



STATEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS
2024-2025

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Introduction

Shepherds Theological Seminary exists to impact the world for Christ by equipping servant leaders for life and ministry through biblical scholarship, intentional mentoring, and a strong commitment to practical ministry formation.

In keeping with this mission, Shepherds maintains an ongoing, institution-wide assessment of educational effectiveness. Each year the seminary gathers and analyzes data from graduating student surveys, entrance and exit Bible knowledge exams, enrollment and completion records, placement outcomes, and financial indicators. These data are used not merely to document compliance but to guide continuous improvement in curriculum, spiritual formation, student support services, and institutional planning.

Since the 2021–2022 Statement of Educational Effectiveness, Shepherds has significantly refined its assessment infrastructure to align with the 2020 ATS Standards. A Center of Excellence now serves as a cross-departmental hub for assessment, faculty development, and institutional effectiveness, and assessment processes have been automated within Canvas and Zoho. Required lifecycle courses—RS550 New Student Orientation and RS795 Graduation Application—now house the Bible Entrance Exam, Bible Exit Exam, and the New Student and Graduating Student Surveys. This ensures comprehensive participation, real-time data aggregation, and direct linkage between student learning outcomes and course-level assessment.

The seminary has also transitioned to a mentor-driven discipleship model that emphasizes one-on-one mentorship, expanded participation for distance learners and teaching sites, and integrated qualitative and quantitative feedback on spiritual formation. Alongside these changes, library resources, off-site teaching locations, and online offerings have continued to expand, providing robust support for students across all delivery modes.

1. Graduate Satisfaction with the Shepherds Experience

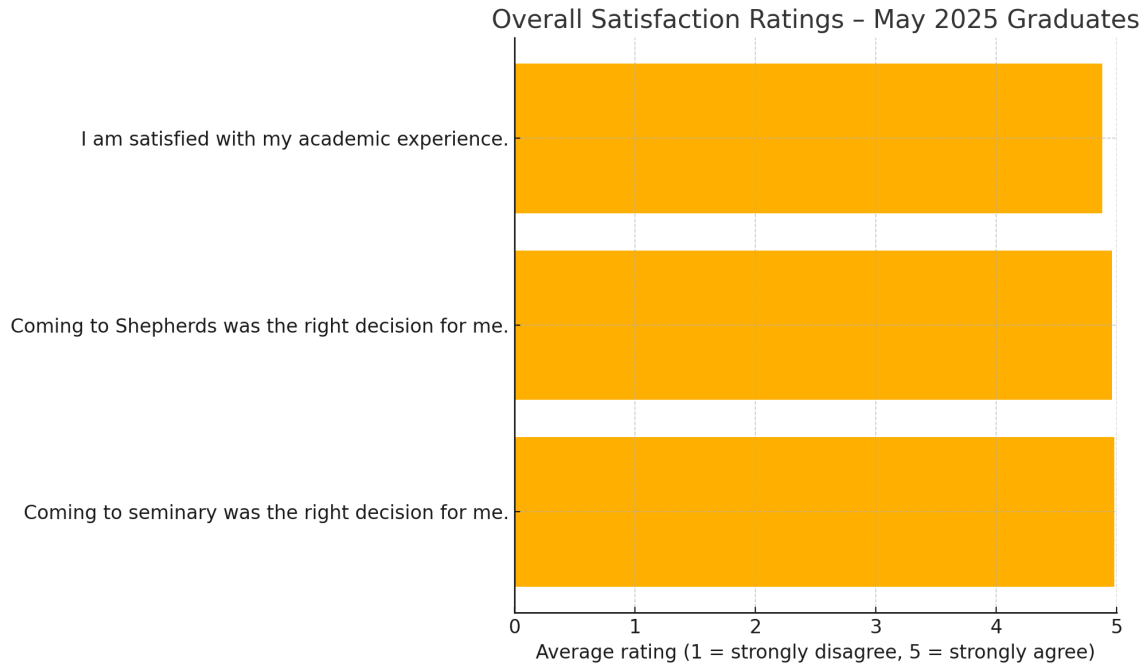
Fifty graduating students completed the Shepherds Graduating Student Survey in 2025. On a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), responses indicate consistently high satisfaction with both the decision to attend seminary and the quality of the academic and spiritual experience at Shepherds.

Core satisfaction items show exceptionally strong affirmation:

- "Coming to seminary was the right decision for me." – average 4.98
- "Coming to Shepherds was the right decision for me." – average 4.96
- "I am satisfied with my academic experience." – average 4.88.

These scores demonstrate that graduates overwhelmingly affirm both their choice of seminary and the quality of their Shepherds experience.

Figure 1 below summarizes these core satisfaction ratings for the May 2025 graduating class.



Beyond overall satisfaction, graduates also reported strong growth in key areas of formation and preparation. Average ratings on additional items were as follows (5 = strongly agree):

- I have grown spiritually. – 4.78
- My faith has grown stronger. – 4.82
- I know at least one faculty member well. – 4.34
- I can integrate theology with ministry practice. – 4.88
- I am prepared for a lifetime of study and learning. – 4.86
- I have made strong friendships while here. – 4.14
- I am prepared to enter a specific ministry career or unpaid/volunteer ministry. – 4.74
- I have been able to manage financially. – 4.62

Figure 2 displays these additional satisfaction ratings, highlighting broad-based strength across spiritual growth, preparation for ministry, and relational community.



2. Student Retention, Degree Completion, and Placement

Shepherds monitors both individual-program completion and overall institutional persistence using ATS and IPEDS reporting frameworks. The most recent ATS Annual Report Form (survey year 2024–2025) provides graduation and persistence data for cohorts entering six years ago (MDiv) and four years ago (MA and other master’s programs).

For these cohorts, ATS CF-4 data indicate the following graduation and persistence outcomes:

- Master of Divinity (MDiv): 44.4% graduation rate and 55.6% combined graduation-plus-still-enrolled persistence.
- Master of Arts (academic): 80.0% graduation rate and 84.0% persistence.
- All degree programs combined: 61.5% graduation rate and 76.9% persistence.

These results show that a clear majority of Shepherds students in each tracked cohort either completed their programs within the ATS time window or remain actively enrolled and progressing toward completion.

Longitudinal data from the ATS Institutional Peer Profile Report (IPPR) further demonstrate strong completion outcomes. For all degree programs combined, Shepherds’ five-year graduation rates for cohorts completing between 2020 and 2024 ranged from the low 60s to the low 70s as a percentage of entering students—consistently above the

peer median for evangelical seminaries in the same size band. Overall, Shepherds' total graduation rates exceed peer averages by approximately 10–25 percentage points across the five-year window, indicating sustained strength in helping students reach degree completion.

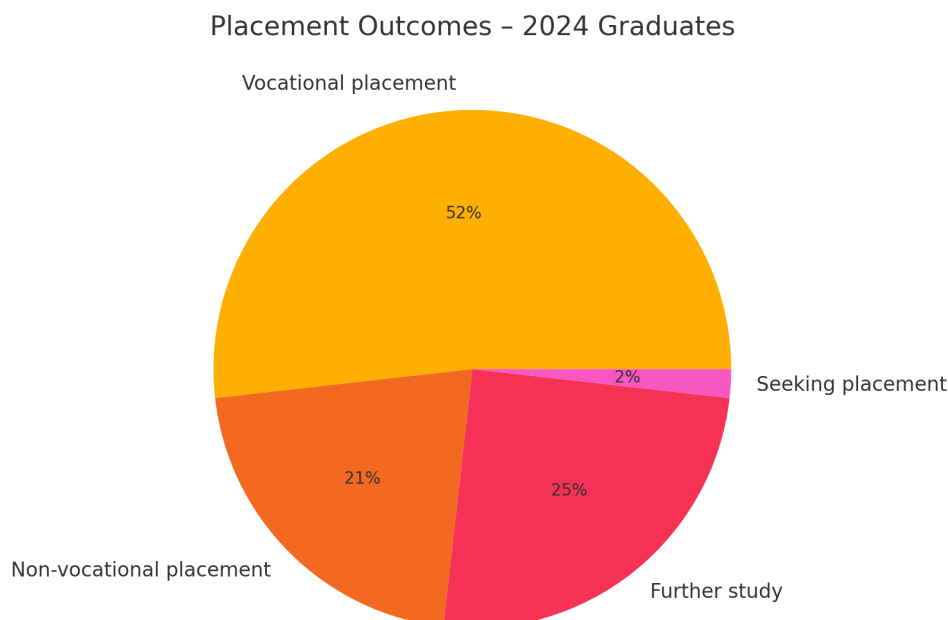
Positive placement outcomes for graduates are similarly strong. IPPR data for 2020–2024 show that between roughly 70% and 98% of Shepherds graduates in a given year achieved positive placement (vocational ministry roles, other professional roles, or further study) within the reporting window, with several years at or above 90%. These outcomes compare favorably with the peer group and reflect Shepherds' commitment to preparing students for lifelong ministry and service.

ATS CF-3 data for graduates completing degrees in 2023–2024 (56 total completers across all programs) provide a more detailed picture of immediate post-graduation outcomes:

- 29 graduates (approximately 52%) entered vocational ministry or other professional roles.
- 12 graduates (about 21%) were placed in non-vocational roles while continuing to use their training in church and community contexts.
- 14 graduates (25%) pursued further formal study.
- 1 graduate (2%) was still actively seeking placement at the time of reporting.

Taken together, these data indicate that nearly all Shepherds graduates move quickly into ministry, further study, or other positive post-graduation pathways.

Figure 3 summarizes these placement outcomes for 2024 graduates.



3. Bible Knowledge Exams and Direct Evidence of Learning

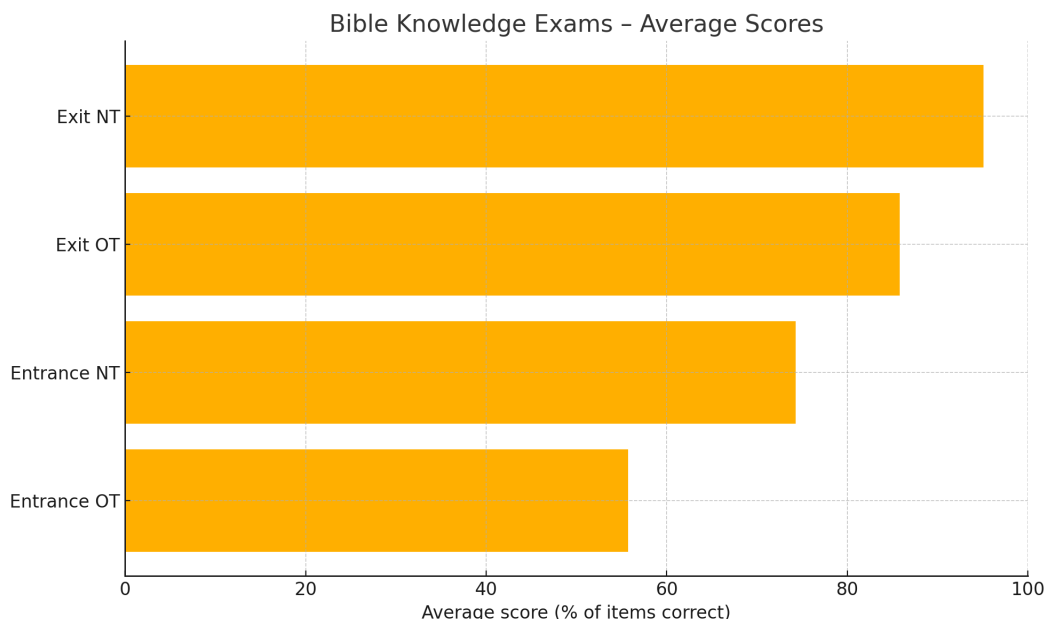
To provide direct evidence of biblical and theological knowledge, Shepherds administers standardized Bible Entrance and Exit Exams. New students complete the Bible Entrance Exam as part of RS550 New Student Orientation, while graduating students complete the Bible Exit Exam in RS795 Graduation Application. Exams assess objective knowledge of Old and New Testament content through multiple-choice questions calibrated to program-level outcomes.

For the most recent cohorts, average scores (expressed as percentage of items correct) demonstrate substantial growth between entrance and graduation:

- Entrance Old Testament exam: approximately 55.7% average score.
- Entrance New Testament exam: approximately 74.3% average score.
- Exit Old Testament exam: approximately 85.8% average score.
- Exit New Testament exam: approximately 95.1% average score.

Overall, combined entrance Bible exam scores averaged in the mid-60% range, while combined exit scores averaged approximately 90%, indicating sustained and measurable growth in core biblical literacy over the course of students' programs.

Figure 4 illustrates this movement from entrance to exit Bible exam performance for both Old and New Testament components.



4. Factors Influencing Learning at Shepherds

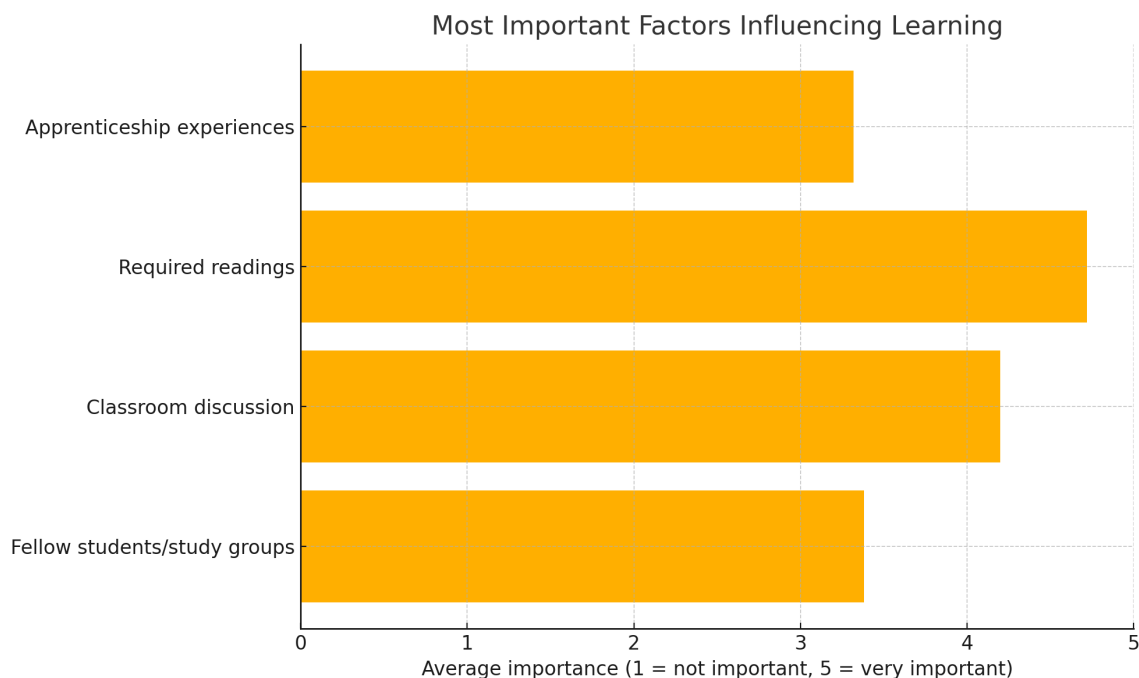
Graduating students were also asked to rate the importance of various factors that influenced their learning while enrolled at Shepherds (1 = not important, 5 = very important). Results underscore the value of rigorous classroom engagement, reading, and applied ministry experience.

Average importance ratings for key learning influences were:

- Fellow students/study groups – 3.38
- Classroom discussion – 4.20
- Required readings – 4.72
- Apprenticeship experiences – 3.32

Required readings and classroom discussion received the highest importance ratings, reflecting the centrality of carefully structured coursework and faculty-guided interaction. Apprenticeship experiences and peer learning groups also contributed meaningfully to student learning and ministry preparation.

Figure 5 summarizes the relative importance of these learning influences for the May 2025 graduating class.



5. Spiritual Formation and Growth in Knowledge

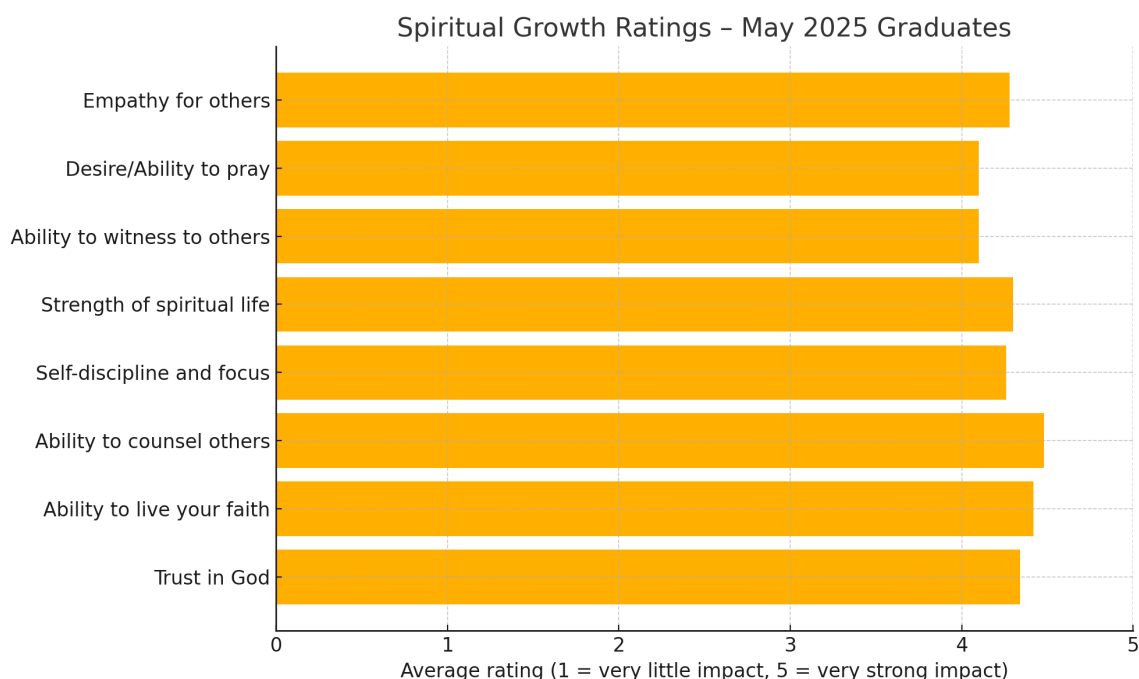
Consistent with Shepherds' mission, graduates report that their time at the seminary produced deep spiritual growth and significant gains in theological knowledge and ministry skills. Using a five-point scale (1 = very little impact, 5 = very strong impact), students rated the degree to which their Shepherds experience impacted specific areas of spiritual formation and knowledge.

Average ratings for spiritual growth outcomes were:

- Trust in God – 4.34
- Ability to live your faith – 4.42
- Ability to counsel others – 4.48
- Self-discipline and focus – 4.26
- Strength of spiritual life – 4.30
- Ability to witness to others – 4.10
- Desire/Ability to pray – 4.10
- Empathy for others – 4.28

These responses indicate that students perceive meaningful strengthening of faith, prayer, empathy, and practical abilities such as counseling and living out their faith in daily life.

Figure 6 presents these spiritual growth ratings for the May 2025 graduating class.



Average ratings for growth in knowledge and ministry skills were:

- Desire for continual learning – 4.72
- Knowledge of Scripture – 4.80
- Knowledge of Church Doctrine and History – 4.64
- Knowledge of Theology – 4.82
- Ability to think and preach/speak exegetically – 4.54
- Ability to give spiritual direction – 4.62
- Desire to become an expert in my field – 4.32

Taken together, these results show strong gains in biblical and theological understanding, desire for ongoing learning, and the ability to communicate Scripture exegetically and to give spiritual direction—a core focus of Shepherds’ curricular design.

Figure 7 summarizes growth in knowledge ratings across these categories.



6. Financial Factors and Affordability

Shepherds intentionally keeps tuition and fees modest relative to comparable ATS schools and offers scholarships, employment opportunities, and other assistance to help students manage the cost of seminary education. Graduating students were asked both about additional educational debt incurred and about the most important sources of income used while at Shepherds.

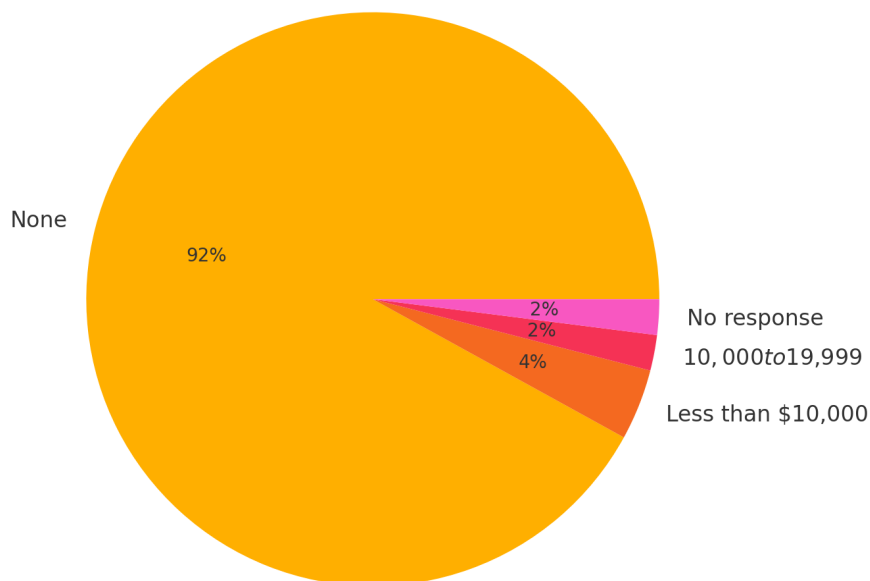
Educational debt levels for the 2025 graduating class were low:

- 92.0% of respondents reported incurring no additional educational debt while at Shepherds.
- 4.0% reported incurring less than \$10,000 in additional debt.
- 2.0% reported incurring between \$10,000 and \$19,999 in debt.

These results, together with ATS financial aid data indicating that only a minority of graduates make use of federal loans, suggest that most students are able to complete their programs without significant educational debt.

Figure 8 shows the distribution of additional educational debt reported by the May 2025 graduating class.

Additional Educational Debt Incurred – May 2025 Graduates

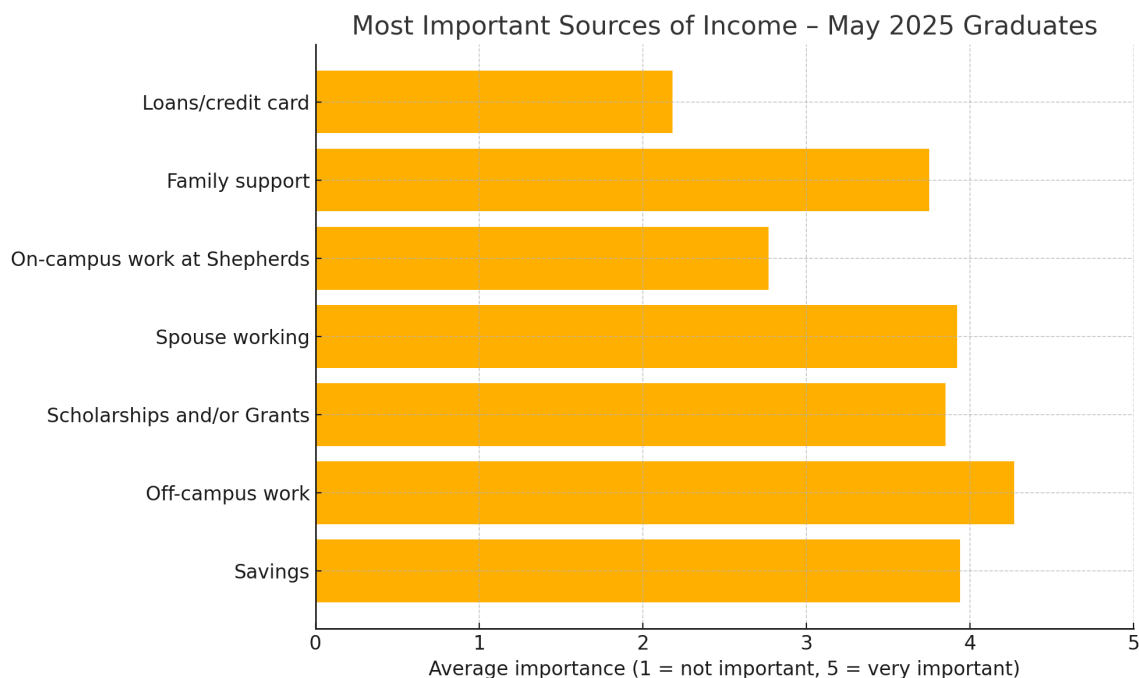


Graduates also rated the importance of various sources of income used to fund their studies at Shepherds:

- Savings – 3.94
- Off-campus work – 4.27
- Scholarships and/or Grants – 3.85
- Spouse working – 3.92
- On-campus work at Shepherds – 2.77
- Family support – 3.75
- Loans/credit card – 2.18

Off-campus work, family and spousal support, personal savings, and scholarships/grants were especially important. On-campus work and loans/credit cards played a more modest but still meaningful role for some students. The diversity of income sources reflects both student initiative and institutional efforts to keep costs manageable.

Figure 9 summarizes the relative importance of these income sources for the 2025 graduates.



7. Tuition and Fees Overview (2024–2025)

According to the ATS Annual Report Form (IC-1, Part C), Shepherds’ published tuition and mandatory fees for the 2024–2025 academic year remain comparatively modest. For representative degree programs, the annual tuition and fees for a full-time student are as follows:

Degree Program	Total Credits Required	Tuition per Credit Hour	Annual Tuition Amount	Annual Fees (Typical)
MDiv	92	\$410	\$9,430	\$842
MA (all types)	Varies	\$410	Varies by program	Varies
DMin	32	\$545	\$5,814	\$1,389

These figures represent typical full-time annual tuition and required fees, not total program cost. Because Shepherds’ tuition per credit hour remains below many peer institutions, overall program costs for MDiv and other master’s degrees continue to be

significantly lower than ATS averages for schools of similar size. This affordability contributes directly to the low educational-debt profile described above.

8. Supporting Educational Resources and Continuous Improvement

Educational effectiveness at Shepherds is supported by robust library and information services, multiple teaching sites and delivery modalities, and an institutional culture of continuous improvement.

The Paul K. Jackson Memorial Library has experienced significant growth in both physical and digital collections and in student usage over the past several years. Recent ATS library reporting indicates holdings of more than 24,000 cataloged items, including approximately 23,600 physical books and nearly 500 ebooks, along with multiple research databases. Year-over-year increases in circulation, in-house use, and especially ebook requests demonstrate that students at all sites increasingly depend on the library for research and learning. Recent migration to OCLC WorldShare and expanded consortial partnerships have further broadened access to resources for residential, extension, and distance learners.

The Center of Excellence coordinates assessment, accreditation, faculty development, and strategic planning. Faculty governance structures—including the Assessment Committee, Academic Committee, and Library Committee—meet regularly to review data, refine curricula, and recommend improvements. Automated reports from Canvas and Zoho provide timely feedback on student learning outcomes, course evaluations, and survey trends, enabling the seminary to close the loop between evidence and action.

Taken together, these indicators show that Shepherds Theological Seminary is effectively fulfilling its mission to equip servant leaders for life and ministry. High levels of student satisfaction, strong graduation and placement rates, demonstrated growth in biblical and theological knowledge, low educational debt, and robust supporting resources all attest to a healthy and maturing institution committed to continuous improvement in service of Christ and His church.