

Debbie Creamer takes early retirement from ATS

BY LISA KERN

Debbie Creamer, senior director of design and organizational learning, has taken early retirement from ATS.

In mid-May, Debbie experienced a spinal infection that caused paralysis and impacted her ability to breathe. After a series of surgeries and 30 days in the ICU, she became stable enough to move to a rehab facility. From her time in rehab, she has regained some use of her hands and arms and now has good lung function but is still paralyzed from the chest down. Debbie has made the decision to leave her work at ATS so that she can focus her energy on her own health and on learning to navigate the world through a power wheelchair.

Debbie joined the staff of ATS in 2013 as director of accreditation and institutional evaluation and served as senior director of accreditation from 2018 to 2020. She facilitated more than 100 comprehensive and focused visits to member schools, and she specialized in helping schools with institutional and educational assessment.

During her time in accreditation, she initiated the use of a learning management system for visitor education, accreditation visit support, and a variety of pilot projects. Debbie provided significant leadership during the redevelopment of the *Standards of Accreditation*, including helping to develop the self-study ideas, the new *Self-Study Handbook*, the revised visitor education materials, and the updated *Reflective Guide to Effective Evaluation for Theological Schools*.

In 2020, as COVID impacted our ability to gather onsite with one another, Debbie's energy switched to providing leadership for designing, implementing, and assessing online networking and learning experiences for ATS staff,



board members, member schools, and other stakeholders through the work of the Educational Design Lab, which she initiated and directed.

In 2022, Debbie was named senior director of design and organizational learning. Her new title formalized the strategic role she was playing in enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of ATS as a hybrid learning organization and in fostering a culture of creativity and innovation in both the work of accrediting and in the Association's programs and services.

"For more than a decade, Debbie has served the ATS membership in significant ways and her contributions have been invaluable," said Chris Meinzer, ATS senior director and COO. "Debbie brought a broad understanding of theological schools to ATS and her insight deepened during her tenure, which benefitted scores of schools and their leadership. She taught so many of



I loved helping schools see assessment as curiosity and bravery (and sometimes even fun), and all of our activities together as experiences of mutual learning. I never tired of experiencing the distinctive character of each member school, and I was continually impressed by the volunteers who gave so much of their own energy to make the work of the Association and Commission possible. I will definitely miss the people of ATS," she said.

"Debbie will be dearly missed at ATS," said Frank Yamada, executive director of ATS.

"Debbie Creamer, as a colleague and friend to the ATS staff and leaders in member schools, exemplified the Association's core values. She demonstrated leadership in the way she encouraged the leadership of others. She championed diversity, supporting the work of schools and colleagues from a wide variety of perspectives, including those voices that historically have not been front and center. She demonstrated collegiality by helping people be curious and to have fun. Debbie not only did her work with the highest quality, but was also able to help schools develop processes of assessment that made them better through continuous improvement," said Yamada.

"Beyond all these great things that Debbie was to both the membership and to the staff, she will be missed for the thoughtful, creative, and loving colleague and friend she is to so many. We will be her biggest cheerleaders and supporters as she enters this next stage of her journey," he said.

us the value of curiosity and courage. As she shifts her focus in this next season, she will surely be missed, but her contributions will continue because they are deeply embedded within all that we do," he said.

"I am grateful for the ten years that I spent on the staff of ATS, as well as for the opportunities and learning experiences that ATS offered me when I was at a member school," said Debbie.

"I remember being surprised when I was offered a position at ATS, as I couldn't believe that I could get paid for doing work that I had enjoyed so much as a volunteer!



Lisa Kern is Manager of Member Engagement at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.