

ATS to offer free improved student questionnaires to all member schools

By JO ANN DEASY

In fall 2020, ATS will make two significant changes to the questionnaires. First, ATS will release a new, updated version of the questionnaires. Second, ATS will make the Entering and Graduating Student Questionnaires free of charge for all ATS member schools.

The ATS Student Information Program, comprised of an Entering, Graduating, and Alumni Questionnaire, began in the late 1990's as an easily accessible tool for theological schools to gather feedback from students on their experiences of theological education. Today, approximately two-thirds of ATS schools use the questionnaires for institutional evaluation, and the Association draws on a dataset of more than 200,000 students to better understand overall trends in the industry.

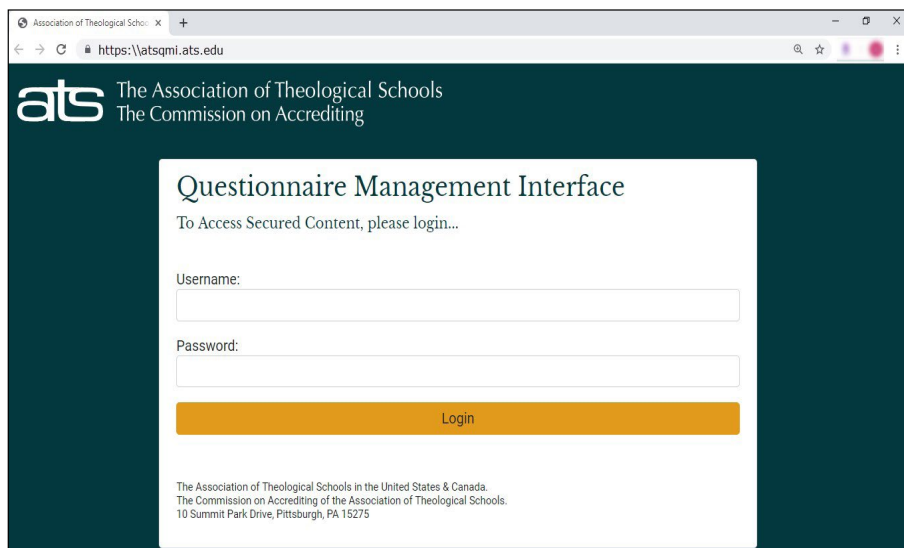
What will change in the new questionnaires?

Last revised in 2013, the ATS student questionnaires will be updated to reflect the changing nature of both theological education and the students we serve. This fall, we launched the first phase of that revision with a major overhaul of the administrator and student interface for the questionnaires. The new interface has an updated look, is easier to navigate, and is more mobile friendly for students completing the questionnaire.

The next step in our revision will involve changes to several sections of the questionnaires. Changes will focus on meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population within increasing diverse theological schools and have focused on the following areas:

- Demographic information
 - o race/ethnicity, gender, and citizenship
- Educational context
 - o online learning and distance from campus
- Finances
 - o work hours
 - o dependent care
 - o educational debt
- Vocational goals
 - o those serving outside congregations
 - o bivocational ministry
 - o those who work while attending theological school

We have also added more branch logic to the questionnaire allowing students to focus on the questions that are most relevant to their own student experiences. Attention is being given in the revision to preserving longitudinal data as much as possible. For those schools who are using raw data, ATS will develop templates that will allow you to merge data between our current and newly revised versions of the questionnaires.



Finally, we are also significantly increasing the options for schools to create custom questions at the end of the questionnaire. Schools will now be able to add multiple types of questions including multiple-choice, single-select, and open-ended. They will also be able to structure in branch logic, allowing them to focus a set of questions on a specific group of students.

Did you say the questionnaires would be free?

Yes. In recent years, data from the ATS Student Questionnaires has become a significant resource in various theological school initiatives including the Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers Initiative (ECFFM) and the Educational Models and Practices Project (EMP). Recognizing the value of these instruments, ATS will be using funds from the new Organizational and Educational Models Project to cover the costs of the entering and graduating student questionnaires for three years—from fall 2020 through spring 2023. Plans are also underway to offer the ATS Alumni Questionnaire free to member schools on a regular basis.

Along with access to the questionnaires themselves, ATS will continue to offer standardized reports for individual schools, comparative data for all ATS participating schools as well as for denominational and regional cohorts, raw data Excel reports for schools with the capacity to do further analysis, and annual training events for those using the questionnaires in institutional assessment and evaluation.

What is the timeline for the remainder of the revision?

Building of the new questionnaires and reporting structures are currently underway. In spring 2020, ATS will

release copies of the new questionnaires and will begin revising supporting documents and training materials. Look for webinars and workshops at the [2020 Student Personnel Administrator's Conference](#) and at the [2020 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting](#) to provide an overview of the new content. Schools will be able to start using the new questionnaire on August 3, 2020.

For those of you using the questionnaires, please note the following:

- July 30–31, 2020: The questionnaires will not be available for administrators or students
- August 3, 2020: New revision is launched
 - Administrators will not be able to set up batches for the 2020–2021 academic year until after the new revision is launched
 - Instructions for passwords will be sent August 3

Any questions?

The process of changing the questionnaires began more than a year ago with a review of feedback provided by participating schools since 2013. In addition, we reviewed data gathered through two recent ATS initiatives—EMP and ECFFM. Proposed questions were vetted by ATS staff and the ATS Student Data and Resources Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from six different ATS schools. Attention was given to the ecclesial diversity of the schools and the bi-national nature of our organization as well as the broader research needs of the Association.

If you have any questions about the revised questionnaires, please contact Jo Ann Deasy (deasy@ats.edu).



Jo Ann Deasy is Director of Institutional Initiatives and Student Research at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.