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ABSTRACT

Accreditation is a primary means of quality assurance in North American higher education. The seven sections of this handbook (an eighth will follow) explain the accreditation process of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS). The first section, "An Introduction to Accreditation by ATS," provides brief descriptions of the meaning, purposes, characteristics, and benefits of ATS accreditation. Section 2, "Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study," provides guidance to schools undertaking a self-study in terms of: (1) the overall purposes of the self-study; (2) the primary work of the self-study; (3) recommended procedures for conducting a self-study; and (4) expectations of the Commission on Accrediting regarding the final self-study report. Section 3, "Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees," describes the activities that the school should undertake prior to the visit, during the visit, and following the visit of the evaluation committee. It also describes ATS procedures related to accreditation evaluation visits. Section 4, "Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees," presents guidelines on: (1) the qualifications, appointment, and expectations of committee members; (2) the work of the committee, including preparation for the visit, conducting the visit, and tasks that follow the visit; (3) a typical schedule; and (4) administrative procedures and policies. The fifth section, "Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation," discusses: (1) how characteristics of the standards influence their use in institutional evaluation; (2) how the general model of evaluation in the ATS standards informs the self-study and accreditation peer processes; and (3) questions for each area of the standards that schools can ask in the context of their self-studies and accreditation committee members can ask in the context of their evaluation visit. Section 6, "Guidelines Adopted by the ATS Commission on Accrediting," contains guidelines on: (1) petitioning the ATS Commission on Accrediting for approval of extension education programs; (2) evaluation of proposals for programs of international theological education; (3) petitioning the Commission for approval of new or revised degree programs; and (4) petitioning the Commission for candidacy for accredited status. Section 7, "Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization in ATS Schools," assists schools in

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the self-study process to consider how they will address the globalization theme in the ATS standards and assists accreditation committees in the evaluation of institutional and educational efforts toward globalizing theological education. (EV)

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Handbook of Accreditation

Section One

An Introduction to Accreditation by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada

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Section One	An Introduction to Accreditation by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada
Section Two	Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study
Section Three	Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees
Section Four	Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees
Section Five	Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation
Section Six	Guidelines Adopted by the ATS Commission on Accrediting
Section Seven	Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization (to be published in 1999)
Section Eight	Guidelines for Evaluating Library and Information Technology (to be published in 2000)

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Contents

An Introduction to Accreditation by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada

Accreditation is a primary means of quality assurance in North American higher education. This section of the ATS *Handbook of Accreditation* introduces the accreditation of theological schools by the ATS through brief descriptions of the meaning, purposes, characteristics, and benefits of ATS accreditation. While each of these descriptions merits further elaboration, their combination provides an appropriate introduction.

Accreditation is a practice that originated with institutions of higher education in North America. Historically, accreditation has been a voluntary activity in which institutions hold themselves mutually accountable to agreed-upon standards of educational quality. To do this, schools form an accrediting body and adopt a set of standards and procedures for evaluating the educational quality of schools accredited by that body. Each school is evaluated according to the standards in a three-part process: (1) the school evaluates itself by conducting a self-study; (2) a committee of peers from other accredited institutions visits the school to evaluate the institution and, on the basis of its findings, prepares a narrative report with recommendations to the accrediting body; (3) the accrediting body considers reports from the various accreditation committees and, in the context of the formally adopted standards, makes decisions about the accredited status of the schools. Accreditation, at its most basic level, is the practice of engaging these activities as a means by which autonomous institutions hold themselves and each other accountable to mutual understandings of educational and institutional quality.

The Meaning of ATS Accreditation

The meaning of accreditation, while it has varied over time, has always been associated with judgments about quality. Accreditation is granted by agencies, like The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, that are entirely non-governmental and cannot confer any legal status on schools. Theological schools in the United States and Canada derive legal authority by state or provincial action to conduct their corporate business, deliver educational programs, and grant degrees. Such governmental actions, however, imply no judgment about the overall quality of an institution. The assessment of institutional and educational quality has been the work of accrediting agencies, and the most technical meaning of "accredited" is that an accrediting agency has judged a school to function according to its standards of quality.

As accrediting standards evolve, the meaning of "accredited" as a status granted to a higher education institution changes. The underlying meaning of ATS accreditation has taken three forms since the organization began to function as an accrediting agency in the 1930s. Each of these forms has introduced new expectations while maintaining the basis of the previous ones.

In its first standards, ATS, along with most other North American higher education accrediting agencies before World War II, evaluated schools in terms of their resources. Indicators of adequate resources included appropriate library resources, facilities, and faculties appropriate in skill and knowledge for theological education. To be accredited, during this era, meant that a theological school was judged to have the resources considered necessary and appropriate for a post-baccalaureate theological institution.

A second movement, one that emerged in the second half of the century, reflected the changed reality of theological schools comprising the Association. Until the 1960s, most schools accredited by ATS

had a similar purpose: offering the Bachelor of Divinity degree for persons (almost exclusively men) preparing for ordination in Protestant denominations in the United States and Canada. By the 1970s, however, the purposes of ATS schools began to change as Roman Catholic and Evangelical Protestant schools sought accreditation, as degree programs multiplied, and as student bodies became more diverse. The result was a movement in ATS accreditation in which the question about resources was asked in the context of the school's purposes, degree programs, and student body, and new questions were asked about the educational distinctiveness of differing degree programs. To be accredited, during this second movement in ATS accreditation, meant that a theological school was judged to have resources appropriate to its educational and institutional purpose, *and* that its educational programs met agreed-upon conventions about admission, content, requirements, and duration.

The most recently redeveloped ATS standards reflect a third movement by modifying earlier questions and adding important new ones. The redeveloped ATS standards, like the standards of other higher education accrediting bodies, emphasize the importance of institutional and educational effectiveness. As a result ATS accreditation poses a new question while continuing forms of many of the older ones: "Is the school achieving its purpose? Is it accomplishing its institutional and educational goals?" To be accredited, according to current ATS standards, means that a theological school is judged to have resources appropriate to its purposes and educational programs, that its degree programs meet agreed-upon conventions of admission, content, requirements, and duration, *and* that it is able to demonstrate the extent to which its educational and institutional goals are being achieved.

Each of these meanings of ATS accreditation has been based on standards adopted by the community of theological schools, thus reflecting a social construction of quality in graduate, professional theological education. The perception of quality contained in the 1996 ATS standards is not the only perception of quality, but it is the only

one that has been constructed by a collaborative process, across a wide range of schools that relate to a broad range of religious communities, at a particular historical moment. It is a perception of quality that is faithful to the theological character of theological schools, congruent with preceding understandings of quality among ATS schools, appropriate to the broader context of higher education, and sensitive to educational needs of religious communities in North America.

The Purposes of ATS Accreditation

Accreditation has generally served two purposes in twentieth-century higher education. The first is to ensure that institutions of higher education function according to *standards of institutional and educational quality*. Whatever the definition of quality contained in accrediting standards, the processes of accreditation have sought to ensure that, at the very least, some acceptable level of these standards of quality is present in an accredited institution. During this century, the understanding of "acceptable level" has continued to escalate, so that accrediting standards are more rigorous and sophisticated now than they were earlier in the century. The second purpose of accreditation is the *improvement* of institutions and their educational programs. Institutions that have clearly met basic standards of quality should improve, both institutionally and educationally, and accreditation is a process that encourages that improvement. Accreditation has other purposes, but these two are the most common across accrediting agencies, and they figure significantly in the ATS approach to accreditation.

ATS seeks to accomplish these general purposes of accreditation for a particular group of institutions: theological schools in the United States and Canada that are within the Jewish or Christian traditions and conduct post-baccalaureate degree programs of education for religious leadership and scholarship in the theological disciplines. Theological education takes many forms in North America—from efforts in congregations and urban training centers to baccalaureate-

level education for ministry. These are all viable forms of theological education needed by the church and religious communities. The purpose of ATS accreditation, however, is to make judgments about the segment of theological education comprising post-baccalaureate, degree-granting, educational institutions located in Canada or the United States. ATS accreditation seeks to ensure that this group of schools is functioning with appropriate quality for graduate, professional, higher education and to stimulate the improvement of these institutions.

Characteristics of ATS Accreditation

The activities of accreditation have a variety of characteristics, and several deserve additional comment, including agreed-upon standards and procedures, the process of institutional self-evaluation, the process of peer review, and the work of the ATS Commission on Accrediting.

Standards and Procedures

ATS accreditation is based on standards and procedures that have been adopted by the Association's membership. The standards are published as Part 1 of the ATS *Bulletin*.

The ATS standards consist of two major parts. The first part includes standards related to institutional and educational resources and processes, and includes sections on purpose, integrity, theological scholarship, the theological curriculum, governance, faculty, students, finances, library resources, and extension education. The second part has a standard for each degree program offered by accredited schools. These degree program standards establish a common economy for graduate theological degrees and define an agreed-upon understanding of their content, duration, location, and requirements. ATS *accredits* an institution on the basis of the standards as a whole and *approves* each of the degree programs it

offers on the basis of the degree program standards. The *Handbook of Accreditation* provides guidance about the use and interpretation of the ATS standards in the Section Five, *Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation.*

Institutional Self-Evaluation

The ATS standards have a normative function in theological education in that they embody a definition of quality that has been established by the broader community of theological schools. While the standards provide room for more than one perception of quality, they constitute a normative reference for an accredited institution's self-evaluation, the evaluation work of peer review committees, and the decisions of the Commission on Accrediting. The procedures of the Association constitute the agreed-upon processes and conventions by which schools, accreditation committees, and the Commission on Accrediting conduct their respective work in the accreditation process.

During the past fifty years, accreditation procedures, including ATS accreditation, have increasingly emphasized the importance of institutional self-evaluation as an important element in accreditation. Through a process of self-study, an institution engages in a sustained and serious evaluation of itself in the context of standards adopted by the wider community of theological schools. A good self-study evaluates the school's strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness in light of the ATS standards and the institution's purpose and goals. Institutions should use the self-study process for institutional assessment, evaluation, and planning, and prepare a report of the study that is fair, candid, and thoughtfully informative for the school and the peer review committee. The *Handbook* provides comprehensive guidance about the self-study process in Section Two, *Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study.*

Peer Review

Accreditation evaluation involves a process of peer review. Individuals are chosen to evaluate an institution because of their general competence in theological education and specific areas of expertise—academics, finances, administration, library, student services, etc. They function, however, as peers from other schools. Their task is to review the school's own self-study and evaluate the institution and its educational programs in the context of the ATS accrediting standards, prepare a report and recommendations to be considered by the Commission on Accrediting, and serve the school by helping it identify its strengths and weaknesses. Accreditation evaluation is a sensitive and serious endeavor, and responsible peer review is central to the process. ATS peer review seeks to provide an objective, knowledgeable evaluation of a school in the context of a shared commitment to quality in theological education across many schools.

As part of a peer evaluation process, members of ATS accreditation committees serve without remuneration, and accredited institutions are expected to make it possible for their faculty and administrators to serve on evaluation committees when requested. Section Four of this *Handbook* provides extensive counsel for persons serving on ATS accreditation evaluation committees, *Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees*. Section Three of the *Handbook, Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees,* provides guidelines for institutional preparation and hosting of accreditation evaluation committees.

Commission on Accrediting

The Commission is charged with the responsibility of maintaining the ATS list of accredited schools and implementing the accrediting standards fairly across the accredited members of the Association. In making its decisions, the Commission relies on the reports of the committees that have visited schools, is bound by the procedures

adopted by the Association, and interprets and implements the ATS standards of accreditation. The Commission consists of twelve to sixteen members (75% from ATS-accredited institutions and 25% public members—persons unrelated to ATS schools in either employee or student capacities) who are elected by the members of the Association. The ATS Constitution gives full power to the Commission to make all accreditation decisions, subject only to the formally adopted process of appeals. No other entity in ATS has influence on the decisions made by the Commission.

Several professional and support staff members of the Association work on its behalf. Staff provide consultation to the schools about accrediting issues, conduct workshops and Commission-mandated staff visits to schools, maintain the accreditation visit schedule, appoint evaluation committee members, provide on-site support to committees during evaluation visits, prepare the agenda for the Commission meetings, maintain its records, and in other appropriate ways, support the work of the Commission on Accrediting.

Benefits of ATS Accreditation

Because the purposes of ATS accreditation are to ensure standards of quality and to facilitate the improvement of theological schools, the benefits of accreditation accrue from the attainment of these purposes. These benefits, however, are experienced in different ways—by the institutions, their internal constituencies, and their external constituencies.

Institutions

The primary benefit to institutions is accreditation's impetus toward improvement. Improvement may occur as a consequence of schools' efforts to meet ATS institutional and degree program standards, by the assessment of external peer reviewers, or by the judgment about institutional strengths and areas of needed growth reflected in Com-

mission on Accrediting decisions. Many schools, for example, complete their self-study and perceive that the process itself resulted in significant improvement for the school, quite apart from the visiting committee's findings or the Commission's actions. Other schools have noted that committee evaluations or Commission actions have provided an impetus for institutional improvement by helping the school focus on and give priority to issues of concern or by providing an external requirement to address areas the school knew it needed to address, but that internal conditions had kept it from doing.

Institutions also benefit from their accreditation when other agencies or institutions make judgments about a school on the basis of its accredited status. For example, because the United States Department of Education recognizes the ATS Commission on Accrediting, ATS accreditation fulfills one of the Department's requirements for institutional eligibility for student participation in federally guaranteed student loan programs. In Canada, some provincial entities have used ATS accreditation as a factor in decisions about the acceptability of degrees individuals have earned from theological institutions in other provinces. Accreditation thus provides an external assessment of the quality of the school and its educational programs which other institutions and agencies then accept.

Internal Constituencies: Students, Faculty, and Administration

Students benefit from their school's accreditation. Work completed at accredited schools is more easily transferred to other institutions—although acceptance of transfer credit is always the decision of individual institutions. A degree from an ATS-accredited theological school is recommended or required for ordination in many denominations, recognition by certain professional associations, and employment in some contexts. Accreditation makes possible forms of public recognition of the academic work students have completed. Students also benefit by ATS standards that require institutions to administer

student financial support in appropriate ways, to provide appropriate services to students, and to adopt and follow patterns of procedural fairness in decisions about students. Finally, students benefit from an accreditation process that ensures the academic and professional integrity of the degrees they earn. While this may mean more or harder work to earn the degree, it ensures students that their work exposes them to the disciplines and practices recognized as important for theological study.

Faculty do much of the work accreditation requires of institutions, especially the self-study, but they, too, receive benefits. The ATS standards support the central role of faculty in theological education, articulate the freedom of inquiry necessary for good scholarship, and provide guidance for many of the educational and professional roles faculty assume. As the standards provide an impetus for institutional improvement, theological schools become better places to teach, learn, and conduct research. Accreditation also serves administrators, particularly as it provides guidance to a wide range of institutional functions, supports appropriate and fair patterns of governance, and offers an external pattern of review that can help a school understand what it does well and where it needs to improve.

External Constituencies: Denominations, Financial Supporters, and the Public

Accreditation benefits the denominations and other constituencies that support theological schools. It provides an external review of institutions that, in turn, can help supporting constituencies determine how others judge the quality of "their" school. It also provides a normative standard for degrees across theological schools. A denomination or congregation, for example, can assume that an M.Div. earned from any ATS-accredited school reflects common expectations of educational achievement and curricular exposure to the disciplines of theological and ministerial studies. Still another benefit to external constituencies is the exposure accreditation provides to agreed-upon patterns of good practice. Most ATS standards have developed over time as schools

have struggled with difficulties, observed their successes, and learned from their mistakes. ATS standards thus reflect a kind of accrued wisdom about resources and institutional practices necessary for good theological education.

Financial supporters of ATS schools can benefit from accreditation in a way similar to their benefit from financial auditing. The function of ATS accreditation, while it is not an audit, is to provide an external, independent judgment about the strengths and weaknesses of an institution, and to encourage wise use of its resources and careful attention to its mission. These forms of accountability ensure financial supporters that the institution is engaged in appropriate educational efforts and that those efforts conform to normative expectations of quality. Accreditation also benefits a wider public, which is often uninformed about theological schools. It provides assurance that the schools in their communities are responsible citizens in the higher education community.

Because accreditation seeks to benefit institutions, and both their internal and external constituencies, it cannot serve as the special advocate on behalf of any one of these beneficiaries. The primary focus of accreditation is on a common good; theological schools exist for the sake of religious communities and the society as a whole.

The Broader Accrediting Community in Higher Education

ATS is one of many agencies involved in the accreditation of higher education.

Some of these accreditors, like ATS, accredit entire institutions. In the United States, the dominant institutional accrediting bodies are the six regional associations, each accrediting a wide range of post-secondary degree-granting institutions in its geographic area. Virtually every college, university, and community college, as well as a

broad range of special-purpose institutions, are accredited by the regional association in whose geographic boundaries the institution is located. Approximately 80% of ATS-accredited schools in the United States are also accredited by a regional accrediting body.

Other accreditors accredit professional or programmatic areas of study undertaken in larger institutions. Social work, medicine, law, teacher education, allied health, counseling, and many other areas of study in preparation for professional practice have their own specialized accrediting bodies. When ATS accredits a university-related divinity school or a college-related seminary, it functions as a professional accreditor for the theological school.

In both cases, ATS coordinates its accreditation work, including the self-studies schools prepare, the appointment of accreditation evaluation committees, and the preparation of committee reports with the regional agencies. This eliminates the duplication of work for free-standing ATS schools that seek dual accreditation or college/university-related theological schools that seek ATS accreditation.

Accreditation is not a totally regulated industry. Because accrediting bodies are founded by the schools they accredit, a few schools could form an accrediting association, with standards that do not address quality, and claim an "accredited" status. In reality, this has happened frequently. There are quality controls for accrediting agencies, which are obtained in three ways. The first is the responsibility of the schools to adopt standards that are fair and rigorous—to hold themselves accountable to a high standard of quality. The second is for the accrediting agency to seek the recognition of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). This Washington-based, non-governmental agency recognizes accrediting agencies that demonstrate that their accreditation supports quality in higher education, contributes to improvement in higher education, provides public information and quality assurance about higher education, and functions with skill and integrity as an accreditation agency. CHEA recognition is limited to agencies that accredit degree-granting higher

education institutions or programs within such institutions. The third quality control is recognition by the U.S. Secretary of Education. The Department of Education reviews agencies by a variety of criteria to determine whether the accreditation provided by an accrediting body is sufficiently rigorous and appropriate to warrant the Department of Education to certify an institution eligible for its students to receive guaranteed federal loans. This certification can be extended to institutions in the U.S. or Canada, if they desire to participate in these federal programs for U.S. citizens.

The Association of Theological Schools is recognized by both the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Handbook of Accreditation

Section Two

Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study

The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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Contents

Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study

A self-study is the primary activity by which an institution prepares for an ATS evaluation visit for initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Self-study is a process by which an institution comprehensively reviews itself through the normative perspective of the accrediting standards. The primary activities of this review are evaluation and analysis. The study results in a report that should serve the institution, the accreditation evaluation committee, and the Commission on Accrediting. This section of the ATS *Handbook of Accreditation* provides guidance to schools undertaking a self-study in terms of: (1) the overall purposes of the self-study, (2) the primary work of the self-study, (3) recommended procedures for conducting a self-study, and (4) expectations of the Commission on Accrediting regarding the final self-study report.

Purpose of the Self-Study

An institutional self-study should serve many purposes. Generally, schools should be attentive to three purposes of self-study: institutional evaluation, institutional planning, and preparation for external review.

Institutional Evaluation

The self-study process provides both the occasion and the perspective to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of a school, its educational programs and institutional activities. Evaluation is described as a fourfold process in the 1996 ATS standards. (Because evaluation is a central feature of the standards and the self-study process, it is described briefly in this section and at length in Section Five of the

Handbook.) Good evaluation involves analyzing information so that value judgments can be made about the merit, integrity, or appropriateness of particular educational or institutional activities. The self-study is a process by which the various constituencies of a school can judge its efforts to enhance its practices and programs.

Institutional Planning

Planning is a process by which institutions review and improve their lives. It involves making decisions about what new activities should be undertaken, what activities should be abandoned in order to apply scarce resources to other activities, what must be accomplished in the near future, and what should be deferred to a later time. Good planning can ensure fairness and equity in the application of resources across the range of agreed-upon activities, and it can direct sustainable patterns of improvement. Because the self-study process requires a comprehensive evaluation, it provides the occasion for the institution to review and revise its strategic plans.

Evaluation and planning, of course, are activities that good institutions pursue on an ongoing basis. The self-study does not introduce these activities once every ten years, but it brings both into focus. A good self-study report describes the results of the institution's self-evaluation and the implementation of decisions based on that evaluation through a comprehensive institutional and educational plan. Self-studies that accomplish these purposes require thoughtful and broad-based work, but they serve the institution very well—regardless of the findings of a visiting committee.

Preparation for External Review

Although the process of self-study serves several internal purposes, the self-study report is also prepared for an external audience. Because the self-study is the primary means by which the institution presents itself for external review, the final report should give the

accreditation evaluation committee a good description of the ways in which the school gathers and organizes appropriate information, goes about its evaluation based on that information, and uses the findings of its evaluative efforts in institutional planning and educational programming

The external review requires that the self-study report be analytical and evaluative, not just descriptive. While some description is necessary for informed external review, a self-study report that only describes an institution and its programs according to the ATS standards is simply inadequate. The report should demonstrate that the school has engaged in a process of self-study that reflects activities that constitute, in part, the basis for granting accredited status (i.e., evaluation, planning, etc.). Institutions can be assured that thoughtful, analytical, evaluative information will be treated respectfully and confidentially, and that good, self-critical, evaluative, analytical work becomes, in the end, the school's best case that it should be accredited.

Because the external committee is required to prepare its report on the basis of the ATS standards, the self-study process and report should demonstrate specifically how the institution meets the standards. If a school discovers that it does not implement a standard appropriately, then the self-study process should provide recommendations for changes necessary to implement the standard in the school's institutional or educational activities.

The Primary Task of Institutional Self-Study: Evaluation

While higher education accreditation has always involved evaluation of institutions, its most recent emphasis, reflected in the 1996 ATS standards, refocuses accreditation on the schools' own practices of evaluating their institutional and educational effectiveness. As a

result, evaluation should have a central place in both the self-study process and the report. The process of evaluation is described in the ATS standards in the following terms:

> Evaluation is a process that includes: (1) the identification of desired goals or outcomes for an educational program, or institutional service, or personnel performance; (2) a system of gathering quantitative or qualitative information related to the desired goals; (3) the assessment of the performance of the program, service, or person based on this information; and (4) the establishment of revised goals or activities based on this assessment. (ATS *Bulletin*, Part I)

This description of the evaluation process also provides a model for understanding how a self-study should be conducted.

The self-study is an appropriate time to review the institution's **goals** in areas addressed by ATS accreditation standards. This review involves two evaluative tasks. The first asks a normative question: *Are these the goals an accredited school should have for its various areas of work, in terms of the agreed-upon commitments of the community of theological schools expressed by the ATS standards?* This first question is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Schools must also evaluate their goals in light of particular institutional issues. Thus, the second task is to ask a contextual question: *Are these goals the right ones for this institution, at a particular point in its history, in the context of the issues confronting the particular religious communities it serves, and in light of the institution's broader mission and purpose?* In many schools, substantive discussions should occur in self-study subcommittees about the value of present goals and the need for revised ones.

Once goals are properly established, the institution needs to identify the kind of **information** it will need in order to assess the attainment of those goals. Institutions that are functioning according to the ATS standards will have systems of information-gathering in

place, and, in the context of the self-study, should review comprehensively the information that has been collected. This review will involve questions like: (1) *Is the right kind of information being collected?* (2) *Is the information collected in usable forms?* and (3) *Does the school use the information effectively in the evaluation process?* For many ATS schools, which have not developed their overall process of information-gathering, the self-study will focus on different questions: (1) *What kinds of information should be collected?* and (2) *What institutional systems will be necessary for collecting this information?* Because these schools need to make evaluative judgment about their efforts, even if they have not developed a comprehensive system of information-gathering, they will need to begin the work of the self-study by auditing all information that is available to determine which data will inform the evaluative focus of the self-study.

Assessment is the task of analyzing and interpreting the information that has been collected. It involves the question: *To what extent, and in what ways, have the goals been attained?* Information alone, no matter how rich or sophisticated, cannot answer this question. The important goals in theological education are complex and require judgment and reflection, based on reasonable patterns of information. Using the available information, self-study subcommittees should assess the quality of an area of concern by reflecting on the ways in which, and the extent to which, the institution is achieving its goals.

The final phase of the evaluation process involves **making decisions** about the goals and the activities that have been devised to achieve the goals. The interpretation in the assessment phase may lead to the conclusion that a goal was attained, but that, in the final analysis, it was not a worthy goal. In this case, attention turns to the ways in which the goal should be altered or abandoned in favor of a more appropriate one. The assessment may lead to the conclusion that a central and important goal has not been attained, and attention then turns to the ways in which the activities designed to achieve the goal should be revised. The assessment phase may also lead to the conclusion that the goal and the activities are appropriate, but the kind of information

that has been collected does not serve the assessment process. In this case, attention turns to the development of more appropriate or comprehensive methods of gathering information. In the context of the self-study, these deliberations typically lead to proposals for goals, program development, or information gathering that become recommendations in the self-study.

The description of evaluation in the ATS standards was not written as a direction for conducting the self-study, but is meant to guide institutional behavior more broadly. However, self-study is a particular activity of accredited schools that is, fundamentally, an evaluative activity, and this definition of the evaluation process is instructive. The work of the self-study involves more than evaluation, but evaluation is central. The ATS Commission on Accrediting requires accreditation evaluation committees to evaluate the self-study. While ATS accreditation is not based on the quality of self-studies, a school's inability to conduct an evaluative self-study may be evidence of a more pervasive inability to function according to the expectations of the ATS accrediting standards.

Conducting the Self-Study

Good self-studies reflect appropriate decisions by institutions regarding the conduct of the study. Conducting a self-study involves the development of organizational structure for the study, including the identification of working groups and key roles to be filled by individuals, the establishment of a timetable, and a process for approving the final self-study report.

Organizational Structure for the Self-Study

No one design is the "correct" one for this task; any organization of the process that accomplishes the work effectively and enables the institution to meet the purposes of the self-study described above, is appropriate and acceptable. However structured, the study should

evaluate the institution and its programs in terms of each of the ATS institutional and degree program standards. If an institution is preparing for a joint review by ATS and a regional accrediting body, the self-study should clearly address the standards of both accrediting agencies. By permission of the Commission through its staff, a design that focuses on particular issues or concerns is also possible for schools conducting self-studies for reaffirmation of accreditation. Such an approach can be coordinated with special self-study designs that some regional accrediting bodies permit.

A typical ATS self-study is organized in the light of the ten ATS institutional standards and relevant standards for each degree program offered by the institution. The work is done, almost always, by a steering committee and several subcommittees. Along with these groups, two individuals are crucial to the success of the study: the director of the self-study, who typically chairs the steering committee, and the editor of the self-study report.

The ***steering committee*** guides the self-study by supervising the process and the development of a coherent report. The committee should be representative of all or most of the constituencies that comprise the school: students, faculty, administration, staff, alumni/ae, and trustees, when available. The responsibility of the steering committee includes:

1. To initiate the self-study by developing its design, organizing the committee structure, developing task assignments for each subcommittee, and determining the overall schedule for the study.

2. To oversee the conduct of the study through activities such as monitoring the progress of the subcommittees and providing support for their work as appropriate to the task, mediating questions of overlapping issues among subcommittees, and developing editorial guidelines for the drafts of subcommittee reports.

3. To develop and oversee the process of review, revision, and approval, including: a procedure for reviewing drafts of subcommittee reports; a process whereby constituencies participating in aspects of the self-study can react to the evaluation, proposals, and recommendations generated by the self-study; and a process of ensuring institutional support for the final report including acceptance of the report, prior to submission to ATS, by the governing board or board executive committee.

4. To assist with development of a plan for follow-up and the implementation of the self-study recommendations.

The steering committee should guide the self-study with care, ensuring that the process approaches evaluation through the perspective of the ATS accrediting standards (and those of a regional accrediting body, if the self-study is conducted for a joint visit). The steering committee should also review the school's accreditation history and ensure that concerns raised in the context of the previous accreditation review are addressed in the study.

Much of the work of the self-study will be completed by ***subcommittees*** that have been assigned to work in specific areas. It is essential that each subcommittee understand the relationship of its work to the self-study as a whole, and be informed about the overarching evaluative approach to be employed in each area of the self-study. Working from the specific charge or task assignment prepared by the steering committee, the subcommittee is responsible for evaluating those aspects of the institution related to the accrediting standards assigned to it. It does this by reviewing the goals or purposes related to its area of study, identifying the data that can inform its evaluation, assessing the extent to which the school is accomplishing its purposes or goals with regard to the subcommittee's particular area of study, and developing recommendations regarding revised goals, revised procedures related to existing goals, or the development of more effective patterns of ongoing information gathering.

The number of subcommittees will depend both on the design of the self-study and on the size and complexity of the institution. An institution will need to decide if self-study tasks should be added to the mandates of existing institutional committees or if a special self-study committee structure should be established. Schools should determine what size the subcommittee structure should have. In some large institutions, a different subcommittee may focus on each standard. In other institutions, the standards may be grouped into categories for both the study process and the report. ATS does not recommend any group patterns, but the ATS standards lend themselves to being considered in the following ways.

For small schools, with a limited number of degree programs and a need to design the study in ways that provide the most economical use of personnel, the study could be organized with as few as three major subcommittees.

1. The standards on Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation (1), Institutional Integrity (2), Authority and Governance (8), and Institutional Resources (9) comprise a broad area of institutional issues and concerns.

2. The standards on Learning, Teaching, and Research (3), Library and Information Resources (5), Faculty (6), and Student issues (7) can be grouped together so the primary activities of a theological school (teaching, learning, and research) are considered in the context of the primary participants in those activities (faculty, students, and library).

3. The standards on the Theological Curriculum (4), the individual degree program standards (A-K), and the standard on Extension Education (10) comprise the formal educational program of a theological school.

For larger schools, with more degree programs and a broader range of activities, the study could be designed so that work is divided among five or six subcommittees.

1. The standards on Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation (1), Institutional Integrity (2), and Authority and Governance (8) could be assigned to one subcommittee.

2. The standards on the Theological Curriculum (4), relevant degree program standards (A-K), and the standard on Extension Education (10) provide a focus on the theological school's educational programs. Depending on the range of degree programs, a school could divide this work among two subcommittees.

3. The standard on Institutional Resources (9) is comprehensive and, given the pressure on finances in theological schools and the broad range of resource issues, might benefit from the primary focus of a single subcommittee.

4. The standards on Learning, Teaching, and Research (3), Library and Information Resources (5), and Faculty (6) might provide a viable combination to focus on the overall academic life of the institution.

5. Because larger schools often have larger and more diverse student bodies, with greater student services, the standard on Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, and Placement (7) represents a variety of concerns that could be the focus of a subcommittee.

Regardless of its assigned area, each subcommittee should focus its work using the general evaluative model described above, and understand that its work is contributing to a comprehensive evaluation of the institution.

Two roles of the self-study typically are assigned to individuals rather than committees. The ***director of the self-study*** provides overall leadership and coordination for the project, and typically chairs the steering committee. The director should have a good sense of administrative process, a broad perspective of the institution, and the ability to facilitate a complex task. Because the director is required to ask a variety of persons to do a variety of tasks, she or he should be authorized by the institution in ways to ensure cooperation and support. The ***editor of the final report*** brings the various committee reports, background materials, exhibits, and appendices into a coherent and usable institutional report that should serve the needs of the school, the ATS accreditation evaluation committee, and the Commission on Accrediting. In some schools, the director of the self-study also serves as editor of the final report, but given the size of both tasks, many schools assign these functions to different individuals.

Scheduling the Work of the Self-Study

The entire self-study process will usually involve one to two academic years of work. A minimum of one full academic year will be needed to design the self-study process, to establish the committees, to engage in the research, to reflect on the findings, and to produce a unified and comprehensive report. Most often, the entire process will occupy two academic years, although the various subcommittees will be engaged for only part of that time. A typical two-year schedule could include the following sequence of activities:

> Fall, Year I: President, dean, and self-study director are invited to participate in the ATS annual self-study workshop in late September. Following the workshop, the steering committee should be appointed, and during the fall, it should work with the director to familiarize itself with the overall evaluative model, plan the organizational structure for the study, develop the subcommittee structure, write task assignments for the subcommittees, develop an overall timetable for the study, and appoint members to the subcommittees.

Spring, Year I: The subcommittees begin their work with the oversight of the steering committee, with the goal of having a first draft of their reports by early fall.

Fall, Year II: Early in the fall, subcommittees submit first drafts of their reports to the steering committee. The steering committee reviews reports in the context of the study as a whole, identifies concerns, lacunae, or issues that should be addressed during the final half of the study, and advises the subcommittees as appropriate. During the fall, the subcommittees complete their work and submit their final reports to the steering committee. The steering committee reviews the reports and establishes a process for review and negotiation of the subcommittee reports.

Spring, Year II: The steering committee solicits responses to the final subcommittee reports and begins preparation of a unitary institutional evaluation and recommendations. The editor works on the various drafts of the institutional reports. The steering committee guides the final review and approval process. During the summer, the report is completed and submitted to The Association of Theological Schools in anticipation of the visit of an accreditation evaluation committee in early fall of the next academic year.

A school should develop its schedule to fit the accreditation visit schedule, the needs, and work patterns of the institution, and to provide adequate time to conduct the self-study well in the context of the school's other work that continues during the self-study.

Institutional Adoption of the Report of the Self-Study

Because the self-study involves a comprehensive evaluation of the school and its various endeavors, and has recommendations to be taken seriously by the institution in the context of its strategic planning, appropriate constituencies within the institution should have the opportunity to participate in a process of review and endorsement of the final report of the self-study. Faculty and administrators are crucial to this process, as is the governing board. The faculty and administration should be familiar with the findings and recommendations of the self-study and, to the extent possible, the recommendations should have a wide base of support. The governing board, or its executive committee, should take formal action to receive the self-study report with the understanding that receipt or endorsement of the report reflects the board's general concurrence with its evaluation and recommendations. The board's action should not be taken as an authorization to implement the recommendations contained in the report, or an indication that the board is in full agreement with every point.

The Self-Study Report

The self-study report is the written account of the study including its process, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Like the self-study, the final report has several purposes. It demonstrates the institution's ability to analyze its effectiveness and develop plans for its own improvement. It also provides evidence of the way in which the institution is functioning with regard to the perspective of the standards of ATS. Finally, it provides the basis for the work of the accreditation evaluation committee and informs the accrediting decisions made by the Commission on Accrediting. The Commission on Accrediting expects self-study reports to conform to some general expectations, to be organized in particular ways, and to be submitted according to the ATS procedures.

General Characteristics

The accreditation process, and the multiple audiences for which the self-study report is prepared, make some features of the report necessary. The report should provide sufficient ***description*** of the institution and the self-study process so that external readers are able to understand the school, its unique circumstances, its purpose, commitments and constituencies, and the processes of the self-study. Reports that are only descriptive are inadequate, but reports that lack description make it difficult for external readers to prepare for the evaluation visit, or for the Commission to have a context in which to interpret the committee's report of findings and recommendations. Reports should document the ***evaluation*** of the school in all areas related to the ATS standards of accreditation. Evaluation, as noted previously in this section of the *Handbook*, is central. It is the major task of the self-study and should feature prominently in the self-study report. Finally, reports should clearly identify the ***recommendations*** that the institution has developed as a result of the self-study. The recommendations should inform the institution's strategic plan and reflect serious intent of the school. They should also clearly indicate how the school will meet the ATS accrediting standards when the self-study evaluation concludes that the school does not sufficiently embody them.

An early 1990s study of self-studies submitted to the ATS Commission on Accrediting identified some characteristics that were present in good reports, and some characteristics of reports that were judged to be weak or inadequate.

Good self-study reports have several features in common. First, they have a coherent pattern of organization that clearly relates the material in the report to each ATS accreditation standard. When a report is being prepared for a joint ATS-regional committee, the report should cross-index material so standards of both accrediting bodies are clearly identified and referenced. Second, good reports clearly describe the process of the self-study so readers understand

the activities of the study that resulted in the evaluation and recommendations it reports. The report should present the data that are crucial to understanding the issues in as clear and concise a manner as possible, including effective use of tables and figures. Longer or more complex summaries of data, such as financial reports, library data, institutional statistics, results of surveys, and other studies conducted as part of the larger self-study, should be included in a supplemental section of appendices.

The report should be as comprehensive as necessary but as brief as possible. Overly lengthy reports complicate peer evaluation and sometimes indicate that the school has been unwilling or unable to identify the most critical elements of its review or the most crucial of its recommendations. The report should not repeat material that is available elsewhere, especially descriptive material that may be found in the school's catalog or handbooks; these sources should be clearly referenced so that evaluation committee members can find pertinent material quickly. Throughout, the report should demonstrate an awareness of the accreditation process, the issues that an external evaluation committee must examine in its review of the institution, and the institutional capacity to be objective and honest in its self-evaluation.

Weak or inadequate self-study reports are often overly descriptive, not evaluative, and too lengthy. They lack a coherent organizational structure, or fail to implement the organization the report professes to have. Self-study reports that fail to identify the evidence that supports the study's findings, or report conclusions that appear not to be based on meaningful information, are not helpful for evaluation committee members or the Commission. Reports that fail to evaluate the institution thoughtfully and carefully in the context of the accrediting standards are not useful and will be evaluated negatively.

In general, the report should provide a readable and useful description of the institution, the self-study process, the evaluation of the school in terms of the ATS accrediting standards, and conclusions

and recommendations emerging from that study. It should be constructed so that it can be both understood by persons not familiar with the school and used by groups within the school who will need to implement its recommendations. Because of the critical importance of the self-study process and report, the Commission on Accrediting expects each ATS accreditation committee to evaluate the institution's self-study report as part of the committee's report to the Commission.

Structure of the Report

While institutions should present their reports in a manner suited to their studies and plans for the future use of the reports, the Commission on Accrediting requires that every report contain some common elements: (1) an introductory chapter that reviews the school's accreditation history, describes the process of the self-study, and identifies the hoped-for accrediting action; (2) a body that reports the study's evaluation with reference to the ATS accrediting standards; and (3) a concluding chapter that presents an overall summary of the institution's self-evaluation and outlines its plans for internal follow-up on the self-study recommendations. In addition, some information may be appropriate to be included as appendices.

Introductory Chapter. This chapter should describe the background and context of the self-study. It should review the school's accreditation history and prior interactions with the Commission on Accrediting. In the context of this review, it should describe institutional responses to prior accreditation committee evaluations and to actions of the Commission. The introduction should give an overview of the design and process of the self-study, including the committee structure and efforts to gain broad participation in the process, and identify any special features of the self-study that will help the reading of the report by the accreditation committee or the Commission on Accrediting. This chapter should also summarize major changes or developments in the school since the last comprehensive evaluation visit and describe the organization of the report. Finally, the introduction

should orient the readers to the special qualities, programs, or structures of the school. The better informed evaluation committees and the Commission are about the school and its uniqueness, the better able they will be to evaluate the institution in terms of its own mission and purposes.

Body of the Report. The body of the report may be organized in a variety of ways but it must include an evaluation of the institution and its degree programs in terms of the ATS standards. Generally, the body of the report will consist of several chapters, organized according to the ATS accrediting standards, and as appropriate, coordinated with the standards of the regional accrediting body. The body of the report, while based on the reports of several self-study subcommittees, should have a coherent focus and common editorial style. As noted above, institutions may organize their reports around functional topics or special projects, in which case, the concluding chapter should describe how the school complies with all the ATS general institutional and the relevant degree program standards.

Concluding Chapter. The final chapter or section, like the introductory one, should include certain elements, regardless of the variations an institution may choose for the main body of the report. It should summarize the overall findings of the study and integrate the recommendations contained in the various parts of the report into a common set with assigned priorities. In anticipation of the action of the Commission on Accrediting, this chapter should clearly identify the following: (1) the strengths of the institution that should be sustained as the school grows and develops; (2) areas where efforts toward improvement should be concentrated over the next several years to strengthen the school and its educational program; and (3) areas where the study has concluded that the institution does not meet the ATS accrediting standards and how it plans to come into compliance with them in the near future. Finally, the conclusion should describe how the institution plans to implement or continue an ongoing process of evaluation, based on the model described in the accrediting standards.

Appendixes and Supplemental Material. Every self-study is based on more sources of information than should or could be included in the body of the report. The steering committee should designate the primary information to be included as appendixes to the self-study report and the information to be made available at the time of the visit. Appendixes should include the primary data that contributed to the substantive analysis and findings of the report, such as summaries of surveys, annual audits and financial analyses, etc.

Submission and Distribution

The school is responsible for submitting and distributing copies of the self-study report according to ATS procedures.

For institutions anticipating an *ATS visit for reaffirmation of accreditation,* the school should send three copies of the report and supplementary materials to the Commission on Accrediting at least sixty days prior to the visit. The school is also responsible for sending one copy of the report and supporting material to each member of the accreditation evaluation committee at least thirty days prior to the visit.

When ATS and one of the regional agencies conduct a *joint visit,* schools should send three copies of the self-study report to ATS sixty days prior to the visit, but the regional agency may have a different requirement for receipt of the self-study by the agency or distribution of the report to members of the accreditation evaluation committee. Schools receiving a joint visiting committee are responsible for attending to appropriate guidelines from each accrediting agency.

For institutions seeking *initial ATS accreditation*, three copies of the completed self-study report must be sent to the ATS office prior to the Commission on Accrediting meeting in which the report will be reviewed and the Commission will determine if an initial accrediting visit will be authorized. The due date for the spring meeting of the Commission is May 1, and for the winter meeting of the Commission, December 1. ATS policy requires the Commission to evaluate the

self-study prior to authorizing an initial accreditation evaluation committee.

In addition to materials incorporated in the report and in the appendixes, other materials that may be useful to the evaluation committee should be organized in a room or office that will be reserved for the evaluation committee. A more complete listing of these materials is included in Section Three of the *Handbook, Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees.*

ATS Consultation Resources

The Commission sponsors an annual workshop each fall for schools engaged in self-study. Because institutional self-studies are highly individualized and should be designed to meet particular institutional needs as well as the needs of the accreditation process, ATS staff are available to consult with schools in self-study, including a one-day consultation at the school during the self-study. Although the Commission does not require approval of an outline or first draft of the self-study, schools are invited to send an outline or first draft of the report to ATS staff, who will review the text and offer counsel regarding its format and adequacy in relation to the standards.

Handbook of Accreditation

Section Three

Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees

The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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The ATS Handbook of Accreditation consists of the following sections:

Section One	An Introduction to Accreditation by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada
Section Two	Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study
Section Three	Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees
Section Four	Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees
Section Five	Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation
Section Six	Guidelines Adopted by the ATS Commission on Accrediting
Section Seven	Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization (to be published in 1999)
Section Eight	Guidelines for Evaluating Library and Information Technology (to be published in 2000)

To order additional copies of the ATS Handbook of Accreditation, please contact the office of The Association of Theological Schools.

Contents

Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees

In addition to conducting the self-study and writing the report of this major effort, the school's other major task in the accreditation process involves the preparation and support necessary for the visit of an ATS accreditation evaluation committee, and attention to several details following the visit. This section of the *Handbook of Accreditation* describes the activities that the school should undertake prior to the visit, during the visit, and following the visit. It also describes ATS procedures related to accreditation evaluation visits.

Preparing for and Supporting the Work of the Accreditation Evaluation Committee

Several tasks should be completed before the visit, many of them involving interactions among the school, ATS staff, and the chairperson of the accreditation evaluation committee. These tasks include: identification of visit dates, appointment of the committee, making local arrangements, preparation of a visit schedule, distribution of self-study reports and related material, and preparation of additional materials to be available for the committee while on campus. In addition, the school needs to provide hospitality and support for the committee during the visit.

Identification of Visit Dates

Approximately a year before the visit, ATS will initiate conversation about possible dates for the visit. Comprehensive visits last from the

afternoon of a first day to the morning of a fourth day, often Sunday evening through Wednesday morning. Because Commission staff attempt to be present for some part of each comprehensive visit, dates will be negotiated that fit both school and ATS staff calendars. In the case of joint visits with regional agencies, the scheduling will be coordinated with the regional agency. Generally, ATS takes the lead in coordinating the dates for joint visits at freestanding schools, and the regional agency takes the lead in coordinating dates for joint visits in schools that are part of a college or university that is receiving a visit by the regional agency.

Appointment of the Committee

Approximately nine to twelve months before the visit, ATS will begin the work of appointing members of the accreditation evaluation committee. Committees for visits conducted by ATS alone typically have three or four members. Joint ATS-regional committees are generally larger. While the selection of committee members is primarily a function of the Commission through its staff, schools will be consulted frequently regarding the kinds of expertise most needed by committee members, the number and composition of committee members, and identification of candidates for appointment. A school may object to the appointment of a committee member on the basis of a potential conflict of interest, which, according to ATS policy, is defined as an individual's prior relationship to the institution, either as student, employee, or candidate for employment. The appointment of committee members is, finally, the prerogative of the Commission.

Individuals are appointed to ATS evaluation committees on the basis of their expertise, general knowledge of theological education, and capacity to evaluate an institution on the basis of its own mission and the ATS standards. To the extent possible, committees are constituted to reflect the diversity of denominations, racial/ethnic character, national context, and gender present among ATS schools. The final roster of visitors, along with their mailing addresses, is sent to the school approximately three months prior to the visit.

Making Local Arrangements

Institutions are responsible for making the local arrangements for the committee's visit, including housing, appropriate work space, and transportation.

In making arrangements for lodging, schools should be mindful that committee members have a great deal of work to accomplish in a very short period of time. The school's efforts to provide gracious hosting and comfortable housing will facilitate this work. Well in advance of the visit, the school should arrange for single room accommodations for committee members and ATS staff at a comfortable, nearby hotel. Hotel rooms should have desks and adequate space for the committee member to work and relax. If possible, the hotel should have restaurant service. Typically, the school should reserve rooms for three nights for a comprehensive visit and two nights for a focused visit. Occasionally, a visitor may require a fourth night's accommodation for a comprehensive visit because of distance or time zone changes, or to obtain reduced airfare. Schools are not responsible for more than four nights of lodging for any visitor. The school should arrange to be billed directly by the hotel for the costs of rooms and meals eaten at the hotel. Schools are not responsible for other personal expenses of committee members or staff (e.g., long distance calls, laundry, etc.).

The school should arrange meeting spaces for the committee, both at the hotel and on campus. The hotel meeting room could be the sitting area of a suite, if it is of sufficient size to provide comfortable work space for the committee, or a separate meeting room in the hotel. Committees will typically use the hotel meeting space several hours on the opening day of the visit, and late afternoons and evenings each of the two full days of the visit. The school should also provide an office or room on the campus for the exclusive use of the committee. This room should be large enough to accommodate both full committee meetings and individual work space. It should also contain the documents, records, exhibits, and supporting material referenced in

the self-study (see fuller description of these resources below). It is desirable for some computer workstations to be available to committee members, preferably in the on-campus committee room, and for arrangements to be made for photocopying.

In consultation with the chair of the committee and the ATS staff member who will participate in the visit, the school should provide for the transportation of the committee during the visit. In addition, the school is responsible for making arrangements with each visitor regarding transportation from the airport upon arrival and to the airport for departure. Committee members will make their own plane reservations and inform the school of their plans.

Preparation of Visit Schedule

The school and the chairperson of the committee should together develop a schedule of visit activities prior to the committee's arrival. This schedule should be as complete as possible, even though changes may be needed during the visit. To expedite making these changes, the school should designate one individual to work with the committee to schedule new interviews, arrange schedule changes, or provide additional documentation.

Section Four of the *Handbook of Accreditation* contains an outline of a typical schedule for an ATS comprehensive visit. All comprehensive evaluations will require most of the activities outlined in that typical schedule, but the chairperson of the committee and the school may negotiate a different sequence of the various activities.

ATS visits typically begin with an opening social function (typically a reception or dinner) that provides an opportunity for the visiting committee to meet the chief administrator and other appropriate persons, to discuss the schedule, and to make any last-minute arrangements for the visit. The balance of the evening should be left free for the committee's first working session together. The first full day of the

visit usually begins with an interview with the chief administrator of the school. The interview with the chief administrator is typically followed by individual interviews with other administrators (e.g., academic dean, business officer, student services administrator, director of the library, chief development officer). During the two full days of a comprehensive visit, committee members will interview most or all full-time faculty members, representative part-time faculty members, representative groups of students enrolled in each of the degree programs, recent graduates, field placement supervisors, and members of the governing board. These interviews should ordinarily be conducted during the day, and evenings should be free for the committee to meet in executive sessions and for individual members to work on their sections of the report. On the morning of the final day of the visit, the committee will present to the chief administrator an oral report of its recommendations to the Commission on Accrediting. It is ATS policy that this oral report be limited to announcing the committee's formal recommendations to the Commission. Representatives of the school may ask questions for clarification, but may not otherwise engage committee members regarding their report. The chairperson or ATS staff member will also review the activities following the visit and preceding the Commission action, and remind the school representatives that this preliminary report should not be made public until the Commission has acted.

While every effort should be made to have a complete schedule prepared in advance, the school should also anticipate that the committee may request changes in the advance schedule. The time constraints of the visit require the committee to adjust the schedule in order to gather the necessary information while on site. Meetings that have been scheduled with groups (students, alumni/ae, trustees, field placement supervisors, etc.) will not be changed after the visit begins. Because the schedule may be changed during the visit, the school should alert its faculty and staff to be available on short notice during the two days of the visit.

Distribution of Self-Study Reports and Related Material

The school is responsible for distributing copies of the self-study report, appendices, and all related material to the ATS office and members of the accreditation evaluation committee. Three copies of the self-study report should be sent to the ATS offices no later than sixty days prior to the beginning of the visit, along with one set of supporting materials (catalog, handbooks for faculty, students, board, etc.). One copy of the self-study report and related material should be sent to each committee member at least thirty days prior to the visit. Schools receiving joint ATS-regional visits are accountable to both the ATS deadlines and the deadlines of the regional agency, which may differ.

Additional Materials to be Available during the Visit

Committee members should receive most of the materials they need for their work prior to the visit, but schools should gather supplemental reference materials for use by the committee during the visit. The committee members will need to review the following on site: copies of minutes of faculty meetings and trustee meetings (last five years), copies of audits and management letters (last three years), ATS Annual Report Forms (last two years), current institutional planning documents, course syllabi, current faculty curricula vitae and samples of faculty publications, samples of students' theses and dissertations, and copies of promotional materials. This material should be available in the room set aside for committee work.

Support during the Visit

Most of the institution's work will be completed prior to the arrival of the accreditation evaluation committee. The institution's primary responsibilities during the visit itself include hosting committee members, participating in interviews, and attending to the details of the committee's stay.

The school should host the committee in ways that enable its members to remain focused on their tasks. Helpful forms of hospitality include simple amenities such as providing coffee, tea, juice, and snacks in the room used by the committee while it is on campus, or placing a small hospitality basket in committee members' rooms at the hotel. ATS visitors contribute approximately one week of time to the school on behalf of ATS and serve without honorarium. Institutional attention to hosting committee members reflects the school's awareness of the effort these peers are making. While taking care to host the committee appropriately, schools should avoid giving gifts of value or treating visitors in ways that could appear to be courting a positive evaluation.

A designated contact person from the school should be available to the committee chairperson at all times during the visit. The chair will depend on this person, during the day or evening, to arrange changes in the interview schedule, answer questions, etc. The school should be prepared, on short notice, to accommodate requests for changes in the schedule or for additional information. ATS committees seek to be judicious in their requests, but their task requires them to assess all appropriate information carefully, and committees frequently discover they need information which neither they nor the school anticipated in advance.

As noted in the guidelines for preparing for the visit, all faculty and administrative leaders, except those on leave at the time of the visit, should be available during the visit. If the visit occurs on a day when classes are not usually scheduled, faculty should be asked to be on campus or available to the committee. While the school should arrange this availability, it should also caution individuals that the committee may not interview all of them. In the limited time of the visit, the committee can focus on only some of many important issues, and cannot typically meet individually with all stakeholders.

Activities Following the Visit

By ATS policy, the committee summarizes its recommendations to the Commission on Accrediting in the exit report. After the committee leaves, the school has several remaining activities in the accreditation evaluation process, including: responding to the draft of the committee's report, preparing a response to the final report for the Commission on Accrediting, paying the ATS invoice for costs associated with the visit, and completing the comprehensive evaluation of the ATS accrediting process.

Responding to the Draft Report

In the exit conference, the chairperson will summarize the formal recommendations of the committee to the Commission on Accrediting. Following the visit, the chairperson will prepare a draft of the committee's report that includes all the committee's findings, its narrative evaluation of the institution, and its recommendations to the Commission. *The school should not publish any part of the committee report, including its recommendations to the Commission*. The committee's report is a recommendation to the Commission on Accrediting, not an official action; the formal action is taken by the Commission.

As soon as possible after the visit, the chairperson will complete a draft of the committee's report. The draft of this document will be sent to the chief administrator of the school for review and response. This response is limited to corrections of factual errors and should be sent directly to the chairperson of the committee. After carefully considering the school's response, the chair, in consultation with other committee members, will prepare a final report for submission to the Commission on Accrediting. The chairperson will send a copy of this final report to the school at the same time the report is sent to ATS. In joint visits with regional associations, the co-chair will take responsibility for sending the report to the regional agency's offices as required.

Responding to the Final Report

After the chairperson has submitted the final report on behalf of the accreditation evaluation committee, the school has two options for responding to the Commission on Accrediting. The first is to prepare a written response to the report for consideration by the Commission on Accrediting. This response, typically in the form of a letter from the school's chief administrator, can state the school's concurrence with the committee's findings and recommendations, or it can challenge the committee's report. This response to the committee report is the proper forum for expressing any disagreement with the judgments of the committee or for challenging its recommendations.

The second means of response available to the school is to meet with the Commission at the meeting during which the committee report is being considered. By Association and Commission policy, any school that has received an evaluation committee visit can have personal representation at the meeting of the Commission in which the report of that visit is being considered for action. ATS staff members routinely provide counsel to schools, upon request, regarding preparation of letters of response or scheduling a meeting with the Commission on Accrediting.

ATS Invoice for Visit-Related Expenses

In accordance with ATS policy, all costs directly related to an accrediting visit are charged to the theological school being evaluated, together with an assessment fee. Dues paid by member schools support most of the ongoing costs of ATS accreditation. The school will be billed for travel costs for each committee member and the assessment fee, as determined by the Commission on Accrediting and published in Part 1 of the ATS *Bulletin*. The travel expenses for all visitors in a semester are averaged, and schools are billed this average amount for each member of the committee. The assessment fee covers ATS costs associated with staff travel for accrediting visits,

committee expenses, and other costs related to the accreditation visit process. Invoices are mailed at the end of the semester in which the visit occurs and are payable upon receipt.

Commission Consideration of Committee Reports

The ATS Commission on Accrediting meets in January and May or June. The Commission typically considers reports from fall visits in January, and reports from spring visits in May or June. For comprehensive evaluations, the Commission's decision-making process includes consideration of the self-study report, the visiting committee report, the institutional response, and the counsel of staff or commissioners present for the visit. The Commission will take its action according to formally adopted procedures and based on the committee's report, the ATS standards of accreditation, and actions taken with respect to other member institutions.

The action of the ATS Commission on Accrediting, following the format of the recommendation in visiting committee reports, will have three basic parts, often with several aspects to each part. The first part is an action on initial or reaffirmation of accreditation, including the length of the grant of accreditation. Second, the Commission will formally act on the approval of each degree program offered by the institution, with separate actions for each site at which the degree can be earned in full, if the school offers it at more than one site. Third, the Commission's action will describe areas of strength in the institution that should be sustained. Fourth, the action will identify areas where the institution should focus efforts toward improvement. Finally, the action will cite any areas where the standards are inadequately implemented in the school and, with regard to these areas, the Commission may impose notations or require follow-up activities such as reports and focused visits.

A letter reporting the Commission action will be mailed no later than thirty days from the date of the Commission meeting. Actions related to accredited status, approval of degree programs, and imposition of notations are published annually in the ATS *Bulletin*, Part 2, *Membership List*.

Appeal Procedures

An institution has thirty days following receipt of the Commission action letter to request an appeal. Actions under appeal are not published in the *Membership List* until the appeal is resolved. Appeal procedures vary according to the action under appeal and are fully described in the ATS *Bulletin*, Part 1, Section X: Appeals.

Evaluation of ATS Accreditation Process

After all activities related to the accreditation evaluation process have been completed, concluding with receipt of the letter reporting the Commission action, ATS invites schools to complete an evaluation of the accreditation process—from the initial staff consultation on the self-study through the committee visit to the Commission action. Completion of this evaluation is an important contribution to ATS efforts to monitor its processes and procedures to maximize the contribution of this process to the overall purpose of ATS—the improvement of theological schools.

Checklist of Activities for Receiving an ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committee

The following checklist is provided as a guide for schools as they are preparing for an ATS accreditation evaluation visit. It should be supplemented, as appropriate, to reflect the school's individual plans and to incorporate activities required by regional accrediting agencies, in the case of a joint ATS / regional visit.

Before the Visit

- Send three copies of the completed self-study report and one set of supporting materials to the ATS office at least 60 days before the visit date.

- Contact the chairperson about schedule of interviews and administrative details of the visit.

- Send copies of the self-study report to each member of the accreditation evaluation committee, together with a current catalog and other appropriate materials, at least 30 days before the visit.

- Confirm hotel arrangements, including single room accommodations for each committee member and a meeting workroom/suite at the hotel for committee working sessions.

- After the tentative schedule has been negotiated with the committee chairperson, distribute it in advance to administrative staff, faculty, and other persons involved, with caveat about changes.

- Plan the opening social event and determine the institutional representatives who will participate.

During the Visit

- Designate a contact person for the committee to arrange schedule changes, provide additional documentation, etc.

- Provide transportation for the committee during the visit as negotiated prior to the visit with the chairperson of the committee.

- Assure availability of persons scheduled for interviews.

- Check occasionally with the committee members to be certain that they have everything they need for their work.

After the Visit

- Examine the draft of the committee's report carefully and send corrections of factual errors (inaccuracies or misrepresentations) to the committee chairperson. The school is requested to respond to this draft within *one week* of receiving it.

- Send a response directly to the Commission following receipt of the final report. This response is the proper forum for expressing agreement or disagreement with the interpretations or recommendations of the visiting committee, and for raising issues that the school would like the Commission on Accrediting to be aware of when it considers the committee's report. Schools are not required to respond, but some response is desirable.

- If necessary, send a representative to the Commission's meeting at which the committee's report and recommendation will be considered. Schools wishing to have representation at the Commission meeting should make their

request directly to the ATS staff, who will schedule a time during the Commission meeting for the institutional representatives.

- Complete the Accrediting Visit Evaluation Form that will be sent by ATS staff after the school has been notified of the Commission's formal action.

Handbook of Accreditation

Section Four

Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees

The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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The ATS Handbook of Accreditation consists of the following sections:

Section One	An Introduction to Accreditation by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada
Section Two	Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study
Section Three	Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees
Section Four	Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees
Section Five	Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation
Section Six	Guidelines Adopted by the ATS Commission on Accrediting
Section Seven	Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization (to be published in 1999)
Section Eight	Guidelines for Evaluating Library and Information Technology (to be published in 2000)

To order additional copies of the ATS Handbook of Accreditation, please contact the office of The Association of Theological Schools.

Contents

Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees

The ATS Constitution identifies several purposes of the Association, including its primary purpose: "To establish standards of theological education and to maintain a list of institutions accredited on the basis of such standards . . . ." The Commission on Accrediting has responsibility for accomplishing this purpose and discharges its responsibility primarily through the *accreditation evaluation process,* which involves a variety of accrediting practices such as visits by peer committees, follow-up reports, consideration of petitions and actions related to accreditation of institutions, and required staff visits to institutions.

The Commission requires several different kinds of visits to schools.

- An *initial accreditation visit* is conducted following the Commission's review of the self-study report in order to evaluate a theological school for initial accreditation by ATS.

- *Comprehensive evaluation visits* are made to schools that have completed a self-study and are seeking reaffirmation of accreditation.

- *Focused visits* occur either because a school is petitioning for approval of a new program, or establishing a new center at which existing programs will be offered, or because the Commission has determined that some concern at a school is sufficient to warrant a visit.

All these visits depend on the skill and thoughtful work of individuals who are willing to serve the larger community of theological schools as members of accreditation evaluation committees.

The guidelines in this section of the *Handbook of Accreditation* are based on the policies and procedures that the Association or its Commission on Accrediting have adopted and the practices the Commission has developed to fulfill its responsibilities as an accrediting body. These include: (1) the qualifications, appointment, and expectations of evaluation committee members; (2) the work of the evaluation committee including preparation for the visit, conducting the visit, and tasks that follow the visit; (3) a typical schedule for an accreditation visit; and (4) administrative procedures and policies. Committee members are expected to be familiar with these guidelines and to conduct their work according to these expectations.

Qualifications, Appointment, and Expectations of Evaluation Committee Members

Qualifications

Persons are invited to serve on ATS visiting committees who essentially meet the following qualifications: (1) a broad perspective on theological education; (2) expertise in certain areas addressed by ATS accreditation standards; (3) the capacity to evaluate another institution with sensitivity to that institution's mission, goals, and religious tradition; (4) the capacity to evaluate a school and its programs on the basis of the ATS accrediting standards and not by personal convictions about theological education; and (5) the ability to work with other evaluation visitors to complete the various tasks required of each visitor.

Appointment

The ATS *Bulletin*, Part 1, describes the approved policies regarding the appointment of accreditation evaluation committee members. Most of these policies were developed to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure knowledgeable and objective evaluation of institutions.

1. Persons appointed to committees should meet the qualifications for evaluation committee visitors.

2 Visiting committees, as far as possible, will be constituted so as to reflect the diversity of racial/ethnic identity, gender, national and denominational affiliation present among the schools of the Association.

3. Persons are not appointed to committees for schools from which they hold degrees or where they have formerly served in any employed capacity.

4. Committee members are not selected from schools that are perceived as primary competitors for students with the school being visited. This often means that visitors are chosen from outside the denomination of the school being visited, and typically means that persons from nearby schools will not be appointed to a committee evaluating a neighboring school.

Expectations

The credibility and effectiveness of the ATS accreditation process depend upon the contribution of committee members. The Commission expects committee members to conduct visits according to established guidelines and to prepare reports that are fair, accurate, and informative. Sensitive adherence to these various expectations is necessary for ATS accreditation to ensure quality and to contribute to the improvement of theological education in the United States and Canada.

Confidentiality. Accreditation visitors in the process of an ATS evaluation necessarily have access to all aspects of an institution's life. Strengths, as well as weaknesses, faults, and disagreements are revealed in accreditation visits. Visitors must deal with this information confidentially and may not discuss it apart from the evaluation committee's deliberations. The confidentiality necessary for ATS accreditation visits has several dimensions. First, during the visit, visitors must not conduct interviews in ways that reveal information obtained in other interviews. Second, following the visit but before the Commission considers the committee's report, visitors must refrain from discussing anything related either to the findings of the committee or its recommendations to the Commission with anyone other than committee members or ATS staff. Third, after the Commission's formal action, committee members must continue to maintain confidentiality about the visit. Confidentiality is absolutely critical for accreditation committee members, and committee members must be careful to observe all these forms of confidentiality.

Avoiding Conflicts of Interest. Committee members are responsible for avoiding conflicts of interest that could interfere with their objective evaluation of the institution. Conflict of interest extends beyond the several conditions identified under "Qualifications" above. Visitors should avoid suggesting themselves for subsequent consultation or responding to an institution's invitation to return as a consultant; discussing their potential employment by the institution; recruiting prospective students for their own school; initiating conversations about potential employment of persons in the school being visited; or accepting social engagements or similar invitations during the visit.

Maintaining the Tone and Character of ATS Accreditation. Accrediting agencies approach their work in various ways. Over the years, ATS has developed a tone and character to its accreditation efforts that should be reflected in the work of committee members. The overarching goal of ATS accreditation is the improvement of theological education. Improvement is supported by a committee's careful identification of areas of deficiency, areas of strength, and areas that

should be the focus of ongoing institutional attention. ATS accreditation functions in a collegial way. Peer evaluators from theological schools engage in thoughtful, fair, and objective evaluation that presses for quality by holding ATS member schools accountable to the understandings of good theological education as defined by accreditation standards adopted by the schools. Committees should emphasize quality, and support the school's goal of improvement, by attending to the normative expectations in higher education and by maintaining an awareness of the contribution of good theological schools to North American religious life.

Discipline of Theological Perspective. The ATS Constitution restricts membership to schools within the Jewish or Christian traditions, but within this restriction exists a wide diversity of convictions and theological perspectives. The integrity of evaluation visits requires that committee members focus on the institutional and educational mission of the school being visited, even though its theological position may be widely divergent from the visitor's own. The ATS standards deal forthrightly with the theological nature of the theological school, but they do not require or permit visitors to make theological judgments about institutions. Accreditation committees are typically appointed to include members from schools both theologically similar to and different from the school being visited. Visitors serve the entire community of theological schools by evaluating the school in the context of its mission, the ATS standards, and the religious constituency it serves.

The Work of ATS Evaluation Committees

An accreditation evaluation committee is convened for the purpose of visiting one school. While visitors may be invited to serve on other committees, they will likely not serve with the same individuals more than once. Committees for ATS comprehensive evaluation visits are usually formed six to nine months in advance of the visit; committees for focused visits are smaller and usually formed two to three months before the visit. Committee members are responsible to prepare for the

visit, conduct the visit by specified conventions, and contribute to the completion of the report following the visit.

Before the Visit

Before the visit, committee members are expected to read:

- this section of the *Handbook, Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees,*
- the ATS accrediting standards,
- the report of the institutional self-study and supporting documents, and
- the materials about the institution provided by ATS.

Also prior to the visit, the chairperson of the committee will discuss areas of responsibility with each committee member and make assignments.

1. *Guidelines for Committee Members*

This section of the *Handbook of Accreditation, Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees,* describes most aspects of the accreditation visit process. In addition to these guidelines, committee members should read Section One of the *Handbook of Accreditation, An Introduction to Accreditation by ATS,* and Section Five, *Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation*.

2. *ATS Accrediting Standards*

The ATS standards of accreditation are published in the *Bulletin*, Part 1, which also describes the policies and procedures for ATS accreditation formally approved by the Association. These standards were adopted in 1996 at the conclusion of a four-year project to redevelop comprehensively the accrediting standards.

3. *Report of the Institutional Self-Study and Supporting Documents*

Not later than one month prior to the visit, the school to be visited will send each committee member: (1) the report of the institutional self-study; (2) appendices related to the self-study; (3) a current catalog; and (4) other supporting materials that the school may choose to provide. Preparation includes a general reading and overview of this material and a more focused, careful reading of all sections for which the visitor has primary responsibility. (Those institutions having a focused visit will not provide a self-study to committee members.)

4. *Materials about the Visit Provided by ATS*

ATS will send several items to each committee member that provide some historical information about the institution.

- The *Report* of the most recent comprehensive evaluation visit contains the evaluation of the previous visiting committee. Visitors should note the strengths and areas of concern identified by the previous committee, as well as its recommendations to the Commission on Accrediting. The Commission may not have adopted all the recommendations of the previous committee, and schools are not bound by the report but by the resultant actions of the Commission. This report does, however, provide perspective, and current visitors should explore how the school has responded to previous evaluations.

- The *ATS Accreditation History* of the institution provides a brief summary of the actions of the Commission on Accrediting, covering as much as a twenty-five year period; this will include the Commission's formal actions following the most recent comprehensive visit.

- The *Institutional Fact Sheet* provides a three-year statistical summary of the institution computed from data supplied by

the school on its ATS Annual Report Forms, including information about enrollment, faculty size, institutional income and expenditures, and library acquisitions and expenditures.

Prior to the visit, the committee chairperson will discuss areas of responsibility with each committee member and make assignments.

During the Visit

The overarching goal of an ATS accreditation visit is the evaluation of a theological school in terms of the standards adopted by the Association. The standards describe a model of evaluation that is central to the institution's self-study and serves as a guide to the work of an accreditation committee. When this model is translated into the activities of the visit, the particular work of the committee includes:

1. *Examining Purpose and Goals*

ATS accreditation begins with the purpose and goals of the institution, and the work of accreditation committees necessarily begins at the same point. What is the central purpose of this school? What are its primary educational goals? What are its major institutional goals? An accreditation committee assesses purpose and goals in two ways. The first is to determine if the institution has thoughtfully identified its purpose and goals in ways that guide the school and are evident in its evaluation efforts. The second is to determine if the institution's purpose and educational goals conform to the normative expectations of the ATS standards. The standards allow considerable latitude to schools regarding institutional purpose and the educational goals for its degree programs, and committees should be respectful of this latitude. However, the accrediting standards have a normative function that places limits on the purposes a school within the Association may adopt.

2. *Data Gathering*

In ATS accreditation visits, committee members gather data to provide the basis for evaluating all aspects of the school. Generally, data are gathered by two means: by interviewing individuals and groups, and by examining institutional documents and records.

Interviews provide an open-ended means of gathering perceptions, concerns, and opinions about the institution and its educational programs. Through interviews, visitors can learn how individuals in the school view the content and recommendations of the self-study report, the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and other issues regarding the school's attention to the ATS standards. Committee members should prepare questions before the interviews and should focus on listening during the interviews. They should avoid interjecting their counsel, unless specifically requested, and then only with caution, and avoid making comparisons of the school being visited with the visitor's own institution. Interviews should be guided toward substantive assessment of important issues for the school, and not merely the airing of individual complaints.

Visitors also gather data by examining institutional records and documents that will be available during the visit. These materials can provide a basis for evaluating claims in the self-study or perceptions obtained during interviews. The kinds of institutional records typically reviewed in a comprehensive visit include institutional strategic plans; audits; course syllabi; admission records; minutes of faculty and board meetings; handbooks developed for trustees, faculty-staff, and students; curricula vitae of faculty; samples of faculty publications; and samples of students' theses and dissertations. Committee members should consult Section Five of the *Handbook of Accreditation, Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation,* for guidance in posing interview questions and examining institutional records and documents.

3. *Forming an Overall Assessment through Deliberations*

The primary purpose of the committee's deliberations during a visit is to develop a comprehensive assessment of the institution. This assessment should be based on the institutional analysis contained in the report of the self-study and on the data gathered by the committee in interviews and review of documents. Throughout the visit, committee members must share information, collaborate, and consult with one another. ATS committees are small enough that each member must assume responsibility for several areas of investigation and for helping the committee come to a broad understanding of the institution. Specific assignments will be made to individuals for exploration and reporting, but conclusions, which take the form of accrediting recommendations, are a shared responsibility of the total group and should reflect the committee's consensus.

4. *Forming a Recommendation about Accreditation*

The Commission on Accrediting needs a formal recommendation regarding the institution's accredited status with ATS. While the formal recommendation will refer to particular situations and needs in particular schools, the Commission expects each evaluation committee to make recommendations in four distinct areas: (1) a recommendation regarding the accreditation and date for next comprehensive review; (2) a recommendation regarding the approval of each of the degree programs offered by the school; (3) a statement of strengths to be sustained during the grant of accreditation; and (4) areas in which the institution should seek to improve during the grant of accreditation; and (5) deficiencies to be addressed within two years, including notations to be imposed, if any. Follow-up reports or visits may be required to evaluate progress with regard to deficiencies.

5. *Writing the Report*

The written report of the committee: (1) documents its findings; (2) formally forwards its recommendation(s) to the Commission on

Accrediting; and (3) provides a record of the external, independent evaluation of the school. Each committee member will have responsibility for drafting sections of the report. Typically, drafts should be completed during the visit, so that only editing must be completed after the visit.

For purposes of consistency of review across schools, the Commission on Accrediting requests that each written report include the following sections: (1) a brief *introduction/history* about the school and the visit itself; (2) a section on each of the *General Institutional Standards;* (3) a section on each of the *degree programs* offered by the institution; and (4) the committee's formal recommendations to the Commission on Accrediting. For visits conducted jointly with a regional agency, variations in report structure are described in the memoranda of agreement between ATS and the regional agency.

Effective reports are characterized by a distinctive tone and style. The tone should be descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, the report should identify those facts about an institution that have led to a committee's judgments, and *not* indicate what the institution should do. The report's primary purpose is to present facts, as perceived by the committee, that serve as the basis for the evaluation and recommendations of the committee. Committee members are expected to write clearly and concisely, to focus on the data and observations that led to conclusions and recommendations, and to provide appropriate collegial counsel to the school through the report. Direct references to persons by name should be avoided (i.e., "one professor said" rather than "Professor Smith said"). The report should describe problems that may be a result of personnel issues in terms of the *problem*, not in terms of the *individual* responsible (i.e., "the financial record keeping is inadequate" rather than "the incompetence of the financial officer is a problem.") The report should draw attention to issues, problems, and strengths without indicting the institution's wisdom or the competence of its staff or faculty. The report should be written in the third person with no first person singular expressions, emphasizing the consensus of the committee in its authorship. Generally, reports should be as brief

as the data will allow; most reports will not exceed twenty single-spaced pages.

After the Visit

The chairperson will edit the report and coordinate its distribution. This process involves sending copies of the first draft of the report to each member of the visiting committee for review of the full report and response. The chairperson sends the draft of the report for review of factual errors only. The ATS office and the regional accrediting agency (if involved) will also receive a copy of the draft report. Based on the responses of the school, the chairperson prepares a final report and sends copies to committee members, the school, and the ATS office (and regional agency office if a joint visit). The ATS staff will then invite the institution to respond to the final draft, including challenges to the findings or recommendations, by writing directly to the Commission on Accrediting. Ideally, the first draft should be circulated within two weeks of the visit, responses received within one week, and the final report completed in the following one to two weeks. Final reports, then, should be mailed to the school and ATS within four to five weeks of the visit.

Schedule for an Accreditation Visit

Each committee determines the schedule that it will use in fulfilling its duties, but most evaluation visits will follow a schedule of activities like the following:

Arrival Day

1. *An initial meeting of the committee in executive session.* The first work session affords the opportunity for committee members to become acquainted with one another, confirm preliminary schedules of interviews and meetings, and check details for the visit. In addition to these administrative details, the committee should discuss preliminary reactions to the self-study, review the distinctive issues of the

visit, identify any initial concerns about the institution based on the self-study and related material, plan the opening interview with the chief administrative officer, and identify issues for committee members to pursue in their respective interviews. The opening session is also a time when the committee will review the protocols, expectations, and procedures for the conduct of ATS accreditation evaluations.

2. *Opening dinner or reception*. A social event, such as a dinner or reception, hosted by the school, serves three purposes: (1) a time for members of the visiting committee to meet representatives of the school, typically including the chief administrative officer, director of the self-study, and other faculty and administrators the chief administrator chooses to invite; (2) the opportunity to review the schedule for the next day's meetings and interviews; and (3) an opportunity to state the nature and purpose of the visit.

First Full Day

1. *Interview with the chief administrative officer*. The full committee should meet with the chief officer of the institution and discuss his or her perceptions of the purpose, present reality, and future of the institution. This conference may be wide-ranging in subjects, but should include some exploration regarding the school's status during the self-study, what has occurred since the self-study was completed, what will be done to follow up on the self-study results, and the issues or challenges the school is currently facing.

2. *Individual conferences with other administrative officers*. Early in the visit, individual interviews should be conducted with key leaders of the school, including the academic dean, student services administrator, chief financial officer, chief development officer, and director of the library. These interviews should explore issues of concern in the respective areas, as well as these senior leaders' perspectives regarding the items noted above in the agenda for the conference with the chief administrative officer of the institution.

3. *Conference with members of the governing board.* The full committee should meet with representatives of the school's governing board, ordinarily without the presence of the chief administrative officer or other employees of the institution. The committee should explore issues of governance, the purpose and mission of the school, and the quality of the work the board does. This may be a luncheon meeting, although it need not be, and should occur during the first day of the visit. The chair of the committee should assume leadership for this meeting.

4. *Conferences with members of the faculty.* Committee members should conduct interviews with as many members of the faculty as possible, either individually or in small groups, including full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty. Among other issues, faculty should be invited to address their perceptions of the self-study's analysis of the institution, the strengths and weaknesses of the educational programs of the school, and the quality of institutional support for theological scholarship (teaching, learning, and research).

5. *Conferences with other administrative personnel.* Members of the committee should interview the registrar, director of admissions, director of computing services, and other administrative personnel regarding issues pertaining to their respective areas of work.

6. *Conferences with a representative group or groups of students.* Members of the committee should interview groups of students currently involved in each of the degree programs offered by the school, as well as groups of women, racial/ethnic minority students, international students, or other significant student groups. These interviews should focus on students' perceptions of the quality of resources and learning, patterns of involvement with faculty and administrators, and the effectiveness of institutional efforts on behalf of students.

7. *Committee executive session.* The committee should attempt to conclude its on-campus work by 4:00 p.m. so it can adjourn to its own executive session, typically at the hotel meeting room. During this

session, the committee should review its impressions of the first day of interviews, identify tentative conclusions that should be tested during the next day's interviews, identify any additional information needed to be collected the next day, and confirm the agenda for the next day's meetings and interviews.

Second Full Day

1. *Conference with graduates*. Some committee members should meet with a group of recent graduates to explore questions about the adequacy of theological education provided by the school and other appropriate issues.

2. *Conference with appropriate officers in other institutions*. If an institution is involved in consortial arrangements or otherwise formally sharing educational resources with other institutions, some members of the committee should meet with representatives of those other institutions to assess the perceived effectiveness of these agreements and arrangements.

3. *Conference with field supervisors*. A meeting with supervisors of field education placements provides opportunity to examine the way in which the school oversees the process, integrates field education with other elements of theological education, and supports the work of supervisors.

4. *Other interviews*. Interviews to follow up on issues identified during the first full day, or to test tentative conclusions reached in the first full day's committee executive session, should be conducted as appropriate.

5. *Examination of records, minutes, and institutional documents*. Committee members should take time during the second full day to review documents available at the institution to confirm observations and conclusions obtained from interviews. These typically include items

such as budgets, analyses of revenues and expenditures, faculty and student manuals, administrative charts and manuals, admission and registrar records, course syllabi, term papers, advanced degree theses, annual reports, faculty/committee/trustee minutes, planning documents, and faculty publications.

6. *Conference with staff members*. A committee member should meet with a group of non-professional staff to assess the adequacy of staff for the work to be completed, and the institution's pattern of supervision and support for staff.

7. *Committee executive session*. The committee should complete its on-campus work by 3:30 p.m. so it can adjourn to an executive session at the hotel meeting room. This meeting should provide opportunity for each committee member to review conclusions reached in his or her area of evaluation, and for the committee, as a whole, to come to consensus about its recommendation to the Commission on Accrediting. Depending of the complexity of the institution, the specific issues of the visit, and the demands of the other agencies participating in the visit, this meeting may last from one to three hours, or more. The meeting should conclude as early as possible in the evening to allow time for committee members to write their respective sections of the report.

Departure Day

1. *Committee executive meeting*. The committee typically meets to summarize written reports, review the recommendations, and plan for the exit conference.

2. *The exit conference*. The concluding event of the visit is the oral report the committee makes to the institution's chief administrative officer and other staff he or she may choose to invite. The chairperson will summarize the committee's assessment of deficiencies, strengths, and concerns, and must state the committee's full recommendation to

the Commission. The chairperson will also review the next steps in the completion of the report for the Commission, including the institution's opportunity for corrections of factual errors in the draft, and for formal response to the Commission upon receipt of the final report. The school should be advised not to publish the recommendations of the committee, or any sections of the report, until the Commission has taken action. This session should be relatively brief; it is not a time for discussion about the committee's judgments.

Administrative Procedures and Policies

Required Time Commitment

The amount and pace of work during a visit require committee members to give their full attention to the activities of the visit, throughout the duration of the visit. For comprehensive visits, committee members should plan for four full days away from their offices and homes to permit participation in the entire visit. Late arrival or early departure impedes the committee's work. Committee members should be available for all activities of the visit.

Expense Reimbursement

ATS provides an expense form for use by committee members, which should be submitted to the ATS office for reimbursement following the visit. Visitors are reimbursed for travel expenses, for coach air or rail fare, limousine or taxi charges, extra hotel and meal expense. ATS will also reimburse visitors for child care or elder care expense, and provide a travel insurance policy of $100,000 for all visitors. Schools will arrange for direct billing of hotel costs during the visit and will provide ground transportation. The chairperson of the committee, or ATS staff member participating in the visit, will take care of group meal expenses for the committee. ATS committee members serve without remuneration, whether for an ATS or a joint visit with a regional agency.

Visitor Evaluation

Chairpersons of ATS committees are requested to complete a brief evaluation of each committee member, and committee members are asked to complete a brief evaluation of the chairperson. In addition, the chief administrative officer of the school is asked to complete an evaluation of the school's overall experience with the ATS accreditation process, including the work of the visiting committee, ATS staff, and the Commission on Accrediting. These evaluations are used to counsel committee members and chairpersons in future visits, and to revise ATS accrediting practices and procedures in order to improve the entire process.

Conclusion

Without the competence and significant contribution of time provided by visiting committee members, the accreditation process would be impossible. The service provided by visiting committee members is invaluable to the improvement of theological education in the U.S. and Canada. In return for this investment of time and professional expertise, it is hoped that the visiting committee members themselves will have an excellent professional development experience that will ultimately enhance their own institutions.

Handbook of Accreditation

Section Five

Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation

The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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The ATS Handbook of Accreditation consists of the following sections:

Section One	An Introduction to Accreditation by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada
Section Two	Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study
Section Three	Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees
Section Four	Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees
Section Five	Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation
Section Six	Guidelines Adopted by the ATS Commission on Accrediting
Section Seven	Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization (to be published in 1999)
Section Eight	Guidelines for Evaluating Library and Information Technology (to be published in 2000)

To order additional copies of the ATS Handbook of Accreditation, please contact the office of The Association of Theological Schools.

Contents

Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation

The standards of accreditation provide a basis for evaluating theological schools accredited by the ATS Commission on Accrediting. The primary purpose of this section of the *Handbook* is to help both self-study committee members and accreditation evaluation committee members to think about the use of the ATS standards in accreditation review. To engage this reflection, this section: (1) discusses how characteristics of the standards influence their use in institutional evaluation; (2) explores how the general model of evaluation in the ATS standards informs the self-study and accreditation peer processes; and (3) lists questions for each area of the standards that schools can ask in the context of their self-studies and accreditation committee members can ask in the context of their evaluation visit.

Characteristics of the Standards that Influence Evaluation

Accrediting standards, across different accrediting agencies, are not very standard. They have different textual forms, reflect different understandings of the function of accreditation, and lead to different patterns of evaluation. Understanding the characteristics of the ATS standards will support their appropriate use in institutional evaluation.

Evaluation and the Types of Textual Material in the ATS Standards

The ATS standards contain three different types of textual material, and each has different evaluative uses. The standards contain: (1) descriptions of quality in theological education; (2) statements about normative expectations of accredited schools; and (3) mandatory requirements to ensure compliance with ethical or regulatory expectations.

Descriptions of Quality. The underlying, central feature of the ATS standards is their definition of institutional and educational quality, as it is understood at a particular time, in the context of particular forces in North American religious life, and in light of the broader community of higher education. A significant portion of the text of the standards describes *characteristics of theological education to which institutions should aspire*.

Most of Standard 3, for example, is devoted to a description of quality in "theological scholarship," as understood by the community of theological schools comprising ATS. The standard describes theological scholarship in terms of the activities of learning, teaching, and research (3.1) and discusses, at some length, the characteristics of theological scholarship (3.2). This type of text is a "standard" because it defines quality for a central component of theological education. Few self-study committees will be able to read Standard 3 and conclude that scholarship at their school reflects all the characteristics described in the standard. They will more likely conclude that it does not, but that if it did, theological scholarship at their school would be better.

The accrediting evaluation task, in the context of this kind of material in a standard, is for the school to determine which of the qualities in the standard are most evident in the school and which are inadequately present or absent altogether. Following this determination, the school

has the task of developing strategies to cultivate characteristics of quality that are not evident and strategies to ensure the continued presence of characteristics that do exist.

ATS accreditation is not based on a school's demonstration that it exhibits all the characteristics of quality described by the standards; but it is based, in part, on the school's reasonable and disciplined efforts to develop the characteristics most in need of development, while maintaining the strengths it already exhibits. The ATS standards hold up many ideals, and ATS accreditation does not assume that every school will exhibit all these ideals. It does assume that schools are committed to improvement and that the qualities in the standards, however ideal, identify appropriate goals for these efforts at improvement.

Normative Expectations. The standards also contain *normative expectations for accredited graduate, professional theological schools*. These characteristics should be present in a school accredited by The Association of Theological Schools, and their absence poses an accrediting concern. These normative expectations are often embedded in the longer descriptions of quality because they are best understood in the context of the standards' definition of quality.

For example, the description of characteristics of quality in theological scholarship (Standard 3) contains some normative expectations about theological scholarship. According to the ATS standards, "Freedom of Inquiry" (3.2.2) is not just an ideal to which the school should aspire, it is a fundamental requirement: "Schools shall uphold the freedom of inquiry necessary for genuine and faithful scholarship, articulate their understanding of that freedom, formally adopt policies to implement that understanding and ensure procedural fairness, and carefully adhere to those policies." This statement is a normative expectation; freedom of inquiry as understood by a school should be present in an accredited school, and its absence raises accreditation concerns.

All normative expectations in the standards include the word "*shall*." These normative expectations embrace a wide range of institutional behavior (for example, in the statement on freedom of inquiry, institutions shall "uphold freedom of inquiry," "articulate their understanding," "formally adopt policies," "carefully adhere"). The evaluation task—both for the school in self-study and the accreditation evaluation committee—is to investigate the range of policies, understandings, and implementation of the normative expectations in the school. Normative expectations constitute the type of text most often associated with accrediting standards. They are a "standard" because they identify characteristics required of accredited schools. A school is accredited by ATS not only because it seeks appropriate patterns of improvement (the description of characteristics of quality noted above), but also because it meets basic requirements that have been judged by the community of theological schools as necessary for graduate, professional theological education.

Mandatory Requirements. A third type of textual material in the standards consists of *mandatory requirements that reflect regulatory or ethical expectations.* These mandatory requirements typically occur as stand-alone statements in the text of the standards and reflect either regulatory requirements of authorities outside the ATS schools, such as governmental agencies, or normative ethical guidelines that are true for any organization related to the Christian or Jewish traditions, like being honest and treating persons fairly.

Unlike the normative expectations described above, mandatory requirements usually require a single, discrete institutional behavior or policy. For example, "The school shall ensure that published materials . . . accurately represent the institution . . . . (and) Wherever appropriate, published institutional documents shall employ gender-inclusive language with reference to persons" (2.3). Either published materials are accurate, in terms of the expectations of this mandatory requirement, or they are not. If they are not, they can easily be put right. In the case of "Institutions shall publish all requirements for degree programs" (7.3.6), the requirements for degree programs are

either published accurately or not, and if they are not, they can easily be corrected. This type of text leads to a simple evaluative task: determining whether the school does or does not comply with the requirement.

The ATS standards have relatively few of these mandatory requirements. In self-studies, schools should audit their institutional policies and behaviors to affirm their compliance. In accreditation visits, evaluation committees should confirm the school's compliance. The mandatory compliance statements are: 2.2; 2.3; 2.6; 7.1.2; 7.3.1; 7.3.4; 7.3.5; 7.3.6; and 7.3.9.

Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards

The standards organize these various types of text in two ways. the first, and most obvious, is by the patterns of educational and institutional life: the purpose of the school, its central activities (conducting educational programs involving teaching, learning, and research), the resources necessary to accomplish educational and institutional purposes (faculty, governance, library, financial and other resources), and the characteristics of the degree programs it offers. The second, and less obvious organizational pattern, is by major, recurring themes woven throughout the standards, including:

- a priority on planning and evaluation
- the value of inclusion across racial/ethnic and gender lines
- the importance of freedom of inquiry for teaching and learning, and
- the globalization of theological education.

These recurring themes could have been included in the standards as discrete sections, but various deliberations about quality in theological education led to the conclusion that these characteristics are best understood as themes that find expression in a wide range of institutional and educational efforts. Each of these four themes is introduced at one point (evaluation, 1.2.2, 1.2.3; racial/ethnic, gender inclusion,

2.5; freedom of inquiry, 3.2.2; and globalization, 3.2.4), and subsequently addressed in many other sections. For example, globalization is introduced and defined in Standard 3, "Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship" (3.2.4), and it occurs in Standard 5, "Library and Information Resources" (5.1.2) and in degree program standards, such as the Master of Divinity (A.3.1.2).

While the recurring references to these themes provide the most effective means for understanding their importance to the purposes and practices of theological education, they pose some problems for the accreditation evaluation task. The themes make the ATS standards, by one way of reading them, seem repetitive, and the evaluation that follows the standards one by one, redundant. The standards require a reading that avoids this problem, and a pattern of evaluation that simplifies a complex task, rather than further complicating it.

The most efficient way to conduct the evaluation with regard to these recurring themes is to assign responsibility for the evaluation of a theme to the self-study subcommittee that is responsible for the standard in which the theme is introduced and described. For example, the self-study subcommittee responsible for reviewing the theological school in the context of Standard 2, "Institutional Integrity" should evaluate the school's overall efforts to "enhance participation of persons of racial/ethnic minorities in institutional life...(and) according to its stated purpose, the school shall seek to address the concerns of women and to increase their participation in theological education" (2.5). The subcommittee should be sensitive to the recurring nature of the theme (5.5.2), (6.1.3), (7.2.4), (8.3.1.3), (8.3.2.3), and consult with the subcommittees evaluating the school in terms of standards 5, 6, 7, and 8. This pattern of review is not the only pattern, and schools may address these themes in a manner appropriate to the school, the force of the standard, and the design of the self-study.

The primary ATS guidance is that multiple self-study subcommittees should not treat the theme as if it were their primary responsibility. Each subcommittee may have a contribution to make to the evaluation, but only one should coordinate the comprehensive evaluation.

Evaluation and the Format of the ATS Standards

The format of the standards also influences evaluation. The standards are organized tightly, and each concept that contributes to the meaning of a broader topic is numbered. Each numbered concept, however, is not a standard; in fact, none of them is. A *standard* is the set of concepts related to a major topic of importance for graduate, professional theological education. "Library and Information Resources" is a standard that is defined and described by the 21 statements organized under five headings. The accreditation evaluation of a school's library and information resources is based on the standard as a whole, not each of the concepts that comprise it.

Self-studies and accreditation committee reviews should not conduct a statement-by-statement review; they should be guided by the thrust of the standard as a whole. A school is considered to meet a standard adequately if it meets it generally, and meets the specific expectations of statements that include "shall." Specific expectations not met provide the basis for improvement. If a school does not embody the expectations of the standard in general, even though it may meet some particular expectations, the school is not considered to have met the standard adequately. In the final analysis, an accrediting decision based on the ATS standards is a qualitative, professional judgment about a school and its educational programs. It is not a decision that merely reflects the compliance with numerous, particular expectations.

Using the General Model of Evaluation in the Accreditation Review Process

During the past fifteen years, ATS accreditation has reflected a growing focus on evaluation. In the adoption of the redeveloped standards and revised procedures in 1996, evaluation became a central feature of ATS accreditation, and it is one of the themes that occurs repeatedly throughout the accrediting standards. It first ap-

pears in Standard 1, "Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation" (1.2.2), which describes the evaluation process in terms of four tasks. The four tasks comprising this general model are instructive for the accreditation evaluation process.

Tasks of the General Model of Evaluation

The first task of evaluation focuses on the goals of a theological school and asks two important questions. The first question is normative: *Are these the goals an accredited school should have for its various areas of work, in terms of the agreed-upon commitments of the community of theological schools expressed by the ATS standards?* The ATS accrediting standards define many goals for ATS-accredited theological schools. For example, standards regarding theological scholarship, faculty, library, student services, institutional resources, extension education, and degree programs contain references to goals expected to be pursued by accredited schools. While the standards give autonomous institutions wide latitude in the identification and implementation of particular goals, the standards are normative, and institutional goals should be evaluated in light of the expectations expressed by the ATS standards. The second question is contextual: *Are these goals the right ones for this institution, at a particular point in its history, in the context of the issues confronting the particular religious communities it serves, and in light of the institution's broader mission and purpose?* Periodically, good schools ask, for example, if their goals for degree programs are the ones most important for religious leadership, in a particular tradition, at a particular time. Accreditation evaluation committees need to review the school's own analysis of its institutional and educational goals.

Once goals are properly established, the second task of the evaluation process is identifying the kind of qualitative or quantitative information that will be needed to assess the attainment of those goals. If a school has a system of information-gathering in place, the self-study should review comprehensively the information that has been collected to determine: (1) if the right kind of information is being

collected; (2) if the information is being collected in usable forms; and (3) if the school is using the information effectively in the evaluation process. For many ATS schools, which have not developed an overall process of information-gathering, the self-study will need to begin by auditing the information that is available to determine what data will inform the self-study evaluation. In addition, the self-study should lead to recommendations about (1) the kinds of information that should be collected and (2) the institutional system necessary to collect the information over time. In the effort to identify appropriate forms of information-gathering, schools should not give priority to quantitative forms of information over qualitative ones. Numerical information is not necessarily more helpful or valuable in determining the extent to which goals have been attained than qualitative forms of information. Numerical information may be preferable for the evaluation of some goals (i.e., efforts to keep student debt at reasonable levels), and qualitative information for other goals (i.e., the extent to which the M.Div. program has contributed to students' growth in theological understanding and moral sensitivity). "Good" information is the kind of information that provides an appropriate resource for the thoughtful evaluation of the goal to which it is related. Accreditation evaluation committees have the responsibility to determine whether or not a school has sufficient and appropriate information to support its self-study conclusions and recommendations, and to provide a basis for determining the attainment of goals in the future.

The third task in the overall evaluation model is assessment, the task of analyzing and interpreting the information that has been collected. The term "assessment" refers to the activities involved in determining what the information or data mean, and asks the question: *To what extent, and in what ways, have the goals been attained?* Information alone, no matter how rich or sophisticated, cannot answer this question. The important goals in theological education are complex and require human judgment and reflection, based on reasonable patterns of information. In many ways, assessment should be the primary activity of the self-study. *Self-study subcommittees should use much of their time assessing the ways in which, and the extent to which, the institution is*

achieving its goals. Accreditation evaluation committees have the responsibility of confirming or not confirming the assessment made by the school in its self-study. One of the committee's primary evaluative functions is assessment: reviewing the conclusions the school has reached about itself on the basis of the goals the school has identified and the information gathered related to these goals. Does the external peer review of the accreditation committee lead to the same conclusions as the school's self-evaluation?

The final phase of the evaluation process involves making decisions about the goals and the activities that have been devised to achieve the goals. This is the process of translating the results of the assessment phase into appropriate plans of institutional action. In the context of the self-study, this task typically takes the form of recommendations regarding refining or establishing goals, or designing or revising institutional or educational programs. Effective schools can identify appropriate actions or revised goals, and over time, demonstrate the capacity to implement them. Accreditation evaluation committees have the responsibility to review the capability of schools to implement the plans they have made in the past, and, based on institutional information and ability, reasonably to implement the recommendations proposed in the self-study.

Cautions about the Use of the General Model of Evaluation

The general model of evaluation in the ATS standards describes an ongoing institutional activity that accredited schools must implement. The model, however, must be used thoughtfully and, in many ways, cautiously—both by schools and accreditation committees.

First, this model is orderly and linear, and life in theological schools (described as "communities of faith and learning" in the standards) is not always orderly, and more likely non-linear than linear. A compulsive and unreflective use of this model could turn the work of

theological schools into technology-driven, cause-and-effect performance that would not serve well the theological vision or the most profound goals of a theological school. Technology, whether electronic or evaluative, is a necessary support system for complex institutions, but an ineffective system of leadership.

Second, the general model of evaluation places a premium on goals and the information that is needed to determine the extent to which the goals have been attained. One temptation in goal-oriented systems is to set goals at readily attainable levels instead of the levels truly required by the institution's purpose, or to set goals for which information can be easily obtained. The necessity of information for the evaluation process should not dictate the character of the goals.

Third, a good evaluation system should have some open space in it because some important institutional or educational effects may occur without intentional planning. The evaluative model, while it focuses on goal attainment, should be able to account for unintended positive outcomes of institutional and educational life.

With due caution, schools accredited by ATS need to implement comprehensive, continuous evaluative efforts, even though it is difficult work. The primary task of a theological school is theological scholarship (understood in the standards as learning, teaching, and research), and the school cannot spend more energy on evaluation than on its primary task. However, evaluation is the only way the school will know if and how it is accomplishing its primary task, and evaluation is sufficiently important that it merits institutional energy and resources. Evaluation, in a school that understands its primary task theologically, is an aspect of stewardship. Evaluation helps a school to understand if it is accomplishing its important tasks: Have students learned what needs to be learned? Has the teaching contributed to the formation and knowledge of religious leaders? Is the school using its scarce resources in the ways that most effectively help it accomplish its purpose?

Questions to Prompt the Accreditation Evaluation Process

The ATS accreditation process depends on thoughtful people who bring intellectual ability to the task of evaluating a school—both in the self-study and in the peer accreditation visit. The questions that follow are meant to prompt thought about the ATS accrediting standards, not to function as a protocol of questions for peer evaluators to ask or answers for schools to develop in the self-study. They provide an interrogative commentary on the standards and a starting point for the evaluative efforts of the overall accreditation process.

1 Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation

1.1 Purpose

- How does the purpose of this school relate to the understanding of purpose in the ATS accrediting standards?
- Is the purpose articulated in ways that define the school's confessional commitments and the implications of those commitments for the school's institutional and educational life?
- How does a theological school related to a college or university support the purpose of the larger institution of which it is a part?
- How does the school's understanding of its purpose distinguish it from other theological schools?
- What process has been used to arrive at the formal statement of purpose; what constituencies contributed to its formation; how is it evaluated? How does the school know if its purpose is being accomplished?

- How has the school's understanding of its purpose influenced recent decisions about institutional change or innovation?

1.2 Planning and Evaluation

- How does the school's purpose influence the allocation of institutional resources? Does the current use of resources reflect the priorities and commitments embodied in the institutional purpose?

- What is the school's overall system of evaluation? Does it include evaluation of employees, students, and members of the governing board? Does it provide for the systematic evaluation of educational programs and institutional efforts?

- What evidence exists that the school has made changes in educational programs or institutional initiatives on the basis of the results of its evaluation efforts?

2 Institutional Integrity

- Items 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.6 are mandatory requirements; see page 4 in this section about evaluation/mandatory requirements.

- What efforts have been undertaken by this school to enhance participation of racial/ethnic minority persons in this school? How does the proportion of racial/ethnic minority representatives in the school compare with the population of racial/ethnic persons in the constituency served by the school?

- How is the school helping racial/ethnic majority students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to provide reli-

gious leadership in an increasingly racially and culturally diverse world?

- What is the confessional commitment of the school toward women in religious leadership roles, and what do these commitments mean for the faculty and student body?

3 Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship

3.1 Activities of Theological Scholarship

- How does the school demonstrate the importance it places on student learning?

- What practices does the school promote to encourage learning that fosters understanding of self and religious tradition?

- What evidence exists that students benefit from a variety of teaching methods and instructional attention to different learning styles?

- How does the school encourage and develop the teaching skills of its instructional staff?

- How does course development reflect patterns of faculty collaboration and interaction?

- How does the school know that individual courses contribute to the broader learning goals of the degree programs?

- Is there evidence that courses reflect developments in the society, in religious communities, and in disciplinary fields of study?

- How does the institution understand the kind of research its faculty should undertake, and how does it support the research of the faculty?

- How do faculty encourage students' development of research skills appropriate for their programs of study and future leadership?

- What is the quality of learning, teaching, and research at this school? What perceptions of quality form the basis of this assessment?

3.2 Characteristics of Theological Scholarship

- How does teaching, learning, and research in this school reflect collaborative efforts among faculty, students, or others?

- How does this school understand the faculty's freedom of inquiry? In the context of this understanding, how is freedom of inquiry articulated in faculty/staff handbooks, in policies of the governing board, and in procedures for promotion and tenure?

- What evidence exists that the school carefully follows its policies? Is there any evidence that faculty or students are denied the freedom of inquiry that is necessary for theological scholarship?

- What are the grounds for dismissal of faculty from tenure or contract? Is there any evidence in the school's recent history as an employer that other grounds were used than the ones formally stated in policies?

- What publics does the school most want the scholarship of its faculty or staff to reach? What support or encourage-

ment does the school provide for reaching these various publics?

- How do teaching and learning at this school contribute to global awareness and concern? How are cross-cultural understandings cultivated by the courses or other educational events? How do course requirements, library collections, and faculty research give evidence of the school's commitments to globalization as it understands this value in theological education?

- How does this school encourage or provide support for students to engage in trans-cultural learning?

- How does this school understand the broader concept of globalization, and what activities of the school provide support for meaningful attention to this issue, as understood by the school?

4 The Theological Curriculum

4.1 Goals of the Theological Curriculum

- Most of the evaluation of the curriculum will be completed in the context of the standards for each degree program (Standards A-K). However, the statements in Standard 4 address some educational goals that should be evident across degree programs.

- How do the educational programs of this school seek to cultivate theological understanding, as described by the standard?

- How will this school, in the context of its religious and intellectual traditions, know if students have a deepened spiritual awareness or growing moral sensibility?

- What educational practices does the school have to cultivate learning in which professional and scholarly skills, understanding of theological disciplines, and spiritual growth are intimately interwoven?

4.2 Degree Programs

- How does the school distinguish among the educational goals for different degree programs, incorporate these differences in curricular design, and communicate the distinctiveness of degree programs to students? When the same courses are used for more than one degree program, how are their requirements adapted to meet the educational goals of the program toward which the course is being credited?

- How does the school determine that a sufficient community of peers exists for each of the degree programs it offers?

- Do the degree programs offered by the school follow the ATS-recommended nomenclature? If not, does the school have compelling reasons for the variation, and has the Commission on Accrediting granted permission for the variation in nomenclature?

- How do the degree programs offered by the school clearly articulate their educational purposes in terms of the four broad categories of ATS-approved degree programs (cf, 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.2.4)?

4.3 Degree Program Standards

- Each degree offered by the school should be evaluated by the appropriate degree program standard (A-K).

- Are the educational goals of the degree program appropriate, in the context of the ATS standards and the educational needs of the students?

- How are the educational goals of the degree programs related to the leadership needs of the religious communities in which the students will serve in ministry?

- In what ways, and to what extent, are the educational goals of the degree programs being met?

- Does the curriculum of each degree program provide adequate exposure to the content areas appropriate to the program of study?

- How adequate are the school's resources for each of the degree programs it offers, and in what ways, or to what extent, do the resources needed for one program contribute to or detract from the resources needed by other programs?

- Are students who are admitted to degree programs properly qualified, and how does the school monitor the quality of its graduates?

- Do the program requirements meet the ATS standards for duration and location?

4.4 Other Instructional Programs

- In what ways do the non-degree programs of teaching and learning offered by the school reflect the purpose of the institution?

- How do non-degree programs reflect the administrative care and educational quality appropriate to a graduate school of theology?

- How does the school distinguish among the types of non-degree programs it offers, and how does it ensure that students know if credit is granted for work; and if credit is granted, how does the school ensure the educational quality of this credit in terms of admissions and academic integrity?

5 Library and Information Resources

5.1 Library Collections

- What is the school's collection development policy; on what basis has it been developed; how recently was it reviewed and updated; and what evidence exists that the collection is developing according to the policy?

- How does the library balance print collections and access to electronic databases; what educational policies support this allocation?

- In what ways does the library coordinate collection development with other theological schools; what contributions does the school's library make to the collection needs of other schools?

- What is the overall quality of the library's collection in the context of the educational programs offered by the school and the research of its students and faculty? How does the library evaluate the quality of its collection?

- What evidence does the library have that its collections are well used and are meeting the needs of students and faculty?

5.2 Contribution to Teaching, Learning, and Research

- What evidence can the school provide that the library actively supports the research interests of faculty and students?

- How does the library support the overall learning goals of the educational programs conducted by the school?

5.3 Partnership in Curriculum Development

- How are library professional staff involved in the school's process of curriculum development?

5.4 Administration and Leadership

- How does the chief administrator of the library participate in institutional planning, faculty decision-making, and the institutional budgeting process; how do these patterns of participation contribute to the library's support for theological scholarship?

- How does the chief administrator of the library provide leadership for evaluation of the personnel who work in the library, the quality of the collection, and the educational contribution of library and information resources?

5.5 Resources

- How does the school determine the appropriate level of resources for the library, and what evidence exists that these resources are being provided by the institution at a level sufficient for the library to meet the educational needs of the school?

- How does the school determine the portion of its educational and general budget that should be devoted to library support, and what evidence exists that the school is regularly spending funds that have been budgeted for the library?

- In what ways are library facilities and space adequate and appropriate for the educational and research purposes of the library?

6 Faculty

6.1 Faculty Qualifications

- What are the credentials of the faculty, and how does the school understand these credentials as appropriate for graduate, professional theological education?

- How does this institution understand and practice freedom of inquiry for faculty? In what ways is this freedom ensured by institutional policy and practice?

- Are faculty members adequate in number to cover the range of disciplines included in the degree programs offered by the school? What are the areas of faculty strength and weakness, in terms of the composition of the faculty?

- In what ways can the faculty be considered diverse, and how does this diversity support or impede the educational programs of the school?

- How does the faculty exercise its responsibility for the academic oversight of the programs of study? Are there evidences the faculty fails to assume this role or that

institutional structures prevent it from fulfilling this expectation?

- What are the policies of this school regarding faculty rights and responsibilities, and other conditions of academic employment; are these the right policies for this school? How do these policies serve the educational mission of the school? What evidence exists that the school routinely implements these policies; what evidence exists that implementation of policies is inconsistent or inappropriate?

- What procedures does this school have to retain qualified faculty members and provide them the support necessary for long-term scholarly contribution? Are these procedures effective, and on what basis does the school determine their effectiveness?

- How do the workload expectations of faculty balance time needed for students, for teaching and administration, for scholarly pursuits, and for contributions to church and community? Because there never seems to be enough time for all these pursuits in a theological school, have adequate and appropriate compromises been made? How does the institution guide or support faculty in terms of balancing the various demands on faculty time?

6.2 Role in Teaching

- Do members of the faculty, administration, and student body perceive that faculty have the freedom in the classroom necessary to discuss the subjects in which they have competence?

- In what ways does the school support the development of faculty as teachers; what encouragement does the school provide to encourage good teaching?

- What mechanisms does the school maintain to evaluate teaching effectiveness of faculty members, and are these mechanisms helpful?

6.3 Role in Student Learning

- How do faculty participate in evaluation of student learning, and how does this pattern of evaluation contribute to the educational goals of the school?

- How do the routine practices of individual faculty members, as well as the entire faculty's oversight of the degree programs, contribute to students' capacity to think theologically, to integrate diverse learning objectives, and to accomplish the educational goals of the program of study?

6.4 Role in Theological Research

- What does the school expect of faculty in terms of research? What support does the institution provide to help faculty meet its expectations? Is this faculty engaged in research, and what is the quality of that research? By what standard do faculty and administration judge the quality of research?

- How do faculty make available the results of their research?

7 Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, and Placement

7.1 Recruitment

- How does the school understand that its policies and practices of student recruitment reflect the purposes, or promote the purposes, of the institution?

- How accurately and realistically do recruitment materials and processes convey the vocational possibilities related to degree programs for which students are being recruited?

7.2 Admission

- In what ways do criteria for admission support the cultivation of quality in religious leadership? What processes are employed to review the quality of candidates, and what strategies have been employed to enhance finding applicants of perceived high quality?

- What evidence supports the expectation that the school functions at the post-baccalaureate level?

- How do admission criteria vary according to the expectations of each of the degree programs offered, and are the resulting variations appropriate to the vocational and academic expectations of the degrees?

- What admission efforts support commitments of the school to encourage diversity of the student body in areas such as race, ethnicity, region, denomination, or gender?

- How do admission efforts and processes encourage an appropriate baccalaureate education, and how does the school help students without adequate baccalaureate backgrounds to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to function competently at the graduate, professional level?

7.3 Student Services

- What is the school's ongoing method of evaluation of student services, what has the evaluation revealed, and what actions have been taken in light of the conclusions reached from the evaluation?

- How does the school provide commensurate services to students wherever they are enrolled?

- How does the school's maintenance of student records ensure appropriate levels of confidentiality and privacy for students, appropriate access for school personnel, and security from physical or electronic destruction?

- How can the school demonstrate that its tuition and fees are appropriate for the degrees earned, in the context of income students can likely anticipate from the forms of religious service for which they are preparing?

- How does the school monitor student indebtedness and what institutional efforts are in place to counsel students, monitor over-borrowing, and cultivate financial responsibility among students?

- What process is in place to respond to complaints from students regarding issues related to accrediting standards, including records of the complaints and the institutional responses to them?

7.4 Placement

- How does the school monitor the completion rate of students and their rate of placement in positions related to the degree programs they are completing? How has this monitoring influenced policies or decisions regarding admissions?

- How does the school advocate on behalf of graduates, who were admitted to and educated in its degree programs, who are members of groups that have been disadvantaged in vocational employment because of race, ethnicity, and/or gender?

8 Authority and Governance

8.1 Authority

- What is the structure and scope of the school's authority? What documents describe this structure, and are they clear and consistent? How appropriately is the authority delegated and how faithfully is the structure of authority implemented in the school's practices? How well does the structure serve the school's purpose and mission?

8.2 Governance

- What is the system of governance in this school? Does it relate appropriately to the school's legal, moral, institutional, or ecclesiastical pattern of authority?

- How does the school understand and implement patterns of sharing the governing process, and how are the unique and overlapping roles and responsibilities of board, faculty, administrators, students, and others defined so that all partners exercise their mandated or delegated leadership?

8.3 Roles

8.3.1 Governing Board

- What evidence supports the expectation that the board maintains the integrity of the institution, including freedom from inappropriate internal or external control?

- How well has the board implemented its role of exercising proper fiduciary responsibility, financial oversight, proper delegation of authority to administration and faculty, and ensuring procedural fairness and freedom of inquiry?

- How does the board monitor the qualifications of its members, and how do those members, in the context of the institution's purpose, reflect diversity of race, ethnicity, and gender?

- How does the governing board oversee ongoing institutional planning and evaluation, and assess the degree to which the institution is achieving its goals and purpose? What indicators does the board use to determine if the purpose of the school is being met or not? How do these indicators relate to the purpose?

- What evidence exists that the governing board understands its role in policy formation and the necessity of delegating much of the implementation of that policy to administration and faculty?

- Is there any evidence that members of the board seek to exercise authority other than in the context of the board as a whole, or its delegated subgroups? If so, how has the board dealt with this problem?

- How does the board know that it is making good decisions on behalf of the school? What indicators does the board use in determining whether or not its decisions have been good?

- How does the board evaluate the performance of board members, and what effect does the evaluation process have on retention of current members or selection of new ones?

8.3.2 - 8.3.4 Administration, Faculty, Students

- How do administrative leaders seek to implement policies in ways that ensure fairness and embody the theological values the school articulates?

- How do the persons serving as administrative leaders reflect the institution's constituencies, accounting for the desirability of diversity in race, ethnicity, and gender?

- Do administrative leaders have adequate resources and authority to discharge their responsibilities? Is there a difference in formal and informal structures that impairs the ability of administrative leaders to perform their tasks?

- Are the structures of accountability clearly defined and implemented?

- How does the faculty know when it is functioning effectively as a governing body over those functions for which it has been delegated authority?

- How does the faculty contribute to the institution's overall decision-making process?

9 Institutional Resources

9.1 Human Resources

- How does the school seek to enhance the quality of the lives of students, faculty, administrators, staff, and support personnel?

- Are appropriate policies in place regarding procedural fairness, sexual harassment, and discrimination?

9.2 Financial Resources

- Has the school maintained economic equilibrium over the past three or more years? If not, what factors contributed to disequilibrium and what plans are in place to restore equilibrium?

- Are the sources of income for this school reasonably stable and are projected revenues sufficient to maintain the educational quality of the school? Is the projected revenue realistic?

- Has this school balanced expenditures and revenue, using a prudent rate of spending from endowment and other assets?

- At what rate is the school consuming the revenue generated by its endowment, and does this rate reflect realistic and prudent assumptions?

- If related to a larger institution, how does the theological school enhance the institution of which it is a part and how does the larger institution understand the contribution of the theological school?

- Does the school employ accounting and reporting procedures generally used in U.S. or Canadian higher education? Is financial information available to decision-makers in timely and appropriate form?

- Does the institution have an annual external, independent audit, and how has the institution attended to the report of the audit, both in terms of overall financial strength and management issues regarding accounting and control?

- How does the institution develop and implement its budget? Does this process result in prudent use of funds properly oriented to the school's purpose and mission?

- How does the school's governing board develop and oversee budget allocations and financial policies? Are finances subject to control or constraint by entities other than the governing board?

- Does the school have an appropriate and efficient process for managing the business affairs of the organization?

- How effective is the school's program of institutional advancement in developing financial resources?

- How does the institution ensure that donor wishes are respected in the use of donor-restricted funds?

9.3 Physical Resources

- How adequate are the school's physical resources for the purpose and programs of the school?

- How does the school attend to the safety and security needs of persons who work and study at the institution?

- How does the institution maintain, allocate, and ensure the adequacy of space for its institutional and educational activities?

- How do the physical resources of the school contribute to or detract from accomplishing the school's purpose and mission?

9.4 Data Resources

- How adequately do the school's data and information resources support the efforts to evaluate institutional and educational effectiveness?

- How adequately do the institution's computing systems support its information needs?

9.5 Institutional Environment

- How does the overall institutional environment contribute to or detract from the attainment of the school's purpose and mission?

9.6 Cooperative Use of Resources

- If a school uses resources it does not own, how are the agreements for those resources maintained and what guarantees does the school have that the resources will continue to be available as needed?

9.7 Clusters

- If the school participates in a cluster or consortium of theological schools, how does the cluster contribute to the attainment of the school's purpose and mission and how does the school contribute to the purpose of the cluster?

- What is the purpose of the cluster, and is the cluster organized in ways appropriate to its purpose? How does the organization of the cluster add to or reduce the work of its constituent members?

- How is the work and effectiveness of the cluster reviewed and evaluated? What evidences of effectiveness are used as the criteria for evaluation?

10 Extension Education

10.1 Purpose

- What is the purpose of any program of extension education and how is the purpose of the program congruent with the purpose of the theological school?

10.2 Types of Extension Education

- What kinds of extension education programs does the school provide?

- How are the programs established, approved, and reviewed by the school's regular procedures for oversight of academic programs?

- If a school contracts with another agency or school for services provided in extension education, how does the school ensure the academic and educational integrity of those services?

10.3 Library and Information Resources

- What library and information resources are available to students at the location of an extension education program, and what is the adequacy of those resources for the educational program offered in extension?

- Are agreements with other institutions for library access available in writing? Are the collections of these other libraries appropriate for theological education? Do students in the extension program have check-out privileges and access to library staff assistance?

10.4 Faculty

- How does the school ensure the variety, quality, and diversity of faculty for extension education programs? Are faculty selected according to regular procedures of the school for appointing faculty?

- On what basis does the school determine the adequacy of qualifications of faculty teaching in extension programs and what system of evaluation is in place to assess their performance? How does the school's regular full-time faculty share in the delivery and academic oversight of the extension education program?

- How do programs using electronic delivery methods ensure appropriate and adequate access to faculty members? What is the overall evaluation of this access?

- How does the school provide appropriate and adequate access for faculty in extension sites to the institution's administrative structures?

10.5 Admission and Student Services

- Do admission requirements for students admitted to extension programs reflect the requirements of the ATS degree program standards and parallel the requirements for on-campus students?

- Does the extension education program provide an adequate community of peers for educational interaction and personal and spiritual formation?

- What is the quality of services provided for students in extension programs; does it parallel the services provided for students on the primary campus of the school?

10.6 Administration

- What organizational structure exists to administer the extension program and is it adequate to ensure the quality of the program?

- Has the school met all licensing or governmental approval requirements of the state or province where the extension education program is operating?

- Does the school provide adequate financial resources to ensure the educational integrity of the program?

10.7 Educational Evaluation

- How does the school, regularly and systematically, evaluate the extension education program? Is this system of evaluation adequate? Can the school identify responses it has made as a result of the conclusions of its evaluative efforts?

10.8 International Extension Programs

- How does a program of North American theological education, delivered internationally, fully embody the requirements and content of a North American degree program as described in the ATS degree program standards?

- How does the international program reflect the criteria and concerns expressed in the ATS Commission on Accrediting policy statement on internationally delivered programs of theological education?

- Does the school have legal authority to operate in the country where the program is being offered?

10.9 Approval of Extension and Education Programs

- Are all programs of extension education offered by the school approved by the ATS Commission on Accrediting?

Handbook of Accreditation

Section Six

Guidelines Adopted by the ATS Commission on Accrediting

The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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ERIC

The ATS Handbook of Accreditation consists of the following sections:

Section One	An Introduction to Accreditation by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada
Section Two	Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study
Section Three	Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees
Section Four	Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees
Section Five	Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation
Section Six	Guidelines Adopted by the ATS Commission on Accrediting
Section Seven	Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization (to be published in 1999)
Section Eight	Guidelines for Evaluating Library and Information Technology (to be published in 2000)

To order additional copies of the ATS Handbook of Accreditation, please contact the office of The Association of Theological Schools.

Contents

Guidelines Adopted by the ATS Commission on Accrediting

Guidelines for Petitioning the ATS Commission on Accrediting for Approval of Extension Education Programs

The ATS Commission on Accrediting has established guidelines to assist member institutions in preparing petitions to the Commission on Accrediting regarding extension education. All programs of extension education, including the offering of complete degrees in extension, the offering of courses on an ongoing basis (but not a complete degree), or the conduct of any activities of external independent study (or distance learning) require action by the Commission. The procedures for review and approval vary with the type of program. An institution seeking to begin an extension education program, to initiate a new site for an existing extension education program, or to offer graduate credit for external independent study should review the following sections of Part 1 of the current ATS *Bulletin*: Procedures Related to Membership and Accreditation, V; and Standard 10, Extension Education. An institution that proposes a substantive change in the method of delivery of its extension activity (e.g., from an instructor present at the site, to instruction mediated by technology) must also petition for the Commission's approval.

The Commission on Accrediting considers the following criteria in decisions regarding the approval of any program of extension education at which complete degrees will be offered, or courses will offered on an ongoing basis; these criteria should be specifically addressed in an institution's petition:

1. the purpose of the proposed extension education program and its appropriateness to the institution's stated purpose and educational goals; this statement should identify the program's appropriateness also for the students and context being served;

2. a statement of the need that the institution proposes to address with the extension program and documentary evidence of institutional efforts to assess that need;

3. the design and requirements of the educational program offered at the extension, identifying the adequacy of the program for the granting of graduate credits in the institution's approved degree programs, as well as the number, diversity, and sequence of courses to be available at the site;

4. the impact of the extension activity on the existing degrees and resources of the institution;

5. the educational resources required and available to implement the extension program, including faculty, administrative support, student services, library and information services and holdings, and technological support;

6. formal agreements with other entities, if the institution proposes to support the program by means of shared resources; and

7. the financial, operational, and physical resources required and available to implement the extension program. Schools must: (a) identify anticipated revenue and expenditures for the extension, including start-up and continuing costs; (b) provide a cash-flow analysis for the support of the program of extension education, within the context of the overall institutional budget; and (c) describe the facilities that will be available at the extension site. The school must also describe the operation of the extension site, including its fiscal management and operational oversight.

The petition should address specifically the ways that the proposed program meets the ATS standards for the individual degree program(s) toward which credit in the extension offering can be applied, and the ATS general institutional standard for extension education. If a complete degree is to be offered at the extension site, the petition should demonstrate the availability of all the educational and formational opportunities necessary to achieve the goals identified in the standards for the degree program.

Site Visits. In addition to the petition (and supporting documentation), the Commission will require a site visit if a member institution proposes offering a full degree program in extension, or if more than half of the course work required for an ATS-approved degree may be completed at the extension center. This site visit will be conducted before the Commission takes action on the institution's petition, and the institution may not commence extension activity at this level before the Commission's written approval has been received. Sites where less than one-half of the degree program can be earned do not require a site visit before courses begin, but will be reviewed within the context of the institution's comprehensive review for reaffirmation of accreditation.

Exception. An exception to this process of approval applies to one type of extension education activity: when an institution offers a course at a site away from its approved location on a one-time basis, this offering does not require the Commission's prior approval. These occasional offerings may include the following: a course offered in the context of a special event, like the annual meeting of a denomination; a course offered at a location because of special resources available there; a course offered to a sufficient number of students, gathering at a site for this single offering; or a course offered as a pilot, to assess the feasibility of the institution's ongoing offering of courses at the site. The Commission requests that member institutions provide notice regarding these occasional offerings, but it does not require prior approval for them.

External Independent Study (or Distance Learning). The credit that can be earned toward an approved ATS degree program from external independent study is limited to one-third of the total credits required for the degree. Petitions for the approval of an external independent study program should demonstrate:

1. how the external independent study contributes to or accomplishes the overall goals and standards for the degrees to which it is credited;

2. how faculty maintain appropriate involvement in the design, delivery, and evaluation of courses;

3. how instructional resources for courses adequately support their goals and objectives; and

4. how administrative services are provided to students enrolled through external independent study.

Deadlines. Petitions should be of adequate length to provide a full description of the proposed degree, and must be received by April 15 for consideration in the Commission's May or June meeting or November 15 for consideration in the January meeting. Institutions accredited both by ATS and by a regional association should note that the two associations' requirements for approval may differ.

International Extension Education. Institutions proposing to conduct extension education programs should prepare petitions according to the separate "Guidelines for Evaluation of Proposals for Programs of International Theological Education."

Guidelines for Evaluation of Proposals for Programs of International Theological Education

The standards of The Association of Theological Schools permit theological schools accredited by ATS to offer programs of graduate theological education at sites outside North America. These programs must meet all relevant accrediting standards and be approved by the Commission prior to their implementation. These "Guidelines" are provided by the Commission to assist schools in the development of proposals and to advise the schools of the issues the Commission will consider in its determination as to whether a proposal should be approved, and the procedures that will be involved in the process of evaluating the proposal and the program.

Issues and Assumptions Regarding International Theological Education Programs

Issues. The Commission assesses proposals for programs of credit-granting theological education outside of North America on the basis of the relevant accrediting standards and in the context of a historic concern, a contemporary reality, and a pervasive theme in the ATS accrediting standards.

- The relevant accrediting standards by which proposals for programs will be evaluated include the standards related to extension education, appropriate degree program standards, and the General Institutional Standards. The outline for proposals in these "Guidelines" identifies specific sections of the standards to be addressed in proposals.

- Historically, efforts to introduce religion by North Americans outside of North America, while well motivated, appear in retrospect to have been imperialistic and to have mingled religious conviction and Western cultural ethos in ways that, ultimately, did not serve well either religion or people outside North America. These "Guidelines"

include a variety of criteria by which schools and the Commission can assess the cultural sensitivity and appropriateness of the proposal.

- Contemporarily, North American higher education, including theological education, is experiencing a period of rapid change and redefinition. In the context of this pervasive change, the already difficult tasks of definition, design, and management of educational programs offered internationally become even more complex. The Commission is responsible for the evaluation and approval of educational programs only as they relate to North American credit-granting forms of education. The "Guidelines" require schools to give thoughtful attention to the North American character of the educational programs for which they are seeking approval.

- The accrediting standards of the Association reflect a pervasive theme regarding the importance of the globalization of theological education. While globalization has more than one meaning among ATS schools, the accrediting standards assert that theological schools in North America must, necessarily, attend to the experience and voices of people outside of North America, and educate persons for religious leadership in ways that prepare them to work effectively among the non-North American cultures pervasively present within North America. The ATS emphasis on globalization is not a reason for developing educational programs outside North America; it is a reason for educating North American students in ways that help them transcend their own cultural boundaries and for engaging theological scholarship so that it is widely informed by the understandings that emerge from different cultural contexts. The school's responses to several questions about an internationally delivered program will provide the basis for assessing its capacity to enhance the globalization of theological education.

Assumptions. The Commission has identified three assumptions that will be reflected in its review of petitions for programs to be offered internationally.

- In various parts of the world, theological education takes many forms and serves a variety of purposes. North American graduate-professional approaches to theological education is one of these forms, and it serves some of these purposes. Neither the Commission nor the Association assume that North American credit-granting theological education is superior to other forms of theological education, or that it is educationally effective in other cultural contexts. North American theological degrees, for a variety of reasons, often may be an inappropriate form of theological education outside of North America. If an institution and its international collaborators conclude that a North American credit-granting program *is* the most appropriate form to be offered at a site, then the Commission and the accredited school have the responsibility to ensure that the program meets all relevant standards for North American theological education as defined by the ATS accrediting standards. For this reason, the Commission expects that the design of a proposed program will reflect collaborative work including the ATS-accredited school and its non-North American partner.

- The Commission has determined that language is a difficulty—first in the language used to describe the program and secondly the language of instruction used in the program. The ATS standards are written for theological education located in a North American context, and while the standards require a program that is offered internationally to be culturally appropriate to the setting in which it is offered, the language ATS uses with reference to the degree is North American. ATS accrediting standards do not require the language of instruction to be English, but they do expect the faculty of the school offering the program to be able to oversee the academic quality of the program, which because of the verbal nature of the theological disciplines, will require skill in the language of instruction.

- In the judgment of the Commission, the categories of degree programs approved by the Commission reflect differential levels of complexity when proposed to be offered at international sites. The degree programs that could be offered with greatest ease internationally are those identified as *Basic programs oriented toward general theological study*. Degrees that require a previous ATS-defined theological degree can be offered with the most degree of ease. Degrees grouped as *Advanced programs oriented toward ministerial leadership,* such as the D.Min., fit this second category. The degrees that require more resources and raise more complex questions in their design and implementation for international delivery are those related to *Basic programs oriented toward ministerial leadership* (like the M.Div.) and *Advanced programs primarily oriented toward theological research and teaching.*

Procedures for Consideration of Programs

The Commission will first review a written proposal that addresses several issues regarding cultural and educational issues related to offering a program at an international site, and a description of the program in terms of the relevant accrediting standards. Following its review of the written proposal, the Commission may use a variety of methods to evaluate the proposal, typically including authorization of a site visit. Generally, approval of these program will be granted only upon the recommendation of a committee appointed to evaluate the delivery of the program at the proposed site.

Content of proposals

1. *Cultural Issues.* The first part of the petition should include an evaluation of the program that reflects the following concerns and issues.

   A. The North American institution should first engage in some cultural analysis of the appropriateness of the educational goals and objectives of the program it proposes to offer for the cultural

context in which it is proposing to offer the program. *What do these educational goals mean in the culture of students who will be studying for the degree?*

B. The North American institution, in collaboration with a national constituency in the country in which the program is to be offered, should evaluate the cultural capacity of the North American institution to offer the program in contextually and culturally appropriate ways. *Does this institution have the skill and capacity to function transculturally?*

C. Programs should, in all cases, be offered in collaboration with a constituency in the country in which the program will be conducted. *Is the institution responding to a legitimate invitation from the nation in which the program of study will be offered?*

D. The North American institution should, in collaboration with its international constituency, carefully evaluate the impact of offering a North American degree program on the educational efforts of other, indigenous, theological education institutions. *Will the financial resources or possible prestige of a North American graduate program negatively affect the ecology of theological education in the country receiving the program? Will the national/North American partnership unduly hurt programs of national institutions that do not have North American partnerships?*

E. The North American institution, if the program is truly collaborative, should be able to identify the ways in which it will be changed as a function of offering a program collaboratively with a constituency outside North America. *How does the institution anticipate that it will be changed as a function of its partnership and the offering of an educational program internationally? Integrity in the partnership influences the flow of funds and patterns of financial support for the international program. Will the North American institution derive income from the international program, or will it be a financial contributor to the program as offered internationally?*

2. *Educational Program Issues.* The second part of the proposal should give attention to the some unique educational aspects of the program of instruction to be delivered outside North America.

A. North American institutions have two primary options with regard to international theological education. One is to support a partner institution in the offering of a non-North American degree—a degree that conforms to the educational conventions of the country in which the program is offered. In this case, the ATS Commission on Accrediting has limited approval responsibilities. Another option is to offer North American degrees internationally to non-North American citizens. In this case, the North American institution should have a clear justification for offering a North American degree. *What good does a North American degree contribute in a non-North American setting?*

B. If sufficient justification exists for a North American degree to be offered internationally, then the school should be able to identify the practices and policies that will ensure that the degree is, in fact, a truly North American degree. *While contextually appropriate, how does the institution deal with language, culture, and institutional resources so that these students truly have the benefits of a North American degree, whatever those benefits may be?*

C. The school, with the help of its international constituency, should be able to demonstrate the support of other theological education institutions in the country in which the program will be offered.

D. The institution should attend to the way in which the ethos of the institution is present in an educational program offered internationally. *How is the unique character and ethos of a particular ATS-related school evident in the program it offers internationally?*

E. The institution should be able to demonstrate that the educational goals and objectives of the instructional program are being achieved. *How will educational effectiveness be determined?*

3. *Description of the program in terms of the accrediting standards.* The proposal should address each area of the standards that are appropriate to the program of instruction being proposed. Typically, these will include:

A. Attention to each section of Standard 10, *Extension Education.*

B. The degree program standard for each degree to which credits from the international program of instruction will be credited.

Site Visits to Locations Outside North America

1. Ordinarily, the Commission will require a site visit to the location at which the program of instruction will be conducted; in all cases in which as much as 50% of the credits required for an ATS-approved degree will be offered, a site visit must be conducted. As appropriate, the Commission will invite a representative of the WOCATI-related (World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions) agency that functions in the region of the proposed program of instruction to participate as a member of the visiting committee. If the North American institution proposing the program of instruction is dually accredited, ATS will coordinate the site visit with the other accrediting agency.

2. The ATS-accredited institution is responsible for reimbursing the Commission for all costs incurred in conducting the site visit, including travel, meals, lodging, immunizations required for travel, and the ATS assessment fee.

3. Ordinarily, the Commission will consider granting approval for international programs for a period not to exceed five years.

Guidelines for Petitioning the Commission on Accrediting for Approval of New or Revised Degree Programs

The ATS Commission on Accrediting has established the following guidelines to assist member institutions in preparing petitions for the Commission's approval of new or substantially revised degree programs. Because the Commission not only accredits institutions but also approves each degree program offered by an accredited school, the school must seek the Commission's approval before it: (a) introduces a new degree program; (b) makes significant changes in the design or requirements of an approved program; or (c) offers an existing approved degree, or portion thereof, at a new location.

The Commission may approve petitions for new or revised degree programs at the master's level, or for ongoing offering of courses at an extension site, based on review of the institution's petition and documentation only. The approval of new doctoral programs and the approval of extension sites where more than half of a degree program can be earned will require the Commission's review of both the institution's petition and the report of a focused evaluation committee authorized in response to the school's petition; this procedure requires the Commission's attention at two regularly scheduled meetings. In no case should a member school admit students to, nor begin classes in, a degree program prior to receiving the Commission's written approval.

The institution's petition should address all of the following factors, which the Commission will consider in decisions regarding approval of new degrees: an evaluation of the new or revised degree program in light of the institution's mission and stated purpose; a detailed description of the design of the proposed degree; the institution's assessment of the impact of the new or revised degree on the ATS approved degree programs already offered; the institution's resources to offer the degree, including an analysis of the financial support for

the proposed degree and its impact on the institutional budget; the need addressed and service provided by the degree:

I. *Educational Goals of the Proposed New Degree in the Context of Institutional Purpose.* The proposal should articulate the educational goals of the proposed program and relate these goals to the institution's statement of purpose and goals.

II. *Degree Design and Requirements.* The petition should carefully describe the degree in terms of its curriculum, requirements, and structure. These should be presented with reference to the appropriate degree standards as published in the Part 1 of the current ATS *Bulletin.*

III. *Impact of Proposed Degree on Existing Degree Programs.* The introduction of a new program typically has some impact on existing programs. The institution's analysis of that impact will aid the Commission in its responsibility to assess the effect of the new program on programs that the Commission has already approved.

IV. *Institutional Resources Required for the Degree.* The petition should describe the institution's assessment of the resources required and available to implement the new degree: faculty, administrative support, student services, library services and holdings, finances, and facilities. The financial analysis should set the proposed program within the institution's overall budget and financial planning. When an institution plans to support a program by means of resources shared with other entities, the petition should include the formal agreements that govern the projected sharing.

V. *Needs Addressed by the Proposed Degree.* The petition should assess needs that the institution hopes to address with the new or revised degree. This assessment may include such elements as the requests of prospective students, a proposal by faculty to develop new or expand existing education emphases, or an initiative from a denomination or other sponsoring body. Typically this assessment will document the

institution's "market analysis" or feasibility studies, as well as its ongoing attention to the constituencies it serves.

Petitions should be of adequate length to provide a full description of the proposed degree, and must be received by April 15 for consideration in the Commission's May or June meeting or November 15 for consideration in the January meeting.

Institutions accredited both by ATS and by a regional association should note that the two associations' requirements for approval of new degree programs may differ, and thus should also consult the regional association for appropriate guidance.

Guidelines for Petitioning the Commission on Accrediting for Candidacy for Accredited Status

The Procedures of The Association of Theological Schools require that an institution seeking Candidate for Accredited Membership follow these steps.

First. The chief administrative officer of the institution should notify the ATS staff, in writing, that the school intends to petition the Commission for candidacy status.

Second. The applicant school shall undertake an internal study of its readiness for candidate for accredited membership. For the purposes of this internal study, the Commission provides the following guidelines:

1. The study should begin with a brief overview of the school's history, purpose, constituencies, goals and long-term ambitions.

2. The study should provide a general assessment of the way in which the school reflects the general institutional standards and the standards for degree programs offered by the school. (ATS *Bulletin,* Part 1). This "readiness study" is not a self-study; rather it serves two purposes. First, because the criteria for Associate Membership are not the same as the standards for accreditation, this study provides an initial assessment by the applicant institution regarding the ways in which the school reflects the expectations of the standards for accreditation. Second, and based on the school's assessment, the institution should identify the changes it will need to make during candidacy in order to be adequately prepared for its initial accreditation evaluation.

3. This study should be limited to approximately fifty pages of narrative text, plus appropriate supporting documentation. The text should address each of the ATS standards of accreditation. The study should reflect attention to the general guidance of the ten general

institutional standards and the degree program standards, and not focus on each sub-section. The subsequent self-study, undertaken after the granting of candidacy for accredited status, will provide the opportunity for a more thorough review of each section of the standards. This study should examine the institution broadly in the context of the standards and provide answers for questions such as: In what ways does the school meet the standards? In what ways does the school not meet the standards? What will the school need to do during the self-study period to ensure that it meets the accrediting standards at the time of its initial accrediting visit? What evidences of institutional strengths and weaknesses become evident when viewing the institution through the perspective of the ATS accrediting standards?

4. In addition, this study should describe the institution's tentative plan for undertaking its self-study, if candidacy is granted. Are the faculty, administrative, and financial resources adequate for the effort? What time-line does the institution propose to complete its required self-study within the two years of candidacy?

5. The study should reflect the judgments of the faculty and key administrative officers of the schools, but it need not be the result of a lengthy deliberative process. The energy for the longer, more consultative and deliberative process should be reserved for the self-study, if candidacy is granted.

6. The institution, upon the receipt of its letter of intent regarding petitioning for candidacy, will be assigned an ATS accreditation staff member who will work with the school through the application process. The school should consult with the staff member and negotiate an outline for the report prior to beginning the work of the study.

Third. Upon completion of the readiness study, the ATS staff member will review it and schedule a staff evaluation visit. The purpose of the staff visit is evaluative, and the staff member will interview students, faculty, administrative leaders, members of the governing board, library staff, alumni/ae and other persons as appropriate to assess the

institution in light of the ATS standards of accreditation. The staff member will prepare a report on the basis of the visit, and the Commission will consider the institution's readiness study and the staff report in its consideration of the petition for candidacy.

Candidacy will be granted if the school successfully demonstrates that either it is, or at the conclusion of the period of candidacy will be, operating according to the ATS general institutional and individual degree program standards, and that it has the institutional capacity to evaluate its institutional and educational effectiveness.

The institution is responsible for travel, housing, and related expenses incurred in the conduct of the staff visit.

Handbook of Accreditation

Section Seven

Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization in ATS Schools

The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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The ATS Handbook of Accreditation consists of the following sections:

Section One	An Introduction to Accreditation by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada
Section Two	Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study
Section Three	Guidelines for Institutions Receiving ATS Accreditation Evaluation Committees
Section Four	Guidelines for Members of ATS Accreditation Committees
Section Five	Using the ATS Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation
Section Six	Guidelines Adopted by the ATS Commission on Accrediting
Section Seven	Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization in ATS Schools
Section Eight	Guidelines for Evaluating Library and Information Technology (to be published in 2000)

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Contents

Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization in ATS Schools

The purpose of this section of the *Handbook of Accreditation* is (1) to assist schools in the self-study process to consider how they will address the globalization theme in the ATS Standards of Accreditation and (2) to provide assistance to accreditation visiting committees in the evaluation of institutional and educational efforts toward globalizing theological education. These guidelines may also serve as a resource to schools as they seek to understand, initiate, and nurture various aspects of globalizing theological education.

This section of the *Handbook* seeks to be illustrative and suggestive, in service to helping schools think about how to approach the standards with respect to globalization. It does not intend to be proscriptive or stipulative. Rather than explicate the standards, therefore, this section offers possible approaches to addressing the cross-cutting theme of globalization throughout the standards.

Aspects and Understandings of Globalizing Theological Education: Terminology

In an address to the 1986 ATS Biennial Meeting, Don Browning offered his now classic fourfold characterization of the globalization of theological education:

> For some, globalization means the church's universal mission to evangelize the world, i.e., to take the message of the gospel to all people, all nations, all cultures, and all religious faiths. Second, there is the idea of globalization as ecumenical cooperation between the various manifestations of the Christian church throughout the world. This includes a

> growing mutuality and equality between the churches of the First and Third World countries. It involves a new openness to and respect for the great variety of local theologies that are springing up within the church in its various concrete situations. Third, globalization sometimes refers to the dialogue between Christianity and other religions. Finally, globalization refers to the mission of the church to the world, not only to convert and evangelize, but to improve and develop the lives of the millions of poor, starving, and politically disadvantaged people.[1]

These four aspects or understandings of theological responses to the global continue to undergird the global understandings of ATS institutions, but the experiences of institutions since 1986 have expanded and refined them. Many ATS schools have included, in their responses to global realities, addressing the increasingly plural and multiethnic realities of North American culture. Others have begun to reflect on whether a comprehensive global culture is emerging and what the role of the Christian church and ministry will be in that culture. The concrete experiences of ATS schools since Browning's 1986 address have created a broad range of terminology by which schools describe their responses to global realities and to Browning's fourfold characterization.

Globalization has had an impact on a wide range of ATS schools. The term itself has experienced shifts in its connotation. Some schools are uneasy with the newer implications of the term itself because "globalization" has become popularly associated with the goals and strategies of multinational corporations. Some member schools prefer to dissociate themselves from this aspect of the term on theological or ethical grounds. Some Christians around the world object to the term "globalization," which they interpret as a new form of colonialization and imperialism; they understand "globalization" as "Americanization." These considerations have led some ATS schools to prefer terms such as "global," "responses to the global," "global awareness," "cross-cultural awareness," or "globalizing theological education."

Others focus on "contextualization" or "enculturation" of Christianity in cultures around the globe.

The search for a more nuanced understanding of the global context of the church and of ministry has also given rise to several different understandings of "cross-cultural" or "intercultural." Some see these terms as related to an anthropological analysis of cultural difference; some as the integration of various cultural perspectives into a worldwide Christian community; some as a call for sensitive and just interethnic relations.

Some schools prefer the terms "pluralism" and "diversity" to globalization, understanding diversity as the situation in which today's Christians find themselves. For some, "pluralism" and "diversity" entail not only cultural and ethnic diversity, but also ecumenical and religious diversity; they see interfaith relationships and understanding as a key aspect of theological responses to "the global."

It is, of course, the original sense of the term "globalization" that lies at the heart of this theme within the standards, the sense that these later paraphrases have sought to recapture and to reflect.

Addressing the Theme of Globalization in the ATS Standards

Globalization is one of four cross-cutting themes in the ATS Standards of Accreditation, the others being (1) a priority on planning and evaluation, (2) the value of inclusion across racial/ethnic and gender lines, and (3) the importance of freedom of inquiry for teaching and learning.

In addition to section 3.2.4, which is devoted specifically to "globalization" as a characteristic of theological scholarship within Standard 3, one finds throughout the General Institutional Standards evidence of globalization as a pervasive theme in the standards. It is reflected

in references to "global awareness," "cultural context," "diversity," "cross-cultural," and other related terms and concepts. Every occurrence of these terms and concepts in the standards is not addressed or enumerated in this section of the *Handbook.* A number of specific sections of the standards are, however, highlighted herein to focus attention on the various ways in which institutions may choose to evaluate their efforts at globalizing theological education.

Many schools in the context of accreditation self-studies have found that the most effective and efficient way to address the recurring themes in the standards is to assign responsibility for evaluation of a particular theme to the self-study subcommittee that is responsible for the standard in which the theme is introduced or most fully described. In the case of the globalization of theological education, that is Standard 3–Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship.

Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship (Standard 3)

There are a number of ways in which an institution might understand and evaluate its approach to globalizing theological scholarship, which the ATS standards understand as learning, teaching, and research. Several sections of Standard 3 are highlighted below in order to illustrate and explore various aspects and approaches to globalizing theological education.

> 3.2.4.1 Theological teaching, learning, and research require patterns of institutional and educational practice that contribute to an awareness and appreciation of global interconnectedness and interdependence, particularly as they relate to the mission of the church. These patterns are intended to enhance the ways institutions participate in the ecumenical, dialogical, evangelistic, and justice efforts of the church. The term globalization has been used to identify these patterns and practices collectively.

Globalizing theological education, therefore, entails an "awareness and appreciation" of global interconnectedness and interdependence (the realities of globalization in its economic, communications, technological, religious, and cultural forms). It is interested in these realities, however, particularly as they relate to the mission of the church, as they create the context in which religious communities live, worship, and witness, and in which clergy and lay leaders minister.

Globalizing theological education, moreover, entails rethinking the institution's educational goals and aims. Among the educational goals of theological learning, teaching, and research are theological, ethical, and critical responses to global realities and concerns.

"Global interconnectedness" and "interdependence" refer to two aspects of the forces of globalization. Developments in communications and business have made the world much smaller and more interconnected. We experience the world as a "global village."

Migrations and the efflorescence of many cultural voices have created globally diverse communities across North America. No longer "over there," the global is now local.

Thus, theological responses to globalization include both international dimensions (mission and evangelism in the global or worldwide church and attention to the many contextualized forms of Christianity across the globe) and local dimensions (awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity within North American communities and the churches).

3.1.2.2 Instructional methods should use the diversity of life experiences represented by the students, by faith communities, and by the larger cultural context. Instructional methods and the use of technology should be sensitive to the diversity of student populations, different learning styles of students, and the importance of communities of learning, and the instructional goals.

As institutions have globalized theological education, they have learned that the effort requires more than simply adding subjects to the curriculum; it also entails changing the way that theological education is practiced.

Schools committed to globalizing theological education have often discovered the extent to which their curricula were based on cultural assumptions about teaching and learning that reflected white Euro-American values and world-views. One consequence of this discovery is that these schools have sought ways to make their courses and their teaching more cross-culturally hospitable to and effective for international students and students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Some examples of these institutional educational efforts include offering courses with intentional cross-cultural goals, using cross-cultural or bilingual pedagogies and resources, reading assignments and bibliographies that draw on a variety of cultural perspectives, and advisement and formational programs for diverse student constituencies. Other examples involve specialized academic programs for particular constituencies, field and experiential educational opportunities to develop cross-cultural awareness and skills, and clarifying the over-arching frames of reference by which teachers and learners understand and evaluate life experiences.

Appropriate curricular adjustments will depend upon the particular student population and cultural mix that comprise the learning environment of the institution. The school committed to global theological education aspires to become a learning environment in which persons of diverse experiences and backgrounds can educate one another in cross-cultural sensitivities and skills.

Faculty and students may need grounding in social sciences (particularly anthropology) and religious phenomenology to develop skills for cross-cultural analysis. Faculty may need to develop an awareness of and respect for other cultures or a deeper understanding of the

relationship of person and culture. The teaching of students who are going into or coming from cross-cultural environments will need to be contextual, and faculty may need training in contextual pedagogies and strategies.

Schools may choose to use developments in technology as one means to globalize their teaching, either by bringing into their educational programs students who cannot come to the campus (and thereby diversifying the student body), by creating cross-cultural or international conversations through the use of educational technologies, or by creating patterns of alternative course scheduling, thereby making education accessible to bi-vocational persons.

Globalizing instructional methods is a significant venture that requires care in both formulation and evaluation. Schools and accreditation visiting committees may address questions such as:

- How are students and faculty in the institution prepared for cross-cultural experiences?
- How are their on-site responses processed and monitored?
- What sort of post-experience reflection is required?
- How are Western academic standards reconciled with genuine inclusivity? That is, how is teaching made hospitable to students of diverse cultural backgrounds?
- Are admissions requirements appropriate for applicants from all relevant cultural settings?
- To what extent should the institution reconsider or broaden the dominant Euro-American model(s) and ethos of education, including those of student evaluation?
- How is the commitment to academic quality integrated with the needs of the church so as to educate for ministry persons who lack traditional academic backgrounds?
- If students require bi-lingual or other special pedagogical strategies to flourish in the school's environment, how are these strategies integrated into the total academic program?

Evaluation is not limited to the quality of each specific program or venture, but should also address the ability of the institution to dedicate to the program the resources required.

- Are unreasonable expectations being placed on the faculty? How much can the faculty be expected to handle?
- How many diverse groups can the school serve well?
- What are the school's institutional limits?
- Does the school have to respond equally to all its constituencies? If not, how does it choose the appropriate constituencies to which to respond?
- What resources does the school require to do particular programs well?

> 3.1.2.3 Courses are a central place of interaction between teachers and learners. The way the instructor arranges the work and structures the class should encourage theological conversation. Courses and programs of study should reflect an awareness of the diversity of worldwide and local settings. In the development of new courses and the review of syllabi, faculty should interact with one another, with librarians, with their students, with the church, and with the developing fields of knowledge. Course development and review best occur in the context of the goals of the entire curriculum.

The section of Standard 3 above restates the need for theological students to apprehend the diversity of the world and the interconnectedness and interdependence of global and local settings within a theological frame of reference, so that they understand the context in which religious communities live and in which they will minister. The standard also reflects the need for courses and programs of study that are designed to address the various audiences of theological education in the complex global world.

An institution may implement research programs and educational outreach programs (including continuing education and non-degree programs) for particular communities, or it may develop particular degree programs in service to a regional constituency, to its denomination, or to a particular international constituency. Possible approaches a school might take include becoming an international training center for the denomination to assist it in providing the resources and support to educate students from around the globe, or developing connections in the global mission networks of its denomination, order, or movement, and thus positioning itself to train students for mission fields around the globe. Other approaches might include establishing a branch campus in a geographic context other than that of the main campus in order to serve the needs of an additional constituency or developing specialized bilingual programs to serve important constituencies with in the denomination or region.

Possible evaluative questions might include:

- How does this program help to fulfill the institution's purpose?
- How has the constituency it has been designed to serve played a role in the development of the goals for the program and in its ongoing evaluation?
- Are the structure of the program, its content, and its pedagogies appropriate for the needs of the special constituency served and for the modes of student evaluation?
- Do all programs (on and off campus) provide for all students an awareness of global diversity and the interconnectedness and interdependence of the global and the local?
- Do the educational goals of the program help to increase the global awareness and cross-cultural skills of the students? Do they prepare students for ministry and citizenship in the global church?
- Do the programs enhance mutuality, interdependence, and empowerment across cultures?

3.2.4.2 Globalization is cultivated by curricular attention to cross-cultural issues as well as the study of other major religions; by opportunities for cross-cultural experiences; by the composition of the faculty, governing board, and student body; by professional development of faculty members; and by the design of community activities and worship.

Globalizing theological education cannot be achieved exclusively by sending students and faculty off-site for cross-cultural experiences. The "global" will still tend to be abstract and "out there" until it is genuinely reflected on the campus. Thus, it is important for an institution to have sufficient representation of cross-cultural students, faculty, board members, and staff who reflect that institution's distinctive understanding of "the global." When the composition of students, faculty, board, and staff reflect global diversity as the institution understands it, then the institution will have the experiential base and the requisite voices to globalize theological education effectively. This ideal is often difficult to realize in practice, but many schools have adopted some version of this aim as a long-term aspiration that shapes their immediate goals.

How to globalize the learning environment and community life of the school is an important evaluative issue. Given the institution's theological understanding of the global and its institutional goals, how does it measure its success at globalizing its learning environment and community? Efforts to achieve a globalized learning environment and community are likely to include such elements as recruiting and sustaining appropriately cross-cultural faculty and student bodies and diversifying extracurricular aspects of theological education such as worship, campus ethos, and the celebration of many cultural traditions.

An institution and an accreditation visiting committee might address questions such as:

- How has the institution's response to globalization changed the way faculty teach and students learn?
- What kind of faculty is needed to achieve the school's goals in globalizing theological education?
- How does the faculty make use of the diversity in the student population to enrich the educational experiences of all students?
- As current faculty members retire, what role do global and cross-cultural goals play in plans for adding new faculty?
- Do the governing board members bring the appropriate backgrounds and expertise to achieve institutional goals for globalizing theological education?

Globalizing learning, teaching, and research, then, entails the development of a board, faculty, staff, and student population that can embody the institution's goals for achieving globalized theological education. Globalizing theological education thus has implications for Standard 6 (Faculty), Standard 7 (Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, and Placement), and Standard 8 (Authority and Governance).

> 3.2.4.3 Schools shall develop practices of teaching, learning, and research (comprehensively understood as theological scholarship) that encourage global awareness and responsiveness.

Globalizing teaching, learning, and research also entails thoughtful educational goals. How "global awareness and responsiveness" are to be understood and achieved will vary from institution to institution. Some institutions have a particular aspiration to cross-cultural sensitivities and awareness, some to a sense of citizenship in the global church, others to cross-cultural skills and awareness to prepare for ministry in today's church. As the understanding of the forces of globalization deepens, the effective school will seek to engage these

forces critically and creatively, taking some risks in order to address and help shape the emerging order. Achieving such goals is a challenge that requires establishing an appropriate educational environment and adjusting teaching, learning, and research strategies in light of the new goals.

Establishing an appropriate environment requires taking account of many factors, including:

Readiness for Cross-Cultural Experiences. Some students may not be ready to take advantage of cross-cultural/globalizing experiences. Advance preparation will make the experience more valuable, and intentional follow-up will help participants to integrate the experience cognitively, theologically, and pastorally.

Diverse Faculty and Student Body. Where such diversity exists, cross-cultural experiences will help students and faculty to negotiate their "home" learning experiences with more awareness and understanding, and the "home" campus ethos will set the stage for the importance of cross-cultural awareness.

Fostering Cross-Cultural Communications Skills. This is an unending and challenging process–but an important one. In addition to the need to recognize "anthropologically" defined cultural skills, this may also entail awareness of how sexism, racism, and cultural chauvinism create barriers to cross-cultural understanding. Addressing such barriers can be vital aspects of a school's response to global realities.

Practices that foster global awareness and responsiveness cultivate certain skills in students and faculty. Institutions define or express those skills and attitudes in a number of ways, depending on their particular understandings of and theological responses to global realities.

Cultivating such skills requires the development of learning models or experiences to enable the achievement of these skills. Such models

might include learning to enter another frame of reference; encountering the unfamiliar experientially and then sympathizing, identifying, and critiquing it; or de-centering participants from their own cultural experiences, so that they learn to deal with the discomfort and then reflect on the experience. Other examples include challenging participants with a different cultural experience and then reflecting on the challenge, or conversely, challenging participants to think about their own culture and their understanding of Christianity in light of the cross-cultural experience. Another example would be examining and/or encountering multiple aspects of another community, including cultural, economic, political, social, and religious aspects.

Questions to assist in evaluating such learning models or experiences might include the following:

- Did the experience have a long-term impact or make a difference in how the participant sees the world and his or her community?
- Were participants open to the experiential aspects of learning?
- How relevant was the experience to the participants' work and ministry?
- Were there cultural misunderstandings? Tensions? Failures? What was learned from the "hard side" of the cultural encounter? How were these difficult experiences processed and understood?

The Theological Curriculum (Standard 4)

Standard 4, on the theological curriculum, contains the following section:

> 4.1.2 The emphasis placed on particular goals and their configuration will vary, both from school to school (depending on the understanding of institutional purpose and within each school (depending on the variety of educational programs offered). The ordering of teaching and learning toward particular sets of goals is embodied in the degree programs of the school and in the specific curricula followed in those programs. The theological curriculum, comprehensively understood, embraces all those activities and experiences provided by the school to enable students to achieve the intended goals. More narrowly understood, the curriculum is the array of specific activities (e.g., courses, practica, supervised ministry, spiritual formation experiences, these) explicitly required in a degree program. In both the more comprehensive and the more narrow sense, the entire curriculum should be seen as a set of practices with a formative aim–the development of intellectual, spiritual, moral, and vocational or professional capacities–and careful attention must be given to the coherence and mutual enhancement of its various elements.

The curriculum structures all the educational practices of the institution with an aim to achieve its established educational goals. Given the multiple aspects of the life of the school, its constituencies and publics, and its theological understandings, those goals will be several. The challenge in a school's response to global realities is how to structure the curriculum to globalize and also to meet all the other curricular goals. Institutions pose the challenge of balancing the goals and aims of the curriculum in a number of ways:

- Are the forces driving the curriculum sufficiently all-encompassing to provide a place for addressing globalization?
- Are the global/cross-cultural learning experiences always extra-curricular and therefore marginal?
- How does experiential learning interface with or relate to core academic courses?

Globalizing the curriculum may include a variety of aspects, each with evaluative questions that might be posed.

Reviewing the curriculum in light of how well it achieves cross-cultural goals.

- What attention is given to cross-cultural global realities in the structure and aims of the curriculum?
- Are cross-cultural/global perspectives included in core courses?

Developing degree programs for particular constituencies, including overseas constituencies.

- How appropriate and effective are educational opportunities and support services for international and multicultural students?
- Do courses recognize different cultural styles, learning styles, and student expectations?

Encouraging broader faculty participation in cross-cultural teaching and immersions.

- What is the extent of faculty ownership and participation?
- How well are the faculty prepared for such participation?

Globalizing the campus learning environment and community life.

- How is global diversity reflected in worship, campus activities, community life?
- How does the school nurture awareness of diverse spiritualities?

Enabling students to understand the importance and benefit of cross-cultural learning experiences and their connection to educational goals and to understanding ministry.

- How will globalizing theological education benefit the student vocationally?

Integrating the experience into the structure of the curriculum begins to address that question, because the experience is linked to educational goals and to an understanding of ministry. Thus an important issue is:

- How well are cross-cultural experiences integrated into the requirements of degree programs?

This aspect of Standard 4 thus has impact on the standards for all degree programs of the school.

Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation (Standard 1)

The guiding elements of an educational institution are its *purpose* and the *evaluation* efforts used to identify how effectively the institution is fulfilling that purpose. (See the Introduction to the ATS General Institutional Standards.)

> 1.2.1 The purpose statement shall guide the institution in its comprehensive institutional planning and evaluation procedures, and in making decisions regarding programs, allocation of resources, constituencies served, relationships with

ecclesiastical bodies, global concerns, and other comparable matters.

Institutional purpose, evaluation mechanisms, and assessment of how well the institution is meeting its purpose are the context and starting point for all the ATS Standards of Accreditation, including the emphasis on globalizing theological education. The nature of an institution's response to the global depends upon its theological articulation of its purpose and goals. By relating its globalization of theological education to its institutional purposes, a school can define its understanding of "the global" (based on the school's distinctive theological self-understanding), contextualize its programs so that they fit the school's distinctive location within church and world, and build on the school's networks and connections. These activities can help a school to decide what to do, how much it can handle, and how to evaluate its efforts.

A school considering its approach to globalizing theological education might begin by reflecting on its theological understanding of the global. Questions that might be posed in this process include:

- What is a school's understanding of its relationship with the global church?
- How does the gospel address and inform global realities?
- How is the gospel interpreted in light of global realities?
- How do these reflections relate to the theological self-understanding and institutional purpose of the school?

A school's response to the global cannot succeed by replicating what other schools have done because what others have done may not fit this particular school's context. That context is the starting point: its history, its region, its denominational and church relationships, its cultural context, and its global networks. Each school is positioned differently by virtue of its location (regional, urban, or rural), its position within its denomination or church, its particular student and

faculty population, and the nature of the churches and constituencies served by its graduates.

For example, a school might begin by asking questions like the following:

- Does the school have a history of mission connections in certain parts of the world?
- Is it the only school in the denomination with a Hispanic, Chinese, Korean, or French language program, for example?
- Do most of its graduates minister to rural parishes?
- Do many graduates enter the international mission or service field?
- Have the regional judicatories identified a need to serve a particular constituency?
- Has recent immigration radically changed the complexion of the local churches or judicatories in the region served by the school?
- Do lay leaders or pastors in particular cultural groups have need for further theological education?
- Is the school positioned to perform a distinctive service to the local or international church?
- With what nearby community or church agencies might the school cooperate in developing a cross-cultural relationship or program?
- Are there opportunities to work collaboratively and pool resources with other theological schools in the region?
- Are there denominational or mission networks or personal connections of faculty, alumni, or trustees upon which the school can build its global programs?

An institution's response to global realities, then, is grounded in its institutional purpose and its understanding of the mission of the church, developed in dialogue with its particular location, built on its established networks and denominational structures, and integrated into its educational and institutional practices. It is also evaluated against these contexts.

Establishing and Evaluating Globalizing Goals

Comprehensive Institutional Global Strategies

Multiple demands on limited resources and aspirations to higher standards of quality have led some schools to develop mechanisms for evaluating the full range of their cross-cultural and global activities.

When different faculty and various constituencies have developed international and racial/ethnic cross-cultural programs, institutions may experience tension between these two aspects of responses to the global. Some schools also experience tensions between ethnic groups and international constituencies. In order to transcend what they see as destructive and unfortunate tensions, schools may seek ways to develop institutional ownership of an overall strategy of "globalization," "diversity," or "cross-cultural relations," to find the right balance of initiatives that is mutually reinforcing rather than conflicting. Beyond evaluation of individual programs, this can lead to an articulation of the theological goals of the curriculum, seeking not only how each program serves a special constituency but also how the presence of all programs and constituencies creates the desired ethos to accomplish education for ministry for all students.

Evaluation of Programs and Ventures

In addition to the decennial, comprehensive evaluations of institutional strategies, the culture of evaluation requires ongoing evaluation of specific programs and ventures.

Offices and administrators of global and cross-cultural programs may be reviewed within the school's administrative structures. Global programs and initiatives that are part of degree programs may be reviewed as the academic program of which they are a part is reviewed. Their goals and objectives may be defined in relationship

to the program objectives. Student participants may be reviewed regularly as part of these programs, courses reviewed by course evaluations, and programs reviewed through exit interviews of graduates.

International exchange and immersion programs may provide a wealth of informal feedback because the "cultural adjustment" required of participants before, during, and after these programs is generally addressed through some structure of briefing and debriefing.

When programs are mounted in cooperation with another school or with a church agency or judicatory, the cooperative relationship may provide another venue for review. Parties to cooperation frequently ask themselves: How is this cooperation working? or Why should we cooperate? Moreover, because the cooperating parties each bring slightly different motives for entering into cooperation, each provides a distinctive angle of vision on the program.

Informal channels of evaluation frequently provide valuable feedback about the quality of programs. Such feedback might include the level of satisfaction or concerns of field site supervisors, comments from church or denominational officials about how well graduates are functioning, or comments by participants or community members during the field placement. The institution may need to develop strategies to capture, learn from, and act on such informal feedback in an effective manner.

When an institution's responses to globalization include relationships or partnerships with international or ethnic communities or agencies, the institution should also evaluate its relationships by asking questions such as the following:

- To what extent are relationships mutual, reciprocal, and sensitive to the needs and priorities of the partners?
- What have been the level and dynamics of communication? How well has the school listened to the needs, goals, and

priorities of the international/multiethnic community? What evidence would document the level of listening?

- How patiently and well has the school worked to identify parallel goals and a "shared stake" with diverse communities?
- Has the school balanced its own needs and those of the partner communities to avoid seeing the communities simply as "markets"?
- How well has the school acknowledged the risks the other community takes in entering into relationship?
- Is there an intention to form a stable environment in which the relation between the program and the mission of the church can be sustained?

Completing the Evaluation Circle

The evaluation of an institution's globalizing goals is part of a circular process that takes many forms and may begin at different points. It often includes the following elements:

- It is rooted in theological reflection and the establishment of institutional goals and purposes in light of accrediting standards and global realities.

- It is embodied in programs and ventures that aim to achieve those globalized goals and purposes.

- As programs come into being, participants and faculty needed to teach them will come to reflect the global diversity and values that the school has espoused.

- The curriculum of a school with a diverse student population will be hospitable to persons with a broad range of backgrounds. As the on-campus student population becomes more diverse, skills in cross-cultural listening and communication become a more critical requirement for learners, who are preparing for effective

ministry and leadership in the global church, and for their teachers as well.

- The quality of teaching and the suitability of the curriculum will thus be evaluated, in part, in terms of the effectiveness of each in preparing students for global awareness.

- Assessing the performance of graduates stimulates further theological reflection, which becomes an occasion for reviewing and revising programs and for refining the theological understanding of institutional goals.

ENDNOTE

1. Don S. Browning, "Globalization and the Task of Theological Education in North America," reprinted in *Theological Education* 30/Suppl. 1 (1993): 15-16.

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