

A year of listening to ATS members: update on redeveloping Standards and Procedures

BY TOM TANNER

Since June 2018 when the membership authorized a redevelopment of the ATS Commission Standards and Procedures, the 19-member redevelopment task force has been busy gathering input from ATS members. That has been their focus during the first year of this two-year process: a year of listening. During that time, the task force has engaged 62 different groups involving more than 700 participants from nearly 200 ATS schools.

Fifty focus groups

Fifty of those 62 groups were specially-convened focus groups that discussed five key questions related to what they found helpful and not helpful in the current Standards and Procedures, what they would like to see changed and not changed in any revisions, and what else they might like to tell the task force. Those focus groups generated nearly 150 pages of notes that the task force is now processing.

A dozen of those focus groups involved more than 100 ATS students—a first in this kind of standards revision process—giving their feedback on a draft of Key Educational Principles. Another eight focus groups engaged representatives from different denominational groups that represent nearly half of all ATS students. The other 30 focus groups involved key constituencies at ATS member schools—presidents, deans, faculty, staff, librarians, development officers, financial officers, student services personnel, field educators, assessment officers, DMin educators, technology experts, trustees, African

A year of listening to the membership

62 groups
700+ participants
100 students

nearly 200 schools
250 pages of notes

ats The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

American leaders, Latino/a leaders, leaders of Asian descent, leaders of the 20 largest ATS schools, leaders of Canadian schools, and others, including more than a dozen trustees.

A dozen working groups

A dozen of the 62 groups were appointed by the task force to explore key issues related to a new set of Standards and Procedures. Those groups researched and discussed accreditation procedures, Canadian concerns, degree programs, denominational input, diversity, faculty, formation, global engagement, governance, institutional structures, libraries and technology, and planning and evaluation/assessment. Those subcommittees and working groups have now generated a dozen reports totaling nearly 100 pages.

Combined with the 150 pages of notes from the 50 focus groups, the task force now has some 250 pages of membership feedback to process, analyze, and synthesize into findings that will inform the second year of this redevelopment project—the year of reflecting and writing. That is on top of the hundreds of pages of reports generated by the four-year, \$7 million Educational Models and Practices project that engaged more than 90 percent of the ATS membership, as well as graduate disciplines in other fields that share similar challenges to theology.

What's next: a year of reflecting and writing

The task force will spend the next four or five months analyzing and reflecting on all this membership input as it begins the “year of reflecting and writing” in 2019–2020. The goal is to have a first public draft of a proposed set of Standards and Procedures to distribute to the membership in December 2019. Based on that feedback, the task force will issue a second public draft in February 2020. That draft will be followed by a series of six regional meetings and two webinars to solicit further feedback.

The ATS Board of Commissioners will then meet with the task force for a special two-day meeting in early April

2020 to develop a “recommended” set of Standards and Procedures. That recommended set will be sent to the membership in May 2020, well in advance of the June 2020 Biennial Meeting in Vancouver, where the membership will discuss and vote on a final, approved set of redeveloped Standards and Procedures.

If you have any further input to give the task force, please email us at redvelopment@ats.edu. For an updated overview of the redevelopment process, please visit the [redvelopment webpage](#) on the ATS website.



Tom Tanner is Director of Accreditation at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He also serves as the ATS commission staff liaison for the redevelopment process.