

# Six months and counting: an update on redeveloping the Standards and Procedures

BY TOM TANNER

*The redevelopment of the ATS Commission Standards and Procedures is now officially six months into a two-year process (June 2018–June 2020). What has the Redevelopment Task Force been doing during that time? Here is a summary of its work during the first half of this first year of “listening, researching, and reflecting.”*



## **Six months of listening**

In “We’re Listening” in the October 2018 issue of *Colloquy Online*, the task force reported that it had scheduled more than 20 different “input-gathering” groups this year. As of December 2018, that list of 20 has grown to nearly 50 different groups involving more than 300 ATS participants—with additional opportunities for other conversations still being identified. The nearly 50 forums include eight subcommittees, four working groups, 12 focus groups, and 24 listening sessions to hear comments and concerns from the ATS membership about redeveloping the Standards and Procedures. About half of the listening sessions will involve nearly 100 ATS students from 12 different ATS schools across North America.

So far, we have heard from about one-fourth of these nearly 50 groups. The feedback to date is consistent with earlier input from the ATS Educational Models and Practices Project in many important areas. For example, members consistently express a desire for standards that

focus on quality, simplicity, and flexibility, and more on quality educational principles than on individual educational practices. Members also identify the need to develop standards that adequately address the growing diversity of our schools—a diversity demonstrated not only demographically but also institutionally in an increasing range of organizational structures and educational practices. We will continue listening throughout the year before the second year of “writing, revising, and recommending.”

## **Six months of researching**

Much of the researching phase of the redevelopment process has been occurring through the ATS Educational Models and Practices Project previously mentioned. That research has focused this fall on identifying key educational principles that define and describe quality theological education. The task force has spent several meetings (see below) reviewing that research and drafting a set of principles that it will share with the Board of Commissioners in February 2019, and then make available to the membership this spring for broader input. That input will come partly through the nearly 50 forums described

above, but also through outreach efforts aimed at the entire ATS membership.

The task force also surveyed the Biennial Meeting participants in Denver this past June. More than 130 responses highlighted the desire for quality, simplicity, and flexibility, along with concerns expressed about not overlooking the differences among us. Another area of study has been through the working group on denominational engagement. That working group identified eight different denominations that account for more than half of the ATS students whose denominational backgrounds are known. Several of those eight denominations were consulted this fall, primarily through regular meetings of presidents and deans of schools closely connected to those denominations. Other denominational engagements are scheduled for early in 2019. It is too early in this process to draw any conclusions from those denominational engagements.

### ***Six months of reflecting***

The task force has met four different times since the ATS membership authorized the redevelopment in June 2018, with many hours of reflecting before, during, and after those meetings. Two of the meetings have been face to face (in Denver and Pittsburgh), and two have been via video conference. As noted in the preceding paragraph, much of that reflection has focused on identifying and articulating key educational principles.

Another significant focus of task force reflection has been on drafting a preamble or preface to a new set of standards. The current working draft, which will be shared with the Board of Commissioners in February 2019, articulates seven “foundational priorities” of the membership upon which the new standards might build. The task force believes a clear and concise preamble, or preface, can remind us of two important factors: (1) our common purposes and priorities as a membership organization (what unites us) and (2) our own distinctives and differences as an accrediting agency (how do we differ from other accrediting agencies?). After the February 2019 Board meeting, a draft of that document will also be shared with the membership for its feedback.

### ***Six months and counting...***

The task force has been working hard these past six months, with much more work still to do. Please pray for these dedicated individuals who are working collectively to ensure that any new Standards and Procedures help all ATS members achieve not only their individual missions but also our common mission: “To promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.”

If you have any input to give the task force, please email us at [redvelopment@ats.edu](mailto:redvelopment@ats.edu). For an overview of the redevelopment process, please visit our [redvelopment page](#) on the ATS website.



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