

Publications by Members of the Association for Theological Field Education: Survey Results

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ABSTRACT: This paper reports survey results regarding publications among members of the Association for Theological Field Education (ATFE), representing the administrators of practice of ministry programs. One goal of ATFE is the encouragement of publications and research regarding members' work. To assess progress toward that goal, numbers and types of publications by members were surveyed. Of the 163 surveys mailed, 73% were returned (reliability 0.70). Findings reveal limited publications, as well as high personnel turnover, and this article explores both of these issues.

Of several goals developed by the Association for Theological Field Education (ATFE) is the encouragement of publications and relevant research among its members. One way of assessing the progress toward the goal, as well as the directions for future research and publications, is to determine the current number and type of publications among the membership. This paper reports the results of a survey among the current members of ATFE, who represent the administrators of practice of ministry programs in theological education.¹

Dissemination of work through publications is one avenue for providing information about an organization or its work, as well as establishing its scholarly interest. Likewise, research allows one to contribute new knowledge in an area and to articulate a research agenda or research questions. It is a way of directing work in an area. Research also contributes to the development and expansion of an area of interest, such as the practice of ministry.

Procedures

Mail Survey and Data Collection. In order to determine the current status of publications among ATFE members, a mail survey was conducted of current members, mailed to the attention of the senior administrators of the practice programs. One hundred sixty-three (163) survey packets were mailed, with 119 returned; this resulted in an acceptable return rate of 73%. Several replies were not usable or noted that members had retired, and those surveys were deleted. Among those returned, 108 were used for the data analysis.

The survey had three categories. The first addressed members' demographic information including age, gender, religious affiliation, ordination status, years of work in field education, their initial theological education, highest professional and highest academic degree earned, tenure status, and length of time (in years) in the current position. The second category asked for school information including the field education position title, program enrollment, and type of school. The last category requested respondents to give information about their publication histories. Publications were divided into eight types: abstracts, articles, books, book chapters, manuals, reviews, videos, and others. For each type, respondents listed the number of publications that they (1) authored, (2) authored in the immediate past five years, and (3) edited.

Analysis of Data. Briefly reported here, the data were entered into SPSS (a data analysis software package), cross-checked for errors, and analyzed. The majority of the demographic data were categories resulting in ordinal data supporting descriptive analysis. The length of time in the current position and publication data were ratio data allowing analyses with correlations and cross-tabs. Analysis for reliability of the data was undertaken with Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient was 0.70, an acceptable level of reliability supporting the continued analysis of the results.

Findings and Discussion

The research project revealed several results with implications for theological education. In order to delimit the focus of the statistical analysis, the primary findings will be stated with a discussion of each. Indeed, a substantive central issue that these data raise is here posed as a question: If professional education regarding ministerial practice is the central mission of theological education, why, then, are directors of programming that is inherently central to this endeavor not publishing their work, not engaging in substantial amounts of research, and demonstrating high positional turnover? To put the question another way: Given the centrality of this work in professional education for ministry, as originally raised by Niebuhr et al, and more recently by Rebecca Chopp,² why does it appear so ambiguous and tentative in nature? What is the level of professional and institutional commitment by and to these personnel and/or to their positions?

The data suggest a high degree of turnover among field education personnel and, perhaps, lack of professional personnel or institutional commitment as well. Without attributing causality to this equation, when lack of commitment is evident on the part of an institution, or its relevant parties, it is difficult to obtain personnel with high commitment. This also works the other way, of course. Regardless of how one desires to construe the dynamics of this issue, the apparent lack of longevity interrelates with few publications, including research-based scholarly work. In terms of theological education and its professional preparation for ministry, it is curious that the area addressing

professional preparation lacks substantive attention. The survey results raise at least three key issues: lack of publications, high turnover of personnel, and questions about preparation and identity. Each of these issues will be explored in more detail with findings from the survey interwoven with the discussion.

Publication Status. The primary aim of this research project was to assess the numbers and types of publications among the current ATFE members. The survey results of more than seventy percent (73%) of the membership reveal that respondents have written few published works and edited even fewer works. There is, however, an increase in the number of publications over time, measured as the immediate past five years.

**Table 1. Number of Authored Publications
by Respondent Frequency (RF) and Percentage**

Number	Abstract		Article		Book		Book Chapter		Manual		Review		Video	
	RF	%	RF	%	RF	%	RF	%	RF	%	RF	%	RF	%
None	101	94.4	49	45.4	74	68.8	70	65.4	74	69.8	71	65.7	95	88.0
1	3	02.8	10	09.3	16	19.4	21	19.4	8	07.4	5	04.6	5	04.6
2	2	01.9	9	08.3	6	06.5	7	06.5	11	10.2	4	03.7	3	02.8
3	2	01.9	9	08.3	4	04.6	5	04.6	7	06.5	5	04.6	1	00.9
4			3	02.8	1	02.8	3	02.8	3	02.4	5	04.6	1	00.9
5			2	01.9	4	00.9	1	00.9	3	02.8	2	01.9		
6			4	03.7	1	00.9					1	00.9	1	00.9
7			2	00.9	1	00.9	1	00.9	2	01.9				
8			1	00.9							1	00.9		
9			1	00.9										
10-15			10	09.3	1	00.9					8	07.4		
16-20			3	02.8							1	01.8		
21-30			3	02.7										
31-40														
41-50			2	01.8							1	00.9		
51-60											1	00.9		
Total	108	100	108	100	108	100	108	100	108	100	106*	98.1	106*	98.1

*Missing Data

Publication data displayed on Table 1 reveal details about publications and their status among this population of educators. The percentages of positive responses are noted here with the corresponding negative responses in paren-

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theses. The majority of ATFE members have produced few publications. Among publications written, 5.6% (94.4%) of the respondents have published abstracts. More than 54% (45.4%) have published articles; 22.6% have written between one and five articles. The number of published articles by members ranged from zero to a high of 49 by one individual. This high was followed by one individual each who had published 47, 30, 23, and 20 articles. What these results reveal is that although, overall, the respondents have published few articles, several respondents have published significant numbers of articles; these are predominantly single-authored works. Additionally, as might be anticipated, there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < .01$) between the length of time in the current position and the number of published books. No other correlations were significant. The last statistical analysis that was conducted was with cross-tabs, which examined for demographic categories that were potentially related to the publication data. No significant results were revealed by the cross-tabs analysis.

Slightly less than one-third, or 31.2% (86.8%), of the members had published books, and slightly more than one-third, or 34.6% (65.4%), had contributed chapters to books. Of the books or book chapters published, 14.8% of the respondents had published one book and 19.4% one book chapter. Similarly, 30.2% of the members had published manuals, and 34.3% had published reviews (69.85% and 65.7%, respectively, have none). Even fewer developed videos. No respondent listed "other" publications, written or edited.

The proportions of publications published within the immediate past five years reveal that in every category the respondents have a higher proportion of their work published within this time period. For example, while 54.6% of the members had published articles, 45% of these articles were published in the past five years. The amount published within this recent time frame is 82% of the total, a trend that transcends the type of work published. Thus one finds that in all categories of publications, most were completed within the past five years.

The third question regarding publications asked respondents to enumerate works they had edited. The vast majority of the member respondents had no edited abstracts (92%), articles (92.5%), books (90.6%), book chapters (98.1%), manuals (98.1%), reviews (99.1%), or videos (98.1%). As noted in these proportions, the largest group is among edited books. Ten members have edited one published book; several respondents reported two or three edited books published.

Members also were asked to list a concept or to provide a brief statement that conveyed their primary publication focus or research interest. Of the total usable replies, 28 did not provide this information. Among the remaining replies, or 80 surveys, the concepts and areas listed varied so widely that it was impossible to categorize them. Several respondents added a comment to the section on publication-research interests, noting they also worked in pastoral

care or taught systematic theology, for example. These replies, too, ranged widely, and they represented most of the disciplines in theological education today. Few, however, listed field education as a focus. What these replies convey is the wide range of interests and backgrounds of the ATFE membership regarding research and publications.

While these data suggest that the amount of publication among these ATFE members is low, comparing these results with publication by ATS faculty members is fruitful. A survey of faculty in ATS schools, conducted in 1993 by the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education, revealed that their rate of publishing was about the same as that of an undergraduate faculty and that about one-third of theological faculty did little or no scholarly publishing.³ Examining the results of the ATFE survey, one finds that about 45% of ATFE administrators have not published articles, about 69% have not published books, and about 91% have not edited published books.

One of the questions that these data raise is why so few administrators of practice programs are engaging in publication and/or research. Attention to

Table 2. Length of Time in Position

Years	Number	Percent
0	05	04.6
1	15	13.9
2	17	15.7
3	09	08.3
4	09	08.3
5	10	09.3
6	05	04.6
7	05	04.6
8	05	04.6
9	02	01.9
10	03	02.8
11	02	01.9
12	02	01.9
13	03	02.8
14	03	02.8
15	03	02.8
16	02	01.9
17	01	00.9
18	02	01.9
20	01	00.9
21	01	00.9
24	01	00.9
25	01	00.9
27	01	00.9
Total	108	100.0

scholarly activities and dissemination of work were underlying concerns on the part of ATFE in highlighting this activity in recent years. To address the issue, other dimensions of this study were explored, which leads to the second key issue for consideration.

Turnover Rate. Respondents were asked to indicate the time in years in their current position (Table 2) and their years of work in field education (Table 3). The length of time in the position among the respondents was revealed to be relatively short. Put another way, the retention rate among the administrators of practice of ministry programs was extremely low. The question is why this occurs.

The members' demographic data may offer some explanation of these findings regarding turnover. The data confirm that this respondent sample is relatively recent in appointment. As displayed on Table 2, half of the program administra-

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tors (50.9%) have been in their positions for four years or less. However, a significant proportion has been in the position less than one year, for one year, or for two years (4.6%, 13.9%, 15.7% respectively), for a total of 34.2% of the members. In contrast to data from the Auburn Center's faculty survey, in which non-retirement faculty attrition was noted as being between 2-4%, the turnover among field educators is extremely high.⁴

These data reveal a very high turnover among ATFE personnel. In order to explore in more detail the publication status of members and possible relationships between years in the position and publications, a simple correlation was conducted between them. These were the only data appropriate for correlation analysis. Indeed, this analysis revealed a statistically significant correlation ($p < .01$) between the number of books published and the years in current position. This is an anticipated finding and is consistent with characteristics in other academic areas. Table 3 displays information on length of time in field education and indicates that while the largest respondent group (38.9%) reported working in field education for ten years or more, the majority of field educators has worked in this area for nine years or less (61.1%).

When one compares data on the length of time in the position to the predominately higher range of age, 51 years and over, it also suggests that field education is a second career. Demographically, 49.1% of the ATFE members are 51 years of age or older. They also are male (65.7%), Protestant (70.4%), and ordained (79.6%). Although these findings are relatively consistent with characteristics of faculties in other areas of theological education, an inconsistency emerges when one examines age and the length of time in years in field education. The lack of parallel time implies that these respondents had other employment prior to working in field education (hence, a second career) and to their current position. The delimited length of time in the position may be an underlying factor that contributes to the low proportion of published works by these respondents. It is also an issue that should be examined further.

High turnover in positions is very costly. Indeed, organizations would typically want to avoid such high turnover in employment. While there may be a rationale for retaining flexibility in positions, the turnover in these positions reflects atypical duration. Not only is high turnover expensive in terms of preparation and training, it also leads to organizational instability and lack of continuity. High turnover throughout one area of these academic institutions also raises questions about a lack of interest in or commitment to that area of an institution's work. These findings also may be a clue to the sense of fragmentation that has been noted in theological education.⁵ Surely, at a minimum, these data suggest instability within the field among the ATFE administrators.

The second report from the Auburn Center's study of theological school faculty sheds light on this phenomenon. It identifies two key determinants with respect to the granting of faculty tenure: the *value* faculty hold for the

**Table 3. Respondents' Demographic Categories
by Number and Percent**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Sub-Item</i>	Number	Percent
<i>Age</i>			
	31-40	08	07.4
	41-50	47	43.5
	51-Over	53	49.1
<i>Gender</i>			
	Female	37	34.3
	Male	71	65.7
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>			
	Roman Catholic	24	22.2
	Protestant	76	70.4
	Other	08	07.4
<i>Ordination Status</i>			
	Lay	13	12.0
	Ordained	86	79.6
	Religious Community	09	08.4
<i>Years in Field Education</i>			
	1-3	27	25.0
	4-6	25	23.1
	7-9	14	13.0
	10-More	42	38.9
<i>School Type Attended</i>			
	Denominational	66	61.1
	Non-Denom.	14	13.0
	Univ-related Div. Sch.	17	15.7
	Univ. Dept. of Religion	9	08.3
	Other	2	01.9
<i>Highest Professional Degree</i>			
	None	12	11.0
	BD, MDiv	34	31.5
	MTh, STM, STL	14	13.0
	DMin, MRE	41	38.0
	Other	7	06.5
<i>Highest Academic Degree</i>			
	None	16	14.9
	BA, BS	23	21.3
	MA, MTS, MS	25	23.1
	PhD, ThD, STD	31	28.7
	Other	13	12.0
<i>Tenure</i>			
	Yes	25	23.1
	No:	(83)	(76.9)
	Faculty only	38	35.2
	Administrator only	22	20.4
	Joint appointment	23	21.3

position and the *care* exercised in the initial selection of a new faculty member.⁶ The high turnover among ATFE administrators raises the question of value and selection. To return to the question regarding the centrality of preparation for ministerial practice in theological education, the high turnover among these personnel highlights even more the question of value. Obviously, an inverse relationship is implied: high turnover among these personnel suggests low value. It may also suggest the second key element—lack of attention to the selection of personnel who occupy these positions. These two determinants are undoubtedly related. Administrators and faculty would give more care and attention to positions that held high(er) value than those that do not. Thus, one can logically assume that high value leads to more care—time, energy, and attention—to the selection of personnel in theological education.

In addition to these interpretations, the data reveal that a small proportion of this sample is tenured. In the academy tenure is a form of institutional stability; it is an avenue to both professional and institutional commitment. Thus, the survey asked these respondents about their tenure status in their current position, with the following results. Tenure is held by slightly less than one-fourth (23.1%) of the ATFE membership. Those without tenure report that they have a faculty appointment (35.2%), an administrative appointment (20.4%), or a joint appointment (21.3%) among the three choices for mutually exclusive appointment types. It is not known how many with tenure have a faculty appointment, but it is assumed that most, if not all, do because administrative appointments are rarely tenured.

Without attributing causality to this result, one would expect tenured members to have published works. However, that assumption does not hold true for this respondent sample. Analysis of those respondents with significantly larger numbers of authored works reveals that several of them are not tenured. Indeed, untenured members authored several of the high numbers of publications reflected in Table 1. Also, several respondents added comments that tenure is unavailable at their institutions. Therefore, one avenue of institutional stability is inaccessible to some members of ATFE as personnel in practice of ministry programming. The issue of tenure could be explored in further research, given the small number of tenured respondents. This leads directly into the issue of identity of program administrators.

Preparation and Identity. The last issue that these data raise is preparation and identity of personnel who administer practice of ministry programs. These two concepts are inherently interrelated, and the issue warrants further exploration. The results indicate that the initial preparation is not that expected for persons engaging in significant amounts of time devoted either to publishing or to research. It raises the question of whether publications, either for dissemination of work or for research, are realistic expectations. For example, for most administrators the highest professional degree is a D.Min. or M.R.E. (38%); fewer report their highest academic degree as Ph.D., Th.D., or S.T.D. (28.7%).

Members also typically receive their initial theological education in a denominational seminary (61.1%). However, examination of the types of non-tenured appointments reveals that the largest percentage (35%) has a faculty appointment. This type of appointment contradicts earlier findings, because an appointment as faculty (only) implies that larger amounts of publications would be forthcoming.

Although this study did not elicit information regarding prior employment, these data complemented by anecdotal information suggest that the majority of persons who are administrators for practice of ministry programs gain entry into the academy as a competent pastor. While a faculty position may build upon church experience, the background of ATFE administrators contrasts with additional preparation for a faculty position, a position that typically requires publications. These data regarding the initial preparation and the highest degree earned among ATFE members in the survey serve to confirm these anecdotes. Thus, clarity of expectations about the position would aid in supporting research and relevant publications. This issue, however, needs to be addressed upon initial appointment.

If the primary identity of ATFE members is that of administrator, then other issues obtain. One argument is that as administrators these personnel serve "at will" and in a fashion similar to other seminary administrators, i.e., without tenure. Another argument is that flexibility in the appointment allows closer tailoring to the school's current needs, student enrollment, or church experience. Tenure in these positions would offer less flexibility in appointment. In contrast, the quite high turnover suggests that the issue is less one of suppleness and more one of instability: remaining in a position for two to three years implies lack of stability rather than flexibility. Other school administrators, such as a dean, typically serve for a specified term with the option for re-appointment. Deans often have a complementary faculty appointment, some with tenure. Thus, the foundational issue is the identity of the program director. If the director is perceived as an administrator, then, while turnover is high, the reasons may be explainable. However, if the administrator is understood as an educator, then these data provide background for a substantive conversation about the personnel, nature, and direction of practice of ministry programming in theological education.

These results may also be viewed in light of the school information provided by survey respondents (Table 4). Respondents typically hold the position title of director (85.2%), the remainder holding other titles (14.8%). Enrollment in programs of the largest proportion of respondents (25.9%) ranges between 25-49 students per year. The majority of respondents is employed in church/denominationally related seminaries (53.7%).

Table 4. Respondents' School Information

<i>Category</i> Sub-Item	Number	Percent
<i>Position Title</i>		
Director	91	85.2
Asst./Assoc. Dir.	01	00.9
Field Supervisor	0	0
Other	16	13.9
<i>Program Enrollment</i>		
Less than 25	22	20.3
25-49	28	25.9
50-74	22	20.4
75-99	16	14.8
100 or more	20	18.5
<i>School Type</i>		
Univ. Related	36	33.3
Church/denom related	58	53.7
Other	14	13.0

The program titles also aid in interpreting these data regarding preparation and identity of this sample. Each respondent was asked to note the title of the program in which he or she was employed. These results ranged widely. It was possible, however, to categorize the titles in the following way. Titles referencing *field education* were noted first, then the term *field* (but not education), followed by the term *supervised* (but not *field*) ministry. These two terms—*field* and *supervised* or any variation of them—represented the largest numbers of respondents among the programs represented by the current ATFE membership, or 79% of the programs. The term *field education*, however, has ambiguous etiology and limited theological foundation and identity.⁷ The third most frequently used concept was *contextual education*: 7 programs (8%) used that term. The remaining program titles (11%) varied widely and appeared to represent the particular emphasis of the school; 3 respondents (2%) did not provide a title.

The question about identity also raises the question of the field educators' disciplines and field education itself as a discipline. Based on the wide range of publications, research foci, and terms used for programs, it would appear that the disciplines of these respondents also range widely. Field education itself was not frequently listed as an area of publication or research, nor was it combined with another discipline. These are issues for another and longer conversation.

Indeed, the identity of persons in field education is undergoing scrutiny. Two respondents added a written comment regarding the identity of field educators. These respondents saw identity as a critical issue about which they "feel strongly." They indicated that they identify themselves as educators

rather than as administrators. This question of identity is an issue for future consideration in ATFE, as well as in theological education.

Recent attention has been given to discussions about identity, the ramifications of a more focused intentional identity, and the shift from administrator to educator. These conversations have occurred at the biennial professional meetings of the ATFE. The term "administrator" was used in this survey to avoid an assumption about terminology (e.g., director). While some respondents may wish to avoid the term "administrator," the designation is typical to denote the program leadership, functions, and accountability. It is interesting that 35% of the respondents report a faculty (only) appointment, even though they have an administrative title and responsibility for the program.

While the central purpose of this project was to assess publications among ATFE administrators, the results highlight others areas of interest and concern. The high turnover, the apparent lack of consistency, and perhaps ambiguity, about the positions and appointments, and the general lack of attention to this group indicate that more attention needs to be given to this area of theological education. Practice of ministry clearly needs further examination. When the goal, as reflected in the ATS Standards of Accreditation, is to develop collaborative learning communities⁸ or to provide avenues to sustain, support, and enhance the work of faculties in theological education, these administrators also need to be considered. Consistency within a school and among schools of theological education is important to provide for an overall quality of education. Likewise, supporting and enriching all personnel leading to more productive and effective faculties also attends to the important relationship between the church and the academy. The programs represented by this respondent sample relate to both sides of the church-academy equation. The student graduates of theological education often seek employment in the local church. Thus models of education that enhance appreciation for both dimensions are important contributors to the enterprise of theological education.

The data from this survey were reported at the biennial AFTE conference in January 2001. Limitations to this research are noted briefly here. No attempt was made to evaluate the publications. The survey did not ask respondents to differentiate between peer-reviewed publications and ones not reviewed, for example. Second, using pre-determined categories resulted in data with limits on analysis. While categories were appropriate to the aim of this project and assisted in obtaining an acceptable response rate, the form of response constrains the type of analyses. Lastly, this author suggests that ethnic-cultural background of members is important for future research in ATFE.

Conclusion

The current members of the Association for Theological Field Education, representing the administrators of practice of ministry programs, reveal a

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range in the number and type of works they have published. Overall, the majority of the respondents reports limited published works. The largest publication number is authored articles, followed by book chapters. Books represent the largest category among edited publications. There has been an increase in the amount of publishing in the past five years. With the exception of published books, the length of time in the position and other groupings are not significantly related to publications. Given the respondents' initial preparation and length of time in current position, these results are not surprising. While the purpose of the survey was to elicit information regarding publications and research, the results highlight a significant turnover among these personnel and apparent ambiguity regarding their identity, preparation, and appointments. Implied are significant instability in these positions, less value regarding the position, and perhaps lack of professional commitment. Given the centrality of practice of ministry to professional theological education, these are issues requiring further exploration.

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ENDNOTES

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2. See H. Richard Niebuhr, in collaboration with Daniel Day Williams and James M. Gustafson, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York: Harper, 1956) and Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).
3. Barbara G. Wheeler, "True and False: The First in a Series of Reports from a Study of Theological School Faculty," *Auburn Studies*, No. 4, January 1996 (New York: Auburn Theological Seminary).
4. *Ibid.*
5. See Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).
6. Barbara G. Wheeler and Mark N. Wilhelm, "Tending Talents: The Second in a Series of Reports from a Study of Theological School Faculty," *Auburn Studies*, No. 5, March 1997 (New York: Auburn Theological Seminary).
7. Charlotte McDaniel, "Vision for the Future: Terminology in Theological Field Education," *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry*, Vol. 20, 2000: 208-218.
8. See particularly Standard 3, Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship and Standard 6, Faculty, *ATS Bulletin 44*, Part 1.