

New assessment resources now available on ATS website

By DEBBIE CREAMER

ATS is pleased to announce several new resources designed to help schools with the critical yet challenging work of educational assessment. These materials are available on the ATS website, under Resources for Assessment Coordinators.

The first among these is *An Assessment Workbook for Roman Catholic Seminaries*, which is the culmination of a multi-year project by members of the Seminary Department of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) in collaboration with the Commission on Accrediting of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS/COA). The workbook explores educational assessment (and, particularly, student learning outcomes and degree program effectiveness) by putting the ATS/COA Standards of Accreditation in conversation with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Program of Priestly Formation* (PPF) and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Program for Priestly Formation* (CPPF).

The workbook describes the importance of assessment, explores how to design an effective assessment plan, and offers clear illustrations of how to identify indicators of student achievement for each of the four dimensions of formation (intellectual, spiritual, human, and pastoral). Because of these emphases, this workbook is intentionally well-suited for Roman Catholic seminaries that are accredited by ATS/COA and are refining their assessment strategies for programs that support priestly formation. While the workbook emphasizes the current ATS Commission Standards and the current editions of the PPF/CPPF, it is also expected that the underlying principles



and themes will remain relevant even as those foundational texts are revised.

Although the title of this document makes clear its value for Roman Catholic seminaries, the text is likely to be useful for a much larger audience as well. For example, it gives clear attention to strategies for assessing spiritual formation, an aspect of educational assessment that many schools find challenging. Themes in the workbook are also useful for degree programs that are not focused on ordination, as well as for institutional evaluation more broadly (e.g., attention to rubrics and to annual assessment reports). In addition, the workbook is accompanied by a collection of case studies, where 12 member schools graciously share real life assessment practices that they have found to be effective in their own contexts, enabling other schools to learn from their experiences.

The Assessment Coordinators webpage also includes a new video resource titled "Educational Assessment: Simple, Sustainable, Sufficient." This 60-minute video is based on the workshop of the same name from the 2018 ATS Biennial Meeting in Denver, and is designed to help institutions evaluate and revise their assessment plans with an eye toward the ATS/COA expectation that

assessment plans be “as simple and sustainable as possible while adequate to answer fundamental questions about educational effectiveness” (Educational Standard, section ES.6.1). This video not only makes this important content available to schools who were not able to attend the initial presentation, but it also means that those who participated in the workshop can revisit its themes or share it with a larger audience (such as a faculty retreat or assessment in-service).

Beyond these resources, the Assessment Coordinators webpage includes links to featured articles and resources on assessment in theological education, a bibliography of additional readings, and information on how to sign up for the [ATS listserv for assessment coordinators](#). The page also includes a convenient link to [A Reflective Guide to Effective Assessment of Student Learning](#), the primary ATS/COA interpretive document on educational assessment, which provides a concise, user-friendly, practical, and accessible framework to help institutions imagine,

implement, and improve their own assessment programs with attention to the expectations of the ATS Commission Standards. Schools may find the guide’s “Checklist for Effective Assessment” to be a particularly useful resource as they review their assessment plans.

These resource materials are not designed to offer a single model to follow nor as best practices for everyone to adopt. Rather, they seek to serve as tools that can help schools think deeply and in an integrated way about the assessment of student learning. All of these materials should be considered in light of both the ATS Commission Standards and the unique mission and context of each individual school. And, as always, for questions related to educational assessment and accreditation, including how it relates to one’s own institutional context, schools are encouraged to contact their ATS Commission staff liaisons.



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