

# Guidelines on Global Awareness and Engagement from ATS Board of Directors

Adopted December 2013



The center of gravity in Christianity has moved from the Global North and West to the Global South and East, while significant resources in theological education remain in the North. What might this mean for theological schools in North America and the work of the Association? A working group of the ATS Board of Directors considered this issue in meetings during the 2012–2014 biennium.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the ATS staff conducted several meetings with interested parties and sought counsel from several persons who are engaged in theological education in the majority world. The opinions vary. ATS activity should be carefully strategized so that: service contributions are heightened; ATS supports initiatives from the majority

world; ATS avoids inappropriate intervention; and ATS remains vigilant about the fundamental differences in financial resources between North American theological schools and schools in most of the majority world. How should ATS consider work in this area in the coming decade? This strategy paper identifies (1) the history of ATS involvement, (2) the commitments of the Commission and the Association that accrue to guidelines for strategic initiatives, and (3) the identification of possible strategies.

## History

ATS first sought to cultivate a more global theological perspective among member schools in the 1980s when it undertook a major project on globalization. Because the language dominant at the time, *internationalization*, was deemed limiting because of its focus on nation states rather than people groups and the multiple cultures of the world, the term *globalization* was chosen as a name for the project. The word later became synonymous with a global economic system and, most recently, has been changed in Association and Commission documents. The work of this project, however, was the first effort of ATS to address global realities and concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> The conversation in the workgroup began as a conversation about whether ATS should change its bylaws to permit schools not in the Christian or Jewish traditions to become members. The decision was that, at this time, it would be more crucial for ATS to pursue the role of North American theological education in world Christianity rather than expanding its membership in multifield directions. The Association and Commission will continue to give attention to multifield issues as they relate to the work of member schools and education of religious leaders.

## ***The Globalization Project***

The ATS project on globalization continued for nearly a decade and, at its broadest level, reflected a variety of strategies. One strategy sought to identify ways in which resources on globalization could be incorporated in the courses and libraries of ATS member schools. Another engaged member schools in thinking about the range of meanings of globalization and how schools could intellectually engage this issue in the context of their own confessional commitments. Yet another effort related to teaching strategies that would make North American students more globally aware, such as immersion trips to ministry and cultural contexts outside North America. Considerable effort was given to introducing the theme of globalization into the various disciplines of the theological curriculum.

## ***WOCATI***

Another aspect of the Globalization Project involved an effort with the World Council of Churches to develop a global venue for theological education. It resulted in the formation of the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI). This organization, comprising regional associations of theological schools from around the world, sought to provide a global forum for discussion of issues related to worldwide theological education. ATS worked for two decades to support the work of WOCATI in various ways.

## ***The decade of the 2000s***

During the past decade, ATS focused its efforts on supporting WOCATI and responding to requests of other Associations for resources and expertise. Since 2004, ATS staff members have received invitations from the Australia-New Zealand Association, Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia, and Asia Theological Association, as well as for participation in events sponsored by organizations that support majority world theological education such as Overseas Council, the Lausanne Theological Education Network, WOCATI, and The World Council of Churches program of Ecumenical Theological Education. In these various contexts, ATS staff members or persons from ATS schools recommended by ATS staff have provided consultation on leadership in theological education, governance, assessment of learning, accreditation practice and procedure, and the character of theological education.

## ***Assessment of efforts***

The work of the Globalization Project, the unique support for WOCATI, and the increasing number of requests for resources and consultation from ATS staff members and others invites an informal evaluation of what has been accomplished.

In some respects, the project on globalization was very successful. It resulted in giving attention to collection development in the libraries of many ATS schools so that holdings provided more global literature to students. ATS itself developed a significant literature on globalization, most of which was published in its journal *Theological Education*. Many ATS member schools became more globally aware and sensitive than they were before this project was undertaken. Most significant, perhaps, was the inclusion of the concern for “globalization” into the 1996 ATS Commission on Accrediting standards, which signaled that ATS member schools had incorporated globalization as part of the definition of good theological education. In 2010, the Commission on Accrediting revisited the section of the standards explicitly addressing globalization and, while reaffirming its importance, agreed to rename it “global awareness and engagement,” partly to distance itself from the prevailing sentiment of “economic globalization” associated with the Global North and to reflect a more appropriate comportment with regard to this important reality.

The ATS work with WOCATI contributed to the ability of this organization to continue as long as it has, although ATS has not been alone in efforts to sustain the organization. The World Council of Churches program of Ecumenical Theological Education has contributed to its most recent meetings and provided administrative support, as have a succession of officers of the organization. WOCATI has sponsored several international meetings, but the ATS membership has become increasingly different from the composition of WOCATI, which was initiated at a time when mainline Protestants constituted the majority of ATS schools and enrollment. Its association with the World Council of Churches connected it with mainline or ecumenical Protestants worldwide. However, the constituency of ATS has changed substantively in the past thirty years. Evangelical Protestants now represent a large majority of all students in ATS member schools, and evangelical and Roman Catholic schools constitute almost two-thirds of the schools in the Association. The changes in theological education outside North America largely parallel those within North America. Evangelical Protestant schools are now a much more visible presence, perhaps even constituting the majority of Protestant theological schools in the majority world. Because WOCATI does not include the Associations to which the evangelical schools belong, the membership of WOCATI does not parallel the membership of ATS, nor does it engage a majority of the world's Protestant theological schools.

The efforts to provide resources and consultation this past decade have been successful in many ways, but they have proceeded on an ad hoc basis, and each engagement has required efforts to negotiate both funding and time. All of these activities have been at the request of international partners, and all of them have reflected the variety of resources that ATS and its member schools have developed. These invitations to ATS for consultation and resources indicate an interest in the expertise and resources that ATS has developed and suggest that the problems of guiding schools and educating religious leaders may be sufficiently similar that the knowledge and practices that have developed in North America could be of use in other parts of the world.

## **Commitments of the Commission and the Association**

Any ATS global engagement should proceed in the context of two major ATS/COA resources that did not exist at the time the Globalization Project began thirty years ago: the normative expectations of the Standards of Accrediting and the value commitments of the Association.

### ***Standards***

Global awareness and engagement is one of five themes that runs through the ATS Commission's Standards of Accreditation, and it is explicitly defined in the General Institutional Standards:

3.3.4.1 Theological teaching, learning, and research require patterns of institutional and educational practice that contributes to an awareness and appreciation of global interconnectedness and interdependence, particularly as they relate to the mission of the church. These patterns are intended to enhance the ways institutions participate in the ecumenical, dialogical, evangelistic, and justice efforts of the church.

3.3.4.2 Global awareness and engagement is cultivated by curricular attention to cross-cultural issues as well as the study of other major religions by opportunities for cross-cultural experiences; by the composition of the faculty, governing board, and student body; by professional development of faculty members; and by the design of community activities and worship.

3.3.4.3 Schools shall demonstrate practices of teaching, learning, and research (comprehensively understood as theological scholarship) that encourage global awareness and responsiveness.

### **Values**

The ATS Board of Directors has adopted four core values to guide the overall program work of the Association:

1. *Diversity*: ATS values the different expressions of faith that are represented by member schools and seeks to respect the varying understandings of theology, polity, religious leadership, and social commitments.
2. *Quality and improvement*: ATS schools value quality in the practice of ministry and in educational practices, and quality is always linked to improvement. The Association encourages schools to advance in quality.
3. *Collegiality*: ATS values the contributions that schools make to one another. Regardless of differences in theological perspective, organizational complexity, or institutional size, ATS schools, as peer institutions, can learn from one another, cooperate on common tasks that benefit the broader community of theological schools, and hold themselves accountable to common practices and quality.
4. *Leadership*: ATS values leadership and considers it essential for schools to attain their missions. ATS is committed to developing the skills and capacities of administrators, faculties, and boards of member schools.

### **Guidelines**

In the context of standards and values, the development and implementation of programmatic aspects of strategic directions in global engagement should reflect several guiding principles. They should

- demonstrate commitment to the Association's core values of diversity, quality and improvement, collegiality, and leadership development;
- ensure that these initiatives are consistent with multilateral approaches to collaboration and the cultivation of effective partnerships both within North America and without;
- reflect the perspective and commitments expressed in the ATS/COA Standards of Accreditation and policies regarding international degree granting or credit sharing conducted by ATS member schools.
- encourage approaches that are comprehensive, inclusive, and institution-wide;
- develop sustainable and long-term institutional capacity as well as institutional vitality and effectiveness;

- encourage attention to the discovery and promotion of common ground in terms of shared ideals, values, and principles among member schools and partners without compromising the importance of diversity and difference;
- include the enhancement and improvement of individual and institutional capacities and skillsets for cross-cultural and contextual competencies in the areas of ecumenical, dialogical, evangelistic, and justice efforts of member schools and their global partners;
- be informed by a sensitivity to and a respect for economic, cultural, and religious differences that shape theological education and practice in the context of profound unevenness and political conflict; and
- encourage careful assessment of efforts that attends to the *changing* needs, forms, and expressions of such engagements in order to ensure that such initiatives remain contextualized, formative, and relevant.

## Strategic directions for global awareness and engagement

In the context of these guidelines, five strategic directions will constitute the programmatic work of ATS in this area.

### 1. *Understanding effective partnerships*

Many ATS member schools have partnerships with educational institutions outside North America. These partnerships take many forms, including degree program extension sites and joint degree programs, student and faculty exchanges, and other organizational patterns of partnership. Within North America itself, networks of scholars and researchers from other parts of the world who are affiliated with ATS member schools have been working to establish partnerships among themselves. While these kinds of partnerships have increased, there is no consensus regarding the characteristics or practices that maximize their effectiveness. Would there be value in ATS developing a systematic and intentional understanding of what characterizes effective partnerships? What are the practices that make these partnerships effective and helpful or, conversely, make them ineffective or problematic? What benefits accrue to the partnerships? What aspects of the partnerships are most beneficial to the ATS member schools, and what aspects are most beneficial to the partner schools and other networks?

To explore these issues and cultivate a broad base of understanding, ATS could convene meetings of representatives of ATS member schools that have partnerships with schools outside North America, followed with possible meetings of representatives of these partner institutions. The results of these conversations should provide the basis for more formalized guidelines and recommendations to member schools about the value of partnerships and the practices that maximize the positive benefits of partner relationships.

### 2. *Global engagement within North America*

Another strategy will focus on the global reality within ATS member schools in North America. A number of schools admitted to the Association in the past decade, for example, are schools founded by immigrant denominations, and they maintain strong ties with their countries of origin. Other ATS schools are in partner relationships or are providing educational programming for leaders of Muslim and other faith communities that often maintain close international relationships among people of their faith community. By the time that the ATS Globalization Project was ending, scholars

were already beginning to talk about “glocal” realities, that the local context contains the global reality. ATS programmatic attention to the global realities present in North American theological education could prove to be a rich pattern of engagement.

### ***3. Cultivating scholarly and programmatic “trade routes”***

Theological scholarship, resources, and expertise have flowed more readily from the Global North to the Global South than the other way. Increasingly, good theological education depends on meaningful bilateral and multilateral flow of scholarship, resources, and expertise. ATS understands scholarship to be inclusive of learning, teaching, and research, and North American schools will be hampered in their scholarly task if they are not well informed by scholarship in the Global South. It appears that better “trade routes” need to be established. While some resources are developing, like GlobTheoLib.net, more are needed. What can be done to enrich and strengthen the flow of scholarly information? What criteria should govern such flows? What role should an association of schools play in identifying them? The work associated with the first two strategic directions would contribute to this one by provide an organic structure for the movement of scholarly knowledge, which ATS could support in a variety of ways by collaborating with existing and yet-to-be-identified partners outside North America. The flow could also take the form of educational and consultative efforts. ATS could offer its programs in leadership education and organizational administration to interested partners outside North America. It could also provide consultative support to interested parties from its expertise in accreditation.

### ***4. Contributing to a pan-Christian conversation on theological education***

The ATS membership has included schools that would now be considered either evangelical or mainline Protestant since its beginning in the early twentieth century. It included Roman Catholic schools after Vatican II, when the Church encouraged their broader ecumenical participation. ATS conversations for the past fifty years have been across the broad spectrum of North American Christianity, and the inclusive character of this conversation has benefitted the work of the Association and its members. ATS leaders have noted, however, that international conversations have tended to be with either mainline Protestants, or evangelical Protestants, or Roman Catholics. Other conversations with representatives in the majority world have identified a desire to talk across Evangelical, Ecumenical, and Catholic/Orthodox lines, but the inability to do so without a trusted partner. Because ATS includes and works with all of these ecclesial families, it is a likely partner. In and of these kinds of conversations, it is especially important for ATS to respond to the desire for a pan-Christian conversation as it is perceived as important by majority world theological educators, and not as an exported idea from North America. ATS would continue cultivating relationships with partners that reflect the ecclesial families of ATS member schools. These include the World Council of Churches program in Ecumenical Theological Education (WCC/ETE), organizations like the World Evangelical Association and its connection with the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), the Lausanne Network, and accreditation agencies and associations outside North America (e.g., The Association for Theological Education in South East Asia [ATESEA], Asia Theological Association [ATA]).

### ***5. Educational and degree programs of study***

ATS member schools have developed joint and collaborative degree programs with some schools outside North America. Some of these programs require approval by the Commission on Accrediting, and a part of the normative expectations, as well as protocols, for that approval includes evidence that the North American school is conducting the program at the invitation of a national entity rather than by its own initiative. While continuing to insist on keeping procedures that respect the integrity of theological schools and their regional associations outside North

America, ATS will begin exploring ways it can be involved in collaborative efforts with new partners outside North America to ensure educational improvement. This could include a range of more formal procedures ranging from degree program recognition to the approval of degree programs offered by schools accredited by agencies in other parts of the world.

ATS may wish to consider, for example, supporting research doctoral programs (PhD and ThD) outside North America in appropriate and meaningful ways. ATESEA has wondered if ATS would approve or recognize its Asian Theological Union DTheo degree since a degree offered through the agency that accredits member schools might have greater value if it were accredited by an outside body. Is there a role that ATS can or should play to support research doctoral education outside North America?

Consistent with its commitment to diversity, mutual respect, collaboration, and integrity, ATS/COA could develop clear guidelines for member schools that are conducting degree programs in a distance learning format. There is no question that the increasing availability of distance learning degrees from North America is finding its way to students in other parts of the world. What should ATS require of North American schools when they have students from outside North America enrolled in their distance learning programs? How do changing delivery modalities of theological education change patterns of relationship among theological schools? How can benefits be maximized and conflicts minimized? How can this “global reach” of North American theological education provide a needed form of service and not yet another form of colonialism?

## 6. Continuing Research and Care

The history of the Association’s work reflects the need for ongoing research about what North American theological education should do with global partners, as well as how it should be done. This initiative is pursued because the majority world has much to offer North American theological education, not because the West has an idea or strategy to convince the rest of the world that it should pursue. Work should proceed with care, with attention to language or strategies that would privilege North American perspectives or patterns of work, with a discipline to keep any North American initiatives at the invitation of majority world theological education, and with an ongoing sensitivity to the complexity of Christian and regional diversity.

### **Board action**

The ATS Board of Directors adopted a long-term strategic commitment to programming for global awareness and engagement with particular concern about care for activities and discipline responsiveness to majority world requests and guidance.

The action provides authorization for the development of proposals to seek funding for programmatic efforts that reflect these possible strategies above. Proposals for grants would identify goals for specific areas of work, staffing strategies for those areas, and program design.