A Study of Faculty Research Practices in Religious Studies @ Yale University

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Introduction

In October 2016 the Yale Divinity Library (YDL) was invited to participate in a qualitative research study of the research practices of faculty members in the field of Religious Studies. The study, sponsored and designed by a not-for-profit research and consulting service called Ithaka S+R,[1] would be based on in-depth interviews with academics at eighteen institutions of higher education[2] in the United States. Each institution would conduct its own local study, which would then inform a larger report prepared by Ithaka.[3] The opportunity to conduct our own study of Yale scholars while at the same time contributing to a larger initiative was very appealing. Participation in the study had the potential to provide the Divinity Library with rich and complex data on the research behavior of scholars in religious studies and to suggest ways that the library might better support faculty research. Although faculty are one of our major constituencies, they tend to visit the library less frequently than in the past and when they do come, it is often to take care of teaching duties (course reserves, instructional technology assistance, audio visual, etc.). We realized how little we knew about actual faculty research practices. After discussions with the recently appointed Director of the Divinity Library, Stephen Crocco, and the Yale Associate

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[1] See http://www.sr.ithaka.org/about/ accessed August 30, 2016.

[2] Participating institutions include Asbury Seminary, Baylor University, Brigham Young University, Columbia University, Concordia Theological Seminary, Emory University, Harvard University, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Luther Seminary, Naropa University, Princeton Theological Seminary, Rice University, Temple University, Tufts University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Notre Dame, Vanderbilt University and Yale University. In addition, representatives from ATLA conducted additional interviews to ensure the representation of faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Islamic scholars.

[3] Roger C. Schonfeld, “Looking at the Research Needs of Religious Studies Scholars,” Ithaka S+R Blog, http://www.sr.ithaka.org/blog/looking-at-the-research-needs-of-religious-studies-scholars/ (accessed August, 30, 2016).

University Librarian for the Arts and Humanities, Allen Townsend, the decision was made to become a partner in Ithaka's Research Support Services Study for the Field of Religious Studies.

The Research Team

The research team was composed of three librarians from the Yale Divinity Library. Although affiliated with the Divinity School, the Divinity Library serves students and faculty from the Department of Religious Studies and other academic departments, as well as visiting scholars from around the world. Suzanne Estelle-Holmer, Associate Director for Collections, Research, and Access, was named the principal investigator (PI). The PI guided the research proposal through Yale's Institutional Review Board, communicated regularly with the Ithaka consultant, and kept the project on track. Graziano Krätli, Digital Projects and Technology Librarian, and Christine Richardson, Serials and Preservation Librarian, served as co-investigators and contributed valuable technical and professional expertise. Danielle Cooper, the Ithaka consultant for the study, was also a *de facto* member of our team.

Methodology

The Research Support Services Study was designed to collect *qualitative* data using semi-structured interviews of faculty members regarding their research practices. The semi-structured questionnaire or "interview script" was designed by Ithaka S+R to address specific questions and themes, but it allowed for other questions to surface in the context of the interview (see Appendix). Why a qualitative and not a quantitative study? Quantitative research queries a large number of respondents and employs highly structured survey questions that produce data that can be counted and visualized. This type of research can be very valuable to researchers who are trying to address specific problems or questions. "Qualitative interviews, [however,] result in rich, complex and nuanced data."[4] They are more open-ended and enable respondents to describe in more detail their practices, beliefs, and attitudes, allowing for questions or topics to arise that the interviewers may not have envisioned at the beginning of their research. Our script contained thirteen questions divided into four major parts: research focus, research methods, publishing practices, and the state of the field.

This study also reflects an "ethnographic approach" to the extent that it seeks to understand the actual practices and behaviors of religious studies scholars through interviews and observation of their work environments. The research team was encouraged to take photos of visually interesting work places or artifacts associated with research activities.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Before the research team was permitted to conduct interviews, the research protocol of the study was vetted by Yale University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All forms of research involving human subjects, including data collection using surveys or interviews, must be approved by the institution's IRB. Suzanne Estelle-Holmer was responsible for preparing the research protocol for review.

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[4] Anna Davidson Bremborg, "2.13 Interviewing," in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 311.

All aspects of research design must be well thought out in advance, and careful attention must be paid to any type of physical, psychological, or social harm that might occur as a result of the study. The primary concern with our study was that the personal identities of the interviewees not be associated with the interview transcripts, nor be revealed in the analysis and reporting stages. All recordings and transcripts would be coded to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Suzanne was required to submit a copy of the final interview script and the consent form to the IRB. All members of the research team took an online course and passed an exam on working with human subjects. Since the likelihood of our study causing harm to the subjects was minimal, Suzanne was advised by her contact at the IRB to seek an *exemption* to IRB oversight. This meant that the study could be carried out as described in the protocol, but that any changes to that protocol would have to be reported to the IRB. An exemption for the study was granted in early January 2016.

Training

The next step for the research team was to attend a two-day (February 11-12, 2016) training workshop at Columbia University sponsored by Ithaka S+R.[5] The training was an excellent bonding experience as the team navigated the New York City train, bus and subway systems, and spent two days together learning alongside colleagues from other university and seminary libraries. The workshop curriculum covered three major topics: interview techniques, coding and

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[5] For a more detailed description of the training program see, Danielle Cooper, Ithaka S+R Blog, “Religious Studies Project Launch and Training Workshop,” http://www.sr.ithaka.org/blog/religious- studies-project-launch-and-training-workshop/ (accessed August 30, 2016).

analysis, and report writing. The workshop, taught by Danielle Cooper, was engaging and interesting. In addition to her high-energy presentations, the workshop also included ample time to practice interviewing and coding.

The institutional context

There are two major loci of study and research in Religious Studies at Yale University: the Divinity School and the Department of Religious Studies. Each views itself as having a very distinct role, the former as a professional school that "encourages scholarly engagement with Christian traditions in a global, multi-faith context"[6] and the latter as a research-oriented, Ph.D.-granting department within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, dedicated to the study of religions from around the world.

Although the two academic units are careful to differentiate themselves, in effect, many tenured Divinity School professors are granted a secondary appointment in the department that entitles them to teach and advise graduate students. There is an element of prestige in having an appointment in the Department of Religious Studies (or other "academic" departments such as history, art history or American studies) even though all Yale faculty go through the same exacting promotion and tenure review process. All of the scholars who participated in our study were associated with either the Divinity School, the Department of Religious Studies, or held appointments in both.

[6] Yale Divinity School Mission Statement, http://divinity.yale.edu/about-yds/strategic-plan/bridging-faith-traditions (accessed August 30, 2016).

The recruiting process

The research team was encouraged to begin identifying potential interviewees before the February training session. Danielle instructed the researchers to create a spreadsheet with the name of each potential faculty member, department, research interest, and email address. The team scoured the Divinity School and Religious Studies Department web sites for possible candidates, but also attempted a more pan-campus approach, looking for faculty in other departments who appeared to have an interest in exploring religious aspects of their fields of study. In retrospect we realize that this was the "romantic" period of our research. Many of the faculty that we hoped to interview, either because they were very prolific, interdisciplinary, or experimental, turned us down or did not respond when we asked for volunteers.

When we returned from our training session, we began to invite faculty members to participate in interviews in earnest. Ithaka asked that we conduct fifteen interviews – five for each member of our team. Suzanne and the Director of the Divinity Library made a short presentation at a Divinity faculty meeting, informing them of the nature and purpose of the study and encouraging their participation. The first week or two of sending out email invitations was discouraging. Many of the faculty we had selected either didn't respond or declined. We reached out to Danielle for advice and she suggested that we modify our invitation. It was overly detailed and she suggested a friendlier, simpler format. We discovered that it was better to provide a simple description of the protocol and then to follow-up with more details as needed by individual faculty members. We finally achieved success when Suzanne received three requests for interviews all on the same day! After using the amended invitation, we received a stream of acceptances that moved us into the interview process. Overall, we contacted 32 faculty members; of these, 11 did not reply, 7 declined (some because they were on leave), and 14 accepted and were interviewed. Of the fourteen, twelve were tenured or tenure-track faculty.

The interview process

The data gathered for this study derives from interviews of faculty members at Yale in the Divinity School and/or the Department of Religious Studies. Faculty members were asked to set aside about an hour for the interview. In many cases, the interviews took less time. Although many faculty members let us interview them in their offices, some preferred to meet in our offices or in another quiet space. Before beginning the interview, respondents were given an informed-consent form (see Appendix). For the purposes of the study they had to give oral assent to its contents. The interviews were recorded with small digital audio recorders and we used the semi-structured interview guide or script developed by Ithaka S+R. In almost every instance the respondents seemed at ease with the interview scenario, speaking freely about their research interests, practices and experiences. After each interview we marked the audio files with an alpha-numeric code and stored them in multiple locations. When the interviews were complete, we sent all of the digital audio files to a commercial service that transcribed them into Word documents.

Data analysis and report

After we received the written transcripts we moved on to the coding process.

This involved a careful reading of the transcripts, allowing for relevant, meaningful, and sometimes surprising topics and themes to surface. Each member of the research team coded in a slightly different manner, but we all came to remarkably similar results. We also circled back, however, to make sure that excerpts we had marked were not taken out of context. The coding phase was followed by regular meetings to discuss the organization and writing of the report.

Research: Process, practices, problematics

Research focus: Situation and self-identification

Respondents were initially asked to describe their current research focus and how their research is situated within academia more broadly. While all subsequent questions dealt mostly with external realities (sources and materials, data, challenges, trends, etc.), these two were more “personal,” as they required some introspection and self-identification. Typically, scholars love to talk about their past projects and publications, but tend to be reticent to talk about ongoing research, especially in its early stages. Our respondents were no exception: They described their current research in terms of past achievements, and stressed continuity as well as change in their choice of projects and topics. Pursuing more than one research agenda at the same time is common, and some respondents differentiated between long- and short-term (or major and minor) projects.

More significantly, perhaps, is the fact that research as our respondents described it, is steadily moving away from intra-disciplinary approaches to cross-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, and trans-disciplinary models.

Scholars increasingly see and describe themselves as engaged in research that looks at one field from the perspective of another, involves people from different disciplines, integrates knowledge and methods from different disciplines, or even strives to move beyond discipline-specific approaches to define new and innovative intellectual frameworks. In fact, even when one's research falls in a specific field or subfield, in reality it always intersects with several others. This is due to epistemological or methodological approaches, or due to its geo-cultural dimension.

Naturally multiform and multifocal, yet characterized by specific goals and a specialist approach, research eludes stiff categories and classification. As a result, scholars typically avoid identifying themselves and their work outright with specific academic fields or departments; instead, they tend to explain how and why their research falls into more than one field, in-between fields, or in no traditional field at all.

This situation may or may not be reflected by departmental affiliation, which is often the result of the internal organization of the employing institution. Departmental affiliation, in fact, is often seen as circumstantial, and unlikely to represent the true nature and full extent of a scholar's research. "I have a joint appointment in Divinity and Religious Studies," observed one respondent, "but I actually work in both theology and ancient Christianity, which kind of belongs to history."

A scholar pointed out how his research field "encompasses a wide variety of disciplines," and may be positioned differently depending on institutional organization and other factors. At Yale, he is part of the Department of Religious Studies, and more specifically Asian Religions, which is one of the ten fields in which the graduate program is organized. (The others are American Religious History, Ancient Christianity, Islamic Studies, Judaic Studies, New Testament, Old Testament / Hebrew Bible, Philosophy of Religion, Religious Ethics, and Theology). His research, however, could fall within Buddhist Studies, which includes historians, ethnographers, anthropologists, textual scholars, art historians, and philosophers; or in a more geographically defined area of study. He further noted that disciplinary affiliations may be based on the old concept of "area studies," which privileges a geographical approach. For example, the institution where he earned his Ph.D. had no Religious Studies department, so his affiliation was with an area studies department called Asian Languages and Cultures.

Some of the respondents with appointments in more than one department felt the need to define and describe their research interests vis-à-vis their departmental affiliations.

A few respondents stated more explicitly what others implied by nuanced descriptions and definitions, that is the fact that their research falls *in between* established fields rather than belonging firmly in one or more.

Based on the interviews we conducted, it appears that the ways scholars define their research foci, and situate them within the academic landscape, reflect a combination of major and minor factors.

The strongest and most influential factor is self-identification and self-perception, which naturally reflects the scholar's academic education and specialization, as well as her or his professional experience, objectives, and achievements.

- *I'm a practical theologian*
- *I am an historian of American religion*
- *I'm really an historian of religion*
- *I would say primarily I'm history*
- *I primarily identify myself as a scholar of the New Testament*

Except for those who are practical theologians, most respondents preferred to transcend or avoid the distinction between "theology" and "religious studies," describing themselves as historians or by stressing the multi- and inter-disciplinary character of their work. With only a few exceptions, the divinity faculty were as inclined as their colleagues in religious studies to avoid the term "theology." Although none of the respondents mentioned this explicitly, the reluctance may represent a fear that "doing theology" might be perceived as discrediting their research by associating it with a particular faith tradition or belief system. None of the respondents claimed that their research was motivated by or linked in any way to their religious beliefs, service to the Church, or service in other religious organizations.

> *Despite my own connection with the Church, I sought to break that nexus wherever possible and to read early Christian texts, not so much relative to the ongoing trajectory of later Christian developments with the consequent anachronism, but rather to read them more in relation to contemporary Greco-Roman and other texts to view them in a more synchronic, rather than purely diachronic sort of way.*

Only rarely do self-identification and self-perception reflect an affiliation with a specific academic field or department. On the contrary, in most cases they draw on more than one field and recognize that departmental appointments may be circumstantial and partially representative.

Additionally, research foci may be project-based and reflect a scholar's evolving interests (e.g., I wrote a book on this subject but now I've moved to this other subject, etc.); these projects may be influenced by external factors and professional opportunities (next year I will be the visiting professor at such and such university, where I was asked to teach this particular subject, etc.).

Lastly, readership and reader-response awareness may play a significant, although minor, role in a scholar's perception of her or his work and academic profile (e.g., my work is actually read by people in fields or departments other than those I am associated with).

Respondents were wary, even disparaging, when asked about the use of theory or theoretical approaches in their research.

- *The truth is I'm kind of anti-theoretical. I think those are very restrictive constructs. I'm interested in what things happened, what people said and meant…*
- *Historians are very nervous about hewing to a particular line or ideology, although there are Marxist historians and liberal historians and so forth and so on. My own historical approach is really more empirical.*

Others conceded that they made reference to theoretical approaches in their teaching. One respondent mentioned that he encouraged his graduate students to read widely in literary, social, and political theory, but to use it as "a spark to the imagination about different questions you want to ask."

Sources: Location, access, types, formats

Most of the research undertaken by our respondents relies upon a combination of traditional resources (primary sources such as manuscripts, archival materials, and critical text editions) and secondary scholarship (monographs, journal articles and newspapers), but also grey literature, audio-visual materials, physical objects, and field interviews.

Locating these resources involves multiple approaches and strategies, as well as a certain amount of serendipity. Depending on the nature of the research and the resources that are being pursued, finding these resources may also be challenging and time-consuming. On the other hand, efforts to locate resources tend to be inversely proportional to the amount of materials that are available (in whatever format) at a scholar's home institution. To quote one of the respondents,

> *One of the great things for me in coming to Yale has been the fantastic library resources which are much stronger than the place I was in before. Although I would like more time, I actually, in some ways, do have more time because I can go to the Beinecke and find just about everything I need.*

Regardless of the approach (and the challenges), the ways in which resources are identified, located, and accessed reflect a growing transition from physical to virtual environments and repositories, as traditional reference works (bibliographies, indices, etc.), communication channels, and professional meetings are increasingly replaced by online equivalents, or by newer forms of social interaction over the Web (electronic mailing lists, blogs, social media, Google, or specialized platforms like Academia.edu). Even in the case of long-standing initiatives such as the CSEL (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*) and *Sources Chrétiennes*, whose critical editions are still published as physical books, scholars are more likely to stay up-to-date about their activities through Web sites, or other Web-based resources, than through a print catalog or bulletin.

Physical repositories such as libraries, archives, and public record offices are still visited, but only when materials are not available online, onsite (i.e., at a scholar's institution), or through some kind of document delivery service.

As dependence on online resources increases, so does the sense that their unavailability represents a challenge. A scholar commented on the big difference between trying to access thousands of texts held at archives in China, and being able to obtain microfilms of these texts. Only a small portion of these texts have been converted, however, and one still needs to order the film and print out or digitize its content in order to access it, whereas a digital copy would make all these steps unnecessary. Visiting repositories overseas for research is increasingly seen as a challenge, rather than an opportunity.

Overall, scholars tend to prefer online access to physical access for a number of reasons, some more obvious than others. Working from a computer at home or in the office is more convenient (and less expensive) than traveling to distant libraries or archives. Additionally, most databases have built-in features and functionalities (particularly around viewing, searching, and downloading content) that significantly enhance a researcher’s experience. A respondent who has been relying almost entirely on online resources for a research project mentioned the unique advantage of searching inside documents, or across entire collections of documents.

Another, whose “recent research involves a lot of looking at manuscripts and reading manuscripts, mostly online,” pointed out that high resolution and magnification allow him "to see much more of the text,” and “to make discoveries” that would be virtually impossible by looking at the original. Online content, if properly presented and sufficiently enhanced, not only makes research easier, but also gives it potentially new directions by opening perspectives and creating opportunities that previous formats did not offer.

Data creation, storage, preservation, and disposal

Predictably, respondents grappled with the question about “data” – whether their research produces data and, if so, what kind. In most cases, interviewers had to provide some sort of explanation or clarification in order to help the respondent understand clearly what the question was aiming at and what kind of information was being pursued. Even so, a few respondents passed over the question, or answered it by focusing on data they pursued rather than on data they produced themselves in the course of their research. Overall, there is a tendency to see “*data”* as “*quantitative data*,” and therefore to discard the concept. The exception is when a scholar is involved in research that draws methodologically from the social sciences.

Researcher-created data typically includes handwritten field notes, audio recordings and transcripts, photographic prints, computer files, and databases created to organize and preserve hundreds, if not thousands, of such files. At one end of this spectrum we have a scholar who, reportedly, still has all the meticulous notes he took during his fieldwork, the names of the individuals he interviewed, the time, location, and duration of each interview, and related information. An intermediate position is represented by another scholar’s statement: “I don't assemble databases formally, but I do so informally … and sometimes I do those things in electronic documents, and sometimes they’re just handwritten.” A third scholar claimed “almost all of my work now is digital,” and then described his research data as “thousands of individual pieces of electronic information,” consisting of photographs of murals and associated text, “stitched together and marked up with various kinds of annotation data.”

Data management, involving the organization, storage, and preservation of recorded information in traditional or digital formats, continues to represent a challenge for most scholars. Some respondents referred to data management as a “dilemma” involving issues of data quantity, format diversity, and technology options.

For the most part, textual data are generated electronically (i.e., using a word processor such as Microsoft Word or Apple Pages) and preserved in digital files stored on the researcher’s computer (with various forms of backup, as discussed later). If originally handwritten, notes are likely to be transcribed and preserved in an electronic document only. Audio-visual data, such as photographs and recordings, are typically generated using electronic (digital) devices.

Data storage and organization go hand in hand, as the issue of “where to keep all this stuff” is affected by how to keep it. This involves file naming, file organization, data de-duplication, and other tasks that are often misunderstood, underestimated, disregarded, or inadequately addressed, by researchers and scholars. On the other hand, respondents did not differentiate between short- and long-term storage (and relative preservation approaches), their concern being mostly about backup (how, where, and if it is reliable and stable in the long run). They also appear more concerned with preserving – or, more precisely, preventing the loss of – data than with their disposal. Only one respondent mentioned shredding paper documents related to a project from the early 1990s, since she does not expect to use them anymore. For the same reason, she is also planning to delete digital files from her computer, to de-clutter and save storage space.

Increasingly, scholars use a combination of disk and cloud storage for their digital data, although few appear to be knowing and proactive about this aspect of their work. Most keep their digital files on various hard disk drives (HDD), including their desktop or laptop computer's drive and several external drives for backup. Some assume that their office computer is regularly backed up on the university servers (usually it is, or it should be), but in the case of a computer crash they wouldn't know how to go about recovering their data other than by contacting their IT support staff.

A scholar whose research produces "Tons of photographs – gigabytes and gigabytes of photographs" considers storage and organization of images her "most difficult problem at the moment." They are currently kept on hard drives, and partly in the cloud, but "it takes forever to upload large amounts of large digital files in the cloud." For the "most immediate stuff" she uses Yale Box. She also pays for additional storage (1 TB) on Dropbox, and she keeps "a bunch of hard drives," but it is difficult to keep them constantly updated. To organize her photographs, she uses Adobe Photoshop Lightroom but finds the learning curve challenging. Consequently, "some kind of technical expertise about data storage would be great for me."

Another scholar has been using qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA 12) to code her data, which are then stored on her computer. The same scholar, whose research involves human subjects (“I do a lot of interviewing”), and whose data include interview recordings and transcripts, mentioned “ethical considerations involved in how data are stored.”

Cloud storage is becoming increasingly popular, either in combination with disk storage or as a standalone solution, and scholars feel comfortable about paying for additional space.

Knowing how things work gives a sense of comfort. The fact that the cloud guarantees data storage on multiple servers in different locations is seen as a more reliable form of preservation. The cloud is also viewed as more secure than personal equipment such as a computer or a portable drive. Any concerns about the possibility of the file hosting service going out of business or changing ownership are offset by the user’s trust that, in such a case, he or she would be able to download all stored data, or migrate them to another cloud based service. None of the respondents expressed concerns about losing physical access to the servers hosting their data or, for that matter, awareness of other cloud security issues such as a vendor’s compliance with a law, regulation, or compulsory legal request.

Overall, we can safely say that the growing amount and diversity of data generated in the course of the research process represents a significant challenge, as scholars find themselves spending more and more time trying to store, organize, and process these data, or trying to learn the skills they need in order to perform these tasks (while the learning curve is getting steeper due to the rapid pace at which information technology evolves).

Research trends: Awareness and dissemination

Keeping abreast of new research and trends in one's field may be challenging, especially since the amount of new resources that are available in print as well as in electronic format is growing, and so is the variety of outlets and channels through which they may be accessed.

Some respondents feel that they can only find anything in the buildup of new publications by serendipity. Others mentioned speed reading as a way to quickly browse tables of contents, journal review sections, Web pages, etc. In fact, skimming and scanning are more common than careful reading (at least for this purpose), and they are increasingly influenced by accessing information and content through computer screens, mobile devices, user interfaces, and dynamic Web pages rather than old-fashioned print layouts. Overall, respondents showed a mix of more-or-less proactive approaches to this issue, as well as a combination of traditional and innovative methods.

Conferences offer an opportunity to physically interact with colleagues, but more than one scholar commented upon learning more about developments in their field by chatting at the bar of the hotel rather than attending presentations and panel discussions.

Scholarly journals remain an important source of information, and scholars often subscribe to some key titles they prefer to own and read at their convenience. Some combine this “private perusal” with visits to the library, where they browse recent issues on the shelves, while others don’t find time to go to the library for this particular purpose (or, indeed, for any other purpose except picking up or returning books).

Publisher’s catalogs are still consulted, although increasingly in electronic format (typically as e-newsletters).

Other “traditional” forms of keeping current include: reading and reviewing books, acting as book series editor, having graduate students read portions of recently discussed published dissertations, and advising Ph.D. students, especially during their dissertation researching/writing period. One respondent mentioned involvement in a collaborative project that brings him overseas, where he interacts closely with a couple of colleagues.

Writing books was also mentioned as a way to keep up with trends by creating them, since the publication of a new book (or, in a more limited way, a journal article) does set a precedent and, if the book gets enough attention, generates comments, discussions, and other forms of follow-up.

Some respondents acknowledged that their efforts in this regard are limited to the particular project they are working on at any given time, which narrows their focus and determines their scope. Others commented upon the advantages of working in a smaller research field, where scholars, librarians, archivists, and book dealers all know each other. This is a particular form of intimacy that often results in faster and more effective ways of exchanging information and resources.

By and large, however, keeping abreast of new developments is increasingly and more effectively done online, and the younger the scholar the more familiar with – and reliant upon – online resources and strategies he or she appears to be. These resources include: random Web searches using specific parameters and keywords; select blogs; social media and social networking websites such as Academia.edu (which allows academics to share their research papers, monitor the impact of their research, and track the research of academics they follow); electronic mailing lists and publisher newsletters. (At least one respondent, though, finds Amazon wish lists more effective than electronic mailing lists, which tend to clog her inbox.)

For the most part, respondents described their publishing practices as being in line with those typical of their field or discipline. Scholarly monographs, edited volumes, and conference proceedings published by leading university presses and academic publishers, still dominate the field, together with peer-reviewed journal articles. (One interviewee felt that printed, peer- reviewed journal articles are more important than monographs or edited volumes for scholarly prestige and career advancement.)

As far as monographs are concerned, the nature of their content and the audiences they try to reach often drive the choice of publisher, as authors aim to find the house that represents the best fit for their books. More than one respondent mentioned that some of their books had been issued by major university or academic presses, while others had found a better match in religious publishing houses such as Abingdon Press, Baker Publishing Group, Eerdmans, Fortress Press, The Pilgrim Press, or Westminster John Knox Press. A couple of interviewees mentioned that religious publishing houses are shrinking due to financial issues, and the resulting gap is being filled by some academic publishers (Brill in particular). Another recent phenomenon in the scholarly publishing market (or a segment of it) is a shift towards the trade book end, resulting in the "crossover trade book," or a scholarly-based subject aimed at a wider non-specialized readership.

Few respondents proved to be fully aware of open access (OA) – the concept as well as its application and implications – and particularly of the difference between "open access" and "online." Many scholars seem to think that whatever is available online is "open" – i.e., freely accessible – and therefore open access is just another way to describe this type of content. (This confusion is probably due to the fact that scholars typically access online resources from a computer on the Yale network, or one remotely connected to it, and the streamlined access provided by Yale prevents them from noticing any differences between an open access and a licensed resource.) Other open access outlets or platforms mentioned by some respondents include online editions of denominational newspapers, and particularly Academia.edu.

Those who acknowledged publishing in open access journals mentioned mostly review publications such as *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (*BMCR*), the *Marginalia Review of Books* (a *Los Angeles Review of Books* Channel that publishes reviews of "literature and culture in the nexus of history, theology, and religion"), and *Biblica* (a quarterly published by the Pontifical Biblical Institute and "devoted to the scientific study of Sacred Scripture"). In the case of peer-reviewed scholarly journals, however, one of the respondents pointed out that a major obstacle for authors is the article processing charge (APC), which is applied by many publishers and, according to one study, averages 900 USD.[7]

Less traditional dissemination outlets, such as blogs and social media, are seen more as platforms for scholarly conversation and debates, or venues where initial research is presented to provoke interest and discussion. They are certainly not seen as substitutes for long-established scholarly outlets, particularly the peer-reviewed scholarly journal (with or without an online edition). In fact, blogs and social media (Facebook and Twitter in particular) are more likely to be used by scholars to exchange information and keep abreast of news and developments in a specific field. Only a few respondents seem to rely upon such tools to showcase their work, and only one mentioned her blog as a space in which her next book may grow.

Most respondents see their publishing practices (simultaneously combining monographs, journal articles, book chapters, and edited works) and venues (a

[7] See Solomon, D. J. and Björk, B.-C. (2012), "A Study of Open Access Journals Using Article Processing Charges," *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 63, no. 8 (August 2012): 1485–1495. doi:10.1002/asi.22673.

mix of university presses, academic and religious publishers, and scholarly journals) as typical of their field or discipline. Some are more active than others on the online front, whether it consists of open source publications, online discussion sites, or social media.

Some respondents noted that the shrinking of the scholarly publishing market, and its concentration into fewer large groups, represents a major problem for young scholars who need to publish their first book in order to advance professionally. Publishers want established authors and broad topics; they don’t want ultra-specialized and dissertation-type books. Does this imply the need to review and update the criteria for granting tenure, especially in regard to online publishing and alternative (and innovative) forms of doing research and presenting its results? Traditional scholarly monographs, single-authored and available in print (or print and ebook) are still seen as the basic requirement, while collaborative digital projects, and related Digital Humanities initiatives, are considered a risk for tenure purposes. (Collaboration in general is less valued because it is more difficult to evaluate a book or a project in terms of individual contributions.)

Challenges and Opportunities

When asked to indicate “the greatest challenges and opportunities currently facing religious studies and/or theology studies,” respondents focused more on the former than the latter half of the question, only rarely mentioning personal or particular issues. There is a general sense that the humanities are losing ground to more remunerative fields of study (STEM in particular); their relevance and status, both in academia and in education in general, is decreasing; and that religious and theological studies are struggling and shrinking more than other fields. The decline in the number of students who are interested in religious or theological subjects (e.g., Greek, Latin, Hebrew, or Aramaic; Old and New Testaments; Biblical exegesis, etc.), is matched by structural changes in universities, resulting in a decrease in tenure-track positions and a growing reliance on adjunct and lecturer positions. This makes it increasingly difficult for Ph.D. graduates to find even part-time or limited, fixed-term appointments, let alone tenure-track positions. Since even permanent positions often come with little or no research funding, humanities research is increasingly becoming a privilege and harder to do.

Inter-disciplinarity was mentioned repeatedly, as both a challenge and an opportunity, by scholars working in different fields. The view from a religious studies perspective is that efforts should be made, maintained, or increased to bridge the various disciplinary and cultural divides that define a field typically organized in subfields based on regional areas. These efforts should facilitate conversations and collaborations among subfield specialists, possibly taking advantage of comparative approaches that were more popular forty years ago. Some theologians, on the other hand, recognize that theological education is in transition, and that practical theologians in particular are concerned that practical forms of knowledge – which rely heavily on readings in and from other disciplines – are properly recognized and situated in the “knowledge market of academia,” so that interdisciplinary approaches are more naturally and meaningfully pursued.

At a personal level, the most serious challenges regard the scholars' needs to keep abreast of ongoing developments in information and communication technologies, which increasingly drive and define all aspects and dimensions of their work. These challenges range from learning and teaching, to doing research, to publishing, and to keeping up with trends in their fields. With new resources and tools becoming available at an ever increasing pace, and newer versions of software applications constantly replacing older ones, researchers find themselves overwhelmed by the amount of time and energy they need to spend to "catch up" and learn new and necessary skills. Some respondents mentioned delegating "technology-intensive" tasks to student research assistants, although they recognize that this is only a partial and temporary solution. Since the same researchers are eager to recognize the great advantages created by electronic resources and digitization efforts in the past two decades or so, we can see how challenges and opportunities actually represent two sides of the same coin.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Below are a number of key findings and recommendations based on the comments and concerns recorded in the course of the interviews. Since they are not ranked in order of importance, and their recording at this stage is more descriptive than prescriptive, further analysis, followed by a more comprehensive needs assessment and prioritization, should be conducted before any formal implementation is considered.

Library Use: Physical spaces versus services and resources

It is a known fact (often repeated with concern, if not alarm) that faculty spend less time in the library than they did five, ten, or twenty years ago, when libraries were largely physical repositories of traditional resources, or when onsite computers were the only way to access library electronic resources and databases. Since many of these traditional resources are now available in electronic format, or may be requested through various document delivery services, faculty naturally spend *less time in the library* browsing the shelves or reading what they find on them. They spend *more time, however, using library services and resources* that they can access remotely (through VPN).

As a result of this shift, faculty (and students) today are more likely to need assistance with *locating and accessing* online resources, or troubleshooting access problems, than with identifying relevant research materials and solving bibliographic hurdles. Library staff should be aware of these changing needs and address them proactively.

Research needs and support: Bibliographic to technological

Just as faculty use of the library has shifted from physical spaces and traditional materials to remote access of online services and resources, their need for assistance and support has shifted from bibliographic inquiries to information and communication technology (ICT) issues.

In addition to accessing and troubleshooting online resources and services (preferably remotely, through off-campus access), faculty increasingly need assistance evaluating, choosing, setting up, and/or using a number of software applications they need for their research and teaching. This includes bibliographic management software, a learning management system, a qualitative data analysis software, and other products.

More specifically, faculty need help with organization, storage, and management of the large amount of digital data they are collecting, acquiring, and generating in the course of their research and teaching work. As we learned in our interviews, the concept, technical requirements, and implications of digital asset management (DAM) are still new or unknown territory for most faculty. The few who showed some awareness of the issue expressed it in terms of a concern for their needs, or their inability to meet needs because of the lack of time or familiarity with technology. Consequently, this is an area in which the library could step in, providing stewardship and assistance in a number of ways such as documentation, presentations, tutorials, one-on-one consultation, etc.

Open Access

Faculty's awareness and understanding of open access (OA) proved to be limited and often incorrect. Consequently, very few had any relevant experience with publishing their work in a truly open access journal. Based on their comments and reaction to the OA question, respondents fall in four groups, namely:

1. Those who admitted they did not know what open access is;
2. Those who had only a vague, often incorrect, idea of open access;

3. Those who knew how open access is used, but had not had the opportunity to publish in an OA journal yet; and
4. Those who were not sure whether the journals in which they published their work were open access or not.

This situation presents an opportunity for librarians to raise awareness of a growing and valuable service, clarify misunderstandings, and provide assistance in identifying and selecting the pros and cons of appropriate venues.

Customized Services

In response to a question that offered respondents a “magic wand,” a number of researchers stated that libraries could help by sending them notices of new resources (books, journal articles, databases, etc.) focused on their research interests. Some asked if it was possible to setup alerts in the library catalog for recent acquisitions. One respondent even proposed a personal librarian program for faculty, based on a popular program that the Divinity Library now offers students.

It appears that despite the information overload that plagues researchers, there still remains an unmet need, or at least a desire, for more customized, targeted information regarding new publications and research tools. Although the technology now exists to set up RSS feeds and other types of alerts, the success of such a system would ultimately depend on the ability of scholars and librarians to converse at regular intervals about research interests and projects. One model of this is the library liaison or subject specialist, who regularly meets with faculty to determine their research needs and to inform them of new library resources.

Another more informal attempt is a program developed by Amy Limpitlaw, when she was a librarian at Vanderbilt University.[8] Her program grew out of an attempt to encourage greater communication between faculty and librarians. Each month, a faculty member was invited to join the library staff for lunch. Faculty members were encouraged to talk about their publications and research, but also about families, hobbies, and other non-work topics. These lunch meetings were well received and served to break the ice between library staff and faculty. This program, however, depends to a great extent on the librarians' willingness to reach out to faculty.

Another suggestion for a customized service was "a more active, ongoing, and mutually-supervised medium that contains the essential tools of the discipline, including everything from reference works to standard journals and book series to what are the reliable websites, databases, search engines, etc." During his interview the respondent suggested this in the context of teaching, rather than in research, but it is another way that faculty and librarians might collaborate. Again, the technology to create online research guides or pathfinders exists in the now ubiquitous LibGuide system or through web pages. The challenge for librarians is to engage and sustain the conversation.

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[8] Amy Limpitlaw, "A First Step in Reaching Out to Faculty," *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings*, 61 (2007): 153-159. There is a wealth of good ideas in this short article on how librarians can better engage faculty with the library.

Conclusions

Focusing on faculty research practices, we learned how little we know about them, how minimal our exchanges and interactions with faculty normally are, and how limited they are to providing immediate assistance or help when they are needed. Typical requests involve locating and accessing specific resources and don't require the understanding of the context in which they originate. For the most part they are dealt with in a timely and satisfactory way. When, however, requests involve resources that are available in electronic or digital format (as they increasingly are), context — rather than content — become relevant. Not the research context, but the far larger and more complex context represented, on one hand, by the conditions of access (technological infrastructure, licensing, copyright, etc.), and on the other by the researcher's own need to store, organize, and preserve content that is being accessed in non-traditional formats. Our challenge as librarians will be to open new avenues of communication so that we can be more aware of the research contexts out of which these needs arise and to be proactive in addressing them.

We are also keenly aware that the fourteen faculty members we interviewed represent only a small subset of the thirty-five faculty at Yale Divinity School (at the time of the study) and the sixteen or so faculty members in the Department of Religious Studies. Although the respondents represent a wide range of research interests and practices, we realize that a wider and more diverse spectrum of participants would have provided more granular and less predictable or repetitive results. For these, we look forward to Ithaka's general report, and to comparing and projecting our findings on the larger canvas represented by the other institutions involved in this project.

Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Research focus

1. Describe your current research focus.

2. Describe how your research is situated within the academy. [Probe for how they position themselves in relation to religious studies and theology studies and if they see their work as connecting to any other disciplines]

Research methods

1. What theoretical approaches does your research utilize or rely on?

2. What research methods do you currently use to conduct your research [e.g. discourse analysis, historical analysis, etc.]?
   a. Does your research produce data? If so, what kinds of data does your research typically produce?
   b. How and where do you currently keep this data?
   c. Where do plan to store this data in the long term? [Prompt: e.g. an archives, an online repository)

3. [Beyond data you produce yourself]What kinds of sources does your research depend on?
   a. How do you locate these materials?

4. Think back to a past or ongoing research project where you faced challenges in the process of conducting the research.
   a. Describe these challenges.
   b. What could have been done to mitigate these challenges?

5. How do you keep up with trends in your field more broadly?

6. If I gave you a magic wand that could help you with your research process – what would you ask it to do? [If they cite broader issues, e.g. lack of time or funding, probe further for coping strategies or workarounds they use to mitigate these challenges when conducting their research]

Publishing Practices

7. Where do you typically publish your research in scholarly settings? [Probe for kinds of publications and the disciplines these publications are aligned with]
   a. Beyond scholarly publishing are there any other venues that you disseminate your research? [Probe: e.g. blogs, popular press, classes]

8. How do your publishing practices relate to those typical to your discipline?

9. Have you ever published your research in open access venues such as open access online journals or repositories?
   a. If so, which journals or repositories and what has been your motivations for doing so? (i.e. required, for sharing, investment in open access principles)
   b. If no, why not?

State of the Field and Follow-Up

12. From your perspective what are the greatest challenges and opportunities currently facing religious studies and/or theology studies?

13. Is there anything else about your research support needs that you think it is important for me to know that was not covered in the previous questions?

Yale University

HSC # 1601017073

Consent for Participation in a Research Project
200 FR 2 (2014-2)

Research Support Services for the Field of Religious Studies
Suzanne Estelle-Holmer, Associate Director
Yale Divinity Library

Purpose:
The Divinity Library at Yale University is conducting a study to examine the research practices of academics in religious studies. This study is designed to better understand the resources and services faculty members need to be successful in their teaching and research. This information will be used to identify improvements to pre-existing research support services at Yale and opportunities for developing new support services for religious studies more widely. This local Yale study is part of a larger suite of parallel studies with other institutions of higher education in the U.S., sponsored by Ithaka S+R, a not-for-profit research and consulting service, with support from the Society for Biblical Literature, the American Academy of Religious and the American Theological Library Association. A report on the findings will be published by Ithaka S+R in December 2016.

Procedures:
Participation in this study will involve an audio-recorded, individual interview with a Yale researcher. The interviews will be 60 minutes and take place in the participants' primary workspaces on the Yale University campus. A photograph of your workspace may be taken, but no individuals will be included in the photographs.

Risks and Benefits:
There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. You may experience benefits in the form of increased insight and awareness into your research practices and the information gained by the researchers may result in improved research support services at Yale

Confidentiality:
All of your responses will be held in confidence. If you choose to participate, your name *will not* be linked to your interview responses or work space photographs at any time. We do not include your name on any of the interview data and there is no link between this consent form and your responses. Participant confidentiality will be maintained by the use of pseudonyms and/or codes and by removing all identifying characteristics. Audio recordings will be deleted after they have been transcribed. Results will be disseminated to library and non-library audiences at Yale, as well as at conferences or in the final Ithaka S+R report. Your name will not be associated with individual responses at any time.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, to end your participation at any time for any reason, or to refuse to answer any individual question. Refusing to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits or compensation to which you are otherwise entitled or affect your relationship with Yale University. Your participation in this study is extremely valuable for our research, and we hope that participating will prove to be an educational experience for you.

Questions:
If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the investigator, Suzanne Estelle-Holmer at (203)432-6374 or email suzanne.estelle-holmer@yale.edu.

If you would like to talk with someone other than the researchers to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Yale University Human Subjects Committee, 203-785-4688, human.subjects@yale.edu. Additional information is available at http://www.yale.edu/hrpp/participants/index.html