

ATS launches consultations with other professional graduate educators: What they can teach us

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN GRAHAM

As part of the \$7 million Educational Models and Practices project, ATS has begun a comparative study of other patterns of graduate professional education. Earlier this spring, the Association hosted its first gathering of administrators and faculty from education, law, business, medical humanities, and social work to discuss the challenges and opportunities engaging educators in those fields. Participants shared their approaches to addressing the challenges and embracing the opportunities, and explored possible implications of their learning for theological education.

In an interview, Stephen Graham, ATS senior director of programs and services and the director of this project, shares how the effort was conceived and what they have learned so far.

Q: *How were these particular fields chosen for the comparative study?*

Through consultation with the Educational Models and Practices Project (EMP) Advisory Committee, we determined a number of disciplines that would be appropriate conversation partners. Members of the advisory committee and members of the University Divinity School Peer Group from the EMP project nominated possible representatives and facilitated connections. We had intended to have a representative from nursing education, but that person had to pull out just before the initial meeting of the group in April.



Q: *Is there a precedent for this sort of study?*

My colleague, Eliza Brown, during her research in preparation for the ATS Centennial this year, discovered that ATS had representatives from legal and medical education give presentations about educational issues in their schools at the 1958 Biennial Meeting. There were also presentations on “The Fundamental Dilemma of All Professional Education” and “The Social Import of the Professions.” So while a study of this kind hasn’t happened for a long time, it is not entirely without precedent.

More recently—in the mid-2000s—the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching did a major project on “Preparation for the Professions” that included extensive studies of education for clergy, lawyers, engineers, physicians, and nurses. Our study is much, much smaller in scope, but the original idea came from the Carnegie studies.

Q: What were the guiding questions of this first meeting with other graduate professional educators?

The study group plans to meet twice with a video conference in between. The initial meeting was to describe current circumstances, the video conference later this summer will explore a range of strategies adopted by the different disciplines, and the wrap-up meeting in the fall will engage questions about the future of the disciplines, with particular emphasis on gathering insights relevant to theological education.

At the April 2018 meeting we centered our conversation around four questions:

1. How have challenges and opportunities for your discipline's graduate professional education emerged over time? What has led to the current situation?
2. What emphasis is placed on vocational, professional identity, personal formation? How is that formation assessed?
3. What are the key competencies required in your profession? Have there been changes in the business model?
4. Have there been changes in this business model?

Q: What are the similar challenges we all face?

There were a few things that emerged across the disciplines, including the following:

- Tensions between the professions and the academy
- Increasingly strong and pointed questions being raised about return on investment
- The pervasive impact of technology
- The goal of all the disciplines to seek the common good in society
- The emphasis across the disciplines on some form of what we in theological education call "formation," with some speaking about professional identity, human qualities, etc.
- Concern for students experiencing pressure, stress, and burnout, in many cases related to questions of meaning

Q: Are there solutions from other fields that may offer promise to theological education?

Most of the disciplines are leveraging technologies to enhance their educational and professional work. Many have developed variations of scheduling, academic calendar, and delivery systems to give students improved access. All are exploring ways to facilitate life-long learning so that graduates can continue to adapt to changing realities. In some of the disciplines, such as teacher education, alternative pathways to credentials or newly developed credentials allow students to enter the profession in non-traditional ways. That, of course, is both an opportunity to schools who are able to facilitate those pathways and a threat to the traditional pathways and programs.

Q: What are your next steps?

This summer our video conference will focus on particular strategies employed to address challenges and embrace opportunities. The guiding questions for that conversation:

1. The Carnegie studies of the professions a few years ago identified "signature pedagogies" for different professions. What are the "signature pedagogies" in your discipline? Have they changed? If so, how?
2. How have educational models and practices in your discipline adapted to new realities?

In our fall face-to-face meeting, we will discuss the future of the disciplines, guided by three questions:

1. Have the roles and the status of faculty changed?
2. Have accrediting agencies and standards of accreditation changed over time?
3. From what you have heard and learned through this project, what recommendations do you have about theological education?

Q: Do you have a vision for how this work might inform the proposed redevelopment of the accrediting Standards and Procedures?

Our hope is that through this study insights will emerge that can inform the work that theological schools do, both in ways that might shape the proposed redeveloped accrediting standards and procedures, and in ways that will spark ideas and potential new educational models and practices that can serve the schools as they work to fulfill their missions in the twenty-first century.



Stephen R. Graham is Senior Director of Programs and Services for The Association of Theological Schools. He also serves as the director of the Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education project.

Members of the Graduate Professional Education Study Group

- **Nathan Carlin**
Associate Professor, Director, Medical Humanities & Ethics Certificate Program, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston
 - **Allan Cole**
Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Director of Undergraduate Programs, Professor, Steve Hicks School of Social Work, The University of Texas at Austin
 - **Chris Guthrie**
Dean, John Wade-Kent Syverud Professor of Law, Vanderbilt University Law School
 - **Matt Merrick**
Associate Dean, Degree Operations, Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University
 - **Bonnie Miller**
Senior Associate Dean for Health Sciences Education, Professor of Medical Education & Administration, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine
 - **Vincent Rougeau**
Dean, Boston College Law School
 - **Jon Singletary**
Dean and Professor, Diana R. Garland School of Social Work, Baylor University
 - **Robert Smith**
Chief Academic Officer, Vice President of the Schools of Graduate and Professional Programs, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota Schools of Graduate and Professional Programs
 - **Stanton Wortham**
Dean, Lynch School of Education, Boston College
- ADVISORY COMMITTEE:**
- Bill Cahoy**
Dean Emeritus, Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary
 - Amy L. Kardash**
President, In Trust Center for Theological Schools
 - Oliver McMahan**
Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation, Professor of Counseling, Pentecostal Theological Seminary
 - Phil Zylla**
Academic Dean, McMaster Divinity College
- QUESTS:**
- Chanon Ross**
Program Director, Lilly Endowment Inc.
 - Shannon Sims**
Report Writer
- ATS STAFF:**
- **Jo Ann Deasy**
Director, Student Information and Institutional Research
 - **Deborah H. C. Gin**
Director, Research and Faculty Development
 - **Stephen Graham**
Senior Director of Programs and Services
 - **Lester Ruiz**
Senior Director of Accreditation and Institutional Evaluation
 - **Tom Tanner**
Director, Accreditation and Institutional Evaluation
 - **Leah Wright**
Coordinator of Faculty Development and Initiatives
 - **Frank Yamada**
Executive Director