

B.H. Carroll Theological Institute moves toward ATS accreditation

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IRVING—B.H. Carroll Theological Institute has moved one step closer to accreditation by the Association of Theological Schools.

In June, the association's board of commissioners voted to change the institute's status from associate member to candidate for accreditation.

To gain candidacy status, the institute submitted a readiness report in January and received an on-site evaluation by ATS commission staff in April. Next, the institute will conduct a self-study review and complete an on-site review as part of the process to earn accreditation.

ATS is a national organization of more than 270 Christian and Jewish graduate schools that offer professional and academic degree programs for clergy and for teaching and research in theological disciplines.

Moved administrative hub

The [B.H. Carroll Theological Institute](#)—which began offering courses in 2004—recently moved its administrative hub from leased space at First Baptist Church in Arlington to an office building in Irving. The institute purchased a 29,000-square-foot, two-story building at 6500 N. Beltline Rd., in the Las Colinas area, and its administrators and other staff moved into about half of that space in two wings on the bottom floor, leasing the rest to commercial tenants.

"We have a permanent home now—a place that is our own," said Gene

Wilkes, president of the institute. “It signals we are still in the game, we are still growing, and we are committed to accomplish all the Lord wants us to achieve.”

But unlike traditional “brick-and-mortar” theological schools, the institute has no central teaching campus. Instead, it offers a hybrid model that includes both face-to-face interaction in classrooms at teaching churches, as well as online instruction and video classes.

“We describe ourselves as having a hub of operations—our administrative facilities in Irving, with long, long hallways to our classrooms in local churches,” Wilkes said. “Sometimes these hallways stretch to foreign countries, where we partner with a teaching church.”

The B.H. Carroll Theological Institute offers seven master’s degree programs and two doctoral degree programs, serving more than 300 students. The institute has worked with more than 30 teaching churches in the United States and internationally. It offers degree programs in Vietnam, Russia and Cuba, where it works with registered churches, traveling on religious visas when allowed.

Significantly different model

Wilkes sees the institute’s model as significantly different from the traditional seminary model of a main campus with extension sites.

“This is costly and keeps the theological training apart from the ministries of the local church,” he said. “We do not want to ‘hold classes in the church’ but to offer theological education as part of the church’s discipleship and leadership development programs. This will be our challenge and opportunity in the future as we partner with local churches to deliver accredited theological education to Christ-centered leaders where they live and serve. We are not looking to build a school. We want to build up the church.”

Quest for accreditation

In January 2007, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board certified the institute to grant degrees. Six years later, the Association for Biblical Higher Education accredited the school, but accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools and from ATS remained elusive.

“We began our quest for accreditation with SACS but pulled off because of regulations related to our global degree offerings,” Wilkes said. “ABHE embraced our global model, so we turned to them. ATS continues to work with us to understand and guide the degree programs we offer in other countries and to date have accepted them. We still have the self-study to complete, and I know we will review those again. The debate between the value of regional versus national accreditation continues nationwide, and every seminary will decide if it goes with one, both or neither.”

Traditionally, ATS insisted no more than one-third of a master of divinity degree could be completed through online courses as part of its standards for accreditation. However, in August 2013, the board of commissioners granted exceptions to six member schools, signaling a new appreciation for online instruction and different educational models.

Access to library

Another major hurdle to this point has been the institute’s library and student access to its holdings.

“The information resources of a seminary are key to its ability to equip men and women for ministry,” Wilkes said. “Traditionally, that benchmark was the hard-copy library in a brick-and-mortar building on campus. That is no longer the case. Digital resources dominate education at all levels today, and we are simply embracing that reality for theological education.

“The accrediting agencies have looked carefully at how we offer information resources to our students and have accepted them as adequate for accredited degree programs. We continue to build our digital library with our own resources as well as with those we can access through other vendors.”

In November, the institute will hold a half-day meeting in connection with the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education meeting in Turkey.

The institute’s leaders hope “to create a consortium of schools to build a global e-library that can be accessed by seminaries and religious universities around the world and in their own languages,” Wilkes said. “I am most excited about this project and the contribution it can make to global theological education.”