

Ten Principles of Educational Quality

Behind the Proposed *Standards of Accreditation*

(2 December 2019 draft)

The proposed Commission *Standards of Accreditation*, on which the ATS membership will vote in June 2020, are focused on principles more than practices. In developing those standards, the task force leading the process identified ten key principles that served as a foundation for their work and now help serve as an interpretive framework for the proposed standards. These ten principles do not have a one-to-one correlation with the ten proposed standards, since some principles relate to several standards and some standards relate to several principles. Rather, these principles provide a broad basis for better understanding the standards and also articulate key commitments of the standards. These principles are the result of many conversations with ATS members, including input from more than a hundred ATS students.

Like the proposed standards, these principles use some terms that are intentionally not defined, given the diversity of the membership. For example, not all schools define formation or diversity the same way, but all schools must attend to formation and diversity in light of their distinctive missions and contexts. These principles are not ranked or ordered, although all flow from the mission and commitments of The Association of Theological Schools and the Commission on Accrediting (see *Preamble to the Standards*). The word “graduate” in each statement below indicates that these principles are focused on the work of our members schools engaged in graduate, professional theological education, while recognizing that quality theological education is not limited to our schools or those modes of theological education.

1. *Theological education is rooted in theological values.* Graduate theological education embodies a community of faith and learning that is guided by a theological vision and that cultivates habits of theological reflection and service.
2. *Theological education prioritizes student learning and student formation.* Graduate theological education demonstrates sound pedagogy and appropriate student learning outcomes in the context of a cohesive curriculum, and sees formation, even transformation, as central to the student experience and to their vocational calling.
3. *Theological education requires communities of engagement.* Graduate theological education occurs within the context of regular and substantive interaction between teachers and learners and among learners within a viable community of learning, with “teachers” understood to include faculty, librarians, administrators, staff, and other appropriate stakeholders.
4. *Theological education is contextually appropriate.* Graduate theological education attends carefully to the contexts, communities, and constituencies in which, and for which, it is offered, and responds to changing contexts with creativity and innovation.
5. *Theological education demonstrates diversity.* Graduate theological education values and demonstrates diversity in its many manifestations, including attention to intercultural competencies, global awareness and engagement, and marginalized voices.
6. *Theological education has appropriate institutional resources and support.* Graduate theological education demonstrates careful planning, sound budgeting, and good stewardship, with attention to the school’s financial, physical, technological, and library and information needs.
7. *Theological education requires sufficient and appropriate personnel.* Graduate theological education is highly relational, requiring a sufficient number of faculty and staff who are appropriately qualified for and supported in their work and who provide support to students.
8. *Theological education requires a healthy institutional environment.* Graduate theological education depends on shared governance based on a bond of trust among boards, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders; it requires clear grounding in its mission and vision and effective patterns of leadership and management.
9. *Theological education demonstrates careful institutional planning and evaluation.* Graduate theological education builds from a clear sense of purpose, is undertaken through intentional processes of planning, is enacted through careful instructional and organizational design, and is evaluated in light of the mission and context of each school.
10. *Theological education depends upon integrity, trust, and mutual accountability.* Graduate theological education is offered by schools that act with integrity and trust, are committed to freedom of inquiry, and hold themselves accountable—to each other, to communities of faith, and to the broader public—for their quality, transparency, and authenticity.