

New numbers reported for 2019–2020 enrollment

By CHRIS MEINZER

This article follows an article from October 2019 regarding fall 2019 enrollment across ATS member schools. At the time of this article, almost 90% of the membership had reported headcount enrollment, and the following preliminary observations are based on these numbers.



In fall 2018, the ATS membership reported total headcount enrollment of 78,046. For fall 2019, the projected total headcount enrollment is about 77,600. This would mean that enrollment would experience an overall decline of less than 0.5%, or be essentially flat year-over-year.

In terms of enrollment changes by school, about 45% have shown enrollment increases and about 55% have shown enrollment declines. The median total headcount change is down about 2%. These expected results would continue a trend that has been in place for more than a decade.

Similar to what we saw in October, in terms of degree categories, more schools reflect increases than declines in the Professional MA and Advanced Professional degrees. Additionally, more schools reflect declines than increases in the MDiv and Academic MA degrees. Changes in enrollment in the Advanced Academic degrees appear to be evenly split.

In terms of ecclesial family total enrollment by school, there is a very interesting preliminary trend. Half of evangelical schools and half of mainline schools are reflecting

overall enrollment increases, while only about 33% of Roman Catholic/Orthodox schools are reporting overall enrollment increases.

1 Within evangelical schools, about 45% of the schools are showing enrollment increases in the MDiv and Academic MA degrees. Conversely, nearly 60% of the schools are showing enrollment increases in Professional MA and Advanced Professional degrees, and 67% of schools that offer Advanced Academic degrees have shown increases.

2 Within mainline schools, about 45% of the schools are showing enrollment increases in the MDiv and Academic MA degrees. This is balanced by roughly 55% of the schools showing enrollment increases in Advanced Professional and Advanced Academic degrees, and about 60% of schools reflecting enrollment increases in the Professional MA degrees.

3 The story for Roman Catholic/Orthodox schools is much different. Not only are only about 33% of the schools reflecting overall increases, but there is not one

degree category that is showing more schools growing than declining. This preliminary trend is unique to fall 2019 for these schools, and requires further study over the next few months.

The initial review of enrollment laid out in this article and the one in October continue to provide some important trends for ATS schools. Overall, there is very encouraging news in that more than 77,000 students pursue their theological education at ATS member schools. Within this overall trend, there are shifts occurring that require attention. The MDiv is currently stable at about 40% of overall enrollment, but the trend toward MA degrees continues and now represents about 35% of overall enrollment.

The underlying enrollment changes reflected within degree categories and ecclesial families demonstrate that school leaders need to nuance enrollment benchmarks

when comparing their own results with others. There are certainly schools that are reflecting missional strength measured by enrollment growth, but there are other schools who have continued to experience enrollment declines across long periods of time.

There are a number of resources from ATS that can help you with your benchmarking. The final [ATS Annual Data Tables](#) should be available in early March. In addition, the [ATS Strategic Information Report](#) and the [ATS Institutional Peer Profile Report](#) should be sent to the chief executive officers of each school in early March. In the meantime, if you have specific questions about enrollment or other strategic data points for your institution, please contact me at meinzer@ats.edu.



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