

Racial/ethnic students represent largest growth area for theological schools

The 2012 Annual Data Tables, which are now available on the ATS website, point to the largest enrollment growth area for theological schools—racial/ethnic students. Students of color—black, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American—comprise more than a third of total enrollment in ATS theological schools, an increase of 55 percent over the past twenty years. With the racial/ethnic composition of the general US population projected to grow to majority status by 2040, this trend warrants thoughtful response to ensure that schools—and their graduates—have the capacity to serve an increasingly multiracial and multicultural world.



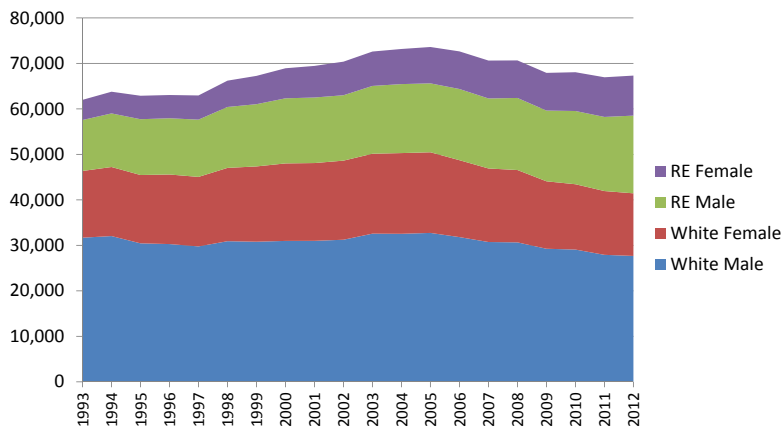
The new data on theological school enrollment reveal a continuing trend that students of color represent the growing population in theological education in both absolute numbers and as a percentage of total enrollment. Among students who report race/ethnicity, collective enrollment by Asian, black, Hispanic, Native American, and multiracial students at ATS member schools has grown from 16.7 percent to 28.1 percent over the past twenty years.¹ Add visa students, who are almost all persons of color, and the racial/ethnic student population has grown more than 55 percent, from 24.6 percent to nearly 38.2 percent of the total reporting enrollment.

Racial/ethnic faculty representation has doubled over the same period, although at 18 percent, it is still well below that of the students as well as that of the general population of the United States, where 93 percent of North American theological students are located.

Black students, at 13.7 percent of the total reporting enrollment, comprise the largest segment of the racial/ethnic 38 percent, and their representation is reflective of the overall US black population, most recently calculated at 12.6 percent (2010). Asian and Hispanic students are represented in smaller numbers. Yet Asian students are represented at a rate approaching twice that of the general public, making up 8.4 percent of the reporting theological school student population versus 4.8 percent (2010) of the US population. In contrast, Hispanic students are the most underrepresented, at 5.7 percent of theological students versus 16.3 percent (2010) of the US population.

1. Roughly 9 percent of students do not report their race or ethnicity.

Total Enrollment by Race & Gender



From an even longer-term perspective, this trend has been working for more than thirty-five years, with the steadiest increases evident among black students.

To a certain extent, this growth in racial/ethnic enrollment reflects growth in the number of schools that are members of ATS, from 220 in 1992 to 273 in 2012. And notably, of the thirteen schools that joined the Association in June 2012, four serve more than 500 primarily Korean

students. This brings the number of primarily Asian schools to seven. Twelve ATS members schools identify themselves as being predominantly black schools.

But the trend also contrasts with an 18.7 percent decline in the percentage of white students over the same twenty-year period. In 1992, white enrollment at ATS member schools was 47,224 (75% of the total 62,646 reporting enrollment), while by 2012 it had decreased to 41,431 (61% of the total 67,830).

Ecclesial family factors

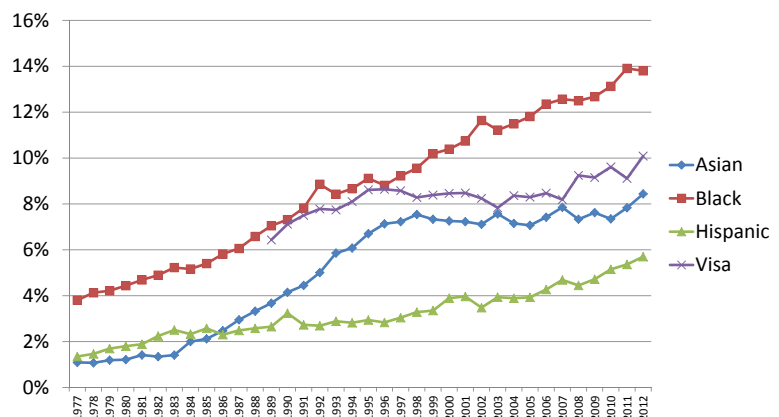
What kinds of schools are attracting racial/ethnic students? Clear trends are evident along ecclesial family lines. The black students are predominantly split between evangelical and mainline Protestant schools.

Asian students are more likely to attend evangelical Protestant schools, with 80 percent enrolled there, 12 percent at mainline schools, and 8 percent at Roman Catholic schools.

Hispanic students are also more likely to attend evangelical schools, with 64 percent enrolled there, 20 percent at mainline schools, and 16 percent at Roman Catholic schools.

With evangelical schools currently representing 42 percent of schools and 63 percent of students, these trends are not surprising. And as evangelical schools grow in number and student population, so do the populations of racial/ethnic students.

Relative Racial/Ethnic Presence in ATS Schools, 1977-2012



Racial/Ethnic Presence in Students by Ecclesial Family

	Evangelical	Mainline	Roman Catholic
Total	63%	28%	9%
Asian	80%	12%	8%
Black	49%	48%	3%
Hispanic	64%	20%	16%
Visa	69%	18%	13%

17 percent during this current academic year. During the years since 2003, when ATS began offering programs to support racial/ethnic faculty and to build institutional capacity to serve racial/ethnic students and faculty, the percentage of full-time faculty of color has increased from 14 percent. While these numbers are encouraging and point to the positive impact of the Association’s attention to diversity, the divergence between student and faculty populations shows that more work needs to be done, and schools still need support in responding to these shifts.

The bigger picture

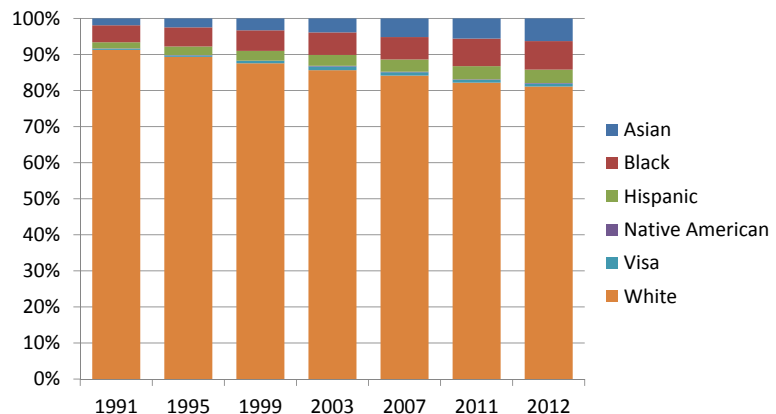
Overall enrollment in ATS member schools, with some exceptions, had been stable with small, incremental growth across the past two decades until the last six years, when the trend has reversed. The number of students enrolled in all programs in member schools declined about 8 percent between fall 2006 and fall 2012, even with the addition of twenty-six new schools to the ATS membership. Today, it is at 74,548.

But the more instructive big-picture story is in the racial/ethnic growth trends. Taken in the broader context of long-range demographic projections, these trends correlate with the expectation that by sometime shortly after 2040, persons of African, Asian, Hispanic, and native descent will outnumber whites in the United States. As pointed out in a recent cover story in *Time* (April 15, 2013), “The Latino Reformation,” Latinos alone will comprise 29 percent of the US population by 2050. By the end of the professional careers of some students currently in seminary, the US white majority will come to an end, and the character of national life will change as the

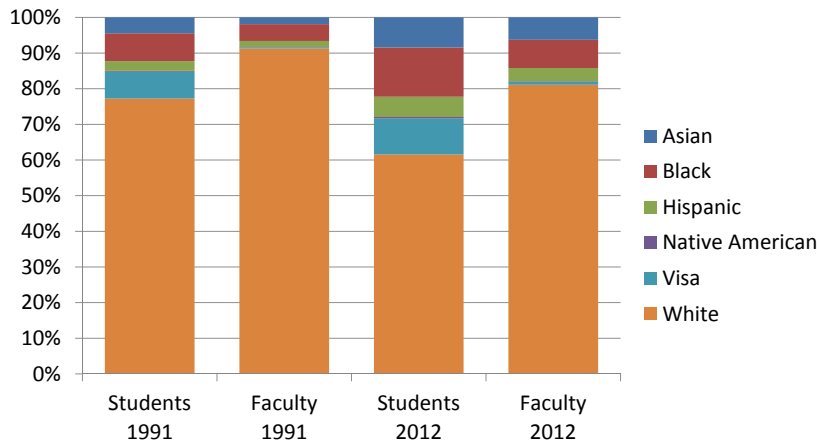
The faculty story

Running parallel to the rapidly growing presence of racial/ethnic students is a less dramatic story of growing diversity within theological school faculties, with representation doubling over the past twenty years but with percentages still well below the composition of either the theological student population or the general public. Racial/ethnic faculty members have increased from 6 percent of the total thirty years ago to

Full-Time Faculty by
Racial/Ethnic Group, 1991-2012



Relative Racial/Ethnic Presence in Students and Faculty, 1991 vs. 2012



racial mixture changes. And while Canadians of European descent will continue to be the majority in Canada, the percentage of racial/ethnic citizens is expected to continue to increase there as well.

According to Daniel Aleshire, executive director of The Association of Theological Schools, “The significance of this change in the ethnicity of the population for religious practices and theological education cannot be underestimated.

The blessing of the growing number of racial/ethnic constituents and the growing number of ethnic parishes and congregations will alter the religious landscape.” Theological schools will be wise to attend to this projection—in recruiting and in program design—so that they are well prepared not only to serve their students but also to prepare their students to serve in an increasingly multicultural North America.

Watch for more commentary on ATS enrollment trends in the cover story of the forthcoming In Trust Magazine, “Sobering Figures Point to Overall Enrollment Decline,” by Barbara G. Wheeler and Anthony T. Ruger.

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