Orientation for Evaluators: Using the Standards in Evaluation

ATS Commission on Accrediting
(revised December 2015)
Agenda for this training session:

1) Introduction (including how to find documents)
2) Overview of the Standards
3) Characteristics of the Standards
4) Synopsis of the Standards
5) Questions to Prompt the Evaluation Process
6) Concluding thoughts
Note: this session is intended to be a companion to the orientation program identified for the type of visit on which you will be participating. Both trainings should be completed by new evaluators prior to their first visit.

You might also find it useful to review other orientation materials on the ATS Commission website under “Accrediting: Evaluation Visits”: http://www.ats.edu/accrediting/evaluation-visits

Contact Joshua Reinders (reinders@ats.edu) if you have any questions about these materials.
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These can all be found on the ATS Commission website.
Overview of the Standards

Standards have 3 parts:
(www.ats.edu/accrediting)

10 Degree Program Standards
(4 categories)

1 Educational Standard
(8 sections)

8 General Institutional Standards
Overview of the Standards:
The General Institutional Standards

1. Purpose, Planning, Evaluation
2. Institutional Integrity
3. Theological Curriculum
4. Library and Information Resources
5. Faculty
6. Student Recruitment, Admissions, Services, and Placement
7. Authority and Governance
8. Institutional Resources
Overview of the Standards: The Educational Standard

ES.1 Degree Programs and Nomenclature
ES.2 Campus-Based Education
ES.3 Extension Education
ES.4 Distance Education
ES.5 Faculty-Directed Individual Instruction
ES.6 Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
ES.7 Academic Guidelines (Admissions, Transfer, etc.)
ES.8 Non-Degree Instructional Programs
Overview of the Standards: The Degree Program Standards

A. Master of Divinity
B. Master of Arts in ___ (professional MA)
C. Master of Church Music
D. Master of Arts (academic MA)
E. Doctor of Ministry
F. Doctor of Education
G. Doctor of _____ (e.g. DMiss)
H. Doctor of Musical Arts
I. Master of Theology (ThM/STD)
J. Doctor of Philosophy/Theology
Overview of the Standards: The Degree Program Standards

Four types of degrees --

- Basic programs oriented toward ministerial leadership (standards A, B, and C)
- Basic programs oriented toward general theological studies (standard D)
- Advanced programs oriented toward ministerial leadership (standards E, F, G, and H)
- Advanced programs oriented toward theological research and teaching (standards I and J)
Overview of the Standards

Standards have 3 parts: (www.ats.edu/accrediting)

10 Degree Program Standards (4 categories)

1 Educational Standard (8 sections)

8 General Institutional Standards
Characteristics of the Standards:
Characteristics of the Standards:

Types of textual material in the standards:

• descriptions of quality
  “characteristics of theological education to which institutions should aspire”

• normative expectations
  “characteristics that should be present in a school accredited by the Commission, and their absence poses an accrediting concern”

• mandatory requirements
  “requirements that reflect regulatory or ethical expectations;” oftentimes yes/no questions where the answer must be “yes” – See list of mandatory compliance statements from the Commission Standards and the Commission Policies and Procedures in chapter 5 of the Self-Study Handbook (p.5) and on the Targeted Issues Checklist
Characteristics of the Standards:

Recurring themes in the Standards:

• a priority on planning and evaluation
• the value of inclusion across racial/ethnic and gender lines
• the importance of freedom of inquiry for teaching and learning
• the globalization of theological education
• technology
Characteristics of the Standards:

Format of the Standards:

• Each numbered concept is not a standard; a standard is the set of concepts related to a major topic of importance for graduate, professional theological education (e.g., Library and Information Resources).

• A school is considered to meet a standard adequately if it meets it generally and meets the specific expectations of statements that include “shall.”

• Specific expectations that are not met provide the basis for improvement.

• Self-studies and accreditation committees should not conduct a statement by statement review; they should be guided by the thrust of the standard as a whole.
1. Purpose, Planning, Evaluation

“Theological schools are communities of faith and learning guided by a theological vision…”

1.1 Purpose: “Purpose statements should be enabling and defining documents and should be realistic and accurate….”

1.2 Planning and evaluation: “The purpose statement shall guide the institution in its … planning and evaluation procedures and in making decisions regarding programs, allocation of resources…, constituencies served, relationships with ecclesiastical bodies, global concerns… ”

NOTE: This standard has one of 11 “mandatory requirements” (1.2.2.2 on evaluating education effectiveness).
2. Institutional Integrity

“Institutional integrity is demonstrated by the consistency of a theological school’s actions with commitments it has expressed in its formally adopted statement of purpose, with agreements it assumes with accrediting and governmental agencies, with covenants it establishes with ecclesiastical bodies, and with ethical guidelines for dealing with students, employees, and constituencies.”

NOTE: This standard has four of the 11 “mandatory requirements” in the Commission Standards.
3. Theological Curriculum

“A theological school is a community of faith and learning that cultivates habits of theological reflection, nurtures wise and skilled ministerial practice, and contributes to the formation of spiritual awareness and moral sensitivity. Within this context, the task of the theological curriculum is central. It includes the interrelated activities of learning, teaching, and research.”

NOTE: Be sensitive to “freedom of inquiry” and “global engagement” (2 of 5 themes in standards: also planning/evaluation, inclusion, technology)
Synopsis of the Standards

4. Library and Information Resources

“The library is a central resource for theological scholarship and education. It is integral to the purpose of the school through its contribution to teaching, learning, and research, and it functions collaboratively in curriculum development and implementation. The library’s educational effectiveness depends on the quality of its information resources, staff, and administrative vision.”

NOTE: Look for “use” of resources as much as “ownership” or “access”
5. Faculty

“The members of the faculty of a theological school constitute a collaborative community of faith and learning… In order for faculty members to accomplish their purposes, theological schools should assure them appropriate structure, support, and opportunities, including training for educational technology.”

NOTE: Review such things as credentials, workload, scholarship, and faculty development opportunities.
Synopsis of the Standards

6. Student Recruitment, Admissions, Services, and Placement

“The students of a theological school are central to the educational activities of the institution. They are also a primary constituency served by the school’s curriculum and programs and, with the faculty, constitute a community of faith and learning. Schools are responsible for the quality of their policies and practices related to recruitment, admission, student support, student borrowing, and placement.”

NOTE: This standard has five of the 11 “mandatory requirements” in the Commission Standards.
7. Authority and Governance

“Governance is based on a bond of trust among boards, administration, faculty, students, and ecclesial 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 …”

NOTE: Shared governance is important ATS value, though that varies depending on type of institution (embedded, freestanding, ecclesial)
Synopsis of the Standards

8. Institutional Resources

“In order to achieve their purposes, institutions need not only sufficient personnel but also adequate financial, physical, and institutional data resources. Because of their theological character, Commission schools give particular attention to personnel and to the quality of the institutional environments in which they function. Good stewardship requires attention by each institution to the context, local and global, in which it deploys its resources and a commitment to develop appropriate patterns of cooperation....”

NOTE: Longest of 8 standards addresses personnel, finances, facilities, technology, institutional environment, etc.; often split among members
Synopsis of the Standards

Review of the Educational Standard and Degree Program Standards depends on a school’s context:

1) Does it have extension sites? (ES.3)  
   (if so, there might be an additional site visit)

2) Does it offer distance education? (ES.4)  
   (if so, there will be a distance education specialist on your visit)

3) Which degree programs does it offer?
Synopsis of the Standards

Note that each of the 10 Degree Program Standards has the same 4 parts:

1) Purpose, Goals, Outcomes, Assessment
2) Program Content
3) Educational Resources (location and duration)
4) Admission
Questions to prompt the evaluation process
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

The accreditation process depends on thoughtful people who bring intellectual ability to the task of evaluating a school—both in the self-study and in the peer-accreditation evaluation. The questions that follow are meant to prompt thought about the Standards of Accreditation, not to function as a protocol of questions for peer evaluators to ask or answers for schools to develop in the self-study. They provide an interrogative commentary on the Standards and a starting point for the evaluative efforts of the overall accreditation process. There is a simple, three-part library that underlies many of these questions: What is the evaluative process? Is it effective? How is the school using the results?

1. Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation

1.1 Purpose

- How does the purpose of this school relate to the understanding of purpose in the Standards of Accreditation?
- Is the purpose articulated in ways that define the school’s confessional commitments and the implications of those commitments for the school’s institutional and educational life?
- How does a theological school related to a college or university support the purpose of the larger institution of which it is a part?
- How does the school’s understanding of its purpose distinguish it from other theological schools?
- What process has been used to arrive at the formal statement of purpose, and what constituencies contributed to its formation?
- How is it evaluated (i.e., How does the school know if its purpose is being accomplished?)
- How has the school’s understanding of its purpose influenced recent decisions about institutional change or innovation?

1.2 Planning and Evaluation

- Subsections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3 anchor the first recurring theme (a priority on planning and assessment). See “Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards” above in this Handbook chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of recurring themes.

- Subsection 1.2.2.2 is a mandatory requirement. See “Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards” above in this Handbook chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of mandatory requirements.
- How does the school’s purpose influence the allocation of institutional resources? Does the current use of resources reflect the priorities and commitments embodied in the institutional purpose?
- What is the school’s overall system of comprehensive evaluation? Does it include evaluation of employees, students, and members of the governing board? Does it also provide for the systematic evaluation of educational programs and institutional efforts?
- What evidence exists that the school has made changes in educational programs or institutional initiatives on the basis of the results of its evaluation efforts?

2. Institutional Integrity

- Subsections 2.2, 2.3, 2.7, and 2.9 are mandatory requirements. See “Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards” above in this Handbook chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of mandatory requirements. In addition, there is a mandatory expectation in the ATS Commission Policies and Procedures (VII.A.4) related to advertising of the comprehensive evaluation. This expectation should be treated in the same fashion as a mandatory requirement.
- Subsections 2.5 and 2.6 anchor the second recurring theme (the value of inclusion across racial/ethnic and gender lines). See “Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards” above in this Handbook chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of recurring themes.
- What efforts have been undertaken by this school to enhance participation of racial/ethnic minority persons in this school? How does the proportion of racial/ethnic minority representatives in the school compare with the population of racial/ethnic persons in the constituency served by the school?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

3 Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship

3.1 and 3.2 Goals of the Theological Curriculum and Activities of Theological Scholarship

- How does the school demonstrate the importance it places on student learning?
- What practices does the school promote to encourage learning that fosters understanding of self and religious tradition?
- What evidence exists that students benefit from a variety of teaching methods and instructional attention to different learning styles?
- How does the school encourage and develop the teaching skills of its Instructional staff?
- How does course development reflect patterns of faculty collaboration and interaction?
- How does the school know that individual courses contribute to the broader learning goals of the degree programs?
- Is there evidence that courses reflect new developments in society, in religious communities, and in disciplinary fields of study?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

4 Library and Information Resources

4.1 Library Collections
• What is the school's collection development policy? On what basis has it been developed? How recently was it reviewed and updated? What evidence exists that collection development is following the policy?
• How does the library balance print collections and access to electronic databases? What constituencies participate in the process of answering this question? What educational policies support the allocation?
• Does the library coordinate its collection development with other theological schools? What contributions does the school's library make to the collection needs of those other schools?
• What is the overall quality of the library's collection in view of the educational programs offered by the school and the research of its students and faculty members? How does the library come to this qualitative conclusion?
• What evidence does the library have that its resources are well and effectively used and that they are meeting the needs of students and faculty members?

4.2 and 4.3 Contribution to Teaching, Learning, and Research and to Curriculum Development
• What evidence does the school provide that the library actively supports the research interests of faculty members and students?
• How are professional library staff members involved in the school's process of curriculum development?

4.4 Administration and Leadership
• How does the chief administrator of the library participate in institutional planning, faculty decision making, and the institutional budgeting process? How do those patterns of participation contribute to the library's support for theological scholarship?
• How does the chief administrator of the library provide leadership for evaluation of the personnel who work in the library, the quality of the collection, and the educational contribution of library and information resources?

4.5 Resources
• How does the school determine the appropriate level of resources for the library, and what evidence exists that those resources are being provided by the institution at a level sufficient for the library to meet the educational needs of the school?
• How does the school determine the portion of its educational and general budget that should be devoted to library support, and what evidence exists that the school is regularly spending funds that have been budgeted for the library?
• In what ways are library facilities and space adequate and appropriate for the educational and research purposes of the library?

5 Faculty
5.1 Faculty Qualifications, Responsibilities, Development, and Employment
• What are the credentials of the faculty, and how does the school understand these credentials as appropriate for graduate, professional theological education?
• How does this institution understand and practice freedom of inquiry for faculty members? What evidence is this freedom ensured by institutional policy and practice?
• Are faculty members adequate in number to cover the range of disciplines included in the degree program offered by the school? What are the areas of faculty strength and weakness, in terms of the composition of the faculty?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

5.3 Faculty Role in Student Learning
- How do faculty members participate in evaluation of student learning, and how does this pattern of evaluation contribute to the educational goals of the school?
- How do the routine practices of individual faculty members, as well as the entire faculty's oversight of the degree programs, contribute to students' capacity to think theologically, to integrate diverse learning objectives, and to accomplish the educational goals of the program of study?

5.4 Faculty Role in Theological Research
- What does the school expect of faculty members in terms of research? What support does the institution provide to help faculty members meet its expectations? Is this faculty engaged in research, and what is the quality of that research? By what standard does the school judge the quality of research?
- How do faculty members make available the results of their research?

6 Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, Borrowing, and Placement
- Subsections 6.1.2, 6.3.1, 6.3.4, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, and 6.3.8 are mandatory requirements. See “Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards” above in this Handbook chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of mandatory requirements.

6.1 Recruitment
- How does the school understand that its policies and practices of student recruitment reflect the purposes of the institution?
- How accurately and realistically do recruitment materials and processes convey the vocational possibilities related to degree programs for which students are being recruited?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

6.2 Admission
- In what ways do criteria for admission support the cultivation of quality in religious leadership? What processes are employed to review the quality of candidates, and what strategies have been employed to enhance finding applicants of high quality?
- How do admission criteria vary according to the expectations of each of the degree programs offered, and are the resulting variations appropriate to the vocational and academic expectations of each degree?
- What admission efforts support commitments of the school to encourage diversity of the student body in areas such as race, ethnicity, region, denomination, gender, or disability?
- How are admission efforts and processes in line with an appropriate baccalaureate education?

6.3 Student Services
- What is the school's ongoing method of evaluation of student services, what has the evaluation revealed, and what actions have been taken in light of the evaluative conclusions reached?
- How does the school provide commensurate services to students wherever they are enrolled?
- How does the school's maintenance of student records ensure appropriate levels of confidentiality and privacy for students, appropriate access for school personnel, and security from physical or electronic destruction?
- How does the school demonstrate that its tuition and fees are appropriate for the degrees earned, in the context of income students can likely anticipate from the forms of religious service for which they are preparing?
- What process is in place to respond to complaints from students regarding issues related to Standards of Accreditation, including records of the complaints and the institutional responses to them?

6.4 Student Borrowing
- How does the school monitor student indebtedness and what institutional efforts are in place to counsel students, monitor overborrowing, and cultivate financial responsibility among students?

6.5 Placement
- How does the school monitor the completion rate of students and their rate of placement in positions related to the degree programs they are completing? How has this monitoring influenced policies or decisions regarding admissions?
- How do the school advocate on behalf of graduates who are members of groups that have been disadvantaged in vocational employment because of race, ethnicity, gender, or disability?

7 Authority and Governance
7.1 Authority
- What is the structure and scope of the school's authority? What documents describe this structure, and are they clear and consistent? How appropriately is the authority delegated and how faithfully is the structure of authority implemented in the school's practices? How well does the structure serve the school's purpose and mission?

7.2 Governance
- What is the system of governance in this school? Does it relate appropriately to the school's legal, moral, institutional, or ecclesiastical pattern of authority?
- How does the school understand and implement patterns of sharing the governing process, and how are the unique and overlapping roles and responsibilities of board, faculty, administrators, students, and others defined so that all partners exercise their mandated or delegated leadership?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

7.3 Roles

7.3.1 Governing Board

- What evidence supports the expectation that the board maintains the integrity of the institution, including freedom from inappropriate internal or external control?
- How well has the board implemented its role of exercising proper fiduciary responsibility, financial oversight, and proper delegation of authority to administration and faculty and of ensuring procedural fairness and freedom of inquiry?
- How does the board monitor the qualifications of its members, and how do those members, in the context of the institution’s purpose, reflect diversity of race, ethnicity, and gender?
- How does the governing board oversee ongoing institutional planning and evaluation and assess the degree to which the institution is achieving its goals and purpose? What indicators does the board use to determine if the purpose of the school is being met or not? How do these indicators relate to the purpose?
- What evidence exists that the governing board understands its role in policy formation and the necessity of delegating much of the implementation of that policy to administration and faculty?
- Is there any evidence that members of the board seek to exercise authority other than in the context of the board as a whole, or its delegated subgroups? If so, how has the board dealt with this problem?
- How does the board know that it is making good decisions on behalf of the school? What indicators does the board use in determining whether or not its decisions have been good?
- How does the board evaluate the performance of board members, and what effect does the evaluation process have on retention of current members or selection of new ones?

7.3.2-7.3.4 Administration, Faculty, Students

- How do administrative leaders seek to implement policies in ways that ensure fairness and embody the theological values the school articulates?
- How do the persons serving as administrative leaders reflect the institution’s constituencies, accounting for the desirability of diversity in race, ethnicity, and gender?
- Do administrative leaders have adequate resources and authority to discharge their responsibilities? Is there a difference in formal and informal structures that impairs the ability of administrative leaders to perform their tasks?
- Are the structures of accountability clearly defined and implemented?
- How does the faculty know when it is functioning effectively as a governing body over those functions for which it has been delegated authority?
- How does the faculty contribute to the institution’s overall decision-making process?

8 Institutional Resources

8.1 Personnel

- How does the school seek to enhance the quality of the lives of students, faculty members, administrators, staff, and support personnel?
- Are appropriate policies in place regarding procedural fairness, sexual harassment, and discrimination?

8.2 Financial Resources

- Has the school maintained economic equilibrium over the past three or more years? If not, what factors contributed to disequilibrium and what plans are in place to restore equilibrium?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

- Are the sources of income for this school reasonably stable, and are projected revenues sufficient to maintain the educational quality of the school? Is the projected revenue realistic?
- Has this school balanced expenditures and revenue, using a prudent rate of spending from endowment and other assets?
- At what rate is the school consuming the revenue generated by its endowment, and does this rate reflect realistic and prudent assumptions?
- If related to a larger institution, how does the theological school enhance the institution of which it is a part, and how does the larger institution understand the contribution of the theological school?
- Does the school employ accounting and reporting procedures generally used in US or Canadian higher education? Is financial information available to decision-makers in timely and appropriate form?
- Does the institution have an annual external, independent audit, and how has the institution attended to the report of the audit, in terms of both overall financial strength and management issues?
- How does the institution develop and implement its budget? Does this process result in prudent use of funds properly oriented to the school’s purpose and mission?
- How does the school’s governing board develop and oversee budget allocations and financial policies? Are finances subject to control or constraint by entities other than the governing board?
- Does the school have an appropriate and efficient process for managing the business affairs of the organization?
- How effective is the school’s program of institutional advancement in developing financial resources?
- How does the institution ensure that donor wishes are respected in the use of donor-restricted funds?

8.3 Physical Resources
- How adequate are the school’s physical resources for the purpose and programs of the school?
- How does the school attend to the safety and security needs of persons who work and study at the institution?
- How does the institution maintain, allocate, and ensure the adequacy of space for its institutional and educational activities?
- How do the physical resources of the school contribute to or detract from accomplishing the school’s purpose and mission?

8.4 Institutional Information/Technology Resources
- How adequately do the school’s data and information resources support the efforts to evaluate institutional and educational effectiveness?
- How adequately does the institution’s technology support its information needs?

8.5 Institutional Environment
- How does the overall institutional environment contribute to or detract from the attainment of the school’s purpose and mission?

8.6 Cooperative Use of Resources
- If a school uses resources it does not own, how are the agreements for those resources maintained, and what guarantees does the school have that the resources will continue to be available as needed?

8.7 Clusters
- If the school participates in a cluster or consortium of theological schools, how does the cluster contribute to the attainment of the school’s purpose and mission, and how does the school contribute to the purpose of the cluster?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

8.8 Instructional Technology Resources

- How does the institution inform students of the necessary skills and mastery of technology required for full participation in the degree program to which they are seeking admission?
- How are "sufficient technical support services" determined and evaluated?

E5 Educational Standard Applicable to All Degree Programs

- Most of the evaluation of the curriculum will be completed in the context of the Standards for each degree program (Standards A through J). However, the statements in the Educational Standard address some educational goals that should be evident across degree programs.
- How do the educational programs of this school seek to cultivate theological understanding, as described by the Standard?
- How will this school, in the context of its religious and intellectual traditions, know if students have a deepened spiritual awareness or growing moral sensibility?
- What educational practices does the school have to cultivate learning in which professional and scholarly skills, understanding of theological disciplines, and spiritual growth are intimately interwoven?

E5.1 Degree Programs and Nomenclature

- How does the school distinguish among the educational goals for different degree programs, incorporate these differences in curricular design, and communicate the distinctiveness of degree programs to students? When the same courses are used for more than one degree program, how are their requirements adapted to meet the educational goals of the program toward which the course is being credited?
- How does the school determine that a sufficient community of peers exists for each of the degree programs it offers?
- Do the degree programs offered by the school follow the recommended nomenclature? If not, does the school have compelling reasons for the variation, and has the Board of Commissioners granted permission for the variation in nomenclature?
- How do the degree programs offered by the school clearly articulate their educational purposes in terms of the four broad categories of degree programs approved by the Commission?
  - E5.1.2 Basic Programs Oriented Toward Ministerial Leadership
  - E5.1.3 Basic Programs Oriented Toward General Theological Studies
  - E5.1.4 Advanced Programs Oriented Toward Ministerial Leadership
  - E5.1.5 Advanced Programs Primarily Oriented Toward Theological Research and Teaching

E5.1.6 Degree Program Standards

- Each degree offered by the school should be evaluated by the appropriate Degree Program Standard (A through J).
- Is the purpose of each degree program distinctive and coherent with the purpose of the Standard in which it is situated?
- Are the educational goals of each degree program appropriate, in the context of the relevant Standard (content), the mission of the institution, and the educational needs of the students?
- How are the educational goals of each degree program related to the leadership needs of the religious communities in which graduates will serve in ministry?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

- Are the learning outcomes for each degree program distinctive and clearly articulated?
- In what ways, and to what extent, are the educational goals of each degree program being met, as demonstrated by the outcomes assessment program of the institution?
- Does the curriculum of each degree program provide adequate exposure to the content areas set out for the program of study?
- Do the program requirements meet the Standards for duration and location?
- How adequate are the school's resources for each of the degree programs it offers, and in what ways, if any, do the resources needed for one program contribute to or detract from the resources needed by other programs?
- Are students who are admitted to each degree program properly qualified for the program for which admission was offered?
- This subsection contains a provision (1.6.1) for modified degree program requirements under certain conditions. If the institution is offering any degree programs with such modifications, what do its evaluative processes show with respect to achievement of the program's learning outcomes?

ES.2 Campus-based Education
- Does the institution provide the variety of resources in a common location required to support a community of learning as described by the Standards?

ES.2.1 Residency
- Does the institution provide the full array of services and resources to support in-person interactions, for example, with instructors, field education supervisors, and spiritual directors?

ES.3 Extension Education
- The issues identified in each of the eight General Institutional Standards are all present, though from a different perspective, in extension education activities. This subsection seeks to focus the

General Institutional Standards with respect to the distinctive concerns of extension education.
- In what ways does the institution demonstrate that it has developed its programs of extension education in ways that are congruent with the institution's mission and purpose, appropriate to the students and context being served, and adequate to fulfill the purposes of the degree programs?
- How has the institution addressed the purposes of its extension site programs in its overall strategic planning and evaluation procedures? What evidence is there that the institution has used the results of its evaluation to modify its extension programs?
- How does the institution establish, approve, and review the programs of study and course curricula for extension education programs in ways that are consistent with its formal institutional policies and procedures?
- How does the institution ensure that library and information resources are appropriate and sufficient for the purposes of the extension programs and the needs of students at extension sites? If library resources and facilities of other institutions are used to meet the needs of extension education programs, how does the school demonstrate that those libraries offer the functional availability and adequacy of appropriate resources?
- Do the full-time faculty members share sufficient responsibility for teaching and academic oversight of extension education to ensure that the institution's goals and ethos are evident wherever the institution conducts its work?
- In what ways does the Institution ensure that students in extension programs have access to appropriate services, including advisory and administrative support, program and vocational counseling, financial aid, placement, and academic records?
- Has the institution met the licensing regulations of the community in which the program is offered?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

**ES.4 Distance Education**

- The issues identified in each of the eight General Institutional Standards are all present, though from a different perspective, in distance education courses and programs. This subsection seeks to focus the General Institutional Standards with respect to the distinctive concerns of distance education.

- There is a mandatory expectation in the ATS Commission Policies and Procedures (VI.G.6) that the institution will have a process by which it verifies that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. This expectation should be treated in the same fashion as a mandatory requirement. Does the institution have such a process in place?

- In what ways does the institution demonstrate that it has developed its programs of distance education in ways that are congruent with the institution’s mission and purpose, appropriate to the students and context being served, and adequate to fulfill the purposes of the degree programs?

- In what ways, if any, is the institution’s terminology inconsistent with the Standard’s definition of distance education, (e.g., describing an extension site as “distance education” because it occurs at a distance from the main campus)?

- How has the institution included planning and evaluation processes for its distance education programs in its overall strategic planning and evaluation procedures? What evidence is there that the institution has used the results of its evaluation to modify either its distance education programs or its mission statement or both?

- In what ways does the school demonstrate how programs offered through the mode of distance education seek to meet the Standards of learning, teaching, and research described in Standard 3; the goals of the theological curriculum addressed in this Standard; requirements regarding library and information resources outlined in Standard 4; and the provisions for faculty control, involvement, and development described in Standard 5?

- How has the institution guarded against allowing the accumulation of distance education courses to constitute a significant portion of a degree program that, as a result, lacks coherence, intentionality, and curricular design?

- How does the institution ensure that distance education programs provide students with appropriate opportunities for collaboration, personal development, interaction with faculty members and among peers within a community of learning, and supervised field or internship opportunities when appropriate to the degree program?

- In what ways does the school provide for faculty development and assistance, thus ensuring consistent, effective, and timely support?

- What procedures are in place to ensure that faculty members possess requisite credentials, demonstrate competence appropriate to the specific purposes of these institutional programs, and benefit from institutional practices regarding scholarly development and support for faculty research?

- How accurately do the school’s recruitment efforts and publications represent the technological aspects of the distance education programs, including a description of the hardware and software used and the ability, skill, and access needed for students to participate satisfactorily in the program?

- How does the school incorporate the administration of its distance education programs into its regular policies and procedures?

**ES.5 Faculty-directed Individual Instruction**

- What approval and monitoring procedures does the institution have in place to ensure that such instruction is limited to meeting “unique educational and student needs” and involves “substantive interaction between the student and the faculty member?”

**ES.6 Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

- Does the institution’s process for assessing student learning outcomes and degree program goals address each of the four components?

- Is there evidence of the alignment of individual course learning outcomes and degree program goals?
Questions to prompt the evaluation process

- Do the measures of student learning provide both direct and indirect evidence?
- Do the procedures for collecting and assessing data related to student learning guard the confidentiality of student work?
- Do students and members of the faculty and governing board have clearly articulated roles in the process of assessing student learning outcomes?
- How are assessment results linked to curriculum and educational planning, institutional strategic planning, and resource allocation?

ES.7 Academic Guidelines: Admission, Transfer of Credits, Shared Credit in Degree Programs, and Advanced Standing

Each of the four elements in this subsection addresses a potential technical issue with regard to the operation of a school's educational program (exceptions to admissions requirements, transfer of credits, shared credit in degree programs, and advanced standing).

- The school is already required (2.9) to make its policy with respect to transfer of credits public. If it accepts transfer credits, do the consequential policies conform to the requirements of ES.7.2?
- If the other three elements of this subsection affect the school's policies and practices, does the school have effective mechanisms for evaluating each element on a regular basis?

ES.8 Nondegree Instructional Programs

- In what ways do the nondegree programs of teaching and learning offered by the school reflect the purpose of the institution?
- How do nondegree programs reflect the administrative care and educational quality appropriate to a graduate school of theology?
- How does the school distinguish among the types of nondegree programs it offers, and how does it ensure that students know if credit is granted for work and if credit is granted, how does the school ensure the educational quality of this credit in terms of admissions and academic integrity?

…and don’t forget the appropriate degree program standards!
Concluding thoughts

• Remember to view the other orientation videos for the type of visit on which you will be participating.

• Additional resources are available on the ATS Commission website.

• Please don’t hesitate to contact Commission staff if you have any questions.
Thank you!