"The saga of efforts to reform higher education often seems like a Russian novel: long, tedious, and everyone dies in the end." --Mark Yudof

Join a Global Conversation about the Future of Theological Education

For this session, we will explore four perspectives in order to shed some light on the following:
- What is possible for the ongoing development of the theological curriculum and instructional design?
- If theological education is for the whole people of God and theological schools are one way to get that job done, what might we expect to emerge in the next 20 years?
- In what ways will the growing trend toward partnerships—national and international, across organizational and cultural boundaries—affect the future of theological education?

As tired as the term may be, innovation has persisted in higher education for most of its history. While it is true that such change has occurred slowly and gradually, often reactively rather than proactively, the issue now is not the impossibility of a new thing; but rather that 21st century challenges and opportunities require more than small, incremental changes.

The reality of a networked, multinational environment, where a drive toward innovation is present in nearly all organizational sectors is a key difference in the 21st century. In higher education, even something as potentially restrictive as accreditation cannot prevent institutional development and innovation. We won't focus on accreditation at this point because we can't do much about it. However, for this session, two matters that affect accreditation are important:

1. *Innovation trumps regulation*. In North America, the founding premise of accreditation is that institutions affected by an accrediting decision should be involved in the process. This premise of a membership of peers engaged in peer review is now considered by the Department of Education (not by ATS) as a conflict of interest. There may be some truth to this concern, but peer review is at the heart of accreditation as a process of institutional and educational improvement. Dan Aleshire, the Executive Director of ATS, asserts that if the Department of Education continues on its current trajectory, the chances of accreditation becoming a productive exercise of peer review are limited. The trajectory he sees is one of increasing regulation and micromanagement. Notably, as regional accrediting agencies become more static, ATS maintains the posture of reasonable flexibility that was reinforced in the recent revision of standards. Then, surprising some, ATS announced its tangible support for innovation by offering grant money for proposals related to innovation in North American theological schools.

2. *International partnerships fuel innovation.* Internationally, accrediting agencies for theological schools tend to be less flexible, and institutions have a greater need to be recognized by their respective government agencies. Yet, many leaders of majority world theological institutions assert that new models are needed because the models they inherited are increasingly unsustainable. Aleshire's invitations to meet with international accrediting agencies suggests a growing interest in standards that are less focused on counting and hierarchical regulation. As theological institutions become less tolerant of regulation, and more proactive in addressing the realities of their own contexts, they are seeking partnerships both nationally and internationally—across organizational, denominational, and ethnic boundaries. The often subservient relationship of international

schools with their North American counterparts is gradually giving way to a mutual search for what's next.

Dallas Willard once observed that all we are today in higher education is the result of decisions made at various points in history. Then he commented: But decisions are not doctrines and we can make new decisions! Fundamentally, primary and interconnected tasks of higher education learning communities include the refinement and extension of human knowledge, the use of knowledge in the service of humanity, the quest to understand the nature and cultural variability of human learning and development, and the implementation of that understanding in instructional design and practice. As we move toward the 22nd century it appears that new decisions will shape these tasks in interesting and hopefully productive ways.

Perspective #1: Majority World Theological Education (Scholar Leaders Document)
Majority world leaders, in particular, have focused attention on factors that point to persisting instability. *Perspective:* Familiar western forms of theological institutions became established at times of greater social, political, and economic stability. These forms were adopted by schools in many countries where instability is the new reality. Leaders within majority world schools expend great effort to sustain and/or restore these forms in the face of persisting upheaval. *Explore* implications of the perspective that instability is the new norm for majority world schools, and increasingly for theological institutions in North America. Organizations globally are implementing flexible and adaptive structures and processes. What might emerge in theological institutions if flexibility rather than stability became the new norm?

Perspective #2: The "Hopelessly Overcrowded" Curriculum (PowerPoint)
The curriculum of the first seminary comprised a few courses blended with apprenticeship. By the 1960s, professionalization had so taken root in North America that more and more courses had been added. However, the "container" was not changed substantially. Inevitably, the theological curriculum became "hopelessly overcrowded" with courses, programs, and other experiences. *Perspective:* Essential capacities in ministry and leadership cannot be developed adequately in an academic setting—in courses. There is insufficient distinction between that which can be learned in conjunction with other disciplines, and that which requires extensive experience in lifelong learning. Capacities of research, reasoning, and discourse require more time to develop than is available in the conventional course schedule or program. Faculty members, by contract, teach courses. They are often classified in departments organized by disciplines. These conventional realities of academic organization can hinder the very capacities we wish to see develop and mature. *Explore* alternatives to curriculum structure and faculty arrangements.

Perspective #3: The Necessity of Partnerships—Nationally and Internationally (PowerPoint)
Perspective: The challenge for the 21st century is for institutions to learn how to relate to and work with other institutions—in a world shaped by networks or webs of organizations. A desire for *mutual* learning and shared contribution will need to be cultivated—especially in light of decades upon decades of western dominance of process and relationships. Perspectives, knowledge, and practices from various types of organizations can be incorporated. *Explore* a way for participants to experience mutual partnership. For example, *imagine* a consortium, a framework for research and development . . .

Perspective #4: Issues That Will Shape Future Decisions (PowerPoint)
Ponder the *perspectives* and issues presented by Allen and others and *explore* implications for BHC.