Promoting the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.
“Accrediting interaction with schools is increasing as schools launch new initiatives, experiment, and assess and adjust their programs.”

- Daniel O. Aleshire, Executive Director, ATS

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Over the past few years, the pace of change has accelerated both in theological education and in the religious landscape of North America and across the globe.

As practices of communities of faith and ministry are in a steady state of flux, theological schools are responding with new institutional structures, programs, and delivery methods. Accrediting interaction with schools is increasing as schools launch new initiatives, experiment, and assess and adjust their programs. Schools are hurrying, as best they can, in the direction of the greatest needs. This rapid pace calls for a commensurately rapid rhythm in ATS communications to its membership of 270 schools, our 31 Affiliates, and the many friends who support theological education in so many ways. In an effort to pick up the pace, then, ATS is providing this formal report on the current status of member schools and ATS activities on an annual instead of a biennial basis. On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Association, the Board of Commissioners of the Commission on Accrediting, and our dedicated staff, I am pleased to offer this first ATS Annual Report to you in hopes that it will enlighten, affirm, and inspire you in your work.
Whatever is going on inside theological schools is intimately connected to what is going on outside them—and what is going on outside comprises deep and pervasive change in the religious landscape.

Studies conducted by the Pew Research Center document the fact that overall religious adherence has waned. Denominations are weakening both in membership and in their role as an organizing center for congregational ministry. Trust in religious institutions is on the decline. Some 23 percent of people in the United States are considered “religiously unaffiliated.”

For those who do actively engage with religion, congregational practices are changing to favor more expressive worship styles, and an ever-larger percentage of religious service attenders are active in larger membership congregations. Mainline Protestants are now in the minority among North American Christians. The US Roman Catholic Church will become majority Hispanic and Asian before 2030, and while the number of Catholics continues to increase, the number of weekly mass attenders lags. Thirty years ago, a significant majority of all students in ATS member schools comprised white males who were pursuing one of a limited number of degrees on main seminary campuses in weekday classes. For the most part, graduates pursued predictable forms of congregational ministry. The majority of students were enrolled in mainline Protestant schools. Schools were not financially flush, but most had revenue in excess of expenses, and students had negligible amounts of educational debt. Changes were in the air and around the edges of this settled time, but they seemed distant.

Today we face a different reality. The edges have overtaken the center, and from a relatively settled cul-de-sac in higher education, theological schools find themselves in a new educational world.

Theological schools work in the broader context of the structure of religion and patterns of participation in communities of faith in North America.

SOME CHANGES RESIDE IN THE STUDENTS

• Women now constitute the majority of student enrollment in 25 percent of ATS member schools and more than 30 percent of total enrollment across all schools.
• The percentage of racial/ethnic students in ATS member schools has grown from less than 10 percent 30 years ago to more than 39 percent in fall 2014, trending toward a majority by 2025. (25% of member schools are majority racial/ethnic now.)
• The majority of all students are either over 50 or under 30, and the over-50 cohort is the fastest growing, now making up nearly one-fourth of all ATS member school students.
• The vocational aims of students have multiplied, with fewer students anticipating work in typical congregational or parish settings and an increasing percentage unsure of their plans.
• The majority of MDiv graduates now leave seminary with debt, and that debt is more than three times the amount that students accrued 20 years ago.

OTHER CHANGES RESIDE PRIMARILY IN THE SCHOOLS.

• Since World War II, nearly 100 seminaries have been founded, most of them evangelical Protestant, with both established and new patterns of theological education.
• Nearly one in three ATS member schools offer full degrees at 245 extension or branch campus settings.
• Protestant theological education has become primarily a commuter student enterprise.
• More than 23,000 students are enrolled in at least one distance education course for credit, and more than 133 ATS schools offer comprehensive distance education programs, with a dozen schools approved to offer MDiv and/or professional MA programs largely or completely online.
• The 245 accredited schools in ATS now offer more than 240 different professional MA degrees.
• Assessment is now expected to be a key component of the educational program in every theological school.
• Curricula have grown in diversity and complexity as disciplinary knowledge has expanded and long-ignored voices have finally been included.
• The percentage of ATS member schools embedded in larger educational institutions has increased to nearly 40 percent.
• More than 50 percent of freestanding ATS schools have expenses that exceed their income.

Many of these changes are significant in and of themselves, but together they constitute a massive and interconnected set of influences on ATS member schools, influences that demand courageous and innovative responses.
Who We Are Collectively

- **270+ Schools**
  - 65% Freestanding
  - 35% Embedded / Affiliated

- **72,000 Students**
  - 67% Men
  - 33% Women
  - 39% Racial / Ethnic

- **3,500 Faculty**
  - 76% Men
  - 24% Women
  - 19% Racial / Ethnic

- **$1.8 billion** in total annual revenue
- **$8 billion** in total long-term investments

- **7,700 Administrators**

- **$1.8 billion** in total annual revenue
- **$8 billion** in total long-term investments

**State of the Enterprise**

- **8 billion** in total long-term investments
- **7,700 Administrators**

- **2015 ATS Annual Report**
**Enrollment, Completions, and Placement**

SCHOOLS ACCEPTED 75% OF APPLICANTS.
OF THOSE ACCEPTED, 72% ENROLLED.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPLICATIONS</th>
<th>ACCEPTANCES</th>
<th>ENROLLMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13,376 MDivs</td>
<td>10,479 MDivs</td>
<td>7,502 MDivs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,828 MA</td>
<td>8,322 MA</td>
<td>6,926 MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL: 30,137</td>
<td>TOTAL: 22,507</td>
<td>TOTAL: 16,136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMPLETIONS**

- MDiv 6,434
- PROFESSIONAL MA 3,017
- ACADEMIC MA 2,708
- ADVANCED MINISTERIAL 1,470
- ADVANCED THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH 958

TOTAL 14,587

MEDIAN PLACEMENT RATES OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS

- MDiv 85%
- DMin 83%
- PROFESSIONAL MA 80%
- ACADEMIC MA 75%
- PhD 71%

**Portrait of a Median School**

- About 150 head count students
- About 90 full-time equivalent students
- About 14 full-time equivalent faculty
- About 10 full-time faculty
- About $3.84 million in expenditures
351 different accrediting actions, affecting 181 different schools: 67% of the ATS membership.

Of the 351 accrediting actions, nearly one-third were handled by Commission staff—a new practice authorized by the Board of Commissioners in February 2014 in order to provide a more timely response to member schools for more routine issues.

During 2014–2015, the Board of Commissioners also revised several of its policies and practices (documented in a revised Policy Manual), added new petition templates, and adopted new guidelines for state authorization and for combining undergraduate and graduate programs. The Board also submitted an interim report to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, which was accepted without further action. Work also began on the re-recognition process with the US Department of Education, with a review scheduled for June 2016.

Several trends have emerged this past year in the accrediting work of the ATS Commission, including the following:

• A growing number of petitions for exceptions and experiments, increasing by 55%, from 19 the previous year to 29 this past year. Since the 2012 revision of the Standards that allowed for such petitions, the Board has reviewed 60 some and granted more than 50—most of which deal with residency (see complete list). Petitions for new degrees and new extension sites were also significant in number.

• An increasing interest in competency-based degree programs, prompted perhaps by the Board’s approval of the membership’s first competency-based MDiv for Northwest Baptist Seminary as a five-year experiment.

• A significant decline in the number of reports on assessment (from 55 to 38), reflecting member schools’ growing experience in assessing student learning and perhaps also the Board’s publication in 2014 of a new assessment guide.

• A decline in numbers, but not necessarily in seriousness or severity, of reports regarding governance. This past year several member schools made headlines over controversial issues related to governance, prompting several high-profile focused visits on that issue.

• A leveling off of petitions for distance education approval (10 last year vs. 17 the year before), though the number of member schools with that approval (132) surpassed 50% of all 246 accredited schools for the first time this past year.

• A 27% decline in the number of required reports (from 211 to 154—the lowest number since 2011), which may be due to several factors, including greater familiarity with the revised Standards.
**Board of Commissioners**

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Phillip Zylla, McMaster Divinity College

**THE WORK OF THE ASSOCIATION**

More than a dozen events specifically designed for administrators and faculty drew nearly 600 participants, who found time for reflection on their vocations as theological educators as well as encouragement, practical skills, and networks of peers and mentors.

**Leadership Education**

“I left feeling renewed, and informed, and inspired.”
Lallene Rector, President, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

“There’s a real solitariness and sometimes a loneliness in leadership, so it’s a wonderful tonic to be close to people who are doing the same work, asking the same questions, and researching the same problems and opportunities.”
Matthew Boulton, President, Christian Theological Seminary

“People are not running away from seminary. They are looking for seminary. The larger community is asking how the seminary contributes or invests in the community and the church. The question is, Are seminaries going to be led by blockers or blessers?”
John Kinney, Dean, Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology
John Kinney’s message to student personnel administrators at an April 2015 conference offered valuable insights for all theological educators.
Global Engagement

A planning grant from the Henry Luce Foundation supported staff exploration of a comprehensive initiative on global awareness and engagement, one of the ATS Board’s strategic priorities for the coming years. As the global face of Christianity grows and diversifies outside North America, western theological education cannot think of its own scholarly work as sufficient at this time without engagement in the scholarship and strategies for theological education in the majority world; nor can it assume that it is a good steward of its significant scholarly resources and educational practices without making them available in appropriate ways in the broader efforts of world Christianity. This exploration, conducted in conjunction with leading international theological educators, will inform future development of partnerships and collaborations.

Research

In December 2013, the ATS Board endorsed the launch of an ATS research function to serve member schools. It will be implemented as an integral component of major projects that the Association undertakes. The research function was inaugurated during the 2014–2015 year with focus on two lines of inquiry. The first, funded through a Leadership Education grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., was a retrospective examination of 15 years of programming through the Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) that will inform future diversity initiatives. The second, funded by a grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, was a multifaceted look at ATS work with faculty to determine what programs and services would best serve their interests in the future. Through multiple modes of research—surveys and regional focus groups—and correlation with the data collected from member schools through the Annual Report Form, ATS is now compiling the most comprehensive knowledge base available on issues of theological education.

Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers (ECFFM)

The ECFFM Initiative began with 16 pilot schools in 2013 and expanded to 51 additional schools in 2014. As coordinators of the initiative, ATS has generated relevant research on educational debt, created a webpage to share resources related to the initiative, distributed small grants to participating schools, and provided opportunities for active collaboration through a listserv, peer groups, and large group forums. Work in 2014–2015 focused on financial literacy programs for more than 17,500 seminary students and research that examined debt levels of graduates, with an emphasis on age, gender, and ethnicity as contributing factors and showing little direct correlation between tuition levels and levels of educational debt. Future work will focus on the causes of student debt, strategies for responding effectively to it, andologies of money and economics.

Educational Models and Practices

Generously funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., the Educational Models and Practices project is the largest and most significant project ever undertaken by ATS. This four-year, “game-changing” initiative is gathering information about innovations in member schools and in other graduate professional education and about where and how graduates are serving. This year, the project focused on gathering information about innovative models and practices that are currently in use at member schools. Ultimately, it will inform redevelopment of the Standards of Accreditation to accommodate and encourage the most effective approaches to meet the needs of students and the communities of faith they serve.

ATS is now compiling the most comprehensive knowledge base available on issues of theological education.
Student Data and Formation Resources

More than 12,000 current and former students from more than 170 member schools completed the Entering and Graduating Student and Alumni/ae Questionnaires, providing a wealth of data about their demographics, levels of debt, motivations for entering seminary, satisfaction with the effectiveness of the education received, and professional plans and experiences. These data are helping schools to understand their constituents and perform assessment more effectively.

71% 31%

71 PERCENT OF 2015 GRADUATES INTEND TO OR ARE ALREADY SERVING IN A CONGREGATION OR PARISH.

Asian/Pacific Islanders, black/non-Hispanic, Hispanic/Latino(a), and Visa students are much more likely to return to congregations they served in before graduation, whereas white students are much more likely to seek placement in another congregation.

ABOUT 31 PERCENT OF GRADUATES ARE OR EXPECT TO BE BIVOCATIONAL.

Another 18 percent report considering bivocational ministry after graduation. These plans vary greatly by race/ethnicity and age: 54% of black/non-Hispanic students and 36% of 40-55 year olds plan on bivocational ministry.

Luce Fellows

Six scholars were named as Henry Luce III Fellows for 2015–2016. This 22nd class of Fellows is being funded to engage in yearlong research in various areas of theological inquiry, from postracial Christianity and missiology to desire in wisdom literature and concepts of God in Latino theology. Since 1994, the Luce program has funded significant work by 142 of the Association’s most talented research faculty representing a total of more than 50 member schools. While the majority of the projects are written for other academics, some publications have served to bring theological issues to the public eye. The program has been funded through 2017.
FINANCES

Commission on Accrediting
FY 2015

REVENUES
$1,231,097

- MEMBER DUES: $1,002,416
- ACCREDITING FEES: $200,194
- PETITION FEES: $26,106
- INVESTMENT: $2,381

EXPENSES
$1,215,538

- TO ATS FOR PERSONNEL: $793,048
- TO ATS FOR INDIRECT: $202,000
- ACCREDITING TRAVEL: $111,102
- BOARD MEETINGS: $52,087
- OTHER: $57,301

Association of Theological Schools
FY 2015

REVENUES
$4,456,258

- GRANT ACTIVITIES: $2,292,448
- REIMBURSEMENT FROM COMMISSION: $995,048
- MEMBER DUES: $342,044
- TUITION & FEES: $385,011
- INVESTMENTS: $41,707
- QUASI-ENDOWMENT DRAW: $400,000

EXPENSES
$4,313,367

- ASSOCIATION SUPPORT: $600,227
- COMMISSION ON ACCREDITING: $793,048
- COMMUNICATIONS & DATA: $439,185
- LEADERSHIP EDUCATION: $2,116,754
- ISSUES & INITIATIVES: $364,353
TOP 12 ATS NEWS STORIES
OF 2014–2015

From its broad vantage point, ATS regularly shares data, trends, tools and best practices, and reflections that keep member schools, the media, funders, and the general public informed about the status and importance of theological education in North America. Metrics reveal which stories resonated most with readers.

1. Seminaries set six enrollment records
2. Why 100 ATS member schools have grown
3. Seminaries awarded $1.5 million to include science in course work
4. Tenure and faculty facts at ATS member schools
5. 67 schools share strategies for reducing student debt
6. 10 steps to developing a dashboard of key metrics
7. Naming vocation: 5 steps of student discernment
8. Breaking the code of silence: Financial planning tools seek to promote greater fiscal responsibility among incoming students
9. Personal reflections on diversity gathering and lessons we’ve learned
10. Piety and Plurality inspires future-oriented conversation
11. Ten things the seminary president can do to build a more effective board
12. Why the Strategic Information Report is an essential tool in every school’s toolbox, and three questions every administrator and board member should ask

Read these articles in their entirety at www.ats.edu.
LOOKING FORWARD

2016 Biennial

The largest gathering ATS convenes, the Biennial Meeting is an opportunity for school leaders and others with an interest in theological education to conduct business, share plenary presentations, learn in workshops, and network with colleagues. In 2016 the meeting will be held in St. Louis, Missouri.

2018 ATS Centennial

Plans are also underway for the Centennial year, which will culminate in the 2018 Biennial Meeting in Denver, Colorado. Throughout the year, ATS will celebrate 100 years of supporting theological schools in service to communities of faith and the broader public.

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