Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes

*Progress and Challenges*

CHEA 2015 Annual Conference

Session 3 (11:00-12:15 on Jan. 27)

Panel Discussion
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

ATS Commission on Accrediting (began 1938)

**Scope:** Graduate degrees in theology/ministry

**Status:** 1 of 4 national, faith-related accreditors

(USDE: 1 of 5 “Community and Social Services” accreditors)

**Size:** 244 accredited and 10 candidate schools

(Of 254 total: 218 in US and 36 in Canada)

(in Pittsburgh since 1990)
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

ATS Commission on Accrediting:

80% of US members also regionally accredited

40% of 254 members part of larger institution

(range from Abilene Christian to Yale University)

Median: 155 students, 10 faculty, 3 degrees

(range from 13 students to 3,300 students)
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

(illustrate with a 30-second video)
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

We’ve made progress...
(members working hard on “assessment car”)

But we still have challenges...
(need clearer focus on “right car”)
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

Most significant area of progress:
Revised our standards in 2010 and 2012

- **General Institutional Standards** (8) in 2010
- **Educational Standard** (8 parts) in 2012
- **Degree Program Standards** (10) in 2012
  - Educational Standard (new part 6) on assessment
  - 1st section of each now focused on assessment

Still, schools had struggled after 2012
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

Evaluation vs. Assessment

*Evaluation* = *institutional performance*

*Assessment* = *student learning*

- student outcomes
- vs.
- student learning outcomes

3 ATS assessment principles:

1. Keep it *simple*
2. Keep it *sustainable*
3. Keep it *sufficient...*

...to answer key questions about educational effectiveness
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

Part 1) Progress in Expectations

Four parts of assessment for ATS Commission:

1) **Identification** of desired outcomes per program
2) **Information** on their achievement (direct/indirect)
3) **Interpretation** of that information by key players
4) **Implementation** of those interpretations for **improvement** (progress not paperwork)
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Part 1) Progress in Implementation

Top 3 follow-up actions by Commission since 2009:

3rd - Planning/eval. (199 actions)

2nd - Finances (388 actions)

1st - Assessment (405 actions)

Why so much concern?
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

Since 2009, **85% of visits** (131 of 155) required follow-up reports on assessment, but trend improving.
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Part 2) Five Challenges

1. Frequent transitions in assessment personnel
   – Theological school deans turn over every 3-5 years
   – Assessment directors often part-time and rotate
   – Culture of assessment vs. culture-bearers of assessment

2. Changing expectations regarding assessment
   – Once focused on information, now improvement
   – Assessing both curricular and co-curricular areas
   – Faculty can become confused as expectations change
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

Like Drawing an Owl

How to draw an owl

1. Draw some circles
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

Like Drawing an Owl

How to draw an owl

1. Draw some circles
2. Draw the rest of the owl
Assessment: Progress and Challenges
Part 2) Five Challenges

3. CHEA expectations on assessment (12B.1)
   – What data are made public?
   – Are these data mainly economic?
   – Student outcomes vs. student learning outcomes
Statement of Educational Effectiveness:
The mission of Beeson Divinity School is:

1) To provide graduate theological education;

2) To prepare God-called persons to serve as ministers in the Church of Jesus Christ; and

3) To worship the Triune God and to encourage the practices of Christian spirituality.

The faculty and staff of the Divinity School are committed to the fulfillment of this mission and to rigorous evaluation of programs, services, and outcomes for the sake of educational effectiveness and quality improvement.

While there are various measures of educational effectiveness employed by theological schools, Beeson Divinity School is pleased to publish the following findings:

Doctor of Ministry

Direct measures of learning (2010-14) revealed that 85% of students met or exceeded the faculty's standards for degree objectives; 13% met standards with some qualification; and 2% failed to meet standards.

Indirect measures of learning (2010-14 graduates' self-reported evaluations) revealed that graduates were very satisfied with how the program of study enhanced their practice of Christian ministry, as expressed in the degree objectives. On a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), the aggregate rating across all degree objectives was 4.33.
Part 2) Five Challenges

4. Assessment challenges in our “industry”
   – No major field or licensure exams in theology
   – Mission-based diversity of members (publish or parish)
   – Increasing number of graduates not seeking career
     (as many as 50% in some degrees)
Assessment: Progress and Challenges

Part 2) Five Challenges

5. *Faculty frustration over assessment*
   - Since 2008 recession, “less straw, more bricks”
   - Doctoral training not focused on assessment
   - ATS focus on 3 S’s: Simple, Sustainable, Sufficient
   - But new day dawning...

   “Student learning outcomes get me up in the morning. This is why I teach—to help my students learn. And I want to know that they have learned.”

   --unsolicited ATS faculty statement
Assessment: Progress and Challenges