New data to consider on duration of Doctor of Ministry degree

By Tom Tanner

"If we have data, let's look at data. If all we have are opinions, let's go with mine." While humorous, those words from a former business CEO have sometimes applied to the task force redeveloping the ATS Commission Standards and Policies. The challenge in this membership-driven process is that everyone's opinion is important. Still, when opinions differ and data exist, the task force has tried to "go with the data."

A case in point involves the proposed new standard on DMin duration (Standard 5.1). The task force has heard many different opinions on the proposal to "require a minimum of 30 semester credits or equivalent units" for the DMin. Many applaud it; some decry it. A concern appears to be the belief that requiring "only 30 credits" will cause the DMin to be devalued and disrespected.

Part of the problem is that the current standards express degree duration in terms of years, not credits: "The DMin program shall require the equivalent of one full year of academic study and the completion of the doctoral project" (E.3.2.1). As the data below show, ATS schools with DMin programs currently interpret "one full year" (of course work) to mean as few as 15 and as many as 45 credits! And the number of credits that ATS schools award the project ranges from 0 to 20! With that much disparity, the task force had to choose a reasonable minimum that would apply to most DMin programs. Again, as the data show, the most common "equivalent of one full year of academic study" for DMin coursework is



24 credits, with six credits as the most common number of credits given to the project.

To test this proposal on DMin duration (30 total DMin credits), the task force looked at the data taken directly from the websites of all 153 ATS schools offering the DMin. Though 31 schools did not list their requirements in credits (just courses or years), the data for the remaining 122 schools strongly support the proposed minimum of 30 total credits. In fact, as the numbers below show, if the DMin duration standard required more than 30 total credits, about 42% of all ATS DMin programs would not meet it:

- 7% of ATS DMin programs require fewer than 30 total credits (ranging from 24 to 29)
- 35% of ATS DMin programs require exactly 30 total credits
- 48% of ATS DMin programs require 32-36 total credits
- 10% of ATS DMin programs require more than 36 total credits (ranging from 38 to 48)

Some think the new standard should require at least 30 credits of just course work, plus the project. However, two-thirds (65%) of all ATS DMin programs require fewer than 30 credits for coursework (only a few require more than 36 credits). It does not seem appropriate to propose a standard that two-thirds of our members would fail—based on these data.

But opinions also matter. To give those most involved in DMin programs a chance to offer theirs, ATS asked the ADME (Association for Doctor of Ministry Education) to survey DMin directors on the proposed standard of "a minimum of 30 semester credits or equivalent units."

Its opinion? Forty-seven of the 49 respondents agreed with that proposal. Another important source of opinion is the professional judgment of ATS peer reviewers. More than 40 ATS DMin programs requiring a total of 30 credits have been evaluated by onsite peer reviewers during the last several decades as part of comprehensive evaluation visits or focused visits. All have been found to provide educational quality appropriate to this doctoral degree with no concerns raised about duration.

Still, the standards are only in draft form, and everyone's opinion is welcome. We look forward to hearing yours.



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