

## ATS Standards

### 6 Student recruitment, admission, services, and placement

The students of a theological school are central to the educational activities of the institution. They are also a primary constituency served by the school's curriculum and programs and, with the faculty, constitute a community of faith and learning. Schools are responsible for the quality of their policies and practices related to recruitment, admission, student support, student borrowing, and placement.

#### 6.1

#### 6.2

##### Recruitment

6.1.1 Schools shall be able to demonstrate that their policies and practices of student recruitment are consistent with the purpose of the institution.

6.1.2 In recruitment efforts, services, and publications, institutions shall accurately represent themselves as well as the vocational opportunities related to their degree programs.

##### Admission

6.2.1 In the development of admission policies and procedures, a theological school shall establish criteria appropriate for each degree program it offers. Admission criteria should give attention to applicants' academic, personal, and spiritual qualifications, as well as their potential for making a contribution to church and society.

6.2.2 Schools shall be able to demonstrate that they operate on a post-baccalaureate level, that the students they admit are capable of graduate-level studies, and that their standards and requirements for admission to all degree programs are clearly defined, fairly implemented, and appropriately related to the purpose of the institution.

6.2.3 Schools shall regularly review the quality of applicants admitted to each degree program and develop institutional strategies to maintain and enhance the overall quality of the student population.

6.2.4 Schools shall give evidence of efforts in admissions to encourage diversity in such areas as race, ethnicity, region, denomination, gender, or disability.

6.2.5 Schools shall encourage a broad baccalaureate preparation, for instance, studies in world history, philosophy, languages and literature, the natural sciences, the social sciences, music and other fine arts, and religion.

#### 6.3 Student services

6.3.1 Policies regarding students' rights and responsibilities, as well as the institution's code of discipline, shall be clearly identified and published.

6.3.2 Schools shall regularly and systematically evaluate the appropriateness, adequacy, and use of student services for the purpose of strengthening the overall program.

6.3.3 Students should receive reliable and accessible services wherever they are enrolled and however the educational programs are offered.

6.3.4 Schools shall maintain adequate student records regarding admission materials, course work attempted and completed, and in other areas as determined by the school's policy. Appropriate backup files should be maintained and updated on a regular basis. The institution shall ensure the security of files from physical destruction or loss and from unauthorized access.

6.3.5 Institutions shall demonstrate that program requirements, tuition, and fees are appropriate for the degree programs they offer.

6.3.6 Institutions shall publish all requirements for degree programs, including courses, noncredit requirements, and grading and other academic policies.

6.3.7 Student financial aid, when provided, should be distributed according to the ATS policy guideline "Student Financial Aid" in Bulletin, part 1.

6.3.8 The institution shall have a process for responding to complaints raised by students in areas related to the accrediting standards of the Commission, and schools shall maintain a record of such formal student complaints for review by the Board.

#### 6.4 Student borrowing

6.4.1 Senior administrators and financial aid officers shall review student educational debt and develop institutional strategies regarding students' borrowing for theological education.

6.4.2 Based on estimates of compensation graduates will receive, the school should provide financial counseling to students so as to minimize borrowing, explore alternative funding, and provide the fullest possible disclosure of the impact of loan repayment after graduation.

#### 6.5 Placement

6.5.1 In keeping with institutional purpose and ecclesial context, and upon students' successful completion of their degree programs, schools shall provide appropriate assistance to persons seeking employment relevant to their degrees.

6.5.2 Theological schools should monitor the placement of graduates in appropriate positions and review admissions policies in light of trends in placement.

**6.5.3 The institution should, in the context of its purpose and constituency, act as an advocate for students who are members of groups that have been disadvantaged in employment because of their race, ethnicity, gender, and/or disability.**

## **NEASC Standards**

### **Standard Six: Students**

**Consistent with its mission, the institution defines the characteristics of the students it seeks to serve and provides an environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students. It recruits, admits, enrolls, and endeavors to ensure the success of its students, offering the resources and services that provide them the opportunity to achieve the goals of their program as specified in institutional publications. The institution's interactions with students and prospective students are characterized by integrity.**

#### **Admissions**

- . 6.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll a student body that is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve and addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students.
- . 6.2 The institution has an orderly and ethical program of admission that complies with the requirements of legislation concerning equality of educational opportunity. Its admission and retention policies and procedures are clear, consistent with its mission and purposes, and available to all students and prospective students electronically and through other appropriate publications.
- . 6.3 Standards for admission ensure that student qualifications and expectations are compatible with institutional objectives. Individuals admitted demonstrate through their intellectual and personal qualifications a reasonable potential for success in the programs to which they are admitted. If the institution recruits and admits individuals with identified needs that must be addressed to assure their likely academic success, it applies appropriate mechanisms to address those needs so as to provide reasonable opportunities for that success. Such mechanisms receive sufficient support and are adequate to the needs of those admitted. The institution endeavors to integrate specifically recruited populations into the larger student body and to assure that they have comparable academic experiences.
- . 6.4 The institution utilizes appropriate methods of evaluation to identify deficiencies and offers appropriate developmental or remedial support where necessary to prepare students for collegiate study. Such testing and remediation receive sufficient support and are adequate to serve the needs of students admitted. (For admission of graduate students, see 4.24.)

#### **Retention and Graduation**

- . 6.5 The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution's academic program, including specifically recruited populations. It ensures a systematic approach to providing accessible and effective programs and services designed to

provide opportunities for enrolled students to be successful in achieving their academic goals. The institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their academic success.

- . 6.6 The institution measures student success, including rates of retention and graduation and other measures of success appropriate to institutional mission.
  - . 6.7 Measures of student success, including rates of retention and graduation, are separately determined for any group that the institution specifically recruits, and those rates are used in evaluating the success of specialized recruitment and the services and opportunities provided for the recruited students.
  - . 6.8 The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services.
- 6.9 Data on retention, graduation, and other measures of student success are regularly reviewed within the institution, with the results being used for planning, resource allocation, and improvement.

### **Student Services**

- . 6.10 The institution systematically identifies the characteristics and learning needs of its student population and then makes provision for responding to them. The institution's student services are guided by a philosophy that reflects the institution's mission and special character, is circulated widely and reviewed periodically, and provides the basis on which services to students can be evaluated.
- . 6.11 The institution offers an array of student services appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students, recognizing the variations in services that are appropriate at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for programs delivered electronically as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees. In all cases, the institution provides academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance. In providing services, in accordance with its mission and purposes, the institution adheres to both the spirit and intent of equal opportunity and its own goals for diversity. (See also 5.19, 7.7, 7.8, 8.3, and 11.8)
- . 6.12 Institutions with full time or residential student bodies provide an array of services that includes access to health services and co-curricular activities consistent with the mission of the institution.
- . 6.13 A clear description of the nature, extent, and availability of student services is easily available to students and prospective students. Newly enrolled students are provided with an orientation that includes information on student services as well as a focus on academic opportunities, expectations, and support services.
- . 6.14 Student financial aid is provided through a well-organized program. Awards are based on the equitable application of clear and publicized criteria. Students are provided with clear and

timely information about debt before borrowing.

- . 6.15 As appropriate, the institution supports opportunities for student leadership and participation in campus organizations and governance.
  - . 6.16 If the institution offers recreational and athletic programs, they are conducted in a manner consistent with sound educational policy, standards of integrity, and the institution's purposes. The institution has responsibility for the control of these programs, including their financial aspects. Educational programs and academic expectations are the same for student athletes as for other students.
  - . 6.17 The institution ensures that individuals responsible for student services are qualified by formal training and work experience to represent and address the needs of students effectively. Facilities, technology, and funding are adequate to implement the institution's student service policies and procedures.
  - . 6.18 The institution has identified, published widely, and implemented an appropriate set of clearly stated ethical standards to guide student services. Policies on student rights and responsibilities, including grievance procedures, are clearly stated, well publicized and readily available, and fairly and consistently administered.
  - . 6.19 The institution has policies regarding the kinds of information that will be included in the permanent record of students as well as policies regarding the retention, safety and security, and disposal of records. Its information-release policies respect the rights of individual privacy, the confidentiality of records, and the best interests of students and the institution.
- 6.20 Institutions with stated goals for students' co-curricular learning systematically assess their achievement.

### **Institutional Effectiveness**

- 6.21 Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses its effectiveness in admitting and retaining students and the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes. Information obtained through this evaluation is used to revise these goals and services and improve their achievement.

### **Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, & Placement** **ATS Standard 6; NEASC Standard 6**

#### **ATS Standards 6.1.1-6.5.2; NEASC Standards 6.1-6.21**

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary is a unified institution existing on four campuses. There is one Board of Trustees and one faculty to govern all of the campuses. However, the distinct histories, locations, target student populations, and educational delivery modes of each campus and major

program have led to appropriately contextualized practices in recruitment, admissions, retention, student services, and placement in order to create vibrant communities of faith and learning. The Hamilton campus is residential and therefore needs special services for the large portion of the student body living in on-campus dorms and apartments. The Boston, Charlotte, and Jacksonville campuses serve commuter populations. The Doctor of Ministry and Hispanic Ministry Programs primarily serve students who must travel from far away to attend intensive residential classes. Where campus and program distinctives are relevant, they will be noted in the sections that follow.

### **Recruitment (ATS 6.1.1-6.1.2)**

Gordon-Conwell's recruitment and admission practices focus on building relationships with prospective students. Admissions representatives work to build relationship between prospective students and themselves, but they also strive to help prospects make connections with faculty, alumni, current students, other prospective students, and staff in key offices (e.g., registration, financial aid, student life). This focus on relationships is intended to help the prospective students discern their own callings and gain an accurate picture of the seminary, both its strengths and its challenges. Leading prospective students into such a diverse web of relationships ensures that an accurate image of the seminary will prevail and any false ideas would be revealed.

Gordon-Conwell's [mission and purpose](#) are summed up succinctly in the seminary's vision statement: *To advance Christ's kingdom in every sphere of life by equipping Church leaders to think theologically, engage globally and live biblically.* The seminary also has a shared value which is routinely mentioned in our discourse within the institution: *To train men and women for ministry at home and abroad.* As such, we seek out those who desire to be equipped to serve the Church and are capable of succeeding in our rigorous academic programs. The seminary strives to accurately represent itself to prospective students through its website, advertisements, and print materials, such as viewbooks, brochures, and postcards. In addition, the seminary reaches out to prospective students through alumni (via alumni events and newsletters) and current students who assist in the recruitment efforts by talking with prospective students and even hosting them during campus visits.

Professional admissions representatives recruit at a variety of venues appropriate to connecting with our target audience of prospective students: undergraduate institutions (both Christian and secular), seminary and graduate school fairs, Christian conferences, fellows programs, churches, and campus ministries. In order to ensure that these individuals are able to accurately represent the seminary, the current job description for admission representatives requires an "intimate knowledge of the Seminary—its history, mission, publics, programs, short and long-range plans, strengths and weaknesses; understanding of the academic, personal and spiritual capabilities required for theological training." Each campus and major program has admissions personnel who are experts in their own area but still able to represent any of the campuses or major programs well.

Prospective students are strongly encouraged to visit campus for themselves to experience the seminary as it truly is. Through open house events (lasting one to three days) and individual visits, each campus

typically hosts at least 175 to 250 campus visitors each year (except Jacksonville, which is closer to 100), connecting these prospective students with faculty, staff, and current students to ensure that they gain a full picture of campus life. Some campuses and programs host informational webinars for those who cannot visit campus in person and the Hamilton campus has an online [virtual campus tour](#) as well.

Students desiring specific knowledge about our degree programs and outcomes can speak with admissions staff or find detailed information on our website. Each [degree program webpage](#) has information about the typical student who pursues that program, potential careers, program distinctives, program details, special tracks (if available), and often some sample courses and short testimonial from an alum of the program. Prospective students may also review our [Statement of Educational Effectiveness](#) on our website.

*Appraisal:*

- There has been great progress in recent years in the availability and usability of information on the school's website. Degree program information is now well organized and is consistent and complete in its presentation. Except for the main page, the degree programs page is the most viewed page by visitors to our website [support with Google analytics], so it is very important that it is up to date, accurate, and helpful.
- Assessment surveys show that the school's website is the first way that most prospective students communicate with GCTS (ESS Q44) and a primary way that they learn about GCTS (ESS Q43). They have found it generally informative (ESS Q13) and user friendly (ESS Q14).
- While it is true that each admissions representative is able to represent all campuses and programs while being an expert in his/her own area, there is still room for growth here since it is natural to primarily represent one's own area. More cross-campus, cross-program recruiting collaboration could lead to better service to prospective students as well as benefits for Gordon-Conwell.

*Projection (i.e., Future Plans):*

- Continue to improve the available resources and user-friendliness of the website since it plays such a key role in recruitment. [Determine specific actions.]
- Consider using more online recruiting methods like webinars and well-planned social media strategies at each campus. [Determine specific actions.]
- Plan an annual retreat for admission staff from all campuses and programs where collaboration and sharing of best practices can take place and we can work toward more collaboration with other offices, including the Alumni Office, Development Office, President Office, etc. [Determine specific actions.]

**Admission (ATS 6.2.1-6.2.5; NEACE 6.1-6.4)**

Since each campus of Gordon-Conwell serves a slightly different population of students and has its own unique programs, the policies surrounding admission vary some between different campuses and

programs. The detailed [processes for application](#) and the requirements for admission to each of Gordon-Conwell's campuses and programs are clearly laid out on the seminary's website.

With the exception of some programs offered through our Boston campus and the Hispanic Ministries Program (see below), all Gordon-Conwell degrees require an undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university. The Master of Theology and Doctor of Ministry programs require applicants to hold an M.Div. or its educational equivalent. Minimum GPA standards are applied to all applicants (generally 2.5 on a 4.0 scale for ministerial/professional degrees and 3.0 for academic degrees, with some exceptions). The minimum GPA requirements are the only admission standard not stated on the website for all programs, but they are still enforced. These degree and GPA requirements are all verified through receipt of official transcripts.

The Boston campus and the Hispanic Ministries Program offer the possibility for students without baccalaureate degrees to be admitted to some Master's programs. This is done through admission to and completion of specialized diploma programs. Admission to these programs requires a high school diploma or GED and at least five years of experience in a recognized ministry. Those who satisfactorily complete a five-to-ten-course diploma program may be considered for full admission to some Master's programs, having proven their academic ability in those previous Gordon-Conwell courses. Other campuses may also accept students without baccalaureate degrees, but this is on a much more limited basis and governed by strict mature admission policies.

In addition to official transcripts, applicants must also submit personal essays, a church endorsement (ministry endorsement for D.Min.), and three recommendations.

three elements are (/have proven to be) effective tools for assessing an applicant's fitness (/readiness or preparedness) to contend with the academic rigor of our programs.

A thorough review of the essays (which are treated as writing samples), transcripts, and recommendations has proven to be effective for assessing an applicant's readiness to contend with the academic rigor of our programs. However, because Gordon-Conwell's mission is to equip Church leaders to advance Christ's kingdom in every sphere of life, applicants must demonstrate more than just academic ability. Their personal essays and recommendations must evidence a profession of being a Christian, a desire to be in Christian service of some kind, and the necessary commitment, character, and spiritual maturity to engage in theological education and ministry training. To ensure that admissions standards are fairly implemented, questionable applications are always reviewed by a small campus/program-specific committee before a student is denied admission. Students admitted with identified needs or deficiencies will be provided proper accommodations and/or support systems. See *Retention and Graduation* section below for more details and specific examples.

There are currently few regular processes for systematically reviewing the quality of applicants once they become students. Students' academic progress is regularly reviewed and those progressing unsatisfactorily are placed on academic probation. Students in counseling programs at the Boston and

Charlotte campuses are evaluated partway through their programs; the Hamilton campus has considered adding this process to its counseling program as well. When individual instances of unqualified students arise, strategies are discussed for how to prevent the problem in the future. However, beyond these few examples, there are no systematic processes for changing admissions strategies based on reviews of the quality of admitted students.

Diversity in the student body is important to Gordon-Conwell and efforts are made to encourage the application of women and ethnic minorities as well as international students. One way that we encourage diversity is by attempting to represent diversity in our admissions staff. Whenever possible, the admission teams at each campus are made up of both men and women as well as minorities. Drawing on student workers, we are able to create diverse teams that can connect with a diverse audience of applicants. When recruiting away from campus, some specific locations, conferences, and schools are chosen to encourage a diverse applicant population. When minority recruiters are not available to travel to these locations, we may bring along minority students to aid in recruiting. Several [scholarships](#) have been specifically designed to assist and encourage those from minority communities to come to Gordon-Conwell. Similarly, international students are supported through several [scholarships](#) available only to them. Perhaps our biggest effort to encourage ethnic diversity is the launching of the [Hispanic Ministry Program](#) in 2009. This program was designed to equip Hispanic church leaders by offering an affordable, quality theological education with classes specifically tailored to their needs. In addition to ethnic diversity, Gordon-Conwell seeks to be a multid denominational seminary and does not limit our recruiting efforts along denominational lines.

These efforts have shown some improvement in the diversity of the student body. Taken as a whole, in Fall 2013 Gordon-Conwell had the following ethnic makeup: 9% non-resident aliens, 13% black or African American, 0.2% American Indian/Alaska native, 9% Asian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 5% Hispanic or Latino, 40% white, and 23% of undeclared ethnicity. Compared with ten years prior, there has been growth in non-resident aliens and black or African American students while the other ethnic categories (except white) have remained about the same. Our diversity is believed to be greater than these numbers at first suggest since at least some of the 23% of unknown ethnicity are likely minorities. The Fall 2013 student body represented 64 foreign countries and at least 91 different denominations.

*Appraisal:*

- While the process for admission is clearly laid out on the website, the specific requirements for all programs are not as easy to find in a consistent manner or centralized location. Some are stated explicitly while others are implied. This should be improved.
- There are few systematic processes to review the quality of admitted students with the intention of improving admissions policies and procedures. This should be rectified. It may be wise to compare certain admissions criteria with student performance indicators at GCTS. (E.g., undergraduate GPAs could be matched up with GCTS GPAs to see if trends emerge.) This may

help to deal with the perception by some that certain programs have too many unqualified students admitted.

- Since some structural and procedural changes at the Hamilton campus in 2013, applications have been more closely scrutinized and judgments on borderline cases more carefully considered, resulting in a significant increase in the denial rate without any changes to the policy.
- The diploma program at the Boston campus has been used for decades to create a path to a full master's degree for students without a bachelor's degree. However, retention in the program and persistence into full master's degrees have been lower than desired. Changes are being made to the program (e.g., different pricing, cohort-based, reduced to five courses, must be completed in one year) to address these areas of concern.
- The TOEFL is used as the primary means of determining if non-native speakers of English will be able to be successful studying in English at Gordon-Conwell. Despite GCTS having TOEFL standards as high as or higher than most of our peer schools [provide evidence], the perception by some staff and faculty is that a number of international students are being admitted who do not have adequate English skills. This can create a challenge for those students as well as for Gordon-Conwell staff, faculty, and other students. One example of changes made in response to these challenges was in our Biblical Studies ThM program: in 2013, the structure of that program was redesigned in part to help non-native English speakers as they acclimate to the English-language academic environment.
- Should the minimum GPAs for admission to all Gordon-Conwell degree programs be published on the website? Some have argued that due to grade inflation, publishing seemingly-low minimum GPA standards gives the appearance of a less rigorous program of study at GCTS.
- Gordon-Conwell does not make efforts to encourage a broad baccalaureate preparation as mentioned in ATS 6.2.5. We do require a bachelor's degree from an accredited school for most programs, but not "broad preparation." What impact has this had on the quality of students admitted?

*Projection (i.e., Future Plans):*

- Task relevant staff at each campus to review the website and gather degree program admission requirements to consistent, centralized locations. [Determine specific actions.]
- Gather relevant staff to devise plans for regular, systematic reviews of admitted students' performance (perhaps including individual case studies of those student specifically indicated by professors as not being prepared to perform at the graduate level) and recommend admissions adjustments (if necessary). [Determine specific actions.]
- Measure the success of the revised diploma program at Boston and respond accordingly. [Determine specific actions.]
- Investigate how other schools are ensuring the success of their non-native English students and make recommendations for Gordon-Conwell. [Determine specific actions.]

**Retention and Graduation (NEASC 6.5-6.9; cf. ATS 6.2.3)**

Retention and graduation are, at least in part, a product of the school's recruitment and admission practices. As explained above, efforts are made to ensure that Gordon-Conwell admits students who are capable of succeeding in our rigorous environment. When students have identified needs, whether due to academic struggles, difficulties studying in English, or documented disabilities, resources are available to assist them. The seminary is in full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and regularly provides accommodations for student with physical handicaps, learning disabilities, and mental health illnesses.

The different campuses and programs provide services appropriate to the needs of their specific students, including: writing workshops, ESL training, one-on-one paper editing, Greek and Hebrew tutors (including a subsidizing tutoring fund for those who cannot afford the additional cost of tutoring), and training in graduate-level research and writing. The Hamilton campus hosts workshops and forums throughout the year on a variety of topics beneficial to the students. The Boston campus has an early-alert system for instructors to identify students struggling at mid-term. The Charlotte campus requires integrative seminars each term. The D.Min. program requires a research methodology course of all new students. Not all of these opportunities and experiences are available at all campuses. They are offered by a combination of faculty, staff, and student volunteers. Available opportunities are noted in each campuses' webpages, *Student Handbook*, student-body emails, bulletin boards, and newsletters.

Students are also supported through a variety of advising, mentoring, and discipling relationship opportunities, both formal and informal. Academic advising is done by faculty or professional staff, depending on the campus or program. All students either have a faculty advisor assigned or are connected more informally with faculty for academic and vocational mentoring. The Pierce Center for Disciple Building provides opportunities for small-group discipling and spiritual formation. The Mentored Ministry program required of MDiv and some MA students requires students to be mentored by local pastors and ministry leaders while serving in those contexts. Counseling students participate in professional seminars with low student-to-faculty ratios (typically 6:1).

When a student's academic progress suffers, they are officially informed and placed on probation; if they do not improve, they are given a specific action plan for improvement before stricter measures are taken. Academic integrity violations are always reported to the Judicial Committee where discipline is often necessary, but always with a view toward the restoration of the student whenever possible. Violations of the seminary's *Community Life Statement* are reviewed by the Pastoral Guidance Committee where discipline and restoration are also carefully balanced.

A standardized method for monitoring student retention and graduation is in place. However, while it is reviewed for different campuses and programs each year with the results inspiring change, the review process is not systematic, complete, or regular. Student success and satisfaction in the school's mission emphases is measured regularly through several standardized surveys administered by the Learning Environment/Surveys Assessment Committee: the Entering Student Survey, Current Student Survey, Graduating Student Survey, and Alumni Survey as well as an annual focus group. The results of these

surveys are shared throughout the institution to help faculty, staff, and administrators to determine where changes are necessary and appropriate. The Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee measures student success through juried faculty reviews of student work artifacts from representative courses in each degree program.

*Appraisal:*

- A 2013 Assessment Committee focus group which investigated student expectations for faculty involvement with students outside of the classroom revealed an unmet desire for organic, informal, and life-changing mentoring relationships with faculty which includes spiritual support and where faculty intentionally take the initiative to be pastoral with them. [include study in appendix]
- Changes have been made at each campus in recent years to improve the student experience and reduce attrition. Hamilton restructured its course schedule to allow for more open time in the middle of the day for forums, events, and student-faculty interactions. [include layout in appendix] Hamilton faculty are encouraged to eat with students in the dining hall each Tuesday. (The Dean's Office provides free meals to those who participate.) The Boston campus restructured its student service staff and service methodologies. The Charlotte campus has redesigned its academic calendar to make the duration and timing of courses more conducive to the type of students they serve. Jacksonville moved their campus to a new location to better meet the needs of their growing student body.
- Retention and graduation analyses revealed an attrition problem at the Charlotte campus. [include reports in appendix] The student service staffing was restructured and the academic calendar was redesigned (see above) to be more appropriate for students who may be working full-time or taking multiple courses at once. While these studies have revealed some retention problems, they have not been run regularly and systematically for all programs.

*Projection (i.e., Future Plans):*

- As part of their ongoing commitment to strong relationships with students, the faculty will continue to pursue additional ways to interact with students outside of the classroom. [Determine specific actions.]
- Create a process for regularly and systematically evaluating retention and graduation rates and reporting these data to appropriate administrators and faculty for action. [Determine specific actions.]
- Monitor success of Charlotte efforts to improve retention and respond accordingly. [Determine specific actions.]

**Student Services (ATS 6.3.1-6.3.8; NEASC 6.10-3.20)**

Since each campus of Gordon-Conwell serves a somewhat different population of students and has its own unique programs, the student services available vary between different campuses and programs in order to ensure that each context is properly supported. Most campuses maintain a *Student Handbook*

on the school's website which contains the academic, student life, and financial policies and procedures as well as detailed requirements for all programs. In addition, the *Handbook* also contains all relevant information about students' rights and responsibilities, code of conduct standards (cf. *Community Life Statement* and *Violations of Academic Integrity* sections), disciplinary procedures, methods of appeal, student grievance procedures, and the process for how the school shall respond to concerns related to accreditation standards. In cases where a full *Student Handbook* is not available, the same requirements, policies, and procedures can be found on that campus' or program's section of the website. If a variation of a particular policy is not mentioned under a specific campus or program, the policy for the main campus is applicable. Additional course-specific standards (e.g., grading policies) may be found in course syllabi. Students are informed of their rights and responsibilities, the school's policies, and where these are published during new student orientation and through email notifications.

In order to help students to succeed and the school to achieve its mission, students are provided with a wide array of services. These services vary and are contextualized between campuses and programs. Please refer to the *Retention and Graduation* section above for details concerning the variety of advising, mentoring, and discipling relationship opportunities, both formal and informal which are provided to students. These services, in addition to the Placement Office (discussed below) provide spiritual, academic, and career guidance. Faculty also have regular office hours each week, worship with students at chapel services, eat lunch with students in the dining hall at least once a week (Hamilton campus), and regularly come early to class at commuter campuses to meet with students (Boston, Charlotte, and Jacksonville). Professional staff are available during office hours to meet with students and via email or phone for those who cannot travel to campus. Staff in student service positions regularly and proactively interact with faculty to support student needs. Student health insurance is offered at the Boston and Hamilton campuses as well as counseling subsidies for those in need (Hamilton campus only). Diverse co-curricular activities (appropriate to the nature of each campus' student body) are regularly offered. These include conferences, seminars, workshops, spiritual formation activities, recreational events, community meals, and coffee houses.

Efforts are made to ensure that reliable, accessible student services are available to all students, regardless of where they are enrolled or how their programs are offered. Webinars and online orientations are used in some programs. All students may use their online student portals to access relevant information from their academic records, register for courses (except for some cohort-based programs), request transcripts, and access other services. Staff and faculty are available via email and phone to students at a distance. Online courses offered through our Semlink+ program are designed to provide the same quality experience to all enrolled students, regardless of campus or location.

Several surveys are administered annually by the Learning Environment/Surveys Assessment Committee to measure the effectiveness of and student satisfaction with services provided: the Current Student Survey (given upon the completion of ten courses), the Graduating Student Survey (given at graduation), and the Alumni Survey (given every five years after graduation). [include samples in appendix] In addition, each year a focus group is conducted on a topic chosen based on the survey responses. [include samples in appendix] Students at the Hamilton (residential) campus may also provide feedback

through their Residence Life Coordinators, the President's Forum each semester (where students may ask questions directly of the president), and through the Student Association. The results of these assessment efforts are reviewed throughout the year and communicated to relevant staff, faculty, and administrators in order to inform them of those student needs which are met and unmet and so that appropriate changes can be made to strengthen the overall student experience and support services.

Job descriptions for professional student service staff require appropriate education, experience, and aptitudes to ensure quality service to students. [include samples in appendix] Thorough training and professional development opportunities (both internal and external) guide the continued development of necessary competencies to address the needs of students effectively. In addition, a significant number of student service staff are alumni, giving them first-hand knowledge of the institution and its systems.

Students' records, both electronic and physical, are properly maintained and protected from damage, loss, and unauthorized access. Most critical physical files are stored in locked, fireproof cabinets in secure locations. Access to electronic records requires unique user logins and passwords assigned only to appropriate parties; these records are backed up daily. Record retention and information release policies are published in the *Student Handbook* and are in full compliance with FERPA and other relevant laws. Employees with access to student records are trained for FERPA compliance.

Comparisons between Gordon-Conwell campuses and with peer and competitor institutions are periodically conducted to determine that tuition and fees are appropriate for their programs. [include recent study in appendix] Local rent costs are monitored when setting the cost of on-campus apartments and dormitories. Information on available scholarships is available on the school's website and various print literature; scholarships are awarded based on need and/or merit to make seminary education more affordable. All financial aid is distributed in accordance with ATS policy guidelines and applicable state and federal laws. The appropriateness of tuition rates and available scholarships is monitored in some part through the Assessment Committee surveys mentioned above. [include samples of debt questions in appendix] Please see the section below on *Student Borrowing* for more information on tuition, financial aid, scholarships, and loans.

Opportunity is provided for students to be elected to the Student Association at the Hamilton campus. A budget is provided in support of the association's events on campus. The association works out of the Student Life Services office but also meets with the president, academic dean, and, as appropriate, with the faculty and trustees. The Student Association is comprised of groups such as the Black Students Association, the Korean Association, the Women's Resource Network, the Fine Arts group, the Justice student association, and the Men's Fellowship. The Charlotte campus supports the Student Council which consists of eight members, four of which are appointed by the faculty each year to a two-year term. This council works with the campus dean to handle issues arising in the student body and to enhance student involvement in the life of the seminary.

*Appraisal:*

- Academic and student life policies and procedures as well as degree program requirements are all available on the school's website. However, they are not all presented in a consistent manner/format. Information from webpages, catalogs, and student handbooks should be more standardized in its presentation to help ensure easy access and less confusion by students.
- While all physical student records are secure from unauthorized access, there are still some areas where additional security may be added or fireproof cabinets may be necessary.
- Electronic student records are backed up daily in multiple ways. [attach email from IT with details] However, additional assurance would come from off-site backups and/or real-time secure backups to the cloud. These changes are being investigated by IT staff to increase data protection and ease of restoration in the event of loss.
- Students in the counseling program at the Hamilton campus have regularly raised concerns that there is not sufficient financial aid available to them. [support this from assessment surveys if possible] It is true that very few scholarships are available for counseling students when compared with other degree programs. This difference has been defended in the past with the rationale that graduates who become pastors or missionaries have less earning potential than licensed counselors and therefore need more financial aid in order to ensure that the mission of the school is not compromised by student debt. Is this still a legitimate argument?
- In the past, international students at the Hamilton campus used to regularly raise concerns that there were not sufficient scholarships available to them when compared with domestic students. In recent years several very significant [scholarships](#) have been created for international students: the Pastors for Africa Scholarship (full ride), the CentriHall Scholarships for Chinese and Asian students (\$10k/year), and the Global Church Scholarships (\$5k/year).
- The Charlotte campus may benefit from a more robust and active student government. Since no student government/council exists at the Boston and Jacksonville campuses, efforts should be considered to create them. However, experiences with the existing Student Council at Charlotte have revealed how challenging it is to form thriving groups of this nature at a commuter campus.

*Projection (i.e., Future Plans):*

- Gather campus deans, registrars, and other relevant staff to discuss and plan for a more standardized presentation of academic and student life policies and procedures as well as degree program requirements. [Determine specific actions.]
- Purchase necessary fireproof cabinets to ensure the protection of all essential physical student records. [Determine specific actions.]
- Continue the discussions by IT staff on new off-site and/or cloud-based student record backup options. [Determine specific actions.]
- Gather relevant administrators to revisit the available financial aid for counseling students and the rationale behind this. [Determine specific actions.]
- Explore new student government/council possibilities at Charlotte, Boston, and Jacksonville. [Determine specific actions.]

## **Student Borrowing (ATS 6.1.1-6.4.2; NEASC 6.14)**

Controlling student debt is a high priority for Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary since we recognize that too much debt can curtail a graduate's ministry choices or even delay or prevent entry into the ministry. While loans are made available to all qualified students, this is not done without proper counsel first. When prospective students visit the Hamilton campus, they are scheduled to meet one-on-one with a financial aid officer to discuss all aid options and to be cautioned about student debt. All inquirers to the Hamilton campus receive a copy of our [Affordable Brochure](#) which discusses many scholarship and aid options and includes detailed examples of how real students have managed to pay for seminary. Students are also encouraged to seek [funding from outside](#) of Gordon-Conwell and are directed to specific resources to assist with this. Those who do apply for loans must complete mandatory Loan Entrance Counseling before being granted a loan and they must complete online Loan Exit Counseling upon completion of their studies.

New and returning students who are approaching a total of \$40,000 in federal student loan debt (combined undergraduate and graduate), are not permitted to continue to borrow until they have petitioned the Debt Committee. Their petition must detail their plan for further borrowing and their future plans for repayment in light of salary expectations. The Debt Committee must approve all students who plan to borrow beyond the \$40,000 limit.

Gordon-Conwell believes that one of the best strategies to reduce borrowing is to have a robust array of scholarships and financial aid options. At the Boston campus most students qualify to have their tuition reduced to less than half the Hamilton campus rate. At the Charlotte and Jacksonville campuses all students receive a tuition rate that is about 25-35% less than the Hamilton campus rate. Tuition is highest at the Hamilton campus, but that is also where there are a large number of scholarships available for every program and almost every full-time student; these common scholarships will typically reduce the cost of education by about 25-40%. Need-based grant aid is available to those who do not qualify for these scholarship programs.

Gordon-Conwell's best method for reducing student debt is our Partnership Program. This program provides a number of co-curricular activities, special training, and resources in biblical stewardship, as well as a full-tuition scholarship that is renewable every year. As a part of the curriculum, Partnership Program students will gain practical ministry skills in fund raising, receive education and experience in applying biblical stewardship principles, and participate in one-on-one and small group discipleship training—all important for future service in church, parachurch and evangelistic ministries, on the mission field, and in numerous other areas of Christian leadership. [attached brochure] This scholarship is available to M.Div. and most MA students at our Hamilton, Charlotte, and Jacksonville campuses. There have been discussions about extending the program to D.Min. students as well. Since it covers 100% of tuition costs, it is our best tool for reducing student debt. Many of the biblical stewardship training elements in this program are open to the entire student body and not just those in the Partnership Program.

### *Appraisal:*

- Despite our many efforts, some students don't realize the true burden that their borrowing will place on them after graduation. What additional methods can we employ to help student borrowers realize how much they will actually be paying compared to their future salaries?
- The Partnership Program has received much positive praise from outside groups and peer schools. [get specifics from B. Coon] Gordon-Conwell has recently received a new grant to study the effectiveness of the Partnership Program in reducing student debt. [attach approved grant proposal] This study should reveal additional areas for improvement in this and other GCTS financial aid programs designed to reduce student borrowing and make seminary education more affordable. The Boston campus and the Doctor of Ministry program may well benefit from access to this program.

### *Projection (i.e., Future Plans):*

- By [date TBD], schedule a meeting between the Registrar, the Director of Financial Aid, and other relevant staff to plan for new ways to disseminate information about student borrowing and its potential impact on future ministry options.
- Review and implement findings of grant-funded research on the Partnership Program and efforts to reduce student debt and investigate potential for use of the Partnership Program at the Boston campus and in the Doctor of Ministry program. [Determine specific actions.]

### **Placement (ATS 6.5.1-6.5.2)**

Gordon-Conwell's "ecclesial context" is multid denominational, and this directly impacts what can be considered "appropriate assistance" for our students and graduates. If we were a denominational school, we would simply work with the denomination for placement. As a multid denominational school, however, the most appropriate assistance we can offer is to connect students with denominations and denominational representatives. Surveyed graduates have told us that they found their denominational or ministry network to be the most helpful in finding work/ministry positions. For this reason, any unaffiliated students are strongly encouraged to consider affiliating themselves with a denomination that fits their theological views. We do still offer many resources for those that do not affiliate themselves with a denomination. Placement assistance includes: resources to help each student determine which denomination(s) would be the best fit for them; contact information for denominational representatives so that students can learn about the different ordination processes and placement assistance offered by the denominations; [MinistryList.com](http://MinistryList.com) which allows churches and ministries to post open positions and graduates to post resumes (currently approximately 300 positions posted and 100 student resumes); one-on-one career counseling with the Director of Placement Services; resume and cover letter workshops offered two to three times per year; and a placement library with relevant resources for student use. Students in the M.Div. and most professional MA programs have field education requirements (e.g., mentored ministry, internships, etc.). These field education experiences also serve as connections for future employment opportunities. Students in the Master of Arts in Counseling program are invited each year to a Graduating Student Forum where information about licensure processes and potential jobs is shared.

As a multidenominational school, it is very challenging to measure the placement of graduates since students rarely tell us directly where/when they get hired and we don't currently have the resources to track this more closely. However, we do gather this information via the Alumni Survey administered by the Assessment Committee. The survey results as of 2013 show the following: Since 2000, 81% of our master's graduates secured their first professional ministry position within one year of graduation. Of those master's graduates, 58% found that position by the time of graduation.

*Appraisal:*

- The Alumni Survey clearly shows that graduates found their "denominational or ministry network" to be the most helpful resource in finding work/ministry positions (Alumni Survey: Q22). As such, our efforts to encourage and assist students to affiliate themselves with a denomination are not unfounded. This may be the best placement assistance that an unaffiliated, multidenominational seminary can offer.
- Our placement web service [MinistryList.com](http://MinistryList.com) was recently moved to a more modern, stable, and usable environment and continues to serve hundreds of churches, ministries, and students.
- Placement services at Gordon-Conwell are severely under-resourced. The Placement Office is run by one-third staff FTE and has virtually no budget. Good work is done by this staff person, but her impact is limited by the lack of resources—both human and financial—dedicated to the office.
- The limited resources of the Placement Office are located on the Hamilton campus. While MinistryList.com is available to all students and graduates, other placement resources are not practically accessible to Boston, Charlotte, and Jacksonville students.

*Projection (i.e., Future Plans):*

- Research how other multidenominational or nondenominational seminaries have structured and run their placement offices; gather relevant administrators to ponder and propose changes and additional resources to improve our placement efforts. [Determine specific actions.]
- Investigate ways to improve access to placement resources and support at other campuses. [Determine specific actions.]

**Institutional Effectiveness (NEASC 6.21; cf. ATS 6.3.2, 6.4.1, 6.5.2)**

The Learning Environment/Surveys Assessment Committee of Gordon-Conwell administers several standardized surveys each year: the Entering Student Survey, Current Student Survey, Graduating Student Survey, and Alumni Survey as well as an annual focus group. Key findings from these surveys are shared throughout the year to relevant faculty, staff, and administrators so that changes can be considered in a timely manner. Each year an annual assessment report is distributed to all staff department heads, faculty division chairs, deans, and administrators. [include sample in appendix] This report includes the details of every survey question related to each person's area and the key findings from the entire year. All those who receive the survey are requested to consider the data and propose appropriate actions/changes based on the findings.

*Appraisal:*

- Assessment findings are disseminated in many different ways throughout the year by the Assessment Committee. However, we don't seem to have a fully-effective way to ensure that key findings are reviewed and discussed by appropriate segments of the faculty. Many individual faculty members will review the findings and respond, but sometimes a larger faculty discussion may be the most appropriate venue for reviewing some findings. How can greater faculty interaction with key assessment findings be improved?

*Projection (i.e., Future Plans):*

- Gather faculty division chairs and key administrators to discuss ways to more effectively circulate assessment findings for maximum impact.

DRAFT