating how it ensures that faculty workload allows for sufficient attention to students. Beyond compensation, the self-study might describe the ways in which the school supports faculty in their work (e.g., administrative or research support; note that professional development will be discussed under Standard 8.7 and research support will be discussed under Standard 8.9). The self-study might also demonstrate that faculty feel appropriately supported in their work (e.g., through satisfaction surveys or by demonstrating faculty longevity).

**8.5** The school has and consistently follows fair and ethical policies and procedures for recruiting, appointing, caring for, evaluating, promoting, and, when necessary, dismissing faculty. All policies and procedures concerning these matters are published in a faculty handbook or similar document that is regularly reviewed and updated as needed.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the school’s policies and process for hiring, evaluating, promoting, and dismissing faculty (cite documents and giving examples of recent practices, as appropriate). It might describe when those policies were last reviewed, any changes made, and recent challenges in implementing them. If a school has faculty members who are placed

by another entity (e.g., university or ecclesial or denominational body), it might describe these practices and discuss how these serve the mission of the theological school. See also Standard 9.8 on shared governance regarding the faculty's role in developing and implementing procedures for appointing, retaining, and promoting faculty.

**8.6** The school supports and safeguards freedom of inquiry for faculty with policies and procedures that are consistent with the mission and theological commitments of the school. Those policies and procedures are clearly published, consistently followed, regularly reviewed, and updated as needed.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the school's policies and practices regarding freedom of inquiry, including any stated limits. It might cite where these policies can be found (e.g., faculty handbook). It might also describe recent examples of how these policies and procedures have been enacted at the school.

**8.7** The school provides ongoing opportunities and sufficient funds for faculty to develop professionally in ways consistent with the school's mission and needs, with the changing nature of graduate theological education, and with assigned faculty responsibilities—both ongoing and new. Faculty development opportunities are regularly budgeted and implemented, clearly communicated, and systematically evaluated.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how goals are set for faculty professional development. It might identify policies or practices for support of professional development (e.g., such as sabbaticals or research leaves, course reductions, stipends, book budgets, or travel allowances), including recent examples. It might describe how these practices are appropriate to the mission and context of the school and to the broad and changing landscape of theological education (for example, indicating how the school helps faculty understand the context of graduate theological education, serve in administrative roles, teach in various modalities, and engage in student formation). The self-study might discuss how it evaluates its policies and practices, giving attention to how these opportunities help faculty develop in their specific roles (including those described in Standards 8.8-11).

### ***Faculty Roles in Teaching and Learning, Scholarship, and Service***

**8.8** The faculty role in teaching and learning includes faculty sharing their expertise with students, using effective pedagogies, being available to students, providing regular and prompt feedback to students, respecting and engaging the diversities that students bring to their educational experiences, and enhancing students' capacities to serve in a religiously diverse, multicultural, and globally interconnected world.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how it understands the faculty role in teaching and learning. Building off of its earlier discussion of student learning and formation (Standards 3.1-7), the self-study might reflect on the specific expectations it has of its faculty. It might describe the typical teaching load for full-time faculty (if appropriate) and discuss how the school understands that load to be appropriate to the mission and context of the school. It might describe how the school seeks feedback on teaching and learning (e.g., course evaluations, course observations) and how faculty engage and respond to such feedback. It might discuss how faculty serve as mentors for students, in ways that appropriate to the school's mission and context. It might note other key responsibilities of faculty and cite institutional documents (such as the faculty handbook) where such responsibilities are described. The self-study might also describe how faculty address the diversities that students bring to the classroom, as well as how faculty help students serve in religiously diverse, multicultural, and globally interconnected contexts (see also Standards 3.3-4).

**8.9** The faculty role in scholarship encompasses faculty staying current in their fields, engaging in research appropriate to their responsibilities, presenting their findings in ways consistent with their disciplines and the school's constituencies, and participating in professional activities germane to their

work. The school supports faculty in their scholarship and has clear and consistent policies and practices on its expectations for faculty scholarship, including how that is evaluated.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how faculty are encouraged and supported in their scholarly role, giving attention both to their subject expertise and also to their responsibilities as theological educators. Depending on the nature and context of the school, this section of the self-study might discuss expectations for publishing, involvement in guild meetings, scholarship for religious communities, and public scholarship. It might also discuss expectations for faculty to contribute to the scholarly discourse regarding teaching methods, administration, formation, mentoring, or other similar areas. The self-study might cite institutional documents (such as the faculty handbook) where such responsibilities are described, including how such scholarship is to be evaluated. In addition to its professional development activities (Standard 8.7), it might indicate the ways in which it supports faculty scholarship (e.g., library services, research assistants, conference funds, course releases). The self-study might give examples or a brief summary of all faculty publications and presentations in the past five years, with full faculty CVs available in the supplemental materials (see the *Self-Study Handbook*).

**8.10** The faculty role in service covers a wide range of activities, consistent with the school's mission and with faculty members' interests and capacities. Whatever service role faculty play, that role is clearly defined, adequately supported, regularly evaluated, and adjusted as needed.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the service expectations for faculty. This may include service internal to the school (e.g., committees, program directors, representatives to the university or board), as well as service external to the school (e.g., working with constituent organizations, pastoral services, engaging various publics). The self-study might discuss how these service expectations are encouraged, assigned, supported, and evaluated, citing institutional documents (such as the faculty handbook) where such responsibilities are described and include recent examples of the types and impact of faculty service.

**8.11** Faculty roles in these three areas, as well as other roles to which faculty are called, are viewed holistically and are understood to be interrelated in support of the mission, ethos, and values of the school. Expectations for faculty roles are clearly defined and are aligned with the school's practices for continuation or promotion. When roles are differentiated, such as for administrative faculty, the school provides clear expectations and appropriate support. Recognizing the particular and changing landscape of theological education, the school attends to the individual and collective vocations of theological faculty.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the three roles named above (teaching and learning, scholarship, and service) combine with other faculty roles (administration, educational design, religious leadership) to constitute the vocation of theological faculty. The self-study might describe the ways in which these roles are understood to be interrelated and interdependent upon each other, both for individual faculty members and for faculty as a whole, rather than not as mutually exclusive and hierarchically ranked categories. The self-study might describe how each of these roles relates to a school's policies and practices for faculty continuation and promotion (e.g., by citing the faculty handbook and describing how faculty members are given credit for certain practices, including how these practices are evaluated). It might also note how it provides clarity to faculty who embody their roles in different ways (e.g., clinical/practical faculty, administrative faculty, or faculty who carry heavy loads for institutional service or for care of specific groups of students), including how the school seeks alignment between what faculty are asked to do and what they are credited for doing, with attention to workload expectations, salary, and/or promotion. More broadly, the self-study might reflect on the breadth and depth of faculty work, and discuss how the school seeks to define, understand, support, and develop the faculty as a whole as well as its individual members, in light of the mission and context of the school.



## Standard 9. Governance and Administration

**9. Governance and Administration:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning governed by those with authority to ensure schools meet their missions with educational quality and financial sustainability. Governing bodies do that by working collaboratively to establish priorities, develop policies, make decisions, authorize actions, and evaluate outcomes. They are composed of qualified persons who broadly represent their schools' constituencies and understand their fiduciary responsibilities. Governance is based on a bond of trust among boards, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and ecclesial or denominational bodies where shared governance is clearly defined and appropriately implemented. School administrations are adequately structured, sufficiently staffed, and duly authorized and supported to fulfill their responsibilities.

### *Governance Authority and Qualifications*

**9.1** The school is under the documented authority of a governing body with appropriate legal authority (and ecclesial or denominational, if needed) to ensure that its mission is achieved in ways that demonstrate educational quality and financial sustainability. A school embedded in another entity has some group that attends to the theological school's mission, such as a board committee or an advisory council, and documents that group's authority and responsibilities. A school with a bicameral system of governance documents the authority and responsibilities of each body, such as a board overseeing financial and administrative matters and a senate overseeing academic matters. A school with a governance system where authority is shared with or delegated by an ecclesial or denominational body documents the authority and responsibilities of each body.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by referencing the school's charter or bylaws (see also Standard 1.6 on authority) and indicating when these were most recently revised. The self-study might describe the school's overall governance structure and discuss how governance works in light of mission and context, including its relationship to any external entity or denominational body. It might discuss how and where "governance is clearly defined," per the opening statement to Standard 9, and might indicate where such definitions may be found (e.g., a board handbook). Embedded schools might describe how the theological school is represented on the related entity's governing board (e.g., a seminary committee or academic affairs committee); if it has a separate advisory council, it might describe the role this council plays in the school's governance structure. Schools with bicameral systems or systems where authority is shared or delegated by an ecclesial or denominational body might cite where the descriptions and authorizations for each facet of the governing structure may be found, with particular attention to the responsibilities of the theological school.

**9.2** The school's governing members possess the qualifications appropriate to their fiduciary responsibilities and represent the diversity reflected in the school's mission, ecclesial or denominational commitments, and constituencies. New members are appointed through clearly defined processes and are adequately oriented to their responsibilities. The school's governing body exercises its authority collectively as a group, not as individuals, and fulfills its responsibilities on behalf of the school as a whole, using the school's mission to guide all major decisions.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the school's governing body practices "fiduciary responsibility"—a legal obligation for non-profits (e.g., duty of care and duty of loyalty) that applies to both US and Canadian schools. It might describe the characteristics of the school's governing body (number of members, gender, race/ethnicity, professions, years of experience on board) and discuss how board diversity reflects the school's mission, ecclesial or denominational commitments, and constituencies. It might describe how new board members are recruited, appointed or elected, and oriented to their work. It might also discuss how board decisions are made collectively, using the school's mission as guide (including examples, as appropriate).

### ***Governance Responsibilities and Processes***

**9.3** The school has clear and current documents that describe its governing body's authority, responsibilities, composition, and governance processes. Common responsibilities include ensuring the school's mission is met; setting priorities for the school through strategic planning; selecting, caring for, evaluating, and, when necessary, dismissing the school's chief executive officer; delegating appropriate authority to school administrators and faculty; and managing the school's finances and other assets by approving budgets, entering into contracts, preserving endowed funds, and ensuring annual independent audits.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by referencing its governance handbook or manual, indicating when this document was most recently revised. It might identify and discuss the sections of the handbook that clearly describe the governing board's authority, composition, and processes. It might discuss how it engages in each of the common responsibilities described in this standard (or, if some other entity carries some of these responsibilities, it might indicate this) and might also describe any unique responsibilities not listed here. A school that is embedded that utilizes a bicameral system or that has limited authority due to its ecclesial or denominational relationship might describe how its governance process is documented and enacted.

**9.4** The school has and implements governance processes that help achieve its mission in light of its context and constituencies. These processes include governance structure(s) appropriate to the size and nature of the school, regular meetings of the governing body, clear conflict of interest policies and practices, and safeguards for procedural fairness and freedom of inquiry. The governing body communicates its major decisions in clear and timely ways to all appropriate constituencies.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the governing body is structured (e.g., a list of officers and committees), how often it meets, how its meetings are structured, how decisions are made (e.g., majority vote or consensus), and how it responds to any institutional needs between meetings. It should describe its conflict-of-interest policies and practices, and how it ensures that people are treated fairly and with attention to due process (including issues of academic freedom). It might describe and give examples of how the governing body communicates key decisions in clear and timely ways, and also discuss how it addresses decisions that cannot be communicated widely (e.g., issues related to personnel matters).

**9.5** The school's governing body regularly evaluates its responsibilities, processes, and actions and uses those results to improve its effectiveness. The governing body also ensures that the school's mission and educational and institutional outcomes are regularly evaluated and that the results are used to better achieve the school's mission and improve its various outcomes.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing how the board engages in self-evaluation, including the approaches or instruments used, frequency of use, and recent response rates. It might give examples of how results from the board's evaluation process have been used to improve board effectiveness. It might also describe how the governing body gives attention to the school's comprehensive evaluation processes (see Standards 2.5-8) and how it ensures that information from these processes is used to help improve the school's educational and institutional outcomes.

### ***Shared Governance***

**9.6** The school recognizes the value of shared governance in theological education by clearly defining and periodically evaluating how shared governance works in its setting. Shared governance recognizes the appropriate roles and expertise of key constituencies. Shared governance understands that decisions of the governing body are enhanced by seeking the wisdom of the community in collaborative ways, where that is feasible and appropriate, especially decisions impacting the school's educational quality and financial sustainability.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by defining the school's own understanding of shared governance, giving attention to the school's mission, context, structure, and ecclesial or denominational or other key relationships. It might cite where this definition of shared governance may be found (e.g., in a board or employee handbook) and how this definition relates to the school's various stakeholders (governing board, administration, faculty, staff, students, and others as appropriate). It might describe how shared governance is implemented and evaluated (including recent examples) and also discuss areas where shared governance may be limited (e.g., personnel matters). If the school does not have its own operational definition of shared governance, it might begin by reflecting on the opening to the previous Standard 7: "Governance is based on a bond of trust among boards, administration, faculty, students, and ecclesial or denominational bodies. Each institution should articulate its own theologically informed understanding of how this bond of trust becomes operational as a form of shared governance. Institutional stewardship is the responsibility of all, not just the governing board. Good institutional life requires that all institutional stewards know and carry out their responsibilities effectively as well as encouraging others to do the same. Governance occurs in a legal context, and its boundaries are set by formal relationships with ecclesiastical authority, with public authority as expressed in law and charter, and with private citizens and other legally constituted bodies in the form of contracts. The governance of a theological school, however, involves more than the legal relationships and bylaws that define patterns of responsibility and accountability. It is the structure by which participants in the governance process exercise faithful leadership on behalf of the purpose of the theological school."

**9.7** The school's governing body delegates to the administration the authority to administer board policies and decisions and manage the school's resources and operations within any appropriate guidelines set by the governing body.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by discussing the various groups that are involved in shared governance at the school, citing documents that clarify the roles and responsibilities of each group. It might give particular attention to how it understands the distinction between how the governing board "governs" and the administration "administers," giving examples of the responsibilities that are delegated to the administration by the board. Schools that are embedded and do not report directly to a board (such as those that report through a provost or other university official) might describe these structures, giving attention to how the board and the theological school communicate with each other. Schools where members of administration serve on the board might discuss how overlapping roles are navigated.

**9.8** The school's governing body delegates to the faculty appropriate authority to oversee the school's academic programs and policies in light of their expertise in those areas. Faculty are also delegated an appropriate role in establishing admissions criteria, in recommending candidates for graduation, and in developing and implementing procedures for appointing, retaining, and promoting faculty.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the roles that faculty play in overseeing the school's academic programs, as well as any limits to these roles. It might also describe the roles that faculty play in setting admissions criteria and admitting students, and in setting graduation criteria and recommending students for graduation (citing documents and giving examples of recent practices as appropriate). It might also describe the role of faculty in hiring, evaluating, promoting faculty (citing documents and giving examples of recent practices as appropriate). The self-study might reflect on how these practices relate to the school's overall understanding of shared governance, and also discuss any difficulties in implementing this aspect of shared governance. See also Standard 8.1.

### ***Administration***

**9.9** The school has an administrative structure adequate to the size and nature of the school and sufficiently staffed to achieve the school's mission. The school has persons who fill the roles of chief executive officer, chief academic officer, and chief financial officer, though one person may fill more than one role. The administration represents the diversity reflected in the school's mission, ecclesial or denominational commitments, and constituencies. Each administrator has appropriate qualifications, clearly defined responsibilities, and the necessary authority and resources to fulfill those responsibilities.

Each administrator is regularly evaluated in light of assigned responsibilities, and the results are used to better fulfill or to adjust those responsibilities.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the school's administrative structure and discussing how that helps the school achieve its mission. It might include the name, job title, primary responsibilities, and reporting structure for each senior administrator, including who fills the roles of chief executive officer, chief academic officer, and chief financial officer. Embedded schools might describe the ways in which administrative roles are embodied in both the theological school and the related entity. The self-study might describe how the administration represents the school's commitments to diversity (or discusses plans for improvement, if needed). The self-study might describe each administrator's qualifications (e.g., educational background, work history, certifications) and indicate how they are supported in their work and how they are evaluated (see also Standard 10.2 regarding the evaluation of individual employees).

## Standard 10. Institutional Resources

**10. Institutional Resources:** Theological schools are communities of faith and learning reliant upon sufficient and stable resources to achieve their missions. These resources include human, financial, physical, technological, and shared resources that require faithful and effective stewardship. Schools acquire and use these resources in trust for the fulfillment of their missions in ways that are realistic, holistic, and sustainable. Schools give particular attention to their greatest resource, people, by building communities where all persons are valued, respected, and enabled to use their gifts in ways that serve well the mission.

### *Human Resources*

**10.1** The school has a core of employees (staff and faculty) who are well qualified, adequately supported, fairly compensated, and sufficient in number and diversity to achieve the school's mission in light of its size, structure, and theological commitments.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its employee structure, including a brief summary of the number of employees, categorized by staff and faculty (denoting full-time and part-time, and FTE). Supplemental materials for the self-study might include a list of all school employees, their job titles, their qualifications, and the diversities they represent (e.g., gender, race and ethnicity, nationality, educational backgrounds, and/or other factors consistent with the school's mission and context; see also Standard 1.5). The appendix to the self-study includes an organizational chart (see *Self-Study Handbook*). The self-study might include a discussion of how employees are adequately supported through professional development and other resources, referencing institutional policies and giving examples as appropriate. The self-study might also describe how the school ensures that employees are fairly compensated (salary and benefits) and how it evaluates how the staff are deemed to be sufficient in number and diversity to support the mission, including any plans for improvement (if needed). Schools that are embedded or that share staff with another entity might describe how their staffing model meets this standard and helps achieve the school's mission, noting any areas for ongoing attention or improvement.

**10.2** The school publishes and consistently applies personnel policies and procedures that ensure a safe, fair, and productive environment, including those regarding procedural fairness, sexual harassment and abuse, other forms of misconduct, nondiscrimination, grievances, hiring, dismissal, and evaluation. Each employee has a written job description that is clear, current, and forms the basis for regular evaluations.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing and referencing its personnel policies and procedures (e.g., employee/faculty handbooks), describing how often these policies are reviewed and updated and how employees are made aware of these policies (e.g., employee orientation, staff training). The self-study might indicate (anonymously) whether there have been recent instances involving these policies or procedures; if so, it might describe how the policies were followed. The self-study might reference employee job descriptions, describing how they align with the school's mission and how often they are reviewed. The self-study might describe the employee evaluation process, including how often evaluation happens (for each category of employees, as appropriate) and how results are used (including recent examples). Schools that are embedded or that share staff with another entity might describe how policies and procedures of the other entity meet this standard and help achieve the school's mission, as well as whether there are any specific differences between the policies or practices of the theological school and those of the other entity. The self-study also addresses issues related to employee safety and security.

### *Financial Resources*

**10.3** The school has sufficient and stable financial resources to achieve its mission with educational quality and financial sustainability. The school prepares and implements annual budgets, including capital budgets, and develops multi-year budget projections that support the school's mission and

reflect its planning and evaluation efforts. Budgeted and actual revenues and expenditures are realistic, holistic, and sustainable, with actual operating results demonstrating a consistent pattern of surpluses over time. Budgets are prepared with appropriate input and are approved and adjusted, as needed, by the school's governing body or other authorized entity. An embedded school demonstrates how the financial resources and budgeting process of the theological school are addressed by the other entity and how effective that is for the school.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by discussing how the school engages in annual and multi-year budgeting (insert current budget and three-year projected budgets in appendices), including its process for gathering appropriate input on the budget and for approving and revising the budget. It should describe how budgets reflect planning and evaluation efforts, including any new strategic priorities (see also Standards 2.3 and 2.5). An embedded school or one dependent financially on another entity discusses here how its budget is developed in support of the mission of the theological school and the other entity. The self-study should discuss how the school's budgets and operating results are "realistic" (based on reasonable revenues and expenditures in light of recent trends), "holistic" (considering the whole impact on the mission, educational quality, students, employees, donors, and other constituencies), and "sustainable" (represent operating surpluses, prudent dependence upon endowment, reserves, donors, and proper utilization of unusual or infrequent resources)—with a credible plan to address any deficiencies going forward.

The self-study might include specific information, such as the percentages of revenue derived from tuition and fees, endowment, gifts, and auxiliary enterprises, describing any significant changes in those percentages in recent years (e.g., since the last accreditation visit). It might also describe any significant changes in the percentages of major expense categories (e.g., instruction, academic support, institutional support, etc.) in recent years, as well as any significant debt the school has and how debt repayment is being addressed. The self-study should discuss how the school responds when the budget and actual results diverge significantly. The self-study appendix and supplemental materials should include more detailed financial information, including recent audits (see *Self-Study Handbook*). For further assistance, see *Guidelines for Understanding Standard 10.3 on Finances* (developed by Board of Commissioners in consultation with a group of CFOs).

**10.4** The school develops its tuition revenue and scholarship strategy in consideration of its mission, planning, financial sustainability, and potential impact on students. If applicable, the school attends to the impact of tuition and other factors on the levels of student educational debt incurred in that school.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by providing the tuition costs by degree category and describing how the tuition levels have been developed in light of the current mission, financial sustainability, and market conditions (for example, by drawing on information from the school's Strategic Information Report, as well as recent tuition data reported on ATS Annual Report Forms). It might describe how its scholarship strategy supports the mission. The phrase "if applicable" above recognizes that tuition revenues or costs are not significant issues for some schools (e.g., where the "sending" body covers tuition). Schools for which tuition revenues or costs are significant factors might describe the levels of student debt (percent of borrowers and average borrowing), how these levels may be impacting the mission of the school and students' ability to pursue their career aspirations, and the steps taken to address issues of student debt (see also Standard 7.9).

**10.5** The school with an endowment develops its investment and spending strategy in consideration of its mission, planning, financial sustainability, and potential impact on the future. The school protects and preserves any endowed funds, including utilizing prudent endowment draws. The school has an investment policy that guides the investment and use of endowed funds, and the policy is appropriate to the school's mission and context.

**SELF-STUDY IDEAS:** A school that has an endowment might describe the investment and use policy for endowed funds and explain how it supports the school's mission. It might describe endowment's size and trends, including endowment draws, over the last five years. If a school has made endowment draws that are not sustainable, it might describe its plans to reduce its endowment draws in the future and discuss how these plans are realistic and appropriate. Any school that does not have an endowment may simply indicate that this standard does not apply.

**10.6** The school develops its donor cultivation and giving strategy in consideration of its mission, planning, financial sustainability, and potential impact on donors. The school respects all donors' intentions, whether their gifts are intended for the endowment or for other purposes. The school has an institutional advancement program that is appropriate to its mission, size, structure, and financial goals.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing its general approach to fundraising and development, including its overall strategies and recent practices in this area. It might discuss the ways in which it attends to annual giving, capital campaigns, and/or planned gifts, and describe the roles of various institutional stakeholders in this work (e.g., development staff, senior administrative leaders, governing board, faculty, alumni/ae). It might describe how donors' intentions are recorded and respected, including recent examples as appropriate. It might discuss how institutional advancement is effective in supporting the school's mission and enhancing the school's finances and might indicate how these practices are evaluated. Schools that are embedded in another institution or that rely on another entity for fundraising might discuss how these development practices support the mission and work of the theological school.

**10.7** The school has qualified persons sufficient in number to manage well its financial affairs. Financial staff ensure the integrity of financial records, implement appropriate internal control mechanisms, and provide on a timely basis to key leaders (governing body, chief administrative leaders, and others as appropriate) the information needed to make sound decisions to achieve the school's mission and to ensure that all fiduciary responsibilities are met. The school has internal accounting and reporting systems that are generally accepted in North American higher education. The school has an independent audit conducted every year, and the results are shared with the governing body and others as appropriate. The school addresses any concerns raised in an auditor's management letter or qualified opinion.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing the number and qualifications of financial office staff and how they address the items listed above. It might discuss how and to whom the financial office provides timely information and how this practice supports the strategic planning process in fulfillment of the school's mission. It might discuss how its accounting/reporting system aligns with generally accepted accounting principles. It might discuss how the school's audit firm is chosen and how audit results are communicated to the governing body and other relevant stakeholders. The self-study appendix should include a copy of the school's most recent audit, along with any management letter or qualified opinion (see *Self-Study Handbook*). If the school's most recent audit included a qualified opinion or management letter that raised any concerns, describe how the concerns have been (or are being) addressed. Similarly, if the school has had any recent control failures, it should describe how these concerns have been resolved and how the school plans to improve controls in the future (see also Standards 10.3-4). Embedded schools might describe how the related entity's accounting and reporting systems operate relative to the theological school and include a copy of the related entity's most recent audit. Schools that participate in Title IV federal loan programs must provide access to its most recent audit of federal financial aid for the school (or if embedded, for the broader entity), including a description of responses to any findings. Title IV schools with a USDE composite financial responsibility score below 1.5 must provide a copy of the USDE letter making that determination and describe their response to that letter (e.g., posting a letter of credit). See also Standard 7.9 on student debt and student loan default rates.

### **Physical Resources**

**10.8** The school has or has access to the physical resources it needs to achieve its mission. The school ensures that the facilities and equipment it uses (whether owned or not) are safe, accessible, in good condition, and meet all regulatory requirements. The school has sufficient work and meeting spaces for students, faculty, and staff that are appropriate to its size and the nature of its educational offerings.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing briefly the school's physical resources, indicating whether these are owned or leased, and describing any significant changes to the school's physical resources in recent years (e.g., since the last self-study). The self-study should

discuss briefly how its physical resources are safe, accessible, in good condition (including a description of any deferred maintenance issues and associated costs), and meet all regulatory requirements (i.e., local, provincial, state, or federal). The self-study might describe how effectively these resources serve the school's mission, with attention to both educational quality and financial sustainability. It might also describe how the school's physical facilities are appropriate to its size and its educational offerings. Schools that are embedded or that share space with another entity (or entities) might discuss the adequacy of their facilities and the effectiveness of such arrangements. See also Standards 3.6-9 for locations other than the main campus.

### ***Technological Resources***

**10.9** The school uses technological resources, including information and educational technology, needed to achieve its mission with educational quality. The school has qualified persons in sufficient number and with sufficient support to maintain adequately its technological resources. The school ensures that the people needing to use those resources are appropriately trained. Information shared through technology meets all applicable laws and regulations, including those related to technology security and privacy.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing briefly the nature of the school's technological resources (such as those related to finances and accounting, development, student information systems, learning management systems, integrated library systems, email and website, etc.). It might discuss briefly how those resources help the school achieve its mission, with attention to educational quality, institutional integrity, and financial responsibility. It might describe the number and qualifications of information technology staff; if other entities provide IT staffing or support for the school, these might be described here. The self-study might describe how students, faculty, and staff are trained to use technology well (see also Standards 3.6-9). It should discuss how the school attends to all applicable laws and regulations regarding technology (including those related to security and privacy) and how employees are trained and oriented to these expectations. The self-study might describe how the school evaluates its technology resources and personnel and indicate how it plans for these needs in the future.

### ***Shared Resources***

**10.10** If the school utilizes shared resources, it does so in ways that help achieve its mission. Resource sharing may range from informal cooperation to formal partnerships with one or more external entities, as well as an embedded school sharing resources internally with the related entity. Formal types of resource sharing with external entities (e.g., cross-appointment of faculty or cross-registration of students, or more expansive forms that include degree-sharing clusters or consortia) are documented in ways that give attention to their nature and purpose, delineations of authority and responsibility, and provisions for periodic review.

SELF-STUDY IDEAS: A school might demonstrate its engagement with this standard by describing ways it shares resources with other entities, beyond those already described earlier (e.g., an embedded school does not need to repeat content already discussed). The self-study might describe how shared resources help fulfill the school's mission, with examples of these arrangements (e.g., shared facilities, joint faculty appointments, shared library services, provision of a dimension of student learning and formation). If the school is part of a formal cluster or consortium, the self-study might describe that arrangement and how it supports the school's mission. If the school is accredited or offers degrees "by virtue of its affiliation with" one or more other entities, it should describe and document the nature of that affiliation (see *Policies and Procedures*, I.B.2) and provide additional details in other standards (e.g., student learning and formation, degree programs, library and information services, faculty, governance, etc.) of how it meets those standards through the resources it shares with the other entity or entities. Written agreements regarding shared resources or services are made available in the supplemental materials for the self-study (see *Self-Study Handbook*). Schools that do not utilize shared resources may simply indicate that this standard does not apply.



