

ATS self-study workshop offers insight for schools

By *MARISSA DECHANT*

Twenty-nine participants from 16 ATS member schools gathered for the Fall 2019 Commission on Accrediting Self-Study Workshop, September 12 and 13, at the ATS office in Pittsburgh. This free event is offered to assist schools—with visits scheduled in the next two to three years—on how to begin the self-study process. Other objectives include learning to value the role of the standards and procedures; appreciating the role of evaluation and assessment; and networking with ATS staff and peers.

Four directors from the ATS staff led individual sessions throughout the workshop: Debbie Creamer, senior director of accreditation; Barbara Mutch, director of accreditation; Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, director of accreditation and global engagement; and Tom Tanner, director of accreditation.

Mutch welcomed the group and provided introductions. She presented a session on the self-study process that encompassed the self-study report, the visiting committee, and the purpose of the accreditation standards.

Tanner was responsible for reviewing the possibilities and implications of the redevelopment process for the standards. He said the session also reviewed the “grandfathering” process approved by the Board of Commissioners for how the new Standards and Policies will be implemented after the membership votes on them next June.



ATS Director of Accreditation Tom Tanner leads a session on the characteristics of good self-study reports.

“The participants at the workshop seemed very interested in the new standards, and they engaged the topic very well with good questions. The first public draft of the proposed Standards and Policies will be made available in early December,” Tanner said.

Tanner gave a second presentation on the self-study process, which overviewed the characteristics of good self-study reports.

“The presentation has been given at all ATS self-study workshops for the last several years and always seems to be received well as very practical and helpful advice,” he said.

Other presentations included Creamer’s, with a review of the accrediting standards related to institutional evaluation and educational assessment. She also explored models for guiding an institution through its self-study process, with particular attention to committee structures, work timelines, and stakeholder involvement.

Ruiz facilitated a conversation with representatives regarding the self-study process for embedded-type schools. This included a look at 13 embedded member schools that were all represented by participants of the

workshop. The presentation centered on how embedded-type schools can best prepare and communicate to their larger umbrella institutions.

Following the workshop, participants gave overall positive feedback. They said they gained an understanding of the self-study process, and were able to network with others at the event.

“The staff was most gracious and welcoming,” said one participant. “The presenters were engaging, and being able to have the PowerPoint presentations and take notes myself on them in the presentation was also a great idea.”

“I’m leaving with a sense of the overall shape of the process, the right attitude to take to it, and a strong sense of character of the report,” said another participant.

Joshua Reinders, ATS accrediting coordinator, handled the workshop registration process in addition to hotel and travel logistics for participants.

The next self-study workshop will be February 6 and 7, 2020. Schools are invited to attend the workshop two years prior to their scheduled accreditation visits. This is the fourth academic year that ATS has both offered a second self-study workshop and held the events at the ATS office rather than at an outside location.

“Moving (the workshop) to the building personalized it by inviting representatives of schools into ‘their’ ATS building and the individual work spaces of their liaisons, and it also gave them the opportunity to meet other members of the ATS staff,” Mutch said.



Marissa Dechant is Executive Assistant at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.