

Digital resource offers economic state of theological education and how some ATS schools have responded

BY DEBORAH H. C. GIN

In a conversation about research priorities for the Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative, ATS research and Pathways directors determined that a key component of the coordination project would be to assess whether ATS schools were more sustainable—had built strong financial models to sustain their educational missions—as a result of the initiative. They realized they needed a different kind of conversation partner.

Seeking a view of how the industry of theological education relates to broader higher education in terms of economic challenges, they commissioned P. Jesse Rine, higher education scholar and executive director of the Center for Academic Faithfulness & Flourishing, to write a recent history of higher education—an economics "how did we get here" paper. Rine and Ronald P. Mahurin, senior consultant with Design Group International and former vice president for the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, wrote *Steady in the Storm: Understanding and Responding to the Winds of Change in Higher Education* to inform the current situation in our industry of theological education.

Members of the Economic Practitioners Advisory Committee (EPAC)—consisting of ATS member school presidents and deans—met to discuss salient points in the



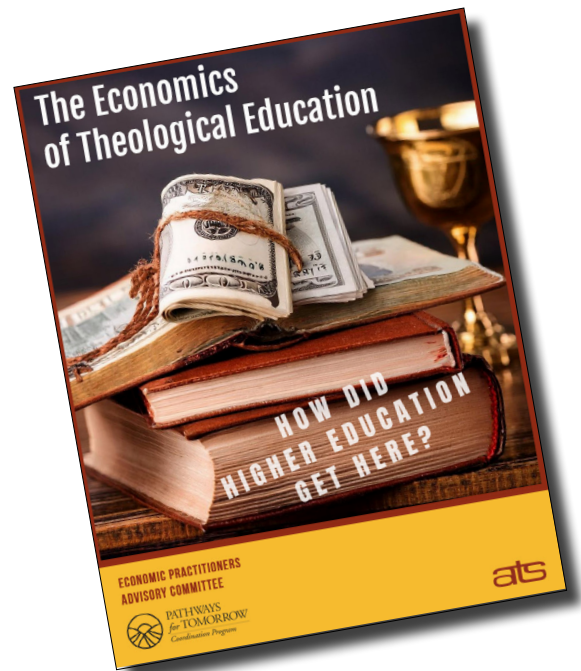
paper, reflecting on similarities and highlighting differences, both where theological education is "ahead" and where it is "behind" higher education. They focused on various audiences that would be important partners in the larger economic conversation—faculty, judicatories, institutional partners, external partners, boards, the industry of theological education—and shared how their *Pathways* projects are helping their schools address one or more of the challenges Rine and Mahurin identified.

Pathways schools are introducing educational innovations, structural disruptions, and breaks from inherited institutional cultures—each of which has economic implications—so EPAC members were asked to share their institutional stories through an economic lens.

This [digital resource](#) features the commissioned paper, which provides a framework of challenges shared by higher education and theological education, and links to EPAC members' reflections on the paper that highlight approaches theological schools have taken to address the challenges. The resource can be helpful for ATS member schools as they engage in conversations, strategic planning, and project implementations that are both educationally effective and financially viable.

While all the EPAC authors had the whole set of challenges in mind, for purposes of this writing project, each focused on a particular audience and challenge. **David McAllister-Wilson's** reflection addresses denominations and the broader industry of theological education and suggests "re-enfranchising" as a way to attend to the challenge of worsening financial conditions in higher education. **Maria Sophia Aguirre** writes to internal partners such as universities in embedded contexts, and she offers an entrepreneurial approach as a solution to the challenge of declining public confidence. **David Vásquez-Levy's** audience is the theological education industry, to whom he extends a call to "regenerating the ecosystem of theological education" to attend to the challenge of the characteristics of today's student. **Ruth McGillivray** speaks to faculty, highlighting the critical role faculty play in a school's ability to address several challenges, including decline in public confidence as well as change in faculty role and perceptions. **Charisse L. Gillett**

focuses on executive leaders and boards, championing an approach to bolster longevity in senior leadership, given today's challenge of rapid shifts in institutional leadership. **Anthony L. Blair** directs his reflections to external partners and those considering such partnerships, and he suggests a new model for theological education in the 21st century—one that turns the challenge of mergers, acquisitions, and closures on its head.



Click the image to flip through the resource!



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