

## UTS President Hugh Spurgin at ATS Biennial Meeting for Theological Educators

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Photo: Dr. Kathy Winings, and Hugh Spurgin at the ATS/COA Biennial in St. Louis, June 28-30

*"I found many fellow conference attendees intrigued that UTS was represented, and very willing to converse in a civil and professional manner about issues which concern everyone involved in theological education. The ATS/COA Biennial discussed topics which are very important to UTS. I had the opportunity to present some of the successful steps that UTS has been able to make, especially in interfaith. I was also able to present, candidly, our challenges." Hugh Spurgin Ph.D., President UTS*

The Biennial Meeting brought ATS presidents, deans, and theological education leaders to learn and network as they examined new models that schools are exploring in service to their missions.

Dr. Kathy Winings commented on the workshop about finances and student debt. ATS has an initiative: Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers. This workshop highlighted key insights and successful strategies theological schools can adopt to better prepare students for the financial challenges they will face in ministry. Workshop attendees heard from several schools which are proactive in reducing student reliance on financial aid. Also addressed were what students can do to improve their financial literacy. The financial security of seminary students has a huge bearing on later effectiveness in ministry.

Another intriguing workshop was on Competency-based Education. Competency-based education and assessment of prior learning are hot topics in higher education. Northwest Baptist Seminary currently

offers the only competency-based education program approved by the Board of Commissioners as an experiment. This workshop examined the case study of what it takes to develop and execute a successful program based on knowledge, skills, and abilities in the classroom as well as those acquired through work experience and other out-of-class learning opportunities. This may also be a future way to reduce educational costs for students.

The issue of race was another hot topic. Special guest Michel Martin of NPR's "All Things Considered" moderated a panel discussion "Theological Education after Ferguson." The topic provoked the question of whether enough was being done in seminaries to counter racism. Are seminaries "race-free"? Dr. Winings did note that in the last twenty years she has seen more and more black seminary presidents and black chief academic officers present at the ATS conferences. However, even in theological schools, which often pride themselves in their racial inclusivity, there is still room for reflection, and improvement. Dr. Winings asks, "How can we, at UTS, as a faith-based school contribute to the conversation which will end racism?" Recent interracial violence in the USA underscores how important it is for theological schools to continue having such conversations and work to help heal a country in pain.

Dr. Hugh Spurgin found the Biennial to be invaluable. He is now in his second year of tenure as UTS president, and immersion in the company of other seminary presidents, chief administrators and academic officers offered him insights into the overall health and vibrancy of theological education in North America. Time and again he was able to discern that though UTS may have its financial pressures and recruitment issues, these are not uncommon among peer schools. The conference introduced new models and new horizons to explore.

Dr. Spurgin and Dr. Winings were also able to spend valuable time with several UTS alumni from the St. Louis area, over a dinner meeting on the Wednesday evening in the middle of the conference.