

ATS reports favorable preliminary enrollment data for fall 2024

By CHRIS A. MEINZER

As of November 20, 2024, nearly all ATS schools have reported enrollment data. This article analyzes 260 schools that reported enrollment in both fall 2023 and to-date fall 2024. This analysis excludes ten schools that have still not reported data and ten schools that joined ATS at the 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting.



Total enrollment in the same-set reporting schools is reflecting an increase of 1.7 percent from what these same schools reported in fall 2023. Overall, 55 percent of these schools reported year-over-year increases while 45 percent reported decreases. These same set schools reported about 75,200 students in fall 2023, and they are reporting about 76,500 students in fall 2024. At the time this article was written, total enrollment across ATS—including a projection of the ten schools not yet reporting and the ten new schools that joined in June 2024—is estimated to be around 78,100.

When looking at degree categories, some interesting trends can be found within these 260 same-set reporting schools. While preliminarily reported in October 2024, the trends reflected continue to hold as the final data comes in.

- **MDiv enrollment** continues its annual decline, reflecting a decrease of 1.5 percent. Of the schools that have reported so far, 45 percent have shown year-over-year increases in MDiv enrollment.

The enrollment within the MDiv continues to show steady decline, which is being experienced broadly across the membership. By ecclesial family, 50 percent of reporting Evangelical schools grew (MDiv enrollment declined by 1 percent), 39 percent of Mainline schools grew (MDiv enrollment declined by 4 percent), and 45 percent of Catholic/Orthodox schools grew (MDiv enrollment declined by 2 percent).

- **MA enrollment** increased by 1.3 percent. MA enrollment, which has been a significant growth area across ATS schools, has slowed its rate of growth in recent years. Half of schools reporting reflected increases in MA enrollment. By ecclesial family, 50 percent of reporting Evangelical schools grew (MA enrollment increased by 1 percent), 52 percent of Mainline schools grew (MA enrollment increased by 5 percent), and 44 percent of Catholic/Orthodox schools grew (MA enrollment declined by 1 percent).
- **DMin and other professional doctorate enrollment** is essentially flat this year, and this trend will warrant deeper assessment as schools finalize their

Reported To-Date Same Set 260 Schools	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	%Change	%Schools Increased
MDiv	25,897	25,519	-1.5%	45%
MAs	27,664	28,036	1.3%	50%
ThM/STM	1,243	1,206	-3.0%	53%
DMin & Other Prof Dr	11,205	11,232	0.2%	48%
PhD/ThD	4,124	4,300	4.3%	50%
Degree-seeking students	70,133	70,293	0.2%	
Non-Degrees	5,018	6,230	24.2%	63%
Total students	75,151	76,523	1.8%	56%

enrollment reporting. Like the MA, this degree category has been a substantial growth area for ATS schools for more than a decade. Last year, DMin and other professional doctorate enrollment fell by just over 3 percent. This year, enrollment appears to be flat, so it may be that this growth area is reflecting a new trend. About half of schools reporting reflected increases in this degree category. By ecclesial family within DMin and other professional doctorate enrollment, 48 percent of reporting Evangelical schools grew (enrollment was flat), 44 percent of Mainline schools grew (enrollment experienced a slight decrease), and 83 percent of Catholic/Orthodox schools grew (enrollment experienced a slight increase).

- **PhD/ThD enrollment** shows an increase of 4.3 percent and ThM/STM reflects a decline of 3 percent.
- **Degree-seeking students** remains essentially flat from fall 2023 to fall 2024. While acknowledging the changes within degree categories, overall, the number of students pursuing degrees has increased slightly.
- Perhaps the most promising enrollment trend is reflected in **non-degree students**. This has been an emphasis of many ATS schools, including schools that received Lilly Endowment Inc. *Pathways for Tomorrow* Initiative grants. Of the schools that have reported so far, enrollment has increased by more than 24 percent, and 63 percent of the schools reported year-over-year increases.

- o Presently, in the 260 same-set schools reporting, non-degree enrollment has grown from about 5,000 students to more than 6,200 students. ATS is currently projecting that enrollment across all schools will grow from about 5,200 students to about 6,400 students once the data is finalized.
- o This growth of 1,200 non-degree students is fairly widespread. About 30 schools reported no non-degree students in fall 2023 and a total of about 600 students in fall 2024. Thus, about half of the growth in non-degree students can be attributed to new programs within ATS schools.
- o Of the 30 schools reporting new non-degree student enrollment in fall 2024, six schools received *Pathways for Tomorrow* grants to explore non-degree projects. These six schools represented about 70 new students.

With this new data, there is much to celebrate. It appears that ATS schools will reflect overall increases, which seems to be a broader trend across all schools, with 56 percent reflecting enrollment increases from fall 2023. Last year, about 45 percent of ATS schools reflected enrollment increases—an incline that has been the norm since about 2006. In future months, ATS will continue to analyze enrollment shifts while also providing some insight into trends in finances and other pertinent data.



Chris A. Meinzer is Senior Director and COO at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.