

The year of educating and implementing new *ATS Standards of Accreditation*

By TOM TANNER

Someone in Seattle said it—a comment coming at the start of the current COVID-19 crisis. It was spoken at a feedback session on the proposed new Standards of Accreditation in early March. It was just one comment among hundreds that were part of the two-year redevelopment process. Yet, this one reflection summarizes so well what the membership approved so resoundingly on June 25 (by a vote of 198 to 1): “The new standards are focused not on a fearful future but on a preferred future. They speak to what is best about theological education.”

As Redevelopment Task Force Chair Sarah Drummond concluded in her Biennial Meeting address (see accompanying [article](#)), with the approval of the new *Standards*, the work—the real work—is just beginning.

“We expect they will spur good conversation in our institutions about how our principles inspire our practices, and how we must renew our minds so we might respond faithfully to the cries of the aching world we serve... This work will not just improve your schools, it will change you,” said Drummond. These principle-based *Standards* (that are simpler, but not easier) call all our schools to “focus... on a preferred future... to speak to what is best about theological education.” The new *Standards* are not a re-vision; they are a re-envisioning of theological education for a new generation.

To help our schools tackle that enormous task, the ATS Board of Commissioners is now transitioning to what ATS Executive Director Frank Yamada has called “the third year of this two-year process.” The first year (2018–2019) was “a year of listening and reflecting.” The second year



(2019–2020) was “a year of writing and revising.” Now, we come to a third year (2020–2021 and beyond): “a year of educating and implementing” the new *Standards*.

Throughout the year, the Board will host a number of events and share a variety of resources to help schools better understand and live into the new *Standards*. Most of these will be online (using Zoom and Canvas), due in part to the current COVID-19 crisis, but also to give wider access to these resources. Some of these will be revisions of existing resources (e.g., see previous *Colloquy Online* articles about the new [Self-Study Handbook](#) and about updated [visitor education resources](#)). Some events will be by invitation (e.g., Self-Study Workshops, School for Peer Reviewers, Orientation for New Commissioners), but most will be accessible to all members.

In the upcoming months, we will share what those resources are and how they can be accessed. Please note that these resources will not be new policies or new

expectations. They will be spaces for us to talk with one another as a community of theological educators about how we might all live into the new *Standards* adopted by the membership. We will begin the “year of educating and implementing” with a major overhaul of the content of the accrediting webpages on the ATS website. Those updates, which will include new petition and notification forms, should be available by the end of July. Schools might also find it helpful to review some of the online

redevelopment materials prepared for the recent Biennial Meeting, including information on implementing the new *Standards* and a set of FAQs about them.

Stay tuned for future announcements about additional resources that the Board will be making available throughout the coming year—and beyond—as we re-envision theological education for a new generation.



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