

Engage. Engage. Engage. ATS executive director reflects on year three

By FRANK M. YAMADA

*"Three is a magic number,
Yes it is, it's a magic number."*

I grew up in front of the television. I am not proud of this fact, nor do I blame my parents. Growing up in front of the TV means that I will spontaneously break into song, rehearsing an old commercial jingle or the opening song to a 1970's sitcom. The lyrics that begin this article were part of ABC's "Schoolhouse Rock," which aired on Saturday mornings in between cartoons. They came to mind as I was reflecting on the end of my second year and the beginning of my third as executive director of ATS.

Three is a magic number. Three has always been a meaningful number for me. Perhaps being a biblical scholar contributes to this. Maybe because I am Christian, three is important because it reflects the divine nature. There are three strikes in a strikeout, three outs in an inning, and three courses in a meal. It may not be universally the case, but three certainly has some social significance. As I think about what this third year will bring, I am enthusiastic about the possibilities on the horizon. A clear theme has emerged across the various parts of work within the Association. That theme is engagement.

Engagement with the member schools: the redevelopment of the standards

My second year, like my first, was a year of listening. The listening within this second year was focused particularly



on the redevelopment of the accrediting standards. Through the work of the Redevelopment Task Force (RTF), we spent hundreds of hours and pored through many more pages of notes listening deeply to the membership. What do member schools hope will be included in these new standards? What did they believe should be left out? Three themes have emerged prominently: quality, clarity, and flexibility. These standards need to reflect how schools are achieving quality in theological education. They need to provide clarity; put more simply, they need to be shorter. Finally, the standards also need to provide flexibility because schools achieve quality in diverse ways.

As we move from the year of listening into the year of writing, it is important to emphasize that the listening will continue. We have already planned for six regional sessions. In these sessions, member schools can provide feedback on drafts of the standards. Look for invitations to attend these regional sessions in the coming months. You can read more about the redevelopment process in the [article](#) written by Sarah Drummond, the chair of

the RTF, and in the [article](#) written by Tom Tanner, the staff liaison, in this current issue of *Colloquy Online*. I am looking forward to the engagement that this year will provide as we move toward the 2020 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting in Vancouver and the possible adoption of a new set of standards.

Engagement with the changing realities of schools

I am pleased to announce that ATS has been awarded a \$5,985,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to examine the shifting organizational and financial model of theological schools and to continue the adaptive work that began with the Educational Models and Practices Project. Theological schools are changing in rapid and profound ways. This grant will enable ATS to engage schools in the areas where they are changing the most. It will include a study of mergers and other ways that schools have sought to shift their business models, and it will convene thought leaders on how to build healthier and more sustainable economic ecologies for schools and students. The project will also explore how faculty and students are adapting within the emerging educational models and practices, how faculty work is changing, and how students are being formed for leadership in communities of faith and for the broader society.

Engaging strategy

Last year, I mentioned that the ATS Board of Directors and the Board of Commissioners are both engaged in a strategic moment. The Board of Commissioners, through the work of the RTF, is overseeing the redevelopment of the standards—a once in a generation development. The ATS Board of Directors is also about to complete a process of strategic prioritization. The goal of this process will result in three to five priorities that will determine the shape of future initiatives and programs to benefit the membership. As we are seeing such significant shifts among ATS schools, I am grateful to the leadership of both boards for having the vision and the foresight to engage in their work strategically in order to set a pathway for effective change moving into the future.

Engage ATS

One of the themes that has emerged in the process of identifying strategic priorities is that of member engagement. Most of the membership knows ATS primarily as an accrediting agency. Fewer administrators and faculty from member schools know that ATS also provides leadership development, support for schools to do their work more effectively, workshops, webinars, data resources, and data interpretation. No other accrediting body that I know of provides resources such as these to its membership.

I am excited to share that ATS will be launching its own online community, Engage ATS. The purpose of this community is to foster connection among those who serve at ATS member schools. The Association's leadership education program promotes a peer learning environment where school leaders share resources and best practices with one another. Engage ATS will further this peer learning within connected online communities of mutual support. Members of these communities will be able to share on demand or just-in-time resources with one another in real time. Engage ATS will also enhance the opportunity for member schools to learn more about and take advantage of the resources ATS provides.

In order to better align staff resources with this theme of engagement, we have made some internal updates to staff titles and job descriptions. I am pleased to announce the following changes among the ATS/COA staff:



Chris Meinzer will be senior director of administration and chief operating officer. This new title recognizes the great work that Meinzer has done over the past two decades. He will provide strategic leadership and administrative operational oversight while continuing to fulfill functions related to the areas of finance, human resources, and property and facilities.



Lisa Kern will be manager of member engagement. She is one of the longest-serving ATS employees, working as communications coordinator for the past 16 years.

As manager of member engagement, Kern will oversee the implementation of Engage ATS while continuing some of the ongoing communication functions such as *Colloquy Online*, promoting ATS events and services, social media outreach, and producing various materials for the Association.



Joshua Reinders will be accrediting coordinator. This title change signals the ways in which Reinders' administrative role has increased in both quantity and complexity.

He will continue to provide administrative support to accrediting staff directors and visiting teams, and he will also be supporting new forms of visitor education and educational pilots that we have begun on the accrediting side.

Engage. Engage. Engage. The theme for the upcoming year seems clear. We look forward to this year of your engagement with the work of the Association and with one another as member schools.



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