

The Educational Models and Practices project: 10 things we've learned so far

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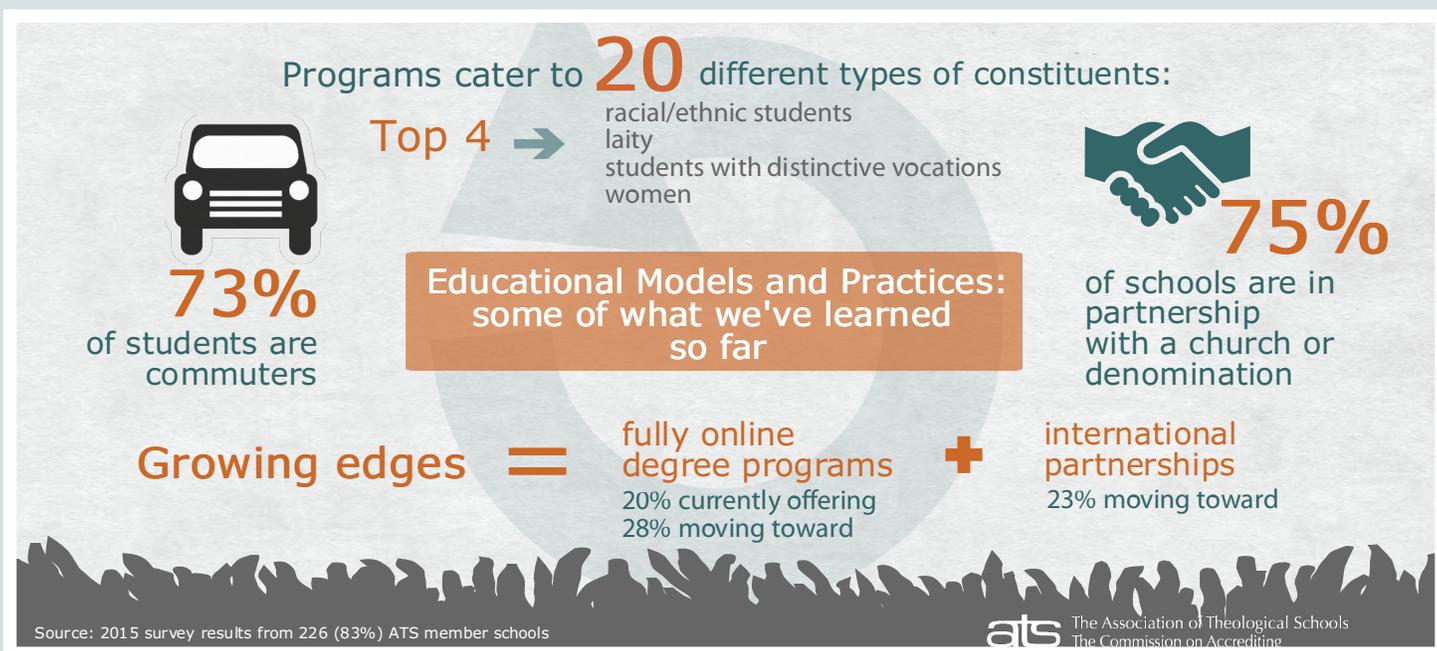
Thirteen members of the Educational Models and Practices advisory committee gathered in Pittsburgh on September 22–23 to review the work of the project so far and to provide guidance for the next phases of research. With 226 (83 percent) of member schools responding to the initial mapping survey, the project has completed its first round of data collection about how schools are responding to changing constituencies and realities in the religious landscape. The mapping survey captures an initial snapshot of what schools are doing through innovative curricular offerings, scheduling, engagement with particular constituents, partnerships, and delivery methods.

The survey respondents constitute a representative cross section of ATS member schools in terms of their size, ecclesial family, national location, and “embeddedness.”

HERE ARE 10 THINGS WE HAVE LEARNED THROUGH THE SURVEY:

1

With the increase in commuter students, on-campus residency is no longer the norm. Students at ATS member schools are, on average, 47 percent local commuter, 26 percent nonlocal commuter, and 27 percent living on or adjacent to campus. Those living on or adjacent to campus drops to 22 percent when counting only Protestant schools.



2 **Schools are responding to the growing commuter constituency.** Of the 102 schools with a majority of students who are local commuters, 82 percent offer block scheduling, which condenses weekly class schedules into one extended meeting per week. And of the 48 schools with a majority who are nonlocal commuters, 85 percent offer intensive course scheduling, which brings students to campus only occasionally but for periods of several days.

3 **Online course delivery is a complex picture.** While 145 (64%) of the schools indicated that they are currently offering partially online courses, only 46 of the schools (20%) reported offering fully online degree programs. Schools that offer fully online degree programs are predominantly evangelical Protestant (70%), free-standing (65%), and large, with student bodies of 300 or more (37%).

4 **In describing their formational character, more schools rank intellectual and pastoral formation as having the greatest import.** When asked to identify the most-emphasized area of formation at their schools, 37 percent ranked intellectual formation and 34 percent ranked pastoral formation, while 15 percent ranked spiritual formation and 14 percent ranked human formation as most important. Though spiritual formation was not identified as one of the highest overall, it is most strongly emphasized among evangelical Protestant schools (22%, as compared with 5% of mainline Protestant schools and 18% of Roman Catholic/Orthodox schools); human formation is most strongly emphasized among mainline Protestant schools (21%, as compared with 9% of evangelical Protestant and 12% of Roman Catholic/Orthodox); and intellectual formation, among Roman Catholic/Orthodox (48%, as compared with 31% of evangelical and 38% of mainline Protestant).

5 **Respondents to the Educational Models and Practices project mapping survey reported more than 2,500 different educational programs and practices.** This does not include the many “programs” they were formerly engaged with or are about to engage. Of the 226 respondents, 146 (67%) reported that they are engaged in 10 or more programs, and 10 (4%) are engaged in 20 or more programs in addition to the degree programs they offer.

6 **The most common educational partnerships reported are with churches and denominations.** Of the responding schools, 169 (75%) are in partnership with a church and/or denomination. Other partnerships include other religious traditions, colleges or universities, other theological schools, institutes or centers, and international partners.

7 **Local church subsidy is by far the most frequently used tuition/funding practice.** Of the responding schools, 91 (40%) are currently engaged in various funding programs where local churches subsidize portions of student tuitions. Only 16 percent of these schools are independent (i.e., not denominationally affiliated or Roman Catholic/Orthodox).

8 **Schools are developing programs for 20 different constituent groups, including alumni/ae, chaplains, underserved persons, youth, and so forth.** Four constituent groups have been named most frequently: racial/ethnic students (64 schools), laity (25 schools), those with distinctive vocations (24 schools), and women (19 schools).

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Schools reported curricular innovations in 16 different categories. The seven categories most frequently named were certificate programs (27 schools), change in degree hours (20 schools), continuing education (32 schools), dual/joint degrees (46 schools), nondegree programs (27 schools), team-teaching (23 schools), and synchronous video (31 schools).

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The two program types that appear to be growing edges are fully online degree programs and collaborations with international partners. About a quarter of responding schools are either “seriously considering” or “about to implement” fully online degree programs (28%) and another quarter, partnerships with international partners (23%).

NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, ATS will analyze responses from the second mapping survey (launched last week) which gathers additional details and evaluative information on the practices identified in the first survey. ATS will also conduct interviews with 30 deans and convene focus groups to discuss current and contemplated innovations. Peer groups will be convened based on findings from the survey around topics such as formation in online contexts, MDiv duration, accelerated BA/MDiv programs, African American/black programs and historically black schools, and alternate tracks to credentials.

Also forthcoming will be a study of models and practices among other areas of graduate professional education, including programs in social work, nursing, and post-BA teacher education as well as counseling, law, medicine, or public health.

Following that will be a study of the religious workforce. Gathering information from graduates and from school placement offices, this study will determine what work graduates are doing in what workplaces, how that work fulfills their sense of ministerial vocation, whether their career trajectories have unfolded as they expected, and what knowledge bases they draw upon in their work.



The *Educational Models and Practices* project will explore current and developing models and practices among ATS member schools, assess their effectiveness in educating students for the 21st century, and affirm effective models and practices by incorporating them into the character and work of the Association and the Commission. Guiding the project is **Stephen R. Graham**, senior director of Programs & Services, and conducting the research for this article is **Deborah H. C. Gin**, director of Research and Faculty Development, both staff members of The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



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