

**Accreditation and  
Student Learning Outcomes  
*Progress and Challenges***

**CHEA 2015 Annual Conference**

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

Panel Discussion

**Accreditation and  
Student Learning Outcomes  
*Progress and Challenges***

**Tom Tanner, Accreditation Director (1 of 5)**



The Association of Theological Schools  
The Commission on Accrediting

# 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)

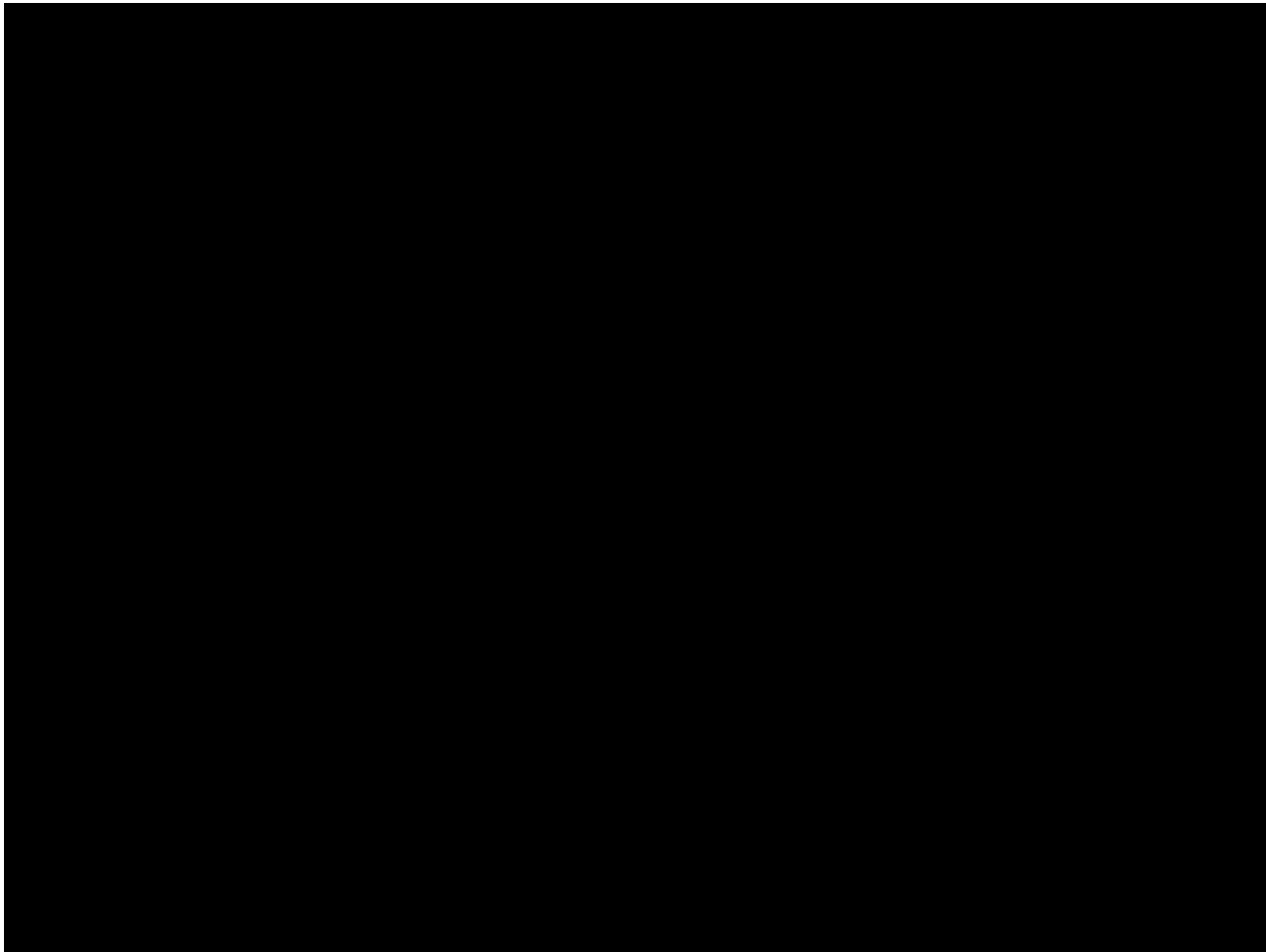
Median: 155 students, 10 faculty, 3 degrees

(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

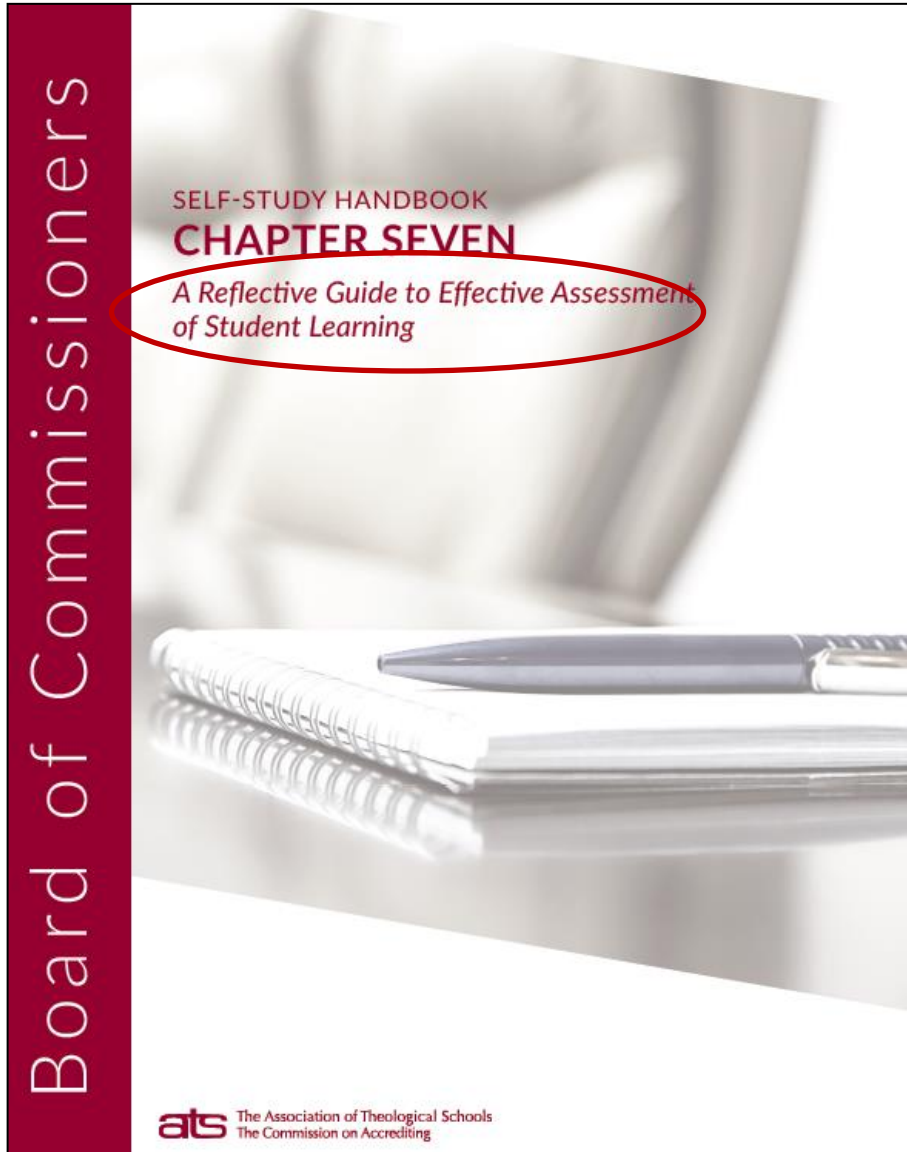
***Degree Program Standards*** (10) in 2012

Educational Standard (new part 6) on assessment

1<sup>st</sup> 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)

# Assessment: Progress and Challenges

## Part 1) Progress in Implementation

Top 3 follow-up actions by Commission since 2009:

3<sup>rd</sup> - **Planning/eval.** (199 actions)

2<sup>nd</sup> - **Finances** (388 actions)

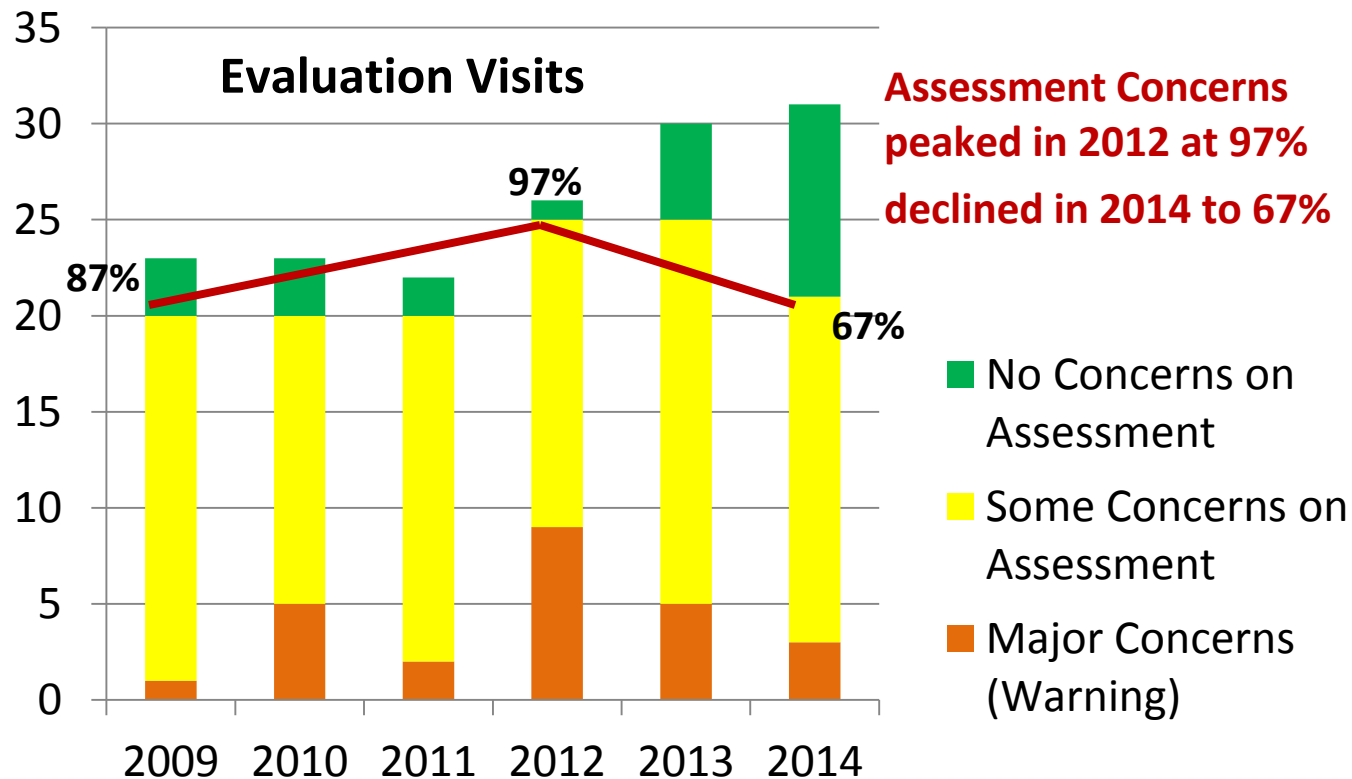
1<sup>st</sup> - **Assessment** (405 actions)

*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



# Assessment: Progress and Challenges

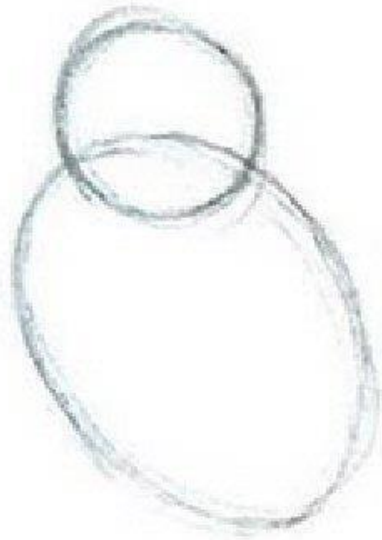
## Part 2) Five Challenges

- 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



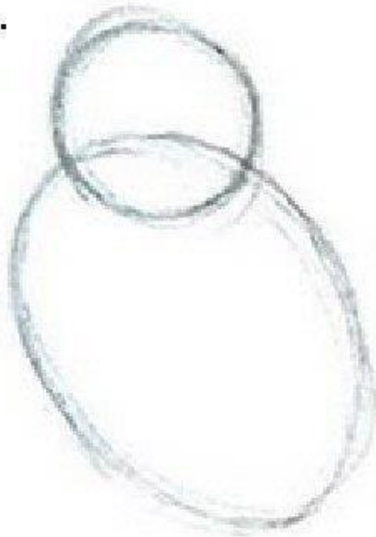
1. Draw some circles

# Assessment: Progress and Challenges

## *Like Drawing an Owl*

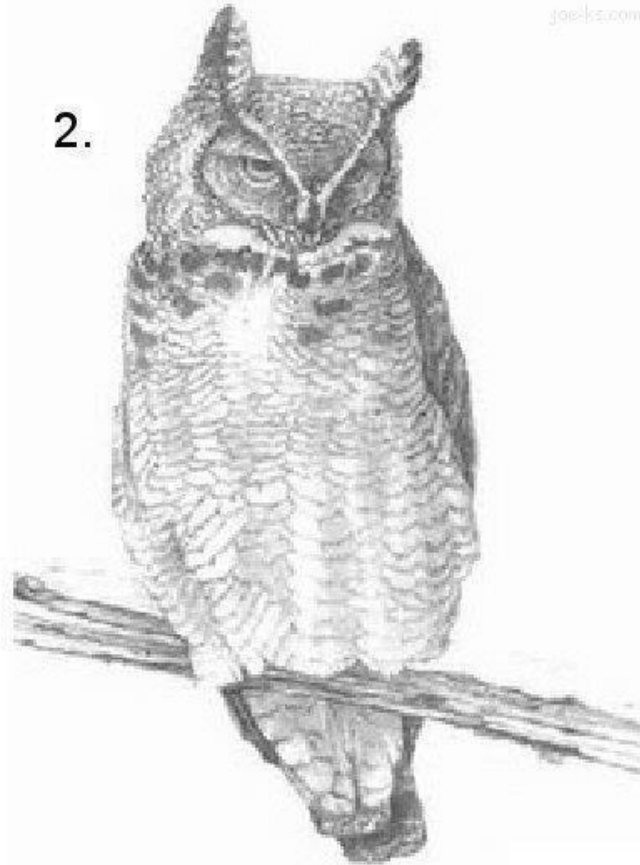
How to draw an owl

1.



1. Draw some circles

2.



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



The screenshot shows the website for The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) Commission on Accrediting. The page is titled 'Member Schools' and displays the profile for Beeson Divinity School of Samford University. The school's address is 800 Lakeshore Drive, Birmingham, AL 35229-2252, with phone number 205-726-4485 and fax number 205-726-2260. The member status is Accredited, and the denomination is Inter/Multidenominational. A link for 'Statement of Educational Effectiveness' is circled in red. The page also lists member school representatives: Dean Timothy George (205-726-2632) and Academic Dean David Hogg (205-726-4485). The Commission Staff Liaison is Tisa Lewis.



### **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.



# Assessment: Progress and Challenges

## 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

