ATS Annual Report Form to receive major revisions

By Deborah H. C. Gin

The ATS Annual Report Form (affectionately known as the "ARF") is getting a facelift! More precisely, this annual process to collect institutional data from member schools is undergoing a multi-year comprehensive revision, with the goal of making the process more relevant for schools and the membership.

Such a complete revision of the ARF and its database has not been done in more than two decades (likely longer, as no one currently on staff remembers participating in one), and the need for such an overhaul is timely, given the revised *Standards of Accreditation*, the creation of a site for data visualization, and an increase in the use of ATS data institutionally and among researchers. In addition, schools report institutional data to various entities—denominations and other judicatories, regional accreditors, and national bodies (such as IPEDS-NCES)—adding more work to already full portfolios. Finding ways to streamline reporting that would also increase data consumption is a priority for the project.

Phase I: Preparation

Phase I began in 2019, and included structural changes to the database architecture and adjustments to data collection and reports, per the new *Standards*. This two-year phase was critical to accommodating any changes that stem from conversations with school administrators in the next phase.

Phase II: Information Gathering

Phase II began last year with ATS research staff looking comprehensively at the nearly 20 ARF forms, identifying potential areas to remove and gaps to fill, and receiving input from the ATS Research and Data Advisory Committee. We are currently in the second part of Phase II and are interviewing key informants at 60 member schools in a research study to identify how ATS schools collect and use data. If you are an invitee at one of those 60 select schools, now is your chance to share your thoughts on the process at length!

The third part of Phase II will include a series of focus group meetings to help interpret the interview findings and gather additional input. An ARF/Database Comprehensive Revision Advisory Committee has been assembled and includes a good representation of the range of schools in the membership (see below). This advisory committee will guide decisions and provide high-level input at all steps of the information gathering phase.

Phase III: Implementation

Phase III will begin in the fall of next year, with the revised ARF in operation the fall of 2023. Our hope is to make data gathering more relevant and aligned with other data gathering the schools do, and to increase data consumption by the schools and their various constituencies through this thorough revision. In so doing, we aim to bolster the data-informed decision-making capacity of the schools and the industry of theological education. We need school input, especially this academic year, to be successful!

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ARF/Database Comprehensive Revision Advisory Committee members

Jennifer Bader, _Boston College School of Theology and Ministry_

Kevin Dougherty, _George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University (also ATS Research and Data Advisory Committee representative)_

Rene Espinosa, _Oblate School of Theology (also ATS Board of Commissioners representative)_

Duane Harbin, _Perkins School of Theology Southern Methodist University_

Nate Helling, _Kairos University (formerly Sioux Falls Seminary)_

Steve Hewko, _Wycliffe College_

Joel Kim, _Westminster Theological Seminary in California_

Deborah Martin, _Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology of Virginia Union University_

Kenneth McFayden, _Union Presbyterian Seminary_

Nate McKanna, _Dallas Theological Seminary_

Margaret Mwenda, _Calvin Theological Seminary (also ATS Board of Directors representative)_

Karen Payne, _United Theological Seminary_

Brent Sleasman, _Winebrenner Theological Seminary_

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OCTOBER 2021

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