



# The Association of Theological Schools The Commission on Accrediting

February 25, 2025

ATTN: Rosemary McNatt  
Starr King School for the Ministry  
414 13th Street  
Suite 700  
Oakland, CA 94612  
*via email only*

## **UPDATED Action Letter**

Dear President McNatt,

The Board of Commissioners met in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on February 3-4, 2025, and included on its agenda Starr King School for the Ministry's comprehensive visit and the resulting report by the evaluation committee.

After reviewing the information in light of the pertinent Commission [\*Standards\*](#) and [\*Policies and Procedures\*](#), the Board voted:

1. To reaffirm the school's accreditation for a period of five years, until 31 March 2030, with the next comprehensive evaluation visit in fall 2029.

Rationale if less than maximum period: The need for a track record of budget surpluses, the upcoming presidential transition, and the need for updated and comprehensive strategic planning and evaluation warrants a shorter period of accreditation.

2. To approve the following educational offerings:

a. Degree programs:

Master of Divinity

Master of Arts in Social Change

b. Distance education: Comprehensive

c. Additional locations: None

3. To affirm these distinctive strengths to be maintained during the next period of accreditation:

a. A mission of educating to counter oppressions, cultivate multi-religious life and learning, and create just and sustainable communities that informs every aspect of institutional and educational life and is passionately embraced by a broad range of constituencies (i.e., students, faculty, staff, board, alumni).

- b. Remarkable and mission guided flexibility that is evidenced in the school's ability to navigate an extraordinary amount of change with a spirit of adaptability, collaboration, creativity, and determination to maintain the school's unique place in educating for progressive religious leadership.
- c. Pedagogical intentionality and clarity evidenced by a posture of risk-taking, openness, innovation, and flexibility on the part of faculty and staff, and a deeply embodied commitment to the intellectual, human, spiritual, and vocational dimensions of learning and formation through the school's holistic, student-centered curriculum, co-curricular services, and activities that are cherished by the school's students.

4. To highlight the following issues needing special attention during the next period of accreditation:

- a. Demonstration of equitable, nondiscriminatory systems and processes for determining and communicating scholarships, financial aid, and implications of educational debt that are attentive to the duration of a student's enrollment, regularly reviewed by the school, and updated as needed (see Standards 7.8-9 and 10.4).
- b. The board's selection, care for, and evaluation of the school's chief executive officer (see Standard 9.3).
- c. Continued mutual engagement in developing a bond of trust among the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students, where shared governance is clearly defined and appropriately Implemented, recognizing the appropriate roles among the board, administration, and faculty that leads to increased communication, understanding, and decision making that supports the school's educational quality and financial sustainability (see Standards 9 opening paragraph and 9.6-8).
- d. Adequate compensation and appropriate workloads for faculty and staff (see Standards 8.4 and 10.1).

5. To require the following reports to address areas needing improvement and/or further information:

- a. To require a report by the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2026, regarding educational evaluation that engages appropriate stakeholders (e.g., faculty, students, finance, admissions and enrollment) and documents a simple, systematic, and sustained process of degree program evaluation that regularly gathers evidence related to each learning and degree program outcome (with a mixture of direct and indirect measures and quantitative and qualitative data). The report should include discussion of processes in place and results from evaluation conducted (see Standards 2.5-8, 4.5, and 4.9). The school is invited to consult the [\*Reflective Guide to Effective Evaluation for Theological Schools\*](#).
- b. To require a report by the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2026, demonstrating how the continuation of the five-year roadmap and/or its successor strategic plan tends to the review of the school's mission statement and the articulation of a plan that focuses on the most strategic priorities for achieving the school's mission, names the strategic priorities, identifies how each will be achieved, and includes the human, financial, physical, and technological resources needed for each priority. The report should (i) demonstrate how the school is

addressing financial sustainability within its strategic priorities (see Standards 10.3 and 10.5); (ii) include evidence that evaluation plans have been adopted, are tied to strategic planning, and are implemented and regularly evaluated; (iii) engage appropriate stakeholders on a sustained basis to analyze and reflect upon how well the evidence indicates that each educational and institutional outcome is being achieved; and (iv) use those analyses and reflections for educational and institutional improvement and effectiveness (see Standards 2.3-7). The school is invited to consult the [Reflective Guide to Effective Evaluation for Theological Schools](#).

6. To issue the following warning because the school, while substantially meeting the Commission *Standards of Accreditation* as a whole, is at risk of not meeting the following specific Standard(s). The school has two years to address this warning adequately, or the Board will take other appropriate action as described in the *Policies and Procedures*, III.G-J.:

**Standard 10.3 on Financial Resources**: While the school has taken steps to shift its financial model and eliminate budget deficits, it remains at risk of not having “sufficient and stable revenue streams and financial resources to achieve its mission with educational quality and financial sustainability.” It must submit a report by the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2026/2027, regarding operating results that demonstrate a trajectory toward a consistent pattern of surpluses over time.

The report should include the school’s plans for ensuring sufficient and stable financial resources to achieve its mission with educational quality and financial sustainability, the FY 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 audits and management letters (if available), the school’s analysis of its FY 2027/2028 operating revenues and expenditures, and budget projections for two to three years.

NOTE: Actions #1–5 (above) are effective **February 4, 2025**; action #6 (above) is effective **February 21, 2025**—thereby allowing sufficient time from the receipt of this notification for any initial request for a review (see ATS Commission [Policies and Procedures](#), VIII.A and VIII.A.1-3). To request a review of the above public sanction(s), the school must submit an official request signed by the school’s chief executive officer (or designee) within two weeks from today’s Board action letter; the school would then have two more weeks to submit specific documentation supporting its review request (VIII.A.1-2). Any initial request for a review is to be addressed to the Board of Commissioners and submitted in care of the Accrediting Records Coordinator ([accrediting@ats.edu](mailto:accrediting@ats.edu)).

The ATS Commission [Policies and Procedures](#) defines a public sanction as a negative action taken by the Board of Commissioners to issue a Warning (III.G), to place on Probation (III.H), or to issue a Show Cause (III.I). The school is reminded that it must disclose its accreditation status publicly on its website and in appropriate documents such as its catalog (VII.A.6). If the school has been placed on public sanction (i.e., warning, probation, show cause), that information must also be included in the school’s public statement of accreditation and disclosed to all current and prospective students **within seven business days** of the effective date of that

action (see III.G-I, VI.A.5, and VIII). The school is to provide evidence to the Commission ([accrediting@ats.edu](mailto:accrediting@ats.edu)) that these disclosures have occurred by **March 4, 2025** (e.g., date stamped screenshots, letter communiques, etc.).

Timeframes for resolving a public sanction may not exceed twelve months in the event of a Show Cause—which is neither reviewable nor appealable (III.I)—or two years in the event of either issuing a Warning (III.G.1) or being placed on Probation (III.H.1). Evidence for removal of the above public sanction(s) should be sent to the ATS Commission on Accrediting no later than **November 1, 2026**, in order to be considered by the Board at its 2027 winter meeting (February). Submission of such evidence follows the guidelines and formatting as other interim reports to the Commission (III.E.1); see also <https://www.ats.edu/Interim-Reports>). To request that a public sanction be removed earlier, the school should contact its assigned ATS Commission staff liaison regarding the possibility of any advance submission and associated deadline for Board review.

Please contact me directly at [hartung@ats.edu](mailto:hartung@ats.edu) with any questions.

Sincerely,

Heather Campaign Hartung  
Director of Accreditation

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