

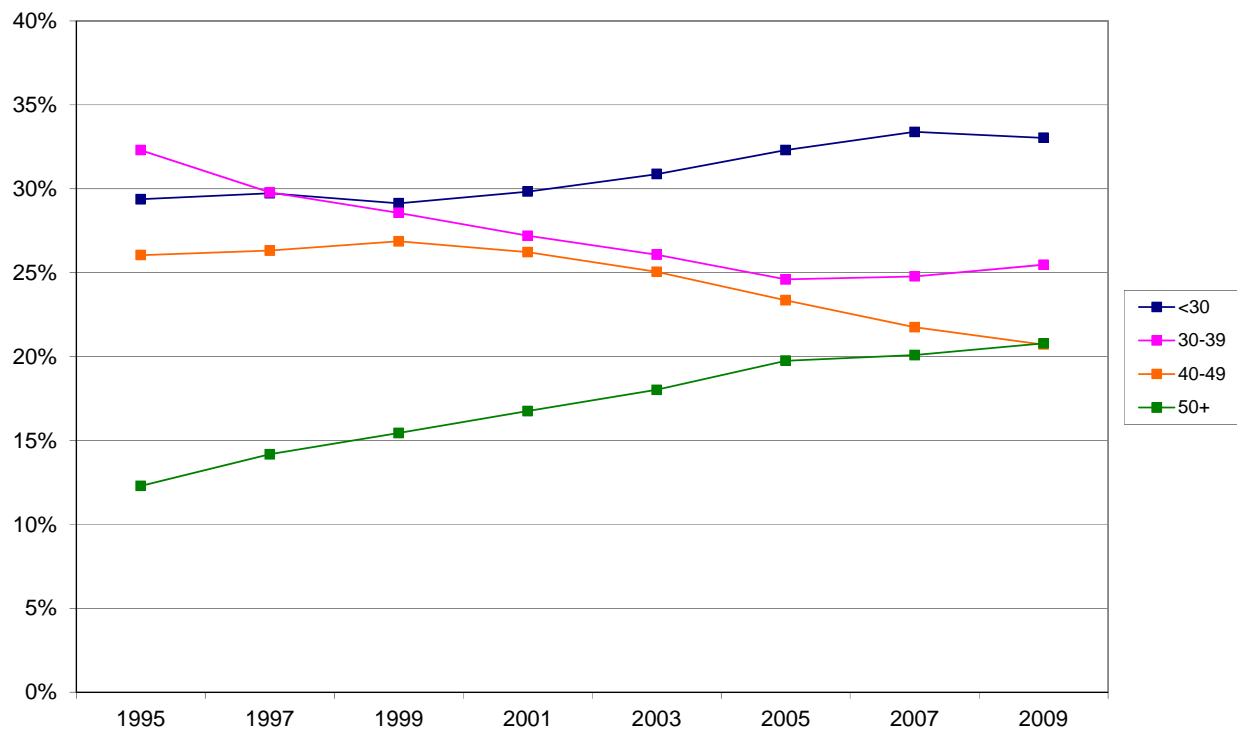
Did you know . . .

. . . that the fastest-growing age group among students at theological schools is those over 50?

A story issued by *USA Today* recently, “More young adults going into ministry,” reported that the median age of candidates for master of divinity degrees has fallen steadily, from 34.14 in 1999 to 32 in 2009. As the story observes, this reverses the trend of the previous ten years, during which the median age climbed from 31.4 to 34.14. These statistics, calculated by the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education using data from The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), are correct—but there is more to the story.

A look at the larger picture of headcount enrollment since 1995 at more than 260 ATS member schools reveals some interesting shifts in the aggregate numbers: **While the under-30 crowd still makes up the largest cohort of students, the group of those in their 50s is growing significantly in number.** Certainly students under 30 continue to outnumber their elders on theological school campuses, representing approximately 33 percent of all students, but their numbers have actually seen a slight decline in the past two years. And while students in the 30–39 age range represent approximately 25 percent of the total, their numbers, too, have generally declined from a peak of 33 percent in 1995, although with some recovery since 2005. Likewise, the 40–49 group has declined from 25 to 20 percent of the total headcount enrollment since 1995.

FIGURE 9 - Relative Head Count Enrollment by Age, 1995-2009



Over the same period, the over-50 group has grown from 12 to 20 percent, now equaling the forty-somethings in number. This growth in the oldest cohort of students, coupled with the continued strong presence of students under 30, may be a reflection of the baby boom phenomenon played out in the form of a second generation. It quite likely also reflects the freedom—and, arguably, the idealism—enjoyed by those two generations in contrast to those in their 30s and 40s, where preoccupation with children, careers, and mortgages might preclude many from following a call to ministry or theological study.

Contact:

[Eliza Smith Brown](#)

Director of Communications

Association of Theological Schools

412-788-6505, ext. 244

Watch this site for future coverage of a related issue: the level of debt carried by students entering and graduating from theological schools.