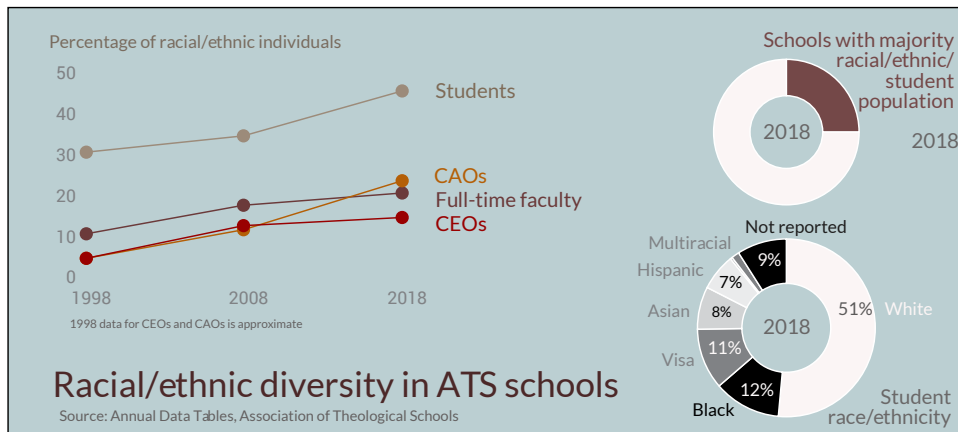


Ecology partners meet to discuss diversity in theological schools

By ELIZA SMITH BROWN

Representatives of eight agencies with a particular interest in theological education gathered on September 20 in Pittsburgh to discuss issues of race and ethnicity in theological education.



The agencies are part of an “ecology” of nine partners who champion seminaries, their students, and their graduates. Each one comes to their shared goal from a different angle. ATS convened the meeting to further its work through the Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CORE). The meeting purpose was to keep the agencies informed about their ongoing work and to identify ways in which they might collaborate. “Coming to a common table, we have the opportunity to combine our strengths for greater impact,” said Mary Young, ATS director of leadership education.

At a moment when six of those nine agencies are led by persons of color, they have a particular opportunity to bring the perspective of racial/ethnic diversity into focus for the betterment of theological education in general. Together, they discussed action items that might build upon the rich diversity that already exists in ATS member schools and in the broader publics of faith served by those schools.

At one point, the conversation turned to faculty as a good leverage point for issues of race and ethnicity. “It is the faculty—more than the students or the administration—who stay with the institution the longest and who hold its culture,” said Timothy Lake of the Wabash Center. “They also have the best connection with students.”

Yet faculty today do not reflect the diversity of the current student population at ATS member schools. While the student population has grown from 30 to 45 percent over the past 20 years, the faculty has grown from 10 to 20 percent. “We have data about faculty who are currently in place, but what we need is more data about those who have left theological education because of their experiences as racial/ethnic faculty. We need to determine what patterns of leadership drive people away,” said Young.

And faculty are not necessarily the drivers of change in theological schools. Administrators often lead transformational change in diversity. Among administrators, representation of racial/ethnic CEOs and CAOs has increased steadily over two decades, from about 4 percent each in 1998 to 14 percent for CEOs and 23 percent for CAOs.

The group identified the need for research to better understand issues of diversity. “But it’s not just the quantitative data that we need,” said Frank Yamada, ATS executive director. “It’s also the quality of the experience that matters.”

Among the issues of concern are recruiting and retention. Which schools are most successful at building and

sustaining a diverse faculty and a diverse student body? How are they doing it? What helps racial/ethnic individuals to thrive in those settings? How can we make the most of the considerable gifts they bring? What is the role of the board, the administration, and the faculty in bringing about positive change? What is the impact? What is the quality of the experience of teaching and learning in a healthy, diverse context? With the new [Data Sharing Policy](#) recently adopted by the Commission on Accrediting of ATS, the door is open for outside researchers to conduct new, objective research on these issues.

Over time, the ecology partners will share their wisdom as they generate and curate resources that support theological educators in recruiting, retaining, and effectively serving racial/ethnic students, faculty, and administrators. Their hope is that schools will find support as they

live into the expectation that we will be living in a very different landscape by 2040 as a demographic shift will bring about a racial/ethnic majority in North America.

In the short term, the group intends to broaden the conversation to include organizations that focus on Asian/Asian American and Indigenous/Aboriginal populations.

Ultimately, the expectation is that the work of this group will inform the ongoing redevelopment of the ATS Standards and Procedures. "Diversity is one of the major topics of discussion in the redevelopment process," said Yamada. "A special subcommittee of the task force on redevelopment is examining just how it will be incorporated."



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Theological Education "Ecology" Partners

*[The Association of Theological Schools \(ATS\)](#) supports its membership of more than 270 graduate schools of theology through programs, services, and accreditation.

*[Asociación para La Educación Teológica Hispana \(AETH\)](#) works in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Latin America, and the Caribbean to promote the quality of Hispanic theological education programs and contribute to the development of congregational and community leaders.

[Faith & Leadership](#), housed at Duke Divinity School, is an online magazine that designs educational services, develops intellectual resources, and facilitates networks of institutions that enable US congregations and pastors to flourish.

*[The Forum for Theological Exploration \(FTE\)](#) is a leadership incubator that provides resources, events, networks, grants, and fellowships to cultivate tomorrow's leaders, pastors, and theological educators. (Not present at the meeting)

*[The Hispanic Summer Program](#) conducts a two-week program of theological education offered from the Latina/o perspective and context for Hispanic students as well as the growing number of non-Hispanic students committed to serving the Hispanic church and community.

*[The Hispanic Theological Initiative \(HTI\)](#), housed at Princeton Theological Seminary, is a community of Latina/o scholars whose goal is to increase the number of Latina/o students and faculty in theological education and better equip US institutions to serve the growing Hispanic population.

[The In Trust Center for Theological Schools](#) supports its member theological schools through resource consulting, a magazine, grants, and its Wise Stewards Initiative in support of board development.

*[The Louisville Institute](#) supports pastors and scholars of North American religion through grants and fellowships, advancing scholarship that will contribute to the church, academy, and wider society.

[The Wabash Center for Teaching & Learning in Theology and Religion](#) supports faculty through workshops, grants, consultants, a journal, and other resources.

*Agencies led by persons of color