

Seminary enrollments showing upturn

by [John Dart](#) in the [May 17, 2011](#) issue

Total enrollment is up for the first time in four years at seminaries of the Association of Theological Schools—thanks to the addition of 11 new schools to the roster of North America's accrediting organization.

Without those newly admitted seminaries and their fall enrollments of about 1,000 students, officials at the Pittsburgh-based ATS would have noted yet another downward tick in the totals. Instead, the 75,431 students studying for the ministry at 261 institutions rose .6 percent from a year earlier.

Looking at 245 schools that have been members for at least five years, ATS says the news was still good. The decline "has slowed to a rate of .8 percent between 2009 and 2010," said Eliza Smith Brown, director of communications and external relations. It had dropped 3.6 percent in the fall of 2008—the largest single-year drop in four years.

Seven of the 11 seminaries admitted last year fell into ATS's category of evangelical institutions. Two are Catholic-related and two are listed as mainline.

The biggest jump—468 students—was provided by Moody Bible Institute's Moody Theological Seminary and Graduate School in Chicago. "Moody acquired control of Michigan Theological Seminary, an ATS accredited school, in January of 2010, although the 468 students listed do represent new students," Brown said. Its campus is in Plymouth, Michigan.

One of the two new mainline schools in ATS is Baptist Seminary of Kentucky, which moved last summer from the campus of Lexington Theological Seminary to the campus of Georgetown College. The Baptist seminary has links to the Progressive Baptist Fellowship. The other new school is Lubbock Christian University (its graduate program in biblical studies). The Texas school was founded in 1957 by members of the Churches of Christ.

Other data recently released by ATS show few changes. Fuller Theological Seminary, based in Pasadena, California, but with multiple campuses in other states, remains the largest in enrollment—3,918. Richard Mouw, Fuller's longtime president, is also currently the ATS president.

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, is second with 2,525 students, barely ahead of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (2,490) in Fort Worth, Texas. Dallas Theological Seminary is fourth largest with 2,028, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts is next at 1,944 students.

"The M.Div. continues to occupy the largest number of students," Brown said. M.Div. candidates constitute 42 percent of the new students this year and 43 percent of the total head count. Women remain a steady 34 percent of total enrollment. As for ethnic ratios, 64 percent are white, 31 percent black, 7 percent Asian, 5 percent Hispanic and .4 percent Native American.

In other seminary news, a proposed partnership has been called off between Meadville Lombard, a Unitarian Universalist seminary in Chicago, and Andover Newton, an American Baptist- and United Church of Christ-related seminary outside of Boston.

Andover Newton, which is slated to start sharing its campus next year with Hebrew College and Rabbinical School, announced April 21 that yearlong negotiations with Meadville "came to a close this week due to institutional complexities" that made partnership unfeasible.

Meadville has sold its four buildings in the Hyde Park area of Chicago and plans to lease space from one of four educational institutions in the University of Chicago area, announced Lawrence Ladd of Boston, the Meadville board chair.

"We are more financially sustainable" as a result, Ladd said in Meadville's news release. The second decisive point, he said, was a promise that "we would not continue under any plan that would diminish Meadville Lombard's identity as a Unitarian Universalist seminary."