We're listening: an update on redeveloping ATS Commission Standards and Procedures

By Tom Tanner

To quote Yogi Berra, "You can observe a lot just by watching." When it comes to the ATS membership, we believe you can learn a lot just by listening. And when it comes to redeveloping the ATS Standards and Procedures, we're listening. After the ATS membership voted *in June 2018 to authorize the Board of Commissioners to undertake the redevelopment process, the 19-member Redevelopment* Task Force *designated the first year (2018–2019) of this two-year project (June 2018–June 2020) as "a year of listening"—and learning.*

We've actually been listening for several years now. We started in 2015 with the launch of the ATS Educational Models and Practices project, a key goal of which was to inform a new set of standards. That project has involved listening to more than 90 percent of the ATS membership through surveys, peer group conversations, special meetings, and other avenues. Much of what has been learned through those four years of listening is described on the ATS website and is informing the redevelopment process.

Building on those lessons learned, the Task Force is now engaged in multi-pronged efforts to listen to the membership in even more focused ways. Those efforts include special focus groups at ATS Leadership Education events, listening sessions at meetings of key constituents, and a dozen different subcommittees and working groups appointed by the Task Force that will be engaging a broad range of the membership. Each of those listening efforts invites continued membership input:

1 One way in which the Redevelopment Task Force is listening is through special focus groups at ATS and ATS-related events. We have budgeted funds to gather a group of eight to ten ATS members at each ATS Leadership Education event this year for extended conversations about redevelopment. Those events include the annual meetings of financial officers, presidents, academic deans, development officers, and student personnel officers, as well as meetings of ATS-related groups like Association for Doctor of Ministry Education and American Theological Library Association.

2 Another way we are listening to the membership this year is through special listening sessions with African-American, Asian-descent, and Latino/a presidents and deans, as well as other groups to be scheduled, including faculty, students,

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and trustees. We are also reaching out to key denominations, including the rectors and deans of Roman Catholic schools and a variety of mainline and evangelical Protestant leaders.

3 Yet a third way we are listening as a Task Force is through the appointment of about a dozen subcommittees and working groups, who are charged with engaging a variety of ATS members in their work this year. The list of issues being addressed by those groups includes (with the Task Force "convener" of that group listed in parentheses): diversity (Frank Yamada), degree programs (Debbie Creamer), planning and evaluation (Sarah Drummond), formation (Peter Vaccari), procedures (Oliver McMahan), faculty (Stephen Graham), governance (Tom Tanner), institutional structures (Stephen Graham), denominational engagement (Harry Gardner), technology and libraries (Debbie Creamer), global engagement (Lester Edwin J. Ruiz), and Canadian consultations (Barbara Mutch). Anyone who wishes to provide input on one or more of those issues is encouraged to contact the convener(s), which can be done by using the email address in the next paragraph.

4 Finally, we have developed a redevelopment webpage dedicated to the redevelopment process, through which we will regularly update the membership and invite your input at any time. We are always open to questions, suggestions, comments, or concerns that any ATS member may raise, which may be sent to redevelopment@ats.edu. We're listening.

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