New *ATS Standards* provide framework for global sustainability among theological libraries

By Mitzi Budde

Editor's Note: Mitzi Budde was the plenary lecturer at the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA)-sponsored webinar ("Standards and Sustainability of Theological Libraries") held September 22-23, 2020, with more than 70 faculty, librarians, and administrators from seminaries, theological schools, and university divinity schools in Southeast Asia participating. This mutual sharing of expertise is part of the Global Awareness and Engagement Initiative of ATS, of which ATESEA is a partner.

As the pandemic and its related economic pressures ripple across the globe, theological institutions and their libraries are developing new strategies of sustainability.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of serving on an accreditation evaluation team for The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) with Limuel Equina, executive director of the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia, who joined us as an observer. Our evaluation team experience was enriched by his astute observations and his kindness and collegiality. At the end of the visit, he gave each of us a souvenir of the Philippines; mine was a jeepney magnet.

Jeepneys are refurbished military jeeps that the United States left behind in the Philippines after World War II. The Filipinos have imaginatively repurposed those jeeps for a new era, a new function, and a new need. The jeeps that had once conveyed soldiers now serve as affordable public transportation. Camouflage is transformed into colorful art. An instrument of invasion has become a symbol of national ingenuity and culture.

The redevelopment of the ATS Standards of Accreditation offers an imaginative repurposing of accreditation for the next generation, and the unexpected pandemic is challenging us to reimagine our work in a new environment. The new *ATS Standards* and the pillars of global sustainability—economy, society, and environment—will resource local theological education and its global engagement in this new era.

A NEW ERA
Global voices
As the economies of our institutions tighten, librarians are designing ways to work more collaboratively and function more strategically rather than succumbing to a narrative of scarcity. Our networks of global and local partnerships in librarianship broaden our avenues of educational engagement with our students, even as the pandemic shrinks opportunities to encounter our patrons in traditional face-to-face ways. Librarians are maximizing our ecosystems for reciprocity and mutual resource

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sharing, while also curating collections in a widening array of formats.

The new *Standards* provide a framework for this creative work in two ways. First, they reflect a change in philosophy from a best-practices approach to a principle-based approach, which accommodates institutional versatility as theological schools rapidly evolve and adapt to changing contexts. Second, the new *Standards* are mission-centered, emphasizing that each school defines its institutional mission for its own context and constituency. A school's rationale of its own educational philosophy then leads to its pedagogical practices and its library's stewardship and sustainability.

Though the *Standards* are flexible for each individual school's unique mission and context, global engagement is a universal value woven through the new *Standards*. The guiding principles for the new *ATS Standards* assert that accreditation—rooted in theological values—demonstrates diversity, intercultural competencies, global awareness, and engagement.[1] These themes are integrated into the standards on institutional mission and integrity, student learning and formation, and librarianship: "The library curates and organizes a coherent collection of resources…to enable interaction with a wide range of perspectives, including **theological and cultural diversity and global voices**" (*ATS Standard* 6.7).

These foundational principles from ATS correlate to the pillars of global sustainability. Being attentive to the economy of theological education means attending to equity of access to collections, technology, and services—stable Internet and access to computer equipment are issues in many parts of the world, including the United States. Being responsive to the society of theological education means honoring diverse voices and ensuring multicultural perspectives throughout the resources we provide and the ecosystems we nurture in our institutions. Being attuned to environment in theological

education means recognizing the library as both place and space, as both physical and virtual venues.

A NEW FUNCTION
Building connections

Sustainability of scholarship for the future calls for building connections in interdisciplinary strategic partnerships, what Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, ATS director of accreditation and global engagement, calls "the multi-directional flows of interdependence and relative autonomy."[2] These are both local and global.

The *Standards* recognize that librarians are educators first and foremost: training students how to discover print and e-resources and how to assess the quality, reliability, and relevance of those resources to their research, and, beyond that, inculcating a love of learning to fuel a lifetime of ministry (*ATS Standard* 6.6). Locally, theological librarians are forging strategic partnerships with the faculty, the Academic Writing Center, the computer lab, the educational technologists, and the IT specialists to design and develop a coherent program of information literacy.

The *Standard* points out that librarians "play a significant and collaborative role in curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation" (*ATS Standard* 6.2). Reciprocally, the Student Learning Standard reinforces the point, saying that curriculum development is collaborative with faculty, librarians, student services personnel, field educators, and others (*ATS Standard* 3.7).

Librarians are also "appropriately integrated into the school's leadership, faculty, and decision-making structures, including budgeting and strategic planning processes" (*ATS Standard* 6.4). In her recent *Colloquy Online* article, Kelly Campbell astutely points out that the idea of the librarian as an educational partner and not merely a service provider is not a new concept for librarians, who have long understood themselves to be theological

1   "Ten Educational Principles Undergirding the 2020 ATS Standards of Accreditation," *ATS Self-Study Handbook*, 2020, 6: https://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/self-study-handbook.pdf

2   Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, "Revisiting Global Awareness and Engagement in a Time of Multiple Pandemics," *Colloquy Online* (September 2020), 7: https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/revisiting-global-awareness.pdf

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educators. But perhaps this pandemic has been a catalyst for wider recognition of the need for collegial collaboration.[3]

International collaboration via Zoom is as accessible as an on-campus consultation these days. The Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia sponsored a webinar symposium on "Standards and Sustainability of Theological Libraries" in September 2020, with presentations from ATS and the American Theological Library Association. A learning from these global consultations is the importance of resource sharing to theological educators, particularly in this time of COVID-19.[4]

Theological libraries and publishers around the globe are collaborating on peer-reviewed, graduate-level open access resources. The Princeton Seminary Theological Commons is an exemplary case of an institution's partnership with the Internet Archive. The American Theological Library Association, the Society of Biblical Literature, the Global Digital Theological Library, the Globethics Library, and the Theological Book Network offer free digital resources for theological research. The Society of Biblical Literature (SBP Press) coordinates an International Cooperation Initiative (ICI) for Online Books that includes publications from ten theological presses, including Fortress Press and Westminster John Knox. And, although it is not open access, the American Theological Library Association offers a discounted subscription program for theological libraries in developing countries to access the ATLA Religion Database. Duke Divinity Library has compiled a handy guide to Open Access Resources in Religious & Theological Studies.

A NEW NEED
Collection curation and pandemic pivots
Theological librarians curate collections that suit the institutional environment, the school's pedagogy, and

its mission. For sustainability, questions of access and ownership are now at the forefront. The previous ATS library standard had emphasized ownership of physical collections. The new library standard recognizes that schools need differing balances of physical collections and e-resources based on their contexts—whether they are research-level libraries or teaching-focused; whether they are free-standing institutions with their own libraries or share a library as part of a larger university or consortium; and whether they are offering residential education or distance education.

Libraries today face complex questions around how to sustain continual growth of collections, how to ensure perpetual access, how to choose among the myriads of e-resource access options (demand-driven acquisition, open access resources, lease versus ownership versus subscription packages), and how to collect and preserve unique archival and special collections for perpetuity. The new standard acknowledges that many of the research resources that our libraries provide today are through such brokered access or consortial agreements with other libraries. How a particular library parses these challenges for its institutional context should be documented in a Collection Development and Access Policy to demonstrate how the library's curation of its print and e-resource collections is coherent and sustainable.[5]

Emphasizing educational quality over pedagogical modality, the new *ATS Standards* also treat residential, online, distance education, and hybrid forms of educational delivery equally. Effective curation of library resources will function differently in these various contexts. Around the globe, the pandemic pivot of 2020 has challenged librarians to work creatively to resource students and faculty and support rapidly changing pedagogies.

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3   Kelly Campbell, "Theological Library Role Changes due to COVID-19," *Colloquy Online* (June 2020), 2: https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/theological-library-role-changes.pdf
4   Ruiz, "Revisiting Global Awareness and Engagement in a Time of Multiple Pandemics."

5   For example, the "Library Resource Access Guide" of the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary Library uses the categories of "efficient discovery, expedited delivery, targeted acquisition, and preservation priorities."

For the library at Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS), this meant that on March 12, 2020, we pivoted—literally overnight—from in-house patron services with 225,000 books at our fingertips to an entirely remote access, e-resource library. With no access to our building nor collections, our library team worked together to re-engineer our workflows and to re-design our resources—while also supporting one another through the uncertainties, fear, and isolation of the unfolding pandemic. Like many seminaries, we shifted funds from the print book budget to expand e-resources.

During the pandemic, publishers and vendors temporarily offered invaluable free e-resources, such as JSTOR access, *Cambridge Companions*, and *Oxford Handbooks*. By taking advantage of these free offers, our library, for example, added access to nearly 100,000 additional e-resources. But the largess is bait: the publishers and vendors hope to entice libraries to subscribe after the free trials end, and many of these e-resources are prohibitively expensive. Providing them in an ongoing way will be unsustainable for most theological libraries. Further, such investments must be informed by new research, such as neurological studies on how memory and cognition function differently when reading print and when reading a screen.

Library services have also had to pivot creatively during the pandemic to convey the library's presence to students and faculty in multiple formats and platforms. At VTS, for example, we started by providing online workshops for faculty and hosting online library office hours daily for students to meet with librarians live via Zoom. We created a virtual library presence on the seminary's learning management system and offered reference services via email and messaging. Library staff designed online research guides on topics such as e-book biblical commentaries for exegesis papers. The library's Facebook page became a venue for inviting the seminary community to try out new e-resources. We also sponsored a student "I Miss My Library" contest as a fun way for students to stay connected to the library as place even as our focus was shifting to library as function.

CREATIVE FLEXIBILITY
Inspired by the jeepney

Theological librarianship today is perhaps best characterized as creative flexibility. Although intensified by the pandemic, these shifts happening in philosophy, in access, in education, and in curation are long-term changes.

Economic, social, and environmental sustainability of scholarship for the long term requires systemic assessment and evaluation. The new library standard shifts in emphasis from measuring holdings (collection counts) to analyzing how effectively patrons are utilizing the library's resources and services, "…in ways that are appropriate to the school's educational mission, degree programs, and educational modalities." (*ATS Standard* 6.5)—the principle-based approach. Library evaluation no longer stands alone, but rather is integrated into the whole ecosystem of institutional evaluation and assessment. The *Standards* suggest that institutional and programmatic evaluation should be simple, systematic, and sustainable. Effective evaluation and analysis will assess how our libraries are adapting to this new era, new function, and new need.

I keep my jeepney souvenir magnet on my office filing cabinet to remind me of the global network of friendships we have in theological education, and the ingenuity and creative flexibility that jeepneys represent. As educators, administrators, and librarians, we are simultaneously seeking to preserve the best of the past, resource present needs, and provision the economic, social, and environmental future of theological education with ingenuity.

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