The Research Practices of Faculty in Religious Studies: A Local Report by Harvard Library Fall 2016

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The Research Practices of Faculty in Religious Studies: A Local Report by Harvard Library
Fall 2016

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Harvard University participated in a national study on research practices of academics in religious studies. The goal of the study was to understand the resources and services these faculty members need to be successful in their teaching and research. This study, based on the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, was part of Ithaka S+R’s national study: Research Support Services Project on Religious Studies. For this study, Ithaka S+R received support and guidance from the American Academy of Religion, the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Theological Library Association. The project is the latest in a series of Ithaka S+R studies. Previous studies focused on scholars in history, chemistry, and art history.

Harvard joined a cohort of 18 participating universities and theological school: Asbury Theological Seminary, Baylor University, Brigham Young University, Columbia University, Concordia Theological Seminary, Emory 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.

A portion of Harvard’s anonymized results, along with data from other participating institutions, was submitted to Ithaka S+R for analysis. The aggregated data will inform a national report that will be published by Ithaka S+R in January 2017. The national report and all local reports will be published open access with links available on the Ithaka S+R website.

This report summarizes our local, Harvard-specific findings and is organized into four sections: The Study of Religion at Harvard, Methods, Our Sample, and Findings. Attached to the report is a series of related Appendices.

THE STUDY OF RELIGION AT HARVARD

Religion faculty at Harvard are affiliated with the Harvard Divinity School or with the Committee on the Study of Religion in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, or both.

Harvard Divinity School was established in 1816 as the country's first nonsectarian theological school. It is dedicated to educating future leaders in religious life and thought with the resources and support of
the wider Harvard University. The school’s faculty educate a student body that is deeply pluralistic. Students reflect a broad spectrum in their academic interests and backgrounds, age, gender, nationalities and ethnicities, cultures and traditions, and professional and life goals. The school’s degree programs are: M.Div., MTS, Th.M. and Ph.D.

The Committee on the Study of Religion, established in the mid-20th century, offers an undergraduate concentration and a Ph.D. in a range of specialized areas. The Ph.D. is offered jointly with the Divinity School.

Resources for the study of religion at Harvard are vast. The Divinity School and Committee on the Study of Religion together offer courses that cover a range of religious traditions from the ancient Zoroastrian tradition to modern Christian liberation movements, Islamic and Jewish philosophies, Buddhist social movements, and Hindu arts and culture. Some faculty work primarily as historians; others as scholars of texts; and others as anthropologists, philosophers, ethicists, or theologians and practitioners of religion. Some faculty are adherents of a religious tradition and others are not.

**METHODS**

The research was conducted by research librarians Gloria Korsman and Reed Lowrie, working under the direction of Douglas Gragg, Harvard Divinity School Librarian. The research project was approved by the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects, Harvard’s Institutional Review Board. Korsman and Lowrie completed Ithaka S+R ethnographic research training on February 11-12, 2016, at Butler Library of Columbia University.

We recruited a broad sample of the faculty who teach religion at Harvard, described below, both from the Harvard Divinity School faculty and also from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

From April 20 through May 25, 2016, Korsman and Lowrie conducted ten semi-structured on-campus interviews with faculty members about their research practices and support needs and gathered photographic documentation of some faculty workspaces. No faculty members or other identifying information appear in the photographs.

Faculty agreed to participate in 60-minute audio-recorded interviews about their research practices and support needs. The semi-structured interview protocol of 13 questions was designed by Ithaka S+R in consultation with an advisory committee and was used nationally at all participating institutions.

Digital audio files of the faculty interviews were transcribed and analyzed in text form using standard qualitative data analysis methodologies. Transcripts were first coded by Korsman and Lowrie. The codes were grouped to facilitate the identification of key themes, from which findings were derived.

The study was voluntary. Faculty interviewees gave their informed consent and were free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the interview at any time for any reason. There were no known risks associated with participating in this study. There were also no direct benefits associated with participation in this study although it was possible that faculty would experience increased insight and awareness into their own research practices and needs.
Faculty confidentiality was strictly maintained during the research study. The names of faculty interviewees are not linked to consent forms, interview responses, or workspace photographs in either the local or national report. No faculty names were shared beyond the research team.

**Our Sample**

We interviewed ten faculty members with a diverse range of subject expertise, methodological approaches, and academic rank. Four of the participants were tenured faculty, four were junior faculty on a tenure track, and two were long-time academics in non-tenured positions. The cohort was equally divided between men and women.

It is very difficult to provide a simple list of the research areas for the participants, as most of them work across several areas of interest. A schematic breakdown of their main research foci, using the research areas identified on the web site of the Committee for the Study of Religion ([http://studyofreligion.fas.harvard.edu/pages/research](http://studyofreligion.fas.harvard.edu/pages/research)), would look something like this:

**African Religions**
**East Asian Religions**
**Hebrew Bible/Old Testament**
**New Testament and Early Christianity**
**Philosophy of Religion (2)**
**Religion and Society**
**Religion of the Americas (3)**

A more substantial catalog of the participants’ research areas would be much more complex. This was revealed in the great lengths several participants took to answer the question asking them to locate themselves within the academy. While some respondents quickly summarized their location – “I am methodologically a historian, with a focus on the history of religion in America, the history of women in America” – others had more interdisciplinary positions: “[My work is] at the interface of literary studies and religious studies and Asian studies.” Also, some scholars are working across several disciplines within and outside of religious studies: “I have a PhD in theology and I’ve done ... a lot of work on the history of Christian theology, particularly mystical theologies.... My work is also very philosophically driven in terms of 20th and 21st century [thought].... So I think in terms of philosophy of religion as well. And I increasingly, because of the work on literature and because of the way I write about medieval materials, I have ... a foot in... with the... Modern Language Association kind of crowd.” Some scholars questioned the idea of some of the main divisions of the discipline: “My work is definitely in the realm of Biblical studies. It also intersects with and overlaps with Jewish studies... I consider myself an historian of ancient Judaism and its interpretation of the Bible. So to me a lot of the divisions don’t make a whole lot of sense in terms of what Biblical studies is itself. It’s a full-fledged discipline or multiple disciplines in its own right, but it intersects with so many other fields that must also be, that are necessarily a part of the definition of that field.”

The methodological approaches of our cohort were likewise diverse. Three scholars self-identified as historians, two as anthropologists, two as philosophers of religion, one as philologist, one as a critical theorist, and one as a literary theorist. But for most of these scholars, this main methodological approach was only a springboard from which other approaches were also applied. The philologist also applies methods from anthropology and papyrology. The anthropologists also use methods from either
or both gender studies and media studies. One of the anthropologists summed up the interplay of subject and method thus: “I draw on cultural studies approaches, queer and feminist theory, a lot of critical race theory. But my primary discipline is anthropology, so that means that I base most of my data on ethnographic research which includes participant observation, interviews, surveys, focus groups, and a combination of those.” Other scholars also pointed to the use of several methods: “[My method is] a combination: critical theory, postmodern theory, postcolonial theory,” or, “I tend to pivot between the historical and the philosophical and with also various modes of literary analysis that I think are crucial to reading the materials with which I work.” The historians were more likely to stay within conventional boundaries: “I'm sort of an old-school empiricist. A historian through and through.... I believe in the contextualization of all events and expressions, and ... that effort to contextualize ... occupies most of my effort.” We will explore more of the nuances of the religious studies scholar’s position in the academy in the State of the Field section.

**Findings**

**Note taking and research management**

Managing large quantities of information is a common challenge for faculty. When considering how to organize information for a book project, one historian commented, “It was a struggle ... to keep track of everything, because the research for that book was massive.” A professor whose work spans multiple disciplines added, “There must be a better way to store this than on the floor of my apartment.” An anthropologist commented that finding information at Harvard is easy, but then “I am overwhelmed sometimes with information and data sources and then my own note-taking on those sources.” When it comes to note-taking and data management, each individual in our sample uses a unique and personal blend of digital and analog tools to organize myriad sources. The digital tools they use have evolved and become more prominent over time.

In most cases, our faculty adapt the same note-taking methods they used successfully in graduate school. For example, one senior professor types notes in Microsoft Word and then prints the notes. The notes go into physical notebooks that are organized by themes and subtopics and then richly annotated. Copies of the original word-processed notes are stored both on the professor’s laptop and on the school’s file server. When writing or teaching on a related subject, these notes may be printed again and filed in a new topical arrangement. The professor also writes notes in the margins of printed books and recently discovered an advantage to annotating texts on a Kindle e-reader: The notes may be searched by keyword! New technologies are adopted when they enhance time-tested note-taking methods.

One of the anthropologists in our sample described the transition from analog to digital recording. “My dissertation research ... was on actual tapes” and is stored in a locked closet. “My current research is digital, so I have it in a password-protected, secured laptop using NVivo software, so I use qualitative data analysis software to keep most of my participant observation fieldwork notes, interviews,
recordings, transcriptions, and things like that.” As an aside, we asked each interviewee, “Does your research produce data?” The question stumped everyone except the several faculty in our sample who apply social scientific methods to the study of religion.

One junior faculty member with a strong preference for print media confessed, “My students think I am a dinosaur,” and then showed us a heavily annotated monograph with underlining, sticky notes, and annotations in various colors. “It’s simply a way of spatially organizing the information so that I can look at it and re activate the information in my mind.” Writing requires printed notes alongside a computer: “My entire process of writing is often excerpting, creating outlines, printing that out, annotating … I still need some kind of concrete artifact in front of me.”

Note-taking is just one aspect of research management. As we move to more digital journal subscriptions, faculty need effective ways to annotate, organize, and retrieve PDFs. One historian keeps copies of PDF documents on a laptop and puts back-up copies on a local file server. One of the anthropologists in our study commented on the challenge of organizing original field data, secondary sources, and notes. “…There is an enormous amount of data. It’s just not always organized and easily accessible … once I collect it.” The professor dreams of a tool that would seamlessly capture and keep track of research as it happens. It is unclear whether our faculty are unaware or dissatisfied with the citation and research management tools, such as Refworks and Endnote, which are already available to them as Harvard affiliates.

Publishing and Open Access

Publishing Practice

It is no surprise that our participants are keenly aware of the changing dynamics of scholarly publication. Several respondents mentioned an expectation that the scholarly monograph was soon to be a relic of the past, that the current economic model of scholarly publication was no longer sustainable. Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents have published, and continue to publish, in this format. They chose various reasons to work with the publishers of their works. Sometimes it was strategic: one scholar wanted to make sure a certain audience saw their book and published with presses that were strong in that subject. Another mentioned the quality of the books that the press made. For both journal articles and monographs the reputation of the outlet is paramount. A typical comment would be: “All of my publications have been aimed at top journals in the different fields…. And then also when it comes to books, definitely the top presses or university presses that have respect in the field that I’m interested in most.”

This quotation was from a junior scholar seeking tenure, who clearly saw the need to publish in highly-respected places. One senior scholar we spoke with raised a salient point about publishing practices, one that was echoed by other respondents:

I think that my publishing practices are typical of people who are thinking about the future and the discipline, people who don’t have to think about getting a job, keeping a job, promotion, and stuff. For people getting a job, it’s different. For someone trying to keep a job, get tenure, it’s different. So publishing practices are different for people.
This scholar of South Asian religion published work with presses in South Asia since that’s where the audience for the work lives. The scholar related a story about how a friend saw one of the books for sale in a train station in Mumbai.

The divergence between senior and junior faculty is not as clear in the realm of online and non-traditional publishing. The same junior scholar who publishes in top-notch academic journals and with highly-respected academic presses also writes frequently on Twitter and blogs on important news sites. Other junior faculty members concentrate on the more traditional avenues: “I’m not completely opposed to [online venues], but … partly because I’m still coming up for tenure, my energies have been focused in more traditional publishing venues. And so I could foresee a time in the future when I would be more present digitally than I am now. But at this point I haven’t done a great deal of that.” Another expressed suspicion about the entire area: “[it] could have something to do with career stage, but in general I feel deeply suspicious of blogs and open source environments.”

Despite their freedom from tenure requirements, senior faculty still mostly publish in traditional academic areas, although one mentioned writing on Twitter and writing pieces for the Harvard web site. Three senior faculty members also mentioned an interest in finding a wider audience and suggested doing this by advocating for open-access publishing.

Open Access

Participants were asked whether they had submitted work to an open-access journal or deposited their work in an open-access repository (at Harvard our open access repository is DASH: Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard). Only one of the ten respondents had knowingly submitted to an open-access journal and uploaded work to DASH. For most of the other participants the barrier was not philosophical, but procedural. We heard several variants of this quotation: “I just don’t know how to go about doing it.” Even participants who spoke glowingly of open access confessed to not having put their own work in DASH or published intentionally with an open-access publication. The arguments in favor of open access were all variations on the need for making work available to the public, not just to members of the academy. A DASH advocate argued:

“So what’s my philosophy behind that? So it’s kind of an economic philosophy, if I really were going to put it. So what a journal article is, and this is a definition that goes back to the 19th century, really the 17th century if you want, but it is something that as a researcher, you want to share and don’t claim any right to make money off of. You don’t want to sell; you want to share. And I think scholars are totally legitimate in their desire to make books and try to make money off books.”

One dissenting voice was heard on the topic, expressing a worry that small professional societies, which are important in the creation of new knowledge, were dependent for survival on selling their journals and that the prices of these titles was not comparable to the fees charged by the commercial STEM journals that were the impetus behind the open-access movement: “I felt like this problem in the sciences, which is a real and acute problem because of the for-profit publishers, was being very hastily … in a not very well-conceived way, once again, read into the humanities.”

The Library
While there was no question that asked specifically about library collections or services, every respondent referenced the library in his or her interview. Three main topics were of concern: accessing library and archival collections, both at Harvard and beyond, and both digitally and physically; using the library’s services, especially instruction for students; and the ease, or difficulty, in using the library’s online tools, both internal (created at Harvard) or external (created by outside vendors or other entities).

Access to Material

Large scale digitization projects like Google Books and HathiTrust have made access to material much easier for many disciplines. We heard variants of the comment one scholar makes that they don’t make as many trips to the library as they used to. Several respondents also mentioned that they never have trouble getting material they need, whether online, physically available at a Harvard Library, or through the Borrow Direct consortium or interlibrary loan. One of the historians mentioned the difficulty in getting students to visit archives to find material that has yet to be digitized: “I took a group of students over to [see] manuscripts at HDS and we had a wonderful session looking at materials, and I think it’s so important for librarians to continue reaching out and doing these kinds of great sessions because students don’t really know what’s there. They’re shy about asking. They don’t know how to access things often.”

In certain fields, however, merely finding the books and other material scholars need to do their work can be challenging. It’s no surprise that anthropologists need to make research trips to gather data for their studies, but, in other fields, finding important books can be a challenge. In South Asian studies, for example, scholars rely on what one respondent refers to as ‘kinship networks’, sharing books and articles on an informal basis. Since certain libraries are stronger in this area than others, consortia like Borrow Direct are valuable but not a panacea as some of the material is uncatalogued. As an example of the lengths to which scholars in this field go to locate material, this passage is worth quoting in full:

Here's one thing that happens. Not a lot of people look at the stuff, so it may involve years [to find a book]. So one time I was in Sri Lanka, went to the library, went to see a librarian ... said I'm looking for this, and he said I think that we have a copy of it in the basement and like a cabinet that's a teaching collection of this famous professor. So we head off to the basement and ... it's like ...they just took the things from [my office] and put it into a cabinet in the basement. So we're like looking for it. And he has a number that he's looking for. I'm just interested in this guy's teaching collection. And while I'm just kind of pulling stuff off the shelves, I find what I'm looking for bound inside another book that no one knew was there. And then another time, I was looking for another book, again for years, and someone said, 'Oh, I think it's up in the attic in the library and this other kind of thing, and when we go up there it's all these stacks of rubbish, books that they're discarding. The guy I was with is just kind of going through the stack of books to be discarded, finds what I'm looking for.
Library Services

The participants were largely satisfied with the library’s services, but some frustration was apparent with the complexities of the decentralized system (Harvard has over 70 libraries and each of the 11 schools has its own library website). While library staff were praised, there was concern that it was sometimes difficult to find the best person to help with a particular question: “I think the Harvard libraries do a great job, and students really do get the information that they need, and I think faculty can, too. But I … and I don’t know if this is a problem with me or something about the setup, I just don’t know what it is. It’s figuring out where and when and how … It’s figuring out, when you have a question, who the right person to go to with it is.” Another scholar said: “from a researcher’s standpoint, we never have enough time, so it’s always a snapshot question. And if I have to go three places, I really want to go to the one where I can just quickly see which place I should go rather than start with you guys and ask, 'By the way, who’s doing that?’ and you’re like, ‘Oh, I don’t know; I’ll place a phone call’ and whatever, and then my two-hour window to find something to get me moving with my thought has passed. And that’s not your fault, but it’s more of a question of how to … represent what there is in ways that you can quickly access resources without multiplying the steps or the contact.”

As mentioned above, some researchers bring classes to the library or send students to the librarians for help with their own research. One faculty member spends one class session teaching students how to use the library. Another said: “Even keeping up with the databases that are available is really hard. And so having library staff who are willing to sit down and do these hour-and-a-half introductions … to the real basics [is valuable], …. But also [important is instruction] … into more sophisticated databases with newspapers, periodicals…. They don’t know that these things exist, and so having refreshers periodically is really helpful.”

Search

While most comments regarding the library involved collections and services, two faculty members made observations about the mechanics of searching that point to some of the difficulties scholars have performing online research. Both of these scholars have done extensive work outside their main disciplines and were sensitive to the importance of differences in the language and terminology used in certain databases, as well as the different capabilities of the databases themselves. One scholar discussed the difficulties in finding material in underrepresented areas like Ethiopian Christianity or Mar Thoma Christianity in India. They comment: “We’ve discovered that’s a sustainably intellectually challenging endeavor because … it’s about creative ways to understand and do searches… We’ll sit together with groups and we’ll think, ‘Okay, what are some other search terms we can use?’ So rather than the more common ‘religion and something’, we’ll look at … representative … individuals or representative movements or [a] representative … case study that we know about that would be itself an illustration of what we’re after and then try to think well what are the mechanisms, what are some descriptive terms that we could … apply to a larger or more general search.”

Another respondent’s research overlaps with work done in medicine. The process is described this way:

The way I would frame the questions and the issues I want to know, how am I going to figure out who is working on that. And so it’ll turn out that there’s actually … you can keyword your way into the medical literature via PubMed. And PubMed is great because it’s so … and a lot of
the science indices are great this way, because they're radically biased to the present, because they basically consider anything old to be irrelevant. So when you start looking at something ... you can sort fairly easily because even though there are however many millions of items indexed there, their radical bias will just show you the eight things that showed up this year. And then you read those and you realize, 'I'm totally not on the wavelength, that's not at all what I want to be seeing, but the footnotes are talking about this, so I'm going back and I'm going to see if they've been doing studies on this'.

Participants also mentioned using Google, HOLLIS+ or HOLLIS Classic (the Harvard discovery system and library catalog, respectively), PubMed, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and other databases. No respondent mentioned using the ATLA Religion Database, usually considered by librarians to be the main tool for finding literature in religious studies.

**The Future of Religious Studies**

One of our questions asked respondents to reflect on the biggest challenges and opportunities currently facing religious studies or theology. The question seemed designed to probe a potential conflict between these approaches (religious studies vs. theology), but our faculty weren’t particularly interested in the distinction. While one scholar mentioned theology as the ‘anchor’ of religious studies, and another called it the ‘root’, more typical was the faculty member who said: “For me, I think it's a false divide. It's clear that at some places there is a strong sense among people in religious studies that they are approaching religion critically and that people who are interested in theology have normative interests and so are not as critical. I don't find that to be a dominant part of the conversation at Harvard Divinity School.” They did, however, have much to say about the current state of religious studies as a field and of the threatened position of the humanities within the academy and in society at large.

Most faculty members emphasized the idea of *relevance* as being the core challenge for the field. One mentioned a pursuit of relevance in current work, where the tools of religious studies are applied to areas of inquiry that wouldn’t necessarily be thought of as religious: the influence of Oprah Winfrey, the policies of Walmart or Goldman Sachs. Another proposed that the future lies in “developing tools for doing transnational kind of research and comparative research.... For the study of religion I think that looks like taking up questions beyond [the] religious canon to the larger issues around ethnicity, race, and gender, which define the kind of larger world that we occupy, those kinds of questions will be more central as you try to understand, ‘What does religious life look like beyond the US?’” This emphasis on studying the present was echoed by a senior scholar who said:

> I think the biggest challenge is reconstituting the common conversation. And the only way you can do that is in relation to social relevance -- either cast with regard to directly addressing social problems, or pedagogically thinking about the enterprise of teaching as an enterprise of teaching people who are going to be members of our very complicated world. And I think we talk that way; people's research doesn’t go that way.

Relevance to broader trends in society was mentioned by a junior faculty member who noted the historical correlation between global strife and an interest in religious studies. This person also mentioned teaching as an opportunity for the field:
It really is crucial to have a strong, informative, intellectual engagement with religion and different forms of religious experience that people, especially younger people, can get, to sort of demystify a lot of the hatred and misunderstandings that occur based off of ignorance. And so I think right now people are turning to both religion in terms of a faith experience for solutions, on one hand, but then also to people who are studying religion to understand global problems in ways that I think are important.

Another respondent went further, asserting that the study of religion was actually uniquely situated to provide for a deeper understanding of human agency and human communities:

So there's the method of what it means to help invite people into a more capacious understanding of anything. If we can do it with religion, where there's skills to learn about what it means to invite people into deeper reflection about things that they think they know. And I think we need that desperately now in the world because we've got such dichotomies and divisive experiences.

But what exactly are these tools that the discipline brings to the table, and how are they different from other fields? Several scholars argued that religious studies hadn’t made the case for why the scholars in their field should be considered experts on the study of religion. The most brutal comment was: “Want me to be honest? I think the biggest challenge for religious studies is whether it can articulate a rationale for its continued existence in the university. And I don’t think we’re particularly alert to the necessity of doing that.” Another said: “We can’t afford to be doing the same things we used to for the next 20 years; otherwise, we will be completely marginalized and we are going to disappear.”

This anxiety plays out against a backdrop of the humanities in general feeling under assault. A junior faculty member framed the larger challenge darkly, wondering whether there is something in the very age we live in that threatens the humanities:

We think we’re more sophisticated, but we’re not. We are the same…. I think that’s the fundamental challenge, it's a massive challenge, and ... it's one that separates our age from much of what's happened in the past.... The advent of the age of machines, the advent of the idea of what's latest is best is something fundamentally new in world history. Before that point, older was better. What is old, what lasts, what is, that's what's of value, and that's what one needs to seek. One should strive to learn the wisdom of the ancients. That's not what people want to do today. They think there's no reason to learn the past. And the undermining of the humanities more broadly within the academy is a function of that somehow, and to the degree that that's happening, that's a desperate concern.

**Conclusion**

Our faculty may benefit from professional development opportunities in the area of research management. The majority of professors we interviewed struggled to effectively organize citations, texts in multiple formats, and their own notes. Six out of ten faculty described using a blend of analog tools (notebooks, marginal notes in books, and filing systems) and also store digital documents on a laptop or on the school’s file server. Their methods for keeping track of research have worked well enough for
them since graduate school, there are feelings that there must be better ways. Only one of our respondents reported using a database solution, Endnote, for research management.

We also found that our historians and text scholars prefer to access primary sources online. Our faculty who study religion of the Americas and Western European most often benefit from large-scale digital projects, and travel less frequently to physical archives than in the past. Some of the projects mentioned were Colonial North America Project at Harvard University, Bar-Ilan University’s Responsa Project, American Antiquarian Society products, and HathiTrust Digital Library. One respondent described the preference for digital archives like this: “[More] digitization is always nice. [I like] to access these things remotely. I know that’s something that most libraries I’ve encountered are hard at work trying to figure out how to do that most effectively.”

Our scholars who study non-western and non-dominant U.S. cultures have fewer digital options. From the South Asian studies professor who relies on ‘kinship networks’ to discover texts, to a professor of African American religion who has examined records stored in closets of private homes, these scholars would benefit from new digital projects. Such projects, like the Library of Congress’ World Digital Library, would require us to forge new partnerships to draw upon the resources of a global array of institutions.

One respondent expressed a potential negative consequence of digitization that scholars must address within their communities:

I was at a meeting with a group of other historians of American religion. Someone had presented his work, it was a long block quote... There were odd things happening in this quotation and someone asked him about it.... And he admitted that he had basically cut and pasted from another source and that he hadn’t read it that closely ... So it’s wonderful to have this material so accessible, but I think the old fashioned way where we had to page through things meant that first of all we were reading things very closely in context, and second we couldn’t cut and paste, we had to transcribe. Which meant that you would only transcribe something that was really meaningful, and in the act of transcribing you would really have to think about what the words said.

Clearly the faculty appreciate the work of Harvard librarians. This quote from a senior faculty member was not atypical: “I don't want to just sound like a cheerleader, but I've just been really happy with the research support. Not just for my own research but what I see it doing for my students.” However, we also discovered that the faculty have a limited idea of the scope of the 21st century librarian’s work. While managing the copious amounts of research material was frequently mentioned as a ‘pain point’ of contemporary scholarship, respondents didn’t necessarily identify the library as a locus for support in that area. This is an opportunity for the library to better market the services they offer in this area; regular workshops are held on campus about using reference management tools like EndNote and Zotero and librarians are available for one-on-one consultations about these and other tools for organizing research materials. One scholar did mention the library’s ability to help them keep up with new databases and other electronic resources, but for most of the participants the library is still seen as a repository of books, journals, and manuscripts with librarians who can help them, and their students, locate this material. Our expertise in search, in research management, and in teaching, was not reflected in the participants’ responses.
Finally, there seemed to be an urgency among a segment of the faculty about the need to support the case for the continuing relevance of the field of religious studies within the academy. Some of this need was related to the sense of the humanities being under threat more generally and a portion was related to the fear that the field hasn’t done enough to identify its strengths as a unique field of inquiry. This was somewhat, although not entirely, generational; while junior faculty were acutely aware of the current state of the humanities, younger scholars were less concerned with the place of religious studies specifically and were more interested in conversing with other disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences to create new modes of inquiry around questions of religious traditions and religious practice.

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Title of the research study: Research Support Services Study for the Field of Religious Studies

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Gloria Korsman, under the direction of Douglas Gragg, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School.

Reasons for the study: This research study seeks to examine the research practices of academics in religious studies in order to understand the resources and services these faculty members need to be successful in their teaching and research. This project is part of a larger suite of similar studies being concurrently conducted at fifteen religious studies libraries in US higher education institutions in conjunction with Ithaka S+R, a not-for-profit research and consulting service that helps academic, cultural, and publishing communities. It is hoped that the information gathered in this study will not only be used to improve the research support services at Harvard but also towards writing a larger report from the aggregated results that will be written and publically disseminated by Ithaka S+R.

Voluntary Being in this study is voluntary. Please tell me if you do not want to participate. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

What you will be asked to do: Your participation in the study involves a 60 minute audio-recorded interview about your research practices and support needs as a religious studies scholar. We also may take photographs to document your work space; however, you will not appear in the photographs.
Benefits and Risks: There are not expected to be any risks associated with participating in this study. There are no direct benefits expected from participation in this study although it is possible that you will experience increased insight and awareness into your own research practices and needs.

How your confidentiality will be maintained: If you choose to participate, your name will not be reported with your interview responses or work space photographs and there will be no link between this consent form and your responses. Your interview responses will be shared with Ithaka S+R, an outside organization who will publish a report online through their website including data from our research. Public reports will not provide demographic or contextual information that could be used to identify you. It is expected that the report will be deposited in Harvard's institutional repository, as well.

Questions? You may contact the researchers at any time if you have additional questions about the study by reaching Doug Gragg.

I have read the information in this consent form. All my questions about the research have been answered to my satisfaction. I ____________________________ consent to participate in the study as described above including:

___being interviewed and being audio-recorded during the interview
___having my work-space documented by photograph

Signature of Research Participant: ____________________________ Date: ____________

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Research focus
1. Describe your current research.
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
3. What theoretical approaches does your research utilize or rely on?
4. 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]

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

6. 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?

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

8. 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**

9. 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]

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

11. 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?

**Future and State of the Field**

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?