

# POLICY GUIDELINES



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# Introduction

Over the course of time, the members of the Association have adopted policy statements to serve as advice and counsel to the membership in a variety of areas. Because policy statements are for “advice and counsel,” they are formally distinct from the Standards of Accreditation and, consequently, were renamed *Policy Guidelines* at the 2010 Biennial Meeting.

Once adopted, a policy guideline is published until removed by formal action of the members of the Association. The year each policy guideline was adopted at a Biennial Meeting of the Association appears beneath its title.

Policy guidelines are offered by the members of ATS as pragmatic operational advice and counsel to member schools. Unlike compliance with the Standards of Accreditation, member schools are not accountable for implementing the guidelines in their policies or procedures. The guidelines are not intended to establish best practices applicable in all jurisdictions or create standards against which member schools’ conduct would be measured. Policy guidelines are not intended and should not be interpreted as legal advice. Member schools should consult their own legal counsel knowledgeable in the applicable law of the state(s) or province(s) where the school operates before implementing policies suggested by these guidelines.

# Academic Freedom and Tenure

*Adopted as advice and counsel by the Association in 1976.*

## The roots of freedom

Freedom has been affirmed, developed, and safeguarded by many persons and groups concerned with justice, with due process, and with commitment to free inquiry. In many lands, the protection of the rights of citizens and groups is provided for in the Constitution, in legal precedents and practices, and in the charters and bylaws of educational and other institutions.

There also are vital religious roots of freedom. Israel's prophets insisted upon speaking the truth of God despite the opposition of those in authority. The early Christians insisted that they were required to obey God rather than men. Freedom, as viewed by Jew or Christian, is as much a gift of God as is life itself.

Recognizing that there are various theological approaches to freedom, theological schools acknowledge that they share a common concern for realizing the highest possible standards of freedom in all institutions of education. Theological schools also acknowledge that the grounds for their understanding of freedom, and thus of academic freedom, need to be stated clearly and adhered to.

The following are fundamental to a Jewish and Christian view of academic freedom:

- Both Jewish theology and Christian theology direct all thought and life toward God, the source of truth, the judge of all human thoughts, and the ultimate end of all theological inquiry.
- The freedom of the person of faith always involves a commensurate responsibility toward God and neighbor. It is never the freedom merely to be left alone or to ignore basic obligations.
- Freedom has specific import in the context of a religious confession of faith. Theological schools may acknowledge specific confessional adherence as laid down in the charters and constitutions of the schools. A concept of freedom appropriate to theological schools will respect this confessional loyalty, both in the institutions and among their individual members. At the same time, no confessional standard obviates the requirement for responsible liberty of conscience in the Jewish or the Christian community or the practice of the highest ideals of academic freedom.
- While freedom must ultimately be realized through the spirit and the loyalties of men and women, it must take form and be protected through concrete standards of institutional practice. Every statement of such standards moves somewhat in the sphere of law and regulation. The effectiveness of such stated principles depends finally upon the dedication within the theological school to a genuine concern for liberty of mind and spirit in theological teaching.

## Principles of academic freedom

### I. Freedom of teaching and research

I.A. Central to the vocation of the theological school and to its faculty members and students is the inquiry for truth. This inquiry is both a communal and an individual vocation.

I.B. In pursuit of the inquiry for truth, a theological school which has a confessional or doctrinal standard may expect that its faculty subscribe to that standard; and the requirement for such subscription should be mutually understood at the time of their affiliation with the institution. The question of a faculty member's adherence to the standard may be opened according to specified procedures.

Any challenge to the confessional or doctrinal regularity of a faculty member should be subject to open hearing before the faculty member's colleagues and before the governing board of the school after consultation with students.

When controversy arises within a religious body concerning the understanding of its confessional or doctrinal standards, the governing body of the school which subscribes to such standards should provide its faculty members with all appropriate procedural safeguards for the protection of their academic freedom.

I.C. Faculty members should be free to teach, carry on research, and publish, subject to adequate performance of their academic duties as agreed upon with the school.

I.D. Teachers should have freedom in the classroom to discuss the subjects in which they have competence and may claim to be specialists without harassment or limitations.<sup>1</sup>

I.E. Teachers should be free to express and act upon their conscientious convictions as individual citizens, although they should realize that there is the tacit representation of their institution in whatever is said.<sup>2</sup>

I.F. Faculty members should take care lest they violate each other's academic freedom by covert interference with their colleagues' work or through bypassing the orderly processes of full faculty discussion of curriculum, appointments, and other basic matters.<sup>3</sup>

### II. Appointments and promotions

#### II.A. Appointments

II.A.1 Power to appoint faculty members is specified in the charters and constitutions of the schools and is usually lodged in the trustees or board of directors on recommendation of the administration.

- II.A.2. Faculty participation in the recommendation of new faculty members shall be assured by the establishment in writing of a specific procedure for such participation. Consultation with students should also be a normal part of the process.
  - II.A.3. The initial appointment to a faculty should be for a definite term, although this principle may be waived in the case of experienced persons of proved competence.
  - II.A.4. Theological schools should make serious efforts to appoint women faculty members, faculty members from minority groups, and young faculty members so that academic discourse may be broadened and the freedom to teach and to do research be extended to groups not now adequately represented.
- II.B. Promotions
- II.B.1. There should be a stated policy concerning the criteria for promotion, which would include recognition of teaching ability and service, concern for the ministry, interest in educational development, spiritual and moral leadership, scholarly research and production, and promise of growing competence.
  - II.B.2. Faculty participation in the recommendation of faculty members for promotion shall be assured by the establishment in writing of a specific procedure for such participation. Consultation with students should also be a normal part of the process.
  - II.B.3. Provision for faculty ranks (e.g., instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, professor) offers a recognized, orderly, and useful arrangement for academic administration and promotion in which institutional flexibility and recognition of faculty service are both preserved.
  - II.B.4. At stated intervals there should be review and evaluation of the performance of all faculty members. This evaluation should serve as the normal basis for decisions concerning the promotion of faculty members.  
  
The purpose of periodic review and evaluation is to provide regular occasions for the peers of faculty members to offer counsel on ways to improve their work, to note strengths and limitations, to lend encouragement and support, and to identify any serious deficiencies that exist or may develop.

- II.B.5. The school administration and the faculty should have a mutual understanding of the general policies of the institution as to salary level and the bases of increase or decrease in salary.

### III. Tenure

- III.A. After the expiration of a probationary period, during which careful evaluation is to take place, faculty members should be granted tenure. Tenure (often called “indefinite tenure”) means appointment to serve until resignation or retirement, with employment not terminated prior to such time. (See IV.A.I. for a statement of adequate cause.)

Theological schools may wish to adopt the policy, with careful safeguards against abuse, of continuing faculty members on a term contract beyond the stated probationary period and prior to the conferral of tenure. (See III.C.2.a.)

- III.B. The provision for appointment on indefinite tenure is one way in which institutions safeguard their faculties’ freedom to teach, to inquire, and to organize their academic programs. It is not intended to confer personal privilege.

It assures faculty members that they will not be subject to dismissal for reasons other than the violation of the basic obligations, which are properly laid upon all teachers and that they may normally expect to pursue their teaching vocation where they are until a change is mutually agreed upon by them and the institution.

This provision for indefinite tenure is an arrangement that is justified by the above considerations and by its fruits in practice. It is not an absolute guarantee either of freedom or its right use. It may lead to difficulties when professors do not fulfill expectations and cling to positions that they are no longer fitted to fill in an adequate way.

Faculties should seek ways to insure so far as possible that the privilege tenure grants will not be abused or result in damage to the function and efficiency of the institutions.

### III.C. Accepted practice

- III.C.1. The precise terms and conditions of every appointment (including any limitation on academic freedom that may exist for any reason whatsoever) should be stated in writing and be in the possession of both the institution and the teacher at the time the appointment is made.
- III.C.2. After appointment to full-time faculty membership, the probationary period should not exceed the agreed upon maximum adopted by the school.

- III.C.2.a. This period normally should not exceed seven years in the institution. If, however, after a probationary period of more than three years in one or more institutions a teacher is called to another school, it may be agreed in writing that the new appointment is for a probationary period of not more than four years.

Theological schools may find it appropriate to extend the total period of nontenured faculty service beyond the seven years under carefully established guidelines, in order to provide a somewhat longer period for the faculty member to have demonstrated the competence and accomplishments associated with the award of tenure. The total period should in no case exceed 10 years for full-time faculty members. The 10 years might consist of seven probationary years, followed by a three-year term at high rank, after which tenure will be awarded or the contract be permitted to expire.

Any such extension of the period of faculty service beyond the normal seven years must provide for protection of the rights of the individual's academic freedom through the process and must be carried through on the basis of explicit guidelines clearly understood by the persons under such extended term arrangements.

- III.C.2.b. Whatever the specified number of years may be, the plan should be clearly understood and should provide a definite safeguard against any situation in which a teacher is kept on indefinitely without tenure and without knowledge of what the prospects are in relation to the school.
- III.C.2.c. At least 12 months prior to the expiration of the last year of the probationary period (or of the extended term appointment referred to under 2.a. above, if any), notice should be given whether or not the faculty member is to be continued in service.

- III.C.3. Termination of membership in a faculty may be by
- III.C.3.a. Expiration of a term appointment;



- III.C.3.b. Dismissal for adequate cause, in which case guidelines are set down in section IV of this guideline;
- III.C.3.c. Resignation, in which case the policy guideline “Faculty Resignations, Leaves, and Retirements” provides guidelines for faculty members and administrative officers;
- III.C.3.d. Retirement, in which case the policy guideline “Faculty Resignations, Leaves, and Retirements” may serve to indicate guidelines;
- III.C.3.e. Termination of service because of financial exigency or in connection with the merger of institutions. (See policy guideline, “Faculty Reductions During Financial Crisis.”)

#### IV. Dismissals

##### IV.A. Principles

- IV.A.1. Grounds for dismissal should be stated in the conditions of faculty employment and clearly understood. These should include incompetence, moral delinquency, and failure properly to perform duties.
- IV.A.2. Dismissal procedures should be clearly stated and rigorously observed. In the hearings involved in these procedures there should be representatives of the peers and colleagues of the professor involved. Student evaluations of the faculty member should be available to those conducting the hearing and to the faculty member.

IV.B. When all personal attempts at negotiation and reconciliation between the administration and faculty member(s) as parts of a religious community have failed, the welfare of the school and faculty may require putting into use clearly defined dismissal proceedings. The following description of proceedings is meant to be suggestive for such definition. Acceptable procedures should provide for the following:

- IV.B.1. Informal inquiry and counsel by a committee chosen by the faculty.
- IV.B.2. When the informal efforts have failed, a clear statement of grounds for removal submitted to the person under notice of dismissal.
- IV.B.3. Hearing by a committee that includes adequate representation by the faculty in one of two ways:
  - IV.B.3.a. A committee of the faculty acting as a fact-finding body, or

IV.B.3.b. A joint committee of trustees and faculty acting as a fact-finding body.

Student evaluation should be available to such fact-finding bodies.

IV.B.4. Recognition that once all of these measures have been taken, the faculty member is still entitled to employ other avenues such as judicatories, civil law courts, and so forth.

IV.B.5. Permission for the person under notice of dismissal to continue at work until proceedings are complete unless immediate harm to self or others is threatened by that continuance. Any suspension should be with pay.

IV.B.6. In clear cases of need, the salary of the dismissed faculty member should be continued for up to one year beyond the effective date of dismissal.

#### APPENDIX

In lieu of the statement formerly carried representing the counsel of the American Association of University Professors and the Association of America Colleges in 1958, ATS recommends careful consideration of the "Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings," published in the *AAUP Bulletin* (Winter 1968), 439-441. This is a considerably longer and more helpful statement than that previously carried by ATS.

#### ENDNOTES

1. "As members of an academic institution, professors seek above all to be effective teachers and scholars. Although professors observe the stated regulations of the institution, provided the regulations do not contravene academic freedom, they maintain their right to criticize and seek revision." *AAUP Statement on Professional Ethics* (2009), IV.
2. "As members of their community, professors have the rights and obligations of other citizens. Professors measure the urgency of these obligations in the light of their responsibilities to their subject, to their students, to their profession, and to their institution. When they speak or act as private persons, they avoid creating the impression of speaking or acting for their college or university. As citizens engaged in a profession that depends upon freedom for its health and integrity, professors have a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom." *AAUP Statement on Professional Ethics* (2009), V.
3. Regarding the academic freedom of students, see ATS policy statement, "Termination of Student Tenure"; *AAUP Bulletin* (Summer 1968), 258-261.

# Accreditation of Theological Schools and Ecclesiastical Assessment of Schools

*Adopted as advice and counsel by the Association in 1990.*

## Introduction

The relationships between theological schools<sup>1</sup> and the churches are so diverse as to defy generalization. In recent years both institutions have undergone profound changes and both find it necessary to rethink and reformulate elements of the relationships to clarify the twofold context of responsibilities of theological schools as rooted in higher education and in the life and work of the church. The following considerations will be helpful for member schools in describing this twofold context in which the institutions exist.

## The context of higher education

- I. The scope of theological education as a whole has changed significantly during the past quarter century. Apart from those seminaries that continue to admit only students preparing for ordination, many schools provide theological education for persons with diverse vocational and personal aims. This broadened function has subtly but significantly affected the identity of theological schools as educational institutions because their mission now often includes broadened purposes that they share with graduate professional schools in general.
- II. Theological schools have come to value peer assessment and to judge themselves by standards shared by graduate professional schools as a whole. Such peer assessment is the function of ATS that reflects both the standards of graduate and professional schools as well as a sensitivity to the denominational standards of churches for ministry. Schools have sought such peer assessment without compromising their loyalty to their denominations. In fact, church affiliated schools understand themselves as serving their respective churches better because they hold themselves accountable to standards of quality and governance established by accrediting agencies such as the ATS Commission on Accrediting. These developments have been in keeping with the dual context in which theological schools exist and from which they derive their identity—namely, higher education and the church.
- III. This accountability in the context of higher education to which theological schools are committed is achieved by accreditation.<sup>2</sup>

## The context of church

- IV. There are two characteristics of the Jewish-Christian community that are particularly notable today. First is the long-standing acceptance of ecumenism. Second is the recent renewed denominational self-consciousness as churches reaffirm their distinctive religious heritage and

ethos. Reflecting these trends, theological education has become decidedly more ecumenical with respect to both faculty and students as schools draw on scholarly resources from various traditions. Likewise, many theological schools that are related to a specific church are educating the leadership of other churches as well as their own. Conversely, the future leadership of a given church may be educated in schools representing a wide range of ecclesiastical identities. The churches for their part are showing increased concern for the continuation of their religious heritage and ethos. It is not surprising that this concern has as one of its focal points those institutions where the future leadership is being formed—namely, the theological schools. The communication of a church's tradition is largely shaped by leaders educated in these schools.

- V. Churches have also established according to their individual polities means of determining and insuring the effectiveness of their theological schools to serve the leadership needs of churches and especially the requisites of ordination (Church Assessment).

### **Purpose of policy guideline**

The intent of this policy guideline is (a) to distinguish between accreditation as a function of peers and church assessment and (b) to stress the conditions by which accreditation as a form of accountability is honored and maintained without prejudice to the churches. While acknowledging other forms of assessment, it does not address questions regarding the nature of assessment that is appropriate to ecclesiastical bodies, which may see fit to evaluate not only graduates but the schools themselves.

But policy guidelines alone, no matter how carefully phrased, will not assure the health of schools. Even the most robust theological schools are also fragile because their strength derives from a web of relationships nurtured by trust and self-restraint. Indeed, it is doubtful whether any school could mature into full strength in an atmosphere in which all parties—church, board of trustees, administration, faculty, and students—dealt with one another merely on a juridical basis, that is, by insisting on exercising fully their “legal rights.” If relationships within a school develop in healthy ways because of mutual trust, self-restraint, dialogue, and shared goals, then healthy relationships between schools and churches depend even more on these qualities.

### **Guiding principles**

The following principles, consonant with the foregoing consideration are offered to assist ATS member schools in clarifying their relations with churches.

- I. ATS affirms the diverse patterns of governance and accountability of member schools in relation to their respective churches and the right of schools and churches having no formal affiliation to develop relationships consistent with the integrity of the school.

- II. ATS acknowledges that ecclesiastical judicatories and dioceses have a legitimate expectation that professional personnel graduating from ATS member schools be prepared to meet qualifications for service within their respective churches.
- III. ATS Commission accreditation affirms the character of theological schools as educational institutions, no matter how intimately affiliated with or administered by church bodies. The schools and the churches share the responsibility of assuring that those elements requisite for a healthy graduate professional school are maintained. Central to these requisites is the preservation of the integrity of the institutional and educational processes of theological schools (i.e., the freedom and responsibility to determine in accordance with the defining tradition and duly constituted internal procedures of the school who shall teach, who shall be taught, what shall be taught, and upon what conditions the appropriate degrees or certificates shall be awarded). These are the conditions that are recognized as essential by the higher education community.
- IV. ATS affirms that the responsibility for determining the qualification for ordination and other nonordained ministerial roles, and for ascertaining who has met them, lies with the church. Where appropriate and in accordance with church polity, church affiliated schools should establish with their judicatories and dioceses the means whereby they as schools fulfill their ecclesiastical responsibilities. This may include an assessment of candidates for ministry in addition to their general educational preparation.
- V. ATS acknowledges that should appropriate church judicatories have evidence that graduates of a member school consistently lack the minimum requirements for service in the church, they have the responsibility of bringing the disparity to the attention of the school. Care should be taken that communication be respectful of appropriate levels of church judicatory and theological school authority and responsibility. Church judicatories should refrain from *unilaterally* imposing curricular requirements or changes in the attempt to address such deficiencies.
- VI. ATS acknowledges the right of member schools to seek multiple accreditation from relevant accrediting bodies recognized by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation or appropriate Canadian agencies, as well as the right to seek certification for discrete professional programs from appropriate certifying bodies (e.g., Clinical Pastoral Education programs).
  - VI. A. ATS believes that there is a fundamental difference between accreditation within an association of peer institutions and church assessment. The evaluation by peers, which is an integral part of the accreditation practices and traditions, must be honored as a distinctive function and service. We believe ecclesiastical bodies have the right to designate those seminaries most appropriate for the training of their ministers, but that procedures of church assessment should not preempt, substitute for, or unduly interfere with the accreditation process.

- VI.B. ATS regards it as fundamentally inappropriate for member schools to be subjected to *accreditation* from any nonpeer body or agency, ecclesiastical or other. *Evaluation*, however, for institutional purposes may well come from ecclesiastical bodies or others.
- VI.C. In any case in which an ecclesiastical body or agency observes substantive and continuing deficiencies in the academic quality or institutional integrity of an ATS member school, notice should be given to the school and may be given to the ATS Commission for proper assessment and appropriate action. Ecclesiastical bodies have the right to expect prompt and thoughtful response from both parties regarding such representation.
- VII. ATS understands that it may be difficult to determine whether a member school is an “appropriate” place for a person of a given church to prepare for service, since this involves the long-range compatibility of its graduates with the ethos of the church. Nonetheless, ATS member schools (especially nonchurch affiliated) are encouraged to develop collegial relations with those churches whose constituents they educate to foster mutual understanding, trust, and continuing engagement in the mutual endeavor of preparing persons for ministry.

## ENDNOTES

1. As the inclusive term, *theological schools* is used to designate divinity schools, seminaries, theological colleges, and theological faculties.
2. Within the academic community, accreditation has a precise and formal meaning. It is the means by which institutions of higher education voluntarily associate as peer groups to exercise self-accountability for the quality and integrity of educational programs, services, and institutional life. Based on peer assessment, this accountability is ordered both by Standards formulated and adopted by member schools, and by practices and procedures defined by long-standing traditions of North American higher education. For The Association of Theological Schools, it is both a process and a status. As a process, accreditation is a comprehensive assessment of an institution according to Standards and criteria that are essential to attaining quality theological education. The ATS Commission Standards of Accreditation and the *Policies and Procedures Related to Membership in the ATS Commission on Accrediting* are posted on the ATS website. Accredited Member status is conferred on an institution that, in the judgment of qualified peers, meets or exceeds the Standards of the Commission. It is an expression of confidence that an institution is guided by appropriate and well-defined mission and purposes, maintains resources that are required for them, and that is ordered by conditions, procedures, and practices that enable and ensure the fulfillment of the purposes to which a theological school is committed.

# Disability and Theological Education

*Adopted as advice and counsel by the Association in 2008.*

## Disability and theological education: Toward a fully inclusive community

Recognizing that all fall short of God's intention for creation, this policy guideline asks ATS member schools to live toward a vision of inclusion of all God's people in theological education. This policy guideline further calls upon each ATS member school to welcome people with disabilities into the communal life and mission of the institution. It also invites schools to become models for their religious constituents regarding ministry to and with persons who have disabilities. Indeed, it is a theological call for each school to work toward the fullest possible inclusion of all God's people in its work and witness. Disability is both an individual and a community issue. Schools should become inclusive communities where all qualified people can learn and serve.

Theological schools are communities of faith and learning, guided by a theological vision.<sup>1</sup> The Jewish and Christian concept of God is one of compassionate love showing special regard for persons who are marginalized in any fashion. At the conclusion of the Genesis witness to creation, God considers the natural order and calls it all good. God takes special delight in the creation of persons as made in the image of God, each with unique gifts and capabilities. The ministry of Christ demonstrates that divine hospitality is available to all persons and that human barriers designating some as inferior are forever destroyed. The resurrection shows us the power of God to overcome all human attempts at limiting God's love, even death itself. The fellowship of the faithful is charged to foster the giftedness of all within the community that all may worship and serve in response to God's call. If issues of disability are central to understanding both divine care and the character of the church, then certainly issues of disability should play a crucial role in Christian ministerial formation.

## Mission

Because God's church welcomes all people, the mission of a theological school ought to attend to the contributions and needs of all its constituents: students, staff, faculty, administrators, board members, ecclesial representatives, donors, family members, and visitors to the campus—including those who live with disability. Member schools should examine their mission statements, and any interpretive expansion on them, to ensure that qualified persons with disabilities are not excluded on account of those disabilities from education preparing them for the ministries of the church. Schools should also prepare men and women for ministry with attention to the unique gifts and needs of persons with disabilities who will be present in their congregations and communities.

Different governmental and other entities use different definitions of what constitutes a "disability."<sup>2</sup> This policy guideline is not legal advice, nor does it seek to describe the legal obligations of member schools with respect to persons with disabilities. Each member school is encouraged to seek its own legal counsel and to be informed of its legal obligations in that regard. Rather, this policy guideline is

aspirational in nature. It is intended to outline the goals by which theological schools can make theological education possible for persons with disabilities who possess the gifts and abilities for ministry. To that end, this policy guideline should be understood to be as inclusive as reasonably possible in terms of defining the scope of persons with disabilities who should receive from member schools welcome, understanding, and assistance.

## **Recruitment, admission, hiring, and retention of people living with disabilities**

A shared mission among theological schools is to identify and recruit students and faculty who will be effective religious leaders, contribute to theological wisdom, and provide ministerial service. Students and faculty members living with disability bring opportunity for new theological insight and understanding.

Schools retain the freedom to make reasonable judgments about students' appropriate potential for ministry, including spiritual maturity, moral integrity, and ministerial capacity. Qualified students with disabilities should have potential access to theological education and should be recruited with the same care and enthusiasm as other students. Students with disabilities should apply for admission under the same guidelines and careful screening as other students to determine whether they have the gifts and readiness for life and learning in a theological community and for future religious leadership.

Likewise, while schools also retain the freedom to make reasonable judgments about the appropriate potential and qualifications of faculty, qualified persons with disabilities should be sought and equally considered as faculty members, administrators, board members, and staff. They should be recruited with the same intentionality as other underrepresented groups in theological education.

## **Curriculum and outcomes**

Graduate theological schools equip future religious leaders. The curriculum, however, has usually included limited or no attention to equipping those leaders with knowledge about the human experience of disability.<sup>3</sup> Curricular attention to issues of disability and interaction with persons living with disabilities cultivate the capacity of leaders to respond in ministry, teaching, and congregational settings.

Courses specifically focused on disability are valuable and necessary, but equally important is infusing knowledge about the experience of disability throughout the curriculum. When people with disabilities are members of the educational community and interact with others in the educational setting, they precipitate generative discourse that is, itself, a powerful curricular resource. Faculty can enhance students' awareness and understanding by weaving the subject of human disability into their courses.<sup>4</sup> The growing body of scholarship about theology and disability provides an important resource for curriculum development.



Schools should develop a process for assessing their efforts to include the contributions of persons with disabilities and to respond appropriately to their needs, including (1) advances in curriculum development and formation for effective ministry to and with persons with disabilities, (2) the school's progress in recruiting qualified persons with disabilities, including students, staff, and faculty, and (3) the impact on students and their ministries from the greater presence of persons with disabilities in the seminary community.

### **Removing barriers to participation**

Member schools should strive to provide access to all aspects of seminary life for those living with disabilities by removing barriers to their fuller participation in the community, unless doing so would result in an undue hardship to the seminary or fundamentally alter the seminary's programs and its requirements. This may include but is not limited to changes in customary practice, the normal routine of activities and events, and the individuals' environment, and may include but is not limited to the classroom, living quarters, chapel, library, activities, and services. Making any such changes is not meant to limit the responsibility for appropriate bodies to determine students' qualifications, readiness, or fitness for ministry.

Schools should have a clear set of guidelines and a process for responding to students who present the need for such changes and services. Schools should support faculty and staff with training and resources to deal appropriately and sensitively with students who have special educational needs.

### **Access and physical environment**

Theological schools should strive to eliminate physical or architectural barriers that exclude or deter people who live with a disability and, in other appropriate ways, provide a physically hospitable environment for study, work, worship, and everyday activities. Schools should address environmental barriers related to parking, steps, doorways, bathrooms, and accessibility to classrooms, offices, library, food service, living quarters, and social and worship spaces. Technology can assist persons with disabilities to have full access to institutional resources, but attention should be given to ensure that access to technology and its ease of use are readily available to all in the community.

An accessibility audit of the campus can identify (1) needed modifications, (2) creative approaches to alter customary patterns, and (3) priorities for the future. Any audit should involve consultation with people with disabilities in the seminary or broader community.

### **Financial commitment**

This policy acknowledges the varying financial circumstances among ATS member schools and the possible costs associated with making facilities and programs accessible to persons with disabilities. Schools must make their own decisions concerning what is financially possible and appropriate. Financial constraints, however, should not unduly prohibit schools from making the commitments necessary to becoming environments that employ and educate qualified persons living with disability and

developing the necessary resources to make the vision a reality. Schools should not overlook potential resources and partner organizations in their communities that might provide expertise and assistance in meeting a range of institutional needs.

### **Seminary community awareness**

Effective theological education requires a welcoming, supportive, and enabling institutional environment. To include persons living with disabilities, schools must intentionally consider the necessary steps to ensure a hospitable community and to identify and remove barriers of attitude. Schools should provide appropriate opportunities to raise awareness and understanding of the gifts and needs that will accompany the presence of persons with disabilities in the school community. For staff, students, and faculty, this will mean training and awareness opportunities that provide theological grounding and practical equipping that will enhance the school's inclusion of persons with disabilities. Special attention should be given to personnel practices that open the workplace in theological schools to persons with disabilities. Assistance should be offered to faculty to identify and implement strategies for providing hospitable learning environments and sensitive pedagogies for students with disabilities. These strategies should attend to classrooms, study experiences, and contextual learning settings. Attention should also be given to formation issues in the student community that include broadened understanding of persons living with disabilities.

### **Relationships with church bodies**

Theological students living with a disability should have the support of their appropriate judicatory or denominational offices. As appropriate to the church relationship of the seminary, theological schools may serve as advocates and interpreters on behalf of students who may be negotiating processes with church officials and committees that are unaccustomed to working with candidates who have a disability. Care should be taken to consult with each student before information is shared with a denominational body. The seminary might help to provide continuing education of clergy regarding ministry to and with persons in their congregations who live with disabilities. Seminaries could also seek to give leadership in their church bodies to raise awareness and foster action around issues of inclusion for persons with disabilities. In many ways, the seminary can become a model for the broader community.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Commission on Accrediting, *General Institutional Standards*, Standard 1, section 1 (Pittsburgh, PA: The Association of Theological Schools).
2. The World Health Organization defines disability as "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in a manner or within the range considered normal for a human being" ([www.who.int/en](http://www.who.int/en)). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines disability as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual such as walking, speaking, and breathing; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment" ([www.ada.gov/pubs/ada.htm](http://www.ada.gov/pubs/ada.htm)). See also *Loving Justice: The ADA and the Religious Community*, Ginny Thornburgh, ed. (Washington, DC: National Organization on Disability, 1996). The ADA has an information line, staffed by the Civil Rights Division of the US Department of Justice: 800-514-0301 (voice) and 800-514-0383 (TDD). The province of Ontario bases a definition of disability on the International Classifica-

tion of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), which views disability as the interrelationship between body functions, activities, and social participation: “a limitation in activity as a result of a health problem or condition” ([www.who.int/classifications/icf](http://www.who.int/classifications/icf)). Human Resources and Social Development Canada, a governmental department, “considers people to have a disability if they have a physical or mental condition or a health problem that restricts their ability to perform activities that are normal for their age in Canadian society” ([www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/odi/documents/PALS/PALS003.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/odi/documents/PALS/PALS003.shtml)).

3. Survey of Theological Education and People with Disabilities (Birmingham, AL: The Center for Religion and Disability, Inc., 2003, 2005), Robert C. Anderson and W. Daniel Blair, principal researchers.
4. A multifaceted approach toward inclusion could include activities such as encouraging faculty and students to include disability topics in their research; chapel services led by people with disabilities; special courses or symposia dealing with theology, disability, and religious life; teaching how people with disabilities can also minister to others rather than simply being the objects of care; or continuing education about disability for community clergy.

# Faculty Reductions During Financial Crisis

*Adopted as advice and counsel by the Association in 2010.*

## Rationale and goals

1. Proactively leading institutions in making difficult yet necessary changes to the finances of theological schools may prevent them from reaching severe financial crises. When extreme financial crisis warrants, the following principles and practices may help guide an institution in making those difficult decisions to balance the survival of the school with the protection of its employees.
2. Financial exigency is declared when an institution needs to take extraordinary action to reduce expenditures and preserve resources.\*
3. This policy guideline is in full harmony and compliance with the mission and standards of the Association.

## Guiding principles

1. Fundamental to the determination of the need for reductions of tenured faculty or contracted staff is a careful and credible statement of the nature and dimension of the financial exigency of the school. Appropriate constituencies of the school should be involved in understanding the facts if a declaration of financial exigency is to be deemed credible. Adopting a collaborative approach to this challenge may increase community-wide trust and support.
2. It should be understood that eliminating contracts of employment may be necessary for the long-term survival of the institution.
3. Institutions should focus on the viability, health, and integrity of the whole enterprise of education for ministry while balancing institutional survival with fair treatment of faculty and contracted staff members.
4. A flexible, equitable, and nondiscriminatory process that is consistent with the overall mission and values of the school should be adopted for making decisions about reductions of faculty or contracted staff members.
5. Appropriate amounts of time and resources should be spent on strengthening current revenue streams while developing new, sustainable revenue sources.

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\* In addition to the suggested guidelines from ATS, schools will find helpful a statement from the Association of American Colleges titled "Statement on Financial Exigency and Staff Reduction" and a statement from the American Association of University Professors titled "On Institutional Problems Resulting From Financial Exigency: Some Operating Guidelines."

6. Mergers or redefining the institutional mission may be additional considerations.

### Recommended practice

1. Schools should seek human resource experts and legal counsel knowledgeable in the applicable law of the state(s) or province(s) where the school operates before incorporating these guidelines into policies.
2. A panel of outside and disinterested qualified persons could be invited to confirm the reality of the financial exigency and assist in designing documents that best communicate the financial realities. It is understood that costs may prohibit this approach; however, local experts may be willing to donate their time and expertise if requested.
3. Schools should develop and implement appropriate personnel policies and procedures in accordance with General Institutional Standard 8, section 8.1.3.
4. At the earliest possible time, full and detailed information regarding the nature and extent of the financial exigency should be made available to all persons and groups potentially affected by the crisis. Compassionate transparency without violating confidentiality may prove useful.
5. Regular disclosure of appropriate information about the finances and financial health of an institution to its constituencies is the first step toward creating a climate of understanding when a school's finances may necessitate staffing reductions.
6. The processes used in reduction of tenured faculty or contracted staff and the announcement of those reductions with termination of contract or employment should be carried on in a compassionate spirit that results in the least damage of the sense of worth of those whose employment is terminated and provides as much transitional financial support as is prudent.
7. All legitimate and practical means of dealing with the financial crisis should be exercised before terminating contracts. This includes a careful analysis of increased endowment spending to eliminate deficits.
8. Any reduction in faculty employment should be done with a clear eye toward such reduction's impact on the quality and scope of education offered to students. Educational needs of the institution must be balanced against other values such as seniority in times of genuine financial exigency.
9. Alternate forms and places of service for those who suffer from reduction in numbers, either within the institution or elsewhere, should be explored.
10. Institutions may consider not increasing salaries or taking across-the-board reductions in salaries as a means toward meeting the exigency.

11. Institutions may offer incentives for early retirement for eligible faculty as a means toward achieving ongoing payroll reduction.
12. Members of a faculty and administrative staff may wish to modify their compensation from the school in order to continue their life and work together.
13. Those with adequate financial means may wish to offer contributed service for part or all of their employment costs for a specified period in order to prevent termination of employment of themselves or of colleagues.
14. The board and administration may consider asking current full-time faculty to serve on a part-time basis until the financial conditions improve.
15. The board, administration, and faculty may consider eliminating or temporarily suspending certain employee benefits (e.g., employer contributions to retirement or sabbaticals).

# Faculty Resignations, Leaves, and Retirements

*Adopted as advice and counsel by the Association in 2010.*

## Rationale and goals

Faculty members are among the greatest resources of theological schools. Appropriate employment treatment of them is crucial for the financial and academic well-being of the schools. Both faculty members and the institutions that employ them need to follow guidelines for institutional procedures that protect the interests of both and contribute to the fruitful fulfilling of institutional mission and individual vocation.

## Resignations

### Guiding principles

1. Faculty considering resignation should provide sufficient notice so that the academic program of the school does not suffer unduly.
2. As appropriate, faculty considering resignation should conduct discussions sufficiently in the open that the school from which the resignation is contemplated has an opportunity to enter into the conversations.

### Recommended practice

3. Tenured faculty members considering resignation should provide notice of a minimum of six months; for an untenured faculty member, the minimum notice should be three months.
4. A school may engage a faculty member at another school in conversation at any time regarding possible employment.

## Sabbatical leaves

### Guiding principles

1. A school is responsible for making provision of time and support for the continued intellectual and spiritual growth of faculty members.
2. A member of the faculty is responsible for taking and using the sabbatical as an opportunity for intellectual and spiritual growth to the benefit of the school and the church.

### Recommended practice

3. A sabbatical leave should be provided for each member of the faculty on indefinite tenure after an agreed upon period of full-time service, provided plans are made to make use of the leave in line with the conditions suggested below.

4. The minimum length of such leave with full salary should be six months, but where a longer leave seems desirable, salary adjustments should be arrived at through appropriate discussion.
5. Sabbatical leave should be conceived of by the faculty member and the administration as a time for deeper study, research, or writing. Where possible, location in another center of learning will add breadth to the faculty member's point of view.
6. Normally the faculty member will agree to return to the school that has granted the sabbatical leave and to remain at the school for a minimum of one year after the leave.

## Retirement

### Guiding principles

1. The retirement policy and plan should be attractive to individuals engaged in educational work, increase the morale of the faculty, permit faculty members with singleness of purpose to devote their energies to serving their institution, and make it possible for them to enter retirement with a sense of security.
2. The occasion of retirement can offer the opportunity for institutional self-reflection about future needs.

### Recommended practice

3. The retirement policy and plan of an institution should be clearly defined and be well understood by both the faculty and the administration of the institution.
4. Due to the complexity of federal and state or provincial laws regarding retirement policies and programs in higher education, the institution should engage the services of appropriate retirement consultants and plan administrators in the development of retirement policies, plans, and procedures and should seek legal counsel knowledgeable in the applicable law of the state(s) or province(s) where the school operates before incorporating these guidelines into policies.
5. Institutions may find that a policy allowing for early retirement may be helpful to members of the faculty, even though such a policy may result in a theological school losing gifted faculty members.



# Striving for Culturally Competent School Communities

*Adopted as advice and counsel by the Association in 2010.*

## Rationale and goals

The value of a culturally competent community lies in the benefits that accrue from experiencing a broad range of individuals with a broad range of perspectives and gifts. In the past four decades, higher education has made significant strides in its thinking and implementing of policies supporting just and diverse academic communities. At the same time, shifting demographics in the United States promise to tip the scales of racial balance in the coming decades. Continued vigilance is therefore required to ensure that institutional policies provide opportunities for diverse populations, build capacity in schools to serve those populations, enhance the educational experience for all constituents, and equip graduates to embrace a commitment to diversity and inclusion—in all their forms—as they minister in their congregations and communities.

This policy views cultural competency as a strength in theological education and encourages ATS schools to live toward a vision of including and valuing the full spectrum of God's people—with their multiplicity of characteristics—in theological education and ministry. It seeks to honor the ATS commitment to respecting diversity as a core value within the schools while at the same time respecting their different expressions of faith and varying understandings of theology, polity, religious leadership, and social commitments. The guidelines provided may be adapted to the particular situation of each school.

## Definitions

**Cultural competency** is proficiency in responding effectively and respectfully to a diverse cultural context. It is the process by which individuals and institutions become aware of and think theologically about assumptions, biases, and knowledge about themselves and others.

**Culturally competent communities** are communities that foster mutual respect and care for others and in which all individuals are recognized as persons loved by God. In a culturally competent community, members know how to relate to those qualities and conditions that are different from their own, how to manage the dynamics of difference, and how to benefit from the diversity around them.

**Discrimination** is any activity that creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others.

**Capacity building** is any activity that enhances an organization's effectiveness (i.e., its resources, competencies, and ability) in fulfilling its mission and sustaining itself within the cultural context in which it operates.

## Guiding principles

1. Culturally competent communities create environments in which individuals enjoy mutual respect, cooperation, and caring.
2. Theological schools should hold themselves accountable to ensuring that they contribute in a positive way to a diverse and multicultural society.
3. Diversity has many dimensions and manifests itself in the uniquenesses of individuals, communities, and their identities.
4. Initiatives toward building a culturally competent community should take a comprehensive and institution-wide approach with the full support of institutional leadership.
5. Opportunities for interaction among all members of the school community will promote discovery of common ground in shared ideals, values, and principles.
6. A culturally competent community promotes freedom of independent thinking and civil discourse and creates a dynamic learning environment.
7. Students and the communities they will serve benefit from teaching, learning, and research born out of a culturally competent environment.
8. Personal, cultural, and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others.
9. Building capacity in the area of cultural competency enhances a school's ability to serve its mission, including education of graduates to function effectively in increasingly diverse societies.
10. A culturally competent theological school will regularly assess its mission and work to determine any areas in need of appropriate response.

## Recommended practice

With these goals and principles in mind, theological schools should conduct ongoing assessments of their institutional climates and practices with respect to issues of cultural competency.

## Mission and resources

1. A theological school's mission and resources should be reviewed regularly to assess readiness and capacity for improvement in achieving cultural competency.
2. A theological school should develop a policy reflecting its aspirations and realistic goals for creating a culturally competent community.

3. A theological school should acquire, allocate, and provide access to resources, such as library, information technology, and student services, that reflect its commitment to cultural competency.
4. A theological school should develop steps to ensure that accountability structures are in place that will both lead to enhanced practices of inclusion and assist the school to identify and address ongoing areas of exclusion.

### **Campus climate**

5. A theological school should endeavor to create a hospitable and welcoming culture.
6. A theological school should promote activities that foster interaction and discovery among all campus constituents.
7. A theological school should establish a procedure and a forum for discussion of any challenges or conflicts or any new initiatives related to cultural competency.

### **Representation**

8. A theological school should strive to ensure that its communications and admissions processes, including recruitment and financial aid policies, maximize access to a full range of prospective students of varied identity and background, as appropriate to the school's particular expression of faith and understanding of theology, polity, religious leadership, and social commitments.
9. A theological school should strive to recruit, to hire, and to retain, through tenure and promotion activities, a qualified faculty and staff whose composition reflects and serves the particular identity and background of its student body.

### **Curriculum, scholarship, and outcomes**

10. A theological school should make resources available to faculty, students, staff, and administration for the purpose of enhancing educational effectiveness in the service of diversity.
11. A theological school, through its faculty, should develop pedagogies and curricula that make learning more effective for the diversity of the student body.
12. Curricular offerings should cultivate the capacity of leaders to respond to diverse populations in ministry, teaching, and congregational settings.
13. Evaluation of scholarship should consider the influence of societal diversity on scholarly inquiry.

**Relationships with church bodies**

14. A theological school should work cooperatively with church bodies to diagnose and correct conditions that inhibit the achievement of culturally competent congregations.

**Financial commitment**

15. A theological school should endeavor to reflect the above commitments in its budget allocations.

# Student Financial Aid

*Adopted as advice and counsel by the Association in 2010.*

## Rationale and goals

Historically, seminaries have been concerned with providing financial aid to those who evidenced financial need in pursuit of their theological studies. Though that is still a major concern, the current environment also demands recognition of academic achievement or other forms of merit. Theological schools need highly qualified students regardless of financial status. In addition, students, schools, churches, and judicatories have expressed growing concerns regarding the increased debt load of students graduating from theological school and entering ministry. These factors lead to the following goals for financial aid provided by ATS member schools:

1. Theological schools should take into account aid granted on the basis of both financial need and merit.
2. Theological schools should counsel students regarding the consequences of educational debt.
3. Theological schools must take into account the many federal, state, and provincial regulations required of institutions participating in government loan programs.

The Association recommends that schools consider the following definitions, guiding principles, and practices in their financial aid procedures.

## Definitions

**Financial aid** consists of scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study/institutional employment.

**Need-based aid** is defined as aid granted to a student to meet the difference between the total cost of attending a particular institution and the amount of resources available to the student.

**Merit-based aid** is defined as aid granted to a student on the basis of academic performance, cocurricular involvement, or other form of merit.

## Guiding principles

1. The student has the major responsibility for his or her educational and living expenses. The school's aid will augment the student's efforts.
2. A student's financial resources will include consideration of merit scholarships; funds available from church, judicatory, and denomination; earnings of student and spouse; savings; veterans' benefits; and outside gifts.

3. Financial aid is not an end in itself but should be administered in such a way as to affirm financial responsibility and integrity of both student and school.
4. The administration of financial aid should be individual, personal, pastoral, and confidential.
5. Theological schools should adopt a financial aid code of conduct to which it and all outside agents (lenders, loan servicers, etc.) must adhere.
6. Need-based financial aid should not exceed the amount of demonstrated student need.
7. Theological schools that are part of larger institutions should coordinate their financial aid policies with those of the larger institution.

### **Recommended practice**

1. A common need analysis system (such as FAFSA for US schools) should be used.
2. The estimate of a student's expenses should include tuition, fees, housing, transportation, food, medical care and insurance, recreation, and contributions to church and charities.
3. A flexible, equitable, and nondiscriminatory system should be developed for processing aid for all students.
4. In packaging aid, each school should take into account the total indebtedness of each student and spouse. Counsel should be given to all students seeking loans that indebtedness, by its very nature, affects ministry options.
5. A theological school must publish its procedures and policies to make certain they are available to students.
6. A theological school should review and change its procedures and practices to meet changing needs.
7. A theological school should provide for an annual review of each student's need.