

Progress in the process: update on redeveloping the ATS standards and procedures

BY SARAH DRUMMOND

The redevelopment task force has been engaged so far this year in a process of listening and gathering data from wide-ranging groups of constituents. Although many of the practices that have guided our listening resemble those used by social scientists, we have been careful to distinguish between “listening” and “re-search.”

Research projects are most appropriately carried out with a certain analytical distance, and we are actually making an effort to build relationships, foster buy-in, and garner trust from our colleagues in this process. We want our membership to feel heard, understood, and respected. We want our colleagues to believe that the redeveloped standards will reflect the wisdom they have generously shared.

One learning that came to me early and has been reinforced and reiterated since is this: *there is nothing necessarily “wrong” with the standards we have, but they are written at the wrong level of abstraction.* They are too close to the ground on which theological schools make the decisions that are best for them, making them difficult to adapt to varied contexts and necessitating constant requests for exceptions. I suspect—nay, believe—that *the new standards will be briefer, simpler, and more focused on guiding principles than on specific practices.* The way our task force has gone about its work, focusing on shared values among constituents (via a [working draft of Key Educational Principles](#)) and a strong foreword to the eventual redeveloped standards (via a [draft Preamble](#) with seven membership priorities), should signal to you



that we are working to stay out of the weeds from the beginning.

I also want to report satisfaction in our work so far as it relates to how we as a task force are working together. “Everyone thinks, but few write” has been a helpful guide, preventing all of us lovers of language from acting the part of the proverbial too-many cooks. Those who have done the first rounds of writing have modeled grace, as others have picked at their use of language with an eye toward how words might be understood across constituencies. The results so far have been documents that (1) we as a task force feel reflect what we discussed and believe, and (2) are a joy to read.

As we continue in this “year of listening,” we welcome your continued input. The task force has scheduled some 50 focus groups this year involving nearly 500 participants from ATS member schools. We want to hear your voice. Please email us at redemption@ats.edu. We look forward to hearing from you.



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