

ATS Accreditation Standards

Brainstorming and Discussion

Presenters: Debbie Creamer (The Association of Theological Schools) and Mitzi J. Budde (Virginia Theological Seminary), members of the Task Force for the Redevelopment of the ATS Commission Standards.

ABSTRACT The presenters provided an overview of the two-year process (2018–2020) to redevelop the standards and procedures for accreditation of the Association of Theological Schools. The session elicited conversation among Atla librarians about the current accreditation standards and how future redesigned accreditation standards might best support the work of theological education, particularly theological libraries, librarians, information resources, and educational technology.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE STANDARDS

The session began with an overview of the process that is currently underway for the Redevelopment of the Standards of Accreditation of the Association of Theological Schools Commission on Accrediting (ATS). The standards come from the membership, are written by the membership, are designed for the sake of the membership, and are approved by the membership. This comprehensive redevelopment was authorized by action of the ATS membership at its biennial conference in Denver in June 2018. The goal is for a proposed set of new standards to be presented to the ATS membership for adoption at the ATS biennial conference in June 2020 in Vancouver.

The first year of the Redevelopment process, 2018–2019, has been a year of listening, researching, and reflecting. This conversation group comes near the end of an extensive listening process with participation from multiple stakeholders. The second year, 2019–2020, will be a year of writing, revising, and

recommending. It will also be a year for feedback and engagement from the constituency. The current plan is for the Redevelopment Task Force to disseminate two drafts for feedback before finalizing the text: the first draft in December 2019 and the second in February 2020. During February and March, six regional meetings will be held across the United States and Canada to receive feedback from the ATS constituency; webinars will also be held. The Task Force expects to present a third and final draft by May 2020 for vote at the June ATS biennial conference. If adopted, the new standards will take effect immediately after the vote. There will be a grandfathering option for those schools who are scheduled for an accreditation visit between 2020 and 2022.

The scope of the redevelopment task includes drafting new accrediting standards, accrediting processes, accreditation visitor education resources, and a new self-study handbook. This process does not include revision of the annual statistical report form, as that is a joint Atla/ATS form. The expectation is that the new standards will provide greater clarity while streamlining the standards, and that they will uphold quality in theological education while providing greater flexibility for schools to respond to the standards by context and mission.

The Redevelopment page on the ATS website offers additional information about the Redevelopment process and timeline.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS:

1. How have the current standards helped your school in better achieving its mission?
2. How have the current standards hindered your school from better achieving its mission?
3. What are some things in the current standards that you hope will not change in the new standards?
4. What are some things in the current standards that you hope will change in the new standards?

This session was offered twice. Thirty people participated on June 13, and seventeen on June 14.